New Interpretation Put On 'Hamlet' By Alley

By JOEL HOCHMAN

As "Hamlet's" director, John Wiley, pointed out, "Each age has attempted to explain him (Hamlet) in terms of its new discoveries of the 'laws' of 'laws' of human nature."

Thus it occurred that the Alley Theater's Hamlet was a man of confusions, harried to his doom by drives very close to what contemporaries refer to as psychosis.

Mr. Wiley may be correct in his historicism, but I for one am not content with his diagnosis.

"HAMLET" AT THE Alley is a production of much ability and polish. The details of the presentation are professionally and skillfully handled, and one cannot overlook the excellence of costumes and set design. And the problems peculiar to theater in the round are met and satisfied.

But the greatest problem of this production is that of the epic proportions of Shakespeare's work.

Hamlet is a controversial play. Scholars have argued for years about Hamlet's age, his hesitations, his motives, faults and excuses. Hamlet is complicated and grand, effusive and heroic, but Hamlet is very, very impressive.

THUS WHEN THE scope and magnitude of ancient Denmark is compressed into the limited expanse of the circular stage, audience is in the midst of the activity there is a danger of distraction.

It is very easy in this presentation to forget dialogue, for mannerism, and to surrender contemplation up to the lures of stage direction.

Many times Hamlet's pronouncements overwhelm the audience with emotiveness and thus reduce Shakespeare's tragedy to the psychologism of Tennessee Williams.

The audience, at such proximity, cannot avoid preoccupations with emotion when lines about Man's finitude are accompanied by physical frenzy. And frenzy is not of primary importance in Shakespeare.

THE FINAL EFFECT is that of an evening at the psychic wrestling matches, where one has viewed a great deal of neuroticism and very little of the aesthetic order of Shakespeare.

Chris Wiggins, as Hamlet, is thoroughly accomplished in the presentation of the driven prince. But correlative to Mr. Wiley's analysis of Hamlet's problems, the interpretations of the rest of the cast seem orientated around Hamlet's emotional displays.

For the most part the cast is most obviously subsidiary, almost to the point of anonymity. Thus these figures assume an almost two-dimensional construction.

Through this process in my (Continued on Page 8)
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view, a great deal of the play's richness is sacrificed. The usurper-King is not a man tragically condemned by his own ambitions. The Queen is not a woman tragically deprived of all her loved world.

POLONIUS IS left only as an amusing fool who got in the way, unfortunately, once too often, Laertes is simply a code of behavior (who looks much too young in the first place.) And everyone else becomes an animated stage-prop.

Finally, against this background, when any character does occasionally assume a well-formed and accomplished identity, the accomplishment seems out of place—like a dash of bright paint against a monotone background.

The subsidiary characterization is not given opportunity or function. This is the fate of the brilliance of Jeanette Clift's mad scene, and Ronald Bishop's Polonian pompomposities.

IN SUMMARY I must in fairness admit Mr. Wiley's right to interpretation. In this connection I must also recommend attendance of the play for those interested in an unusual approach to "Hamlet."

But I must also insist that Hamlet as a neurotic is not an epic figure in his tragedy, but a sad and disturbing case-history.