THE SECRET MIND
I had never wanted to go to Ireland in my life. Yet here was John Huston on the telephone asking me to his hotel for a drink. Later that afternoon, drinks in hand, Huston eyed me carefully and said, "How would you like to live in Ireland and write *Moby Dick* for the screen?"

And suddenly we were off after the White Whale; myself, the wife, and two daughters.

It took me seven months to track, catch, and throw the Whale flukes out.

From October to April I lived in a country where I did not want to be.

I thought that I saw nothing, heard nothing, felt nothing of Ireland. The Church was deplorable. The weather was dreadful. The poverty was inadmissible. I would have none of it. Besides, there was this Big Fish. . . .

I did not count on my subconscious tripping me up. In the middle of all the threadbare dampness, while trying to beach Leviathan with my typewriter, my antennae were noticing the people. Not that my wide-awake self, conscious and afoot, did not notice them, like and admire and have some for friends, and see them often, no. But the overall thing, pervasive,
was the poorness and the rain and feeling sorry for myself in a sorry land.

With the Beast rendered down into oil and delivered to the cameras, I fled Ireland, positive I had learned naught save how to dread storms, fogs, and the penny-beggar streets of Dublin and Kilcock.

But the subliminal eye is shrewd. While I lamented my hard work and my inability, every other day, to feel as much like Herman Melville as I wished, my interior self kept alert, snuffed deep, listened long, watched close, and filed Ireland and its people for other times when I might relax and let them teem forth to my own surprise.

I came home via Sicily and Italy where I had baked myself free of the Irish winter, assuring one and all, "I'll write nothing ever about the Connemara Lightfoots and the Donnybrook Gazelles."

I should have remembered my experience with Mexico, many years before, where I had encountered not rain and poverty, but sun and poverty, and come away panicked by a weather of mortality and the terrible sweet smell when the Mexicans exhaled death. I had at last written some fine nightmares out of that.

Even so, I insisted, Eire was dead, the wake over, her people would never haunt me.

Several years passed.

Then one rainy afternoon Mike (whose real name is Nick), the
taxi-driver, came to sit just out of sight in my mind. He nudged me gently and dared to remind me of our journeys together across the bogs, along the Liffey, and him talking and wheeling his old iron car slow through the mist night after night, driving me home to the Royal Hibernian Hotel, the one man I knew best in all the wild green country, from dozens of scores of Dark Journeys.

"Tell the truth about me," Mike said. "Just put it down the way it was."

And suddenly I had a short story and a play. And the story is true and the play is true. It happened like that. It could have happened no other way.

Well, the story we understand, but why, after all these years, did I turn to the stage? It was not a turn, but a return.

I acted on the amateur stage, and radio, as a boy. I wrote plays as a young man. These plays, unproduced, were so bad that I promised myself never to write again for the stage until late in life, after I'd learned to write all the other ways first and best. Simultaneously, I gave up acting because I dreaded the competitive politics actors must play in order to work. Besides: the short story, the novel, called. I answered. I plunged into writing. Years passed. I went to hundreds of plays. I loved them. But still I held off from ever writing Act I, Scene I, again. Then came *Moby Dick*, a while to brood over it, and suddenly here was Mike, my taxi-driver, rummaging my soul, lifting up tidbits of adventure
from a few years before near the Hill of Tara or inland at the autumn changing of leaves in Killeshandra. My old love of the theater with a final shove pushed me over.

But, also pushing and shoving with free and unexpected gifts, came a mob of letter-writing strangers. Some eight or nine years back I began receiving notes that ran as follows:

Sir: Last night, in bed, I told your story "The Fog Horn," to my wife.

Or:

Sir: I am fifteen years old and won the Annual Recitation Prize at Gurnee Illinois High, having memorized and declaimed your tale, "A Sound of Thunder."

Or:

Dear Mr. B.: We are pleased to report our seven-man semi-staged reading of your novel Fahrenheit 451 was greeted warmly by 2,000 English teachers at our conference last night.

In a seven-year period, dozens of my stories were read, declaimed, recited and dramatized by grade school, high school and college amateurs all across the country. The letters piled up. Finally, they toppled and fell on me. I turned to my wife and said, "Everyone except me is having fun adapting me! How come?!!"

It was, then, the reverse of the old tale. Instead of crying out that the emperor is naked, these people were saying, unmistakably, that an English flunk-out from Los Angeles High School was fully clothed, and too thick to see it!
I began, then, to write plays.

One final thing jolted me back toward the stage. In the last five years I have borrowed or bought a good many European and American Idea Plays to read; I have watched the Absurd and the More-Than-Absurd Theater. In the aggregate I could not help but judge the plays as frail exercises, more often than not half-witted, but above all lacking in the prime requisites of imagination and ability.

It is only fair, given this flat opinion, I should now put my own head on the chopping-block. You may, if you wish, be my executioners.

This is not so unusual. Literary history is filled with writers who, rightly or wrongly, felt they could tidy up, improve upon, or revolutionize a given field. So, many of us plunge forward where angels leave no dustprint.

Having dared once, exuberant, I dared again. When Mike vaulted from my machine, others unbidden followed.

And the more that swarmed, the more jostled to fill the spaces.

I suddenly saw that I knew more of the minglings and commotions of the Irish than I could disentangle in a month or a year of writing and unraveling them forth. Inadvertently, I found myself blessing the secret mind, and winnowing a vast interior post-office, calling nights, towns, weathers, beasts, bicycles, churches, cinemas, and ritual marches and flights by name.

Mike had started me at an amble; I broke into a trot, which was before long a full sprint.
The stories, the plays, were born in a yelping litter. I had but
to get out of their way.

Now done, and busy with other plays about science-fiction ma-
chineries, do I have an after-the-fact theory to fit playwriting?
Yes.
For only after, can one nail down, examine, explain.
To try to know beforehand is to freeze and kill.
Self-consciousness is the enemy of all art, be it acting, writing,
painting, or living itself, which is the greatest art of all.
Here's how my theory goes. We writers are up to the following:
We build tensions toward laughter, then give permission, and
laughter comes.
We build tensions toward sorrow, and at last say cry, and hope
to see our audience in tears.
We build tensions toward violence, light the fuse, and run.
We build the strange tensions of love, where so many of the
other tensions mix to be modified and transcended, and allow that
fruition in the mind of the audience.
We build tensions, especially today, toward sickness and then,
if we are good enough, talented enough, observant enough, allow
our audiences to be sick.
Each tension seeks its own proper end, release, and relaxation.
No tension, it follows, aesthetically as well as practically, must
be built which remains unreleased. Without this, any art ends
incomplete, halfway to its goal. And in real life, as we know, the failure to relax a particular tension can lead to madness.

There are seeming exceptions to this, in which novels or plays end at the height of tension, but the release is implied. The audience is asked to go forth into the world and explode an idea. The final action is passed on from creator to reader-viewer whose job it is to finish off the laughter, the tears, the violence, the sexuality, or the sickness.

Not to know this is not to know the essence of creativity, which, at heart, is the essence of man's being.

If I were to advise new writers, if I were to advise the new writer in myself, going into the theater of the Absurd, the almost-Absurd, the theater of Ideas, the any-kind-of-theater-at-all, I would advise like this:

Tell me no pointless jokes.
I will laugh at your refusal to allow me laughter.
Build me no tension toward tears and refuse me my lamentations.
I will go find me better wailing walls.
Do not clench my fists for me and hide the target.
I might strike you, instead.
Above all, sicken me not unless you show me the way to the ship's rail.
For, please understand, if you poison me, I must be sick. It seems to me that many people writing the sick film, the sick novel, the sick play, have forgotten that poison can destroy minds
even as it can destroy flesh. Most poison bottles have emetic recipes stamped on the labels. Through neglect, ignorance, or inability, the new intellectual Borgias cram hairballs down our throats and refuse us the convulsion that could make us well. They have forgotten, if they ever knew, the ancient knowledge that only by being truly sick can one regain health. Even beasts know when it is good and proper to throw up. Teach me how to be sick then, in the right time and place, so that I may again walk in the fields and with the wise and smiling dogs know enough to chew sweet grass.

The art aesthetic is all encompassing, there is room in it for every horror, every delight, if the tensions representing these are carried to their furthest perimeters and released in action. I ask for no happy endings. I ask only for proper endings based on proper assessments of energy contained and given detonation.

Where Mexico surprised me with so much darkness at the heart of the noon sun, Ireland surprised me with so much sun swallowed in the heart of the fog to keep one warm. The distant drummer I listened to in Mexico tread me to a funeral march. The drummer in Dublin tread me lightly through the pubs. The plays wanted to be happy plays. I let them write themselves that way, out of their own hungers and needs, their unusual joys, and fine delights.

So I wrote half a dozen plays and will write more about Ireland.
Did you know that people meet in great head-on bicycle collisions, and suffer from fearful concussions for years after, all over Eire? They do. I have caught and held them in one act. Did you know that in the cinemas each night just an instant before the Irish National Anthem is due to explode its rhythms, there is a terrible surge and outflux as people fight to escape through the exits so as not to hear the dread music again? It happens. I saw it. I ran with them. Now I have done it as a play, "The Anthem Sprinters." Did you know that the best way to drive at night in the fog across the boggy midlands of Irish country is to keep your lights off? And to drive terribly fast is better! I have written that. Is it the blood of an Irishman that moves his tongue to beauty, or the whiskey that he pours in to move his blood to move his tongue and tell poems and declaim with harps? I do not know. I ask my secret self which tells me back. Wise man, I listen.

So, thinking myself bankrupt, ignorant, unnoticing, I wind up with one-act plays, a three-act play, essays, poems, and a novel about Ireland. I was rich and didn't know it. We all are rich and ignore the buried fact of accumulated wisdom.

So again and again my stories and my plays teach me, remind me, that I must never doubt myself, my gut, my ganglion, or my Ouija subconscious again.

From now on I hope always to stay alert, to educate myself as best I can. But, lacking this, in future I will relaxedly turn back to my secret mind to see what it has observed when I thought I was sitting this one out.
We never sit anything out.
We are cups, constantly and quietly being filled.
The trick is, knowing how to tip ourselves over and let the beautiful stuff out.

MY THEATER OF IDEAS

The time, indeed, is theatrical. It is full of craziness, wildness, brilliance, inventiveness; it both exhilarates and depresses. It says either too much or too little.
And one thing is constant through all the instances cited above. Ideas.
Ideas are on the march.

For the first time in the long and plague-some history of man, ideas do not merely exist on paper, as philosophies in books do.
Today's ideas are blueprinted, mocked-up, engineered, electrified, wound-tight and set loose to rev men up or run men down.

All this being true, how rare the motion picture, the novel, the poem, the story, the painting, or the play which deals with the greatest problem of our time, man and his fabulous tools, man and his mechanical children, man and his amoral robots which lead him, strangely and inexplicably, into immorality.
I intend my plays to be first entertaining and grand fun that will stimulate, provoke, terrify, and, one hopes, amuse. This, I think, is important, to tell a good story, to write the passions well,
on to the end. Let the residue come when the plays are over and the crowd goes home. Let the audience wake in the night and say, Oh that's what he's up to! Or the next day cry, He means us! He means now! Our world, our problems, our delights and our despairs!

I do not want to be a snobbish lecturer, a grandiloquent do-gooder, or a boring reformer.

I do wish to run, seize this greatest time in all the history of man to be alive, stuff my senses with it, eye it, touch it, listen to it, smell it, taste it, and hope that others will run with me, pursuing and pursued by ideas and ideas-made machines.

I have been stopped once too often by policemen at night who ask me what I am doing, walking on the sidewalk.

I have written a play called "The Pedestrian," laid in the future, about the plight of similar walkers in the cities.

I have witnessed innumerable seances between television sets and rapt, transported, and oblivious children of all ages, and I have written "The Veldt," a play about a wall-to-wall television room in the very near future which becomes the center of all existence to a trapped family.

And I have written a play about a poet-of-the-ordinary, a master of the mediocre, an old man whose greatest feat of memory is to recall how a 1925 Moon or Kissel-Kar or Buick once looked, down to the hub-caps, windshields, dashboards and license plates. A man who can describe the color of every candy
wrapper ever purchased, and the design of every package of cigarettes ever smoked.

These plays, these ideas, put in motion now on the stage, I hope will be considered a true product of our time.

1965