

The Theater: 'MacBird!' Opens at the Village Gate

Barbara Garson Play
Staged by Roy Levine

NYT-2/24/67
BY WALTER KERR

BARBARA GARSON, the author of "MacBird!" is like someone who has suddenly thought of something funny to say at a party, who has blurted out the beginning of the joke only to realize that it is hurtling her headlong toward embarrassing consequences, and who has then plunged on anyway—hurriedly, boldly, wistfully, boorishly—hoping against hope that something, anything, would turn up to save the day.

The first stammers out of her at the Village Gate are conceivably amusing. As everyone knows by this time, "MacBird!" is a paraphrase—though not actually a parody—of Shakespeare's "Macbeth" that places Lyndon Johnson in the bloody title role and John F. Kennedy in the position of his sacrificial victim during a Texas house party.

And just so long as this central event hasn't happened, just so long as everyone on stage is still alive, the jest is half-alive, too. It's amusing enough to hear quips once again about the possibility of a Kennedy dynasty, to hear John summoning Bobby to an important post near him because "I need your manly immortality." A flash of remembered and irreverent fun stirs as Bobby, in the urgent, tousle-haired person of actor William Devane, whoops directly into a staff conference to tee off what looks like a wild game of touch volleyball.

We remember these jokes. John Kennedy made them himself. They are safe jokes. The conversation keeps going. To fade the jokes freshened up a bit by recasting them in an occasionally teasing, always smooth, iambic pentameter almost makes them seem trackworthy for one last time.

Then the conversation stops. These jokes have been safe jokes for a reason. Onstage the targets are hale and hearty, ambitious and bumptious, available, still vulnerable, altogether within range. So long as a man is breathing he can be hit even where it hurts.

But it is something else again to be hit where we hurt, as in some sense we still do. Trailing black robes and wearing a laurel wreath about his brow, President Kennedy—here John Ken O'Dunc—marches in solemn procession beneath a canopy to be sworn into office. The pace, as director Roy Levine has straightforwardly arranged it, is

The Cast

MACBIRD! a play by Barbara Garson. Staged by Roy Levine; songs and music by John Duffy; setting by Clarke Dunham; costumes by Jeanne Bifton; lighting by Robert Brand; assistant director, Alma Schieren; production stage manager, Russell McGrath. Presented by Julia Curtis and David Productions. At the Village Gate, 169 Bleecker Street.

Prologue	.....Dalton Dearborn
Beau Wilch	.....Jennifer Darling
Muslim Wilch	.....Cleveland Little
Revolutionary Wilch	.....Tony Capodilupo
John Ken O'Dunc	.....Paul Hecht
Robert Ken O'Dunc	.....William Devane
Ted Ken O'Dunc	.....John Pleshette
MacBird	.....Stacy Keach
Crony	.....David Spielberg
Aide	.....Joel Zwick
Secretary	.....Deborah Gordon
Chamberlain	.....Dalton Dearborn
Lady MacBird	.....Rue McClanahan
Earl of Warren	.....John Clark
Spectators	.....Deborah Gordon, Jennifer Darling, Dalton Dearborn, Tony Capodilupo, Joel Zwick
Egg of Head	.....Dalton Dearborn
Crony's Crony	.....Joel Zwick
MacBird's Daughters	.....Deborah Gordon, Jennifer Darling
Conspirators	.....Dalton Dearborn, Cleveland Little, John Clark
Wayne of Morse	.....Paul Hecht
Messenger	.....Deborah Gordon

stately. The martial music is reminiscent. Darkened lights, lowering skies, the promise of a moment and the foretaste of all that is to come suddenly fuse, descend upon us, place us in a context that is genuinely impressive and, in the aftermath, irretrievably sad. Something gives at the pits of our stomachs.

Comedy gives on the instant and is very, very difficult to lure back. We are aware, now, that the impertinent pentameters are not all that smooth, that they are not in any trenchant sense relevant. The newly elected John Ken O'Dunc makes his address to the nation. It includes the phrase "Ask not what you can profit off your country." Our ears rebel. They rebel not out of political sensitivity, not out of sentimental loyalty to a man. They rebel because the coarse syntax is untypical,

unrepresentative, offhand, random. Nothing is truly being satirized; the coarseness is entirely gratuitous, entirely Mrs. Garson's.

We are all out of kilter now, or the play is. Our unease can only be compounded—from any imaginable comic point of view—as the Kennedy figure is taken from the Johnson ranch, lifted high into an automobile with one hand in air and profile at the ready, to be shot at. As the shots ring out, we realize that the author has indeed made herself unique in our time. She has attempted to wrap the assassination firmly in the arms of a vast burlesque merriment. The arms won't fold; they freeze.

Committed, she must go on. We are invited to watch the new President arrange, by indirection, the plane crash in which young Ted Ken O'Dunc is injured. We attend to a report that the Egg of Head (Adlai Stevenson, as the punning transplants of the evening's names go) has been found dead on the street, "a poisoned dart near his body."

And as we listen to incongruities that have no grain of recognition in them to spur hilarity, we watch the people on stage growing more desperate in their incidental vaudeville. Lady MacBird must of course go mad; her madness takes the form of smelling something so foul (her husband) that she must spray Airwick all over it, at once. "Out, damned odor, out" is not precisely inspired comedy.

Putting chest protectors and catcher's mitts onto a Johnson ready to do battle under burning cherry trees, dropping the usurper with a

'MacBeth' Paraphrase Portrays 2 Presidents

heart-attack ("Thus cracks a noble heart"), spurring the Wayne of Morse onto the stage in red tights to make waste about him with a lance twice as long as he is—not one of these improvisations catches us unaware as something ticklesome because it is something true.

We have merely moved from a deed that didn't happen to a series of deeds that haven't happened. The author is casting about in the dark, her revolver going off repeatedly and in all directions, unaware of what she is hitting or whether she is actually hitting anything at all. The invention is irresponsible in a poetic sense; it doesn't scan.

Some of the performing is genial, the staging is breezily professional, the action takes place in a coffeehouse that is in actuality one more smoke-filled room. But resemblances to realpolitik end here. The Elizabethans themselves were fond of scurrilous broadsides, and printed them daily. Germany between wars mounted tough cabaret skits that named names.

But we are here involved in something else. We are involved with a woman who seems to have started talking and couldn't be stopped because the talk just kept coming out. The talk itself seems a very strange fusion of the more cavalier pronouncements of the extreme left and extreme right both. The upshot is a kind of crackpot consensus, with wan and bewildered smiles doing what they can to keep alive. *Fuh*

Oswald Inquiry Now Centered on Cuban Refugees

By GENE ROBERTS
Special to The New York Times

NEW ORLEANS, Feb. 25—The death this week of a former airline pilot left District Attorney Jim Garrison, who says he has detected a "conspiracy" that culminated in the assassination of President Kennedy, with an investigation centered almost entirely on Cuban refugees.

This was learned here from a source within Mr. Garrison's office and bolstered by what is known publicly about the "witnesses" Mr. Garrison and his staff are seeking.

The District Attorney's investigators are combing Cuban refugee communities in the United States, and especially Miami. They are searching for persons who can shed light on what Mr. Garrison thinks was a plot to kill Premier Fidel Castro of Cuba that turned into a plot to assassinate President Kennedy.

Garrison Is Assailed

Today, Mr. Garrison was attacked sharply by Carlos Bringuier, a leader among anti-Castro Cubans in New Orleans who once engaged in a radio debate with Lee Harvey Oswald, the man the Warren Commission says killed President Kennedy alone and without being a part of any plot.

Mr. Bringuier said the District Attorney had "hurt all of the Cuban community."

Many of Mr. Garrison's "clues" appear to be old ones. They were developed by the Warren Commission and the Federal Bureau of Investigation and later rejected by them on grounds that they were either false clues or were unsupported by evidence.

Clue's Are Described

One of the "clues" is the anti-Castro sentiment of David William Ferrie, the former airline pilot who was found dead in bed this week, and what Mr. Garrison believes to have been a link between him, Oswald and anti-Castro Cubans.

Another is testimony taken by the Warren Commission from Dean Andrews, a New Orleans attorney who said, then denied, then said again that Oswald and several Latin American homosexuals had once been sent to his office by a shadowy figure named "Clay Bertrand."

A third is a photograph from Warren Commission files showing Lee Harvey Oswald distributing pro-Castro literature with a man Mr. Garrison's investigators believe to be a Cuban.

The fact that Oswald was distributing pro-Castro, rather than anti-Castro, literature has not dissuaded Mr. Garrison from his theory that Oswald was part of an anti-Castro plot.

The District Attorney believes, according to one of his investigators, that Oswald might have distributed the literature in an effort to win

the confidence of the Cuban Government and gain permission to enter that country.

Once in Cuba, Mr. Garrison's theory goes, Oswald would have become the "trigger man" in the plot to assassinate Premier Castro.

However, when Oswald was denied permission to enter Cuba, his theory continues, the anti-Castro "conspirators" decided next to use him to assassinate President Kennedy as a

way of punishing him for his "failure to follow up the Bay of Pigs invasion with a second military effort.

'The Key to the Case'

Although Mr. Garrison has declined to discuss details of his theory publicly, he alluded to it yesterday in a news conference when he paraphrased "Alice in Wonderland" and said "the key to the whole case is through the looking glass."

"Black is white, white is black," he went on, "I don't want to be cryptic, but that's the way it is."

Mr. Garrison also said yesterday that "there were several plots, and change of direction (in them) did occur."

The Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Warren Commission found television film at station WDSU in New Orleans showing Oswald distributing pro-Castro leaflets with two men. One of the men was identified by the bureau as Charles Steele of New Orleans who said that Oswald had hired him at an employment office for \$2.

The other man, the one Mr. Garrison assumes was a Cuban, was never identified by the bureau according to Wesley J. Liebler, an attorney who helped direct the Warren Commission's investigation in New Orleans. Oswald lived in that city in his teens and again in the spring and summer of 1963.

\$50,000 Bond Asked

Mr. Liebler said, however, that the Federal agency had circulated the photograph widely enough to convince the Warren Commission staff that if the second man had been a close associate of Oswald's, some trace of the association would have been found. The conclusion of the staff was that Oswald had probably hired the man from the employment office.

been that the man also was wanted for homicide.

Later, police determined that the photograph Mr. Garrison had shown them was an enlargement taken from the WDSU film.

In addition to the photographs, Mr. Garrison and his staff have also been intrigued by the rambling testimony of Mr. Andrews, the New Orleans attorney who now works part time as an Assistant District Attorney in Jefferson Parish, which borders New Orleans.

Mr. Andrews testified that a few months before the assassination of President Kennedy on Nov. 22, 1963, Oswald came to his law office in the company of "gay (a term meaning homosexual) kids—they were Mexicanos" who said they had been sent by a man named "Clay Bertrand."

Oswald, he went on, wanted assistance in getting a "yellow-paper" discharge (slang for a "bad conduct" discharge).

changed by the Department of Defense to an honorable discharge.

Then, after President Kennedy was assassinated, the testimony continues, "Clay Bertrand" called at a hospital where Mr. Andrews was "under medication" and asked him to rush to Dallas and represent Oswald.

Mr. Liebler, Mr. Andrews admitted telling the Federal Bureau of Investigation that Clay Bertrand was a "figment of imagination." Thenu he added that he had said this because the "feebies," his name for the Federal agency, "were on me like the plague."

Descriptions Varied

He also conceded that he had once described Bertrand as being 6 feet 1 or 2 inches tall and 5 feet 8 inches tall.

Mr. Liebler said an intensive search by the Federal Bureau of Investigation had failed to

show any evidence of the existence of a Clay Bertrand.

Today, Mr. Andrews said he had not talked to Mr. Garrison because such talk might be dangerous, but added that he believed he was being "tailed."

He has been "tailed" sporadically, he went on, since the early 1950's when he defended Carlos Marcello, a man accused by the Metropolitan Crime Commission here of having a link with the Mafia.

Mr. Garrison's investigators found it "interesting" that Mr. Andrews had said that Oswald had been accompanied by "gay . . . Mexicanos." They think they might have been Cubans and note that Mr. Ferrie, the former pilot, was once charged—but never prosecuted—for alleged homosexual involvement with juveniles.

However, the Orleans Parish Coroner, Nichols Chetta, said Mr. Ferrie died of a brain hemorrhage, possibly brought on by stress. **END**

Mr. Garrison also has been unable to locate the man, it was learned although—according to sources close to the Miami Police Department—he thinks he knows his name. Mr. Garrison and his investigators send department officials a name for identification. The name is "Miami State . . . name . . ."

LAT - 2/26/63

KENNEDY: Death and New Orleans Plot/Talk

New Orleans Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison — a flamboyant 6-foot-6 gun-toting politician—announced to the world last week that he had "solved the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and will arrest every individual involved in the course of time."

He gave himself plenty of time: "... It might be months ... it might be 30 years." But he said, "This is no Mickey Mouse investigation. There were other people involved besides Lee Harvey Oswald."

The announcement surprised millions who had accepted the Warren Commission Report when it said there was no creditable evidence to be drawn from the hundreds of rumors linking others in a plot with Oswald, who the commission found did the shooting.

However, Garrison was mining a solid shaft of doubt in this country and abroad with his revelations. A Harris Survey last October found that Americans, by a 3 to 2 margin, refuse to accept the lone-assassin idea.

Garrison blamed local newspapers for breaking the story too soon and endangering his case and his witnesses (one of whom died in less-than-clear circumstances shortly after the story began to raise world-wide headlines). The newspapers in New Orleans said they broke the story because Garrison had spent some \$8,000 of the taxpayer's money since last October when he began his secret investigation.

Garrison's Plot Theory

Garrison denied that his findings showed any foreign involvement in the assassination, but further than that he provided no details.

From newspaper investigations, however, it seems that his plot theory rests on an FBI-refuted tip from a New Orleans courthouse

hanger-on and "private detective by the name of Jack S. Martin.

Martin told authorities that Dav Ferrie, a former airline pilot (first arrest with minor boys), taught Oswald how to shoot a rifle with telescopic sight, put Oswald in hypnotic trance with directions shoot Kennedy, and arranged spirit him out of Dallas in a plane after the killing. But after New Orleans authorities picked up Ferrie in the assassination aftermath, Secret Service agent reported that Martin, "who has every appearance of being an alcoholic," admitted he suffers from "telephonitis" while drinking and that it was during one of his drinking sprees that he telephoned Asst. Dist. Atty. Herma S. Kohlman and told him the fantastic story.

Even so, when Ferrie died last week, adding his name to the list of at least 16 persons who were linked with the assassination and who have since died, a shudder ran through those who claimed some knowledge of Oswald's activities in New Orleans when he lived there during the summer of 1963.

Suicide to Avoid Arrest?

Garrison termed Ferrie's death a suicide, implying that he killed himself to avoid arrest, but the coroner said he died from natural causes—a blown blood vessel in the brain—and that there was nothing to indicate suicide except an unsigned, undated typewritten note saying death was a "sweet prospect found on the dining room table in Ferrie's apartment.

After the death, others connected

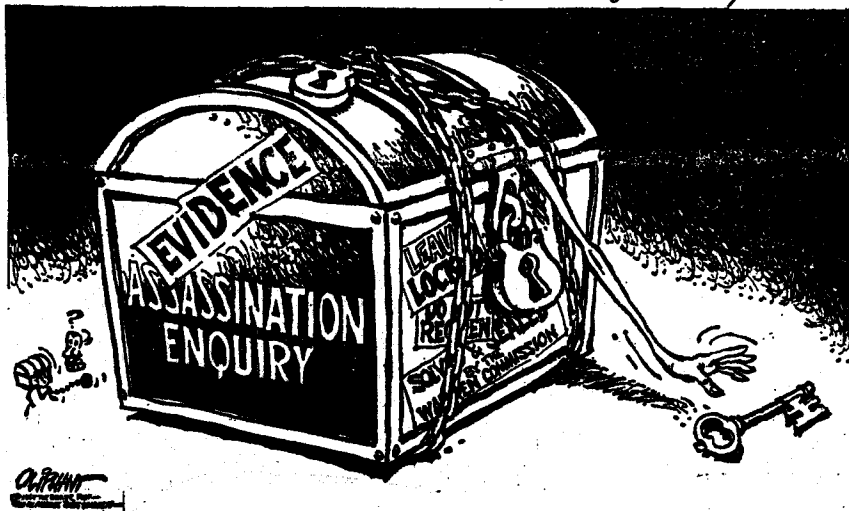
with the Garrison investigation dropped from sight. David Lewis, a bus station baggage clerk and "private detective," moved his family, then showed up in Garrison's office saying: "I'm not worried about myself, but I am about my family. Maybe there has been too much said about me already, but they know my name and know what I look like and they know where I work, so that's it." Lewis claimed to have known Oswald, and says he saw him with five other men Garrison feels were connected with the Kennedy plot. "I won't name any name until Garrison tells me so," Lewis had said earlier. "There definitely, absolutely was a plot. There was other people involved besides Oswald."

Cuban Exiles in Case

Cuban exiles added spice to the case. Oswald was connected with the Fair Play for Cuba Committee—a pro-Castro organization—when he was in New Orleans. Several still-mysterious Cubans are reportedly working with Garrison in his investigation, and there is the persistent rumor that some exiles, angry at Kennedy's failure to order all-out support of the exile invasion at the Bay of Pigs in 1961, were talking about killing the President.

As the week waned, Garrison kept his details to himself, went about raising money to continue his investigation, warned that continued publicity endangered the lives of witnesses, and refused to pass on his file to Washington. **END**

2-28-67



Cartoon by Olfphant

NYT-4-25-67
Connally Has Doubts

AUSTIN, Tex., Feb. 24 (AP)
—Gov. John Connally said today he had personal doubts that Mr. Garrison's investigation would produce "anything new or revealing."

The Governor, who was wounded while riding with Mr. Kennedy in Dallas, said he did not "want to pass judgment" on Mr. Garrison's investigation "since I am not apprised of the facts" and said he was sure Mr. Garrison was a "responsible public official." **END**