

brate all things Hindu (including even the caste system), propagate the myth of India as the original home of the 'Aryan race,' and deplore all 'foreigners,' including . . . Muslims. The history of Indian science and technology . . . is described as an unfolding of the Hindu genius," and the role of critical inquiry in science is given short shrift.

In India during the 1970s and '80s, a "sci-

ence-for-the-people" movement advocated the use of science as a means of social revolution, Nanda says. Those involved sought to employ scientific knowledge "to contest the dominant, largely Hindu world views on caste and women." But when influential intellectuals argue that scientific rationality itself is a "colonial construct," only the interests of Hindu nationalism are served.

ARTS & LETTERS

The Two Black Theaters

"The Chitlin Circuit" by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in *The New Yorker* (Feb. 3, 1997),
20 W. 43rd St., New York, N.Y. 10036.

Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright August Wilson's call last year for an autonomous black theater for black Americans (subsidized by foundations and government agencies) still has the stage world in a tizzy. In January, he faced off with critic Robert Brustein, founder of the Yale Repertory Theatre, in a sold-out debate in New York's Town Hall. "What next?" said Brustein in the *New Republic*. "Separate schools?" Overlooked in all the hullabaloo, observes Gates, head of the Afro-American Studies Department at Harvard University, is the fact that a thriving black theater for the masses already exists: the "Chitlin Circuit."

It was born during the 1920s, when the Theater Owners Booking Association brought plays and other entertainments to black audiences throughout the South and Midwest. Though the association did not outlast the decade, the market it created—disparagingly labeled the Chitlin Circuit—did. Playing in theaters and school auditoriums, black touring companies crisscrossed black America, Gates says, providing "a movable feast that enabled blacks to patronize black entertainers. On the whole, these productions were for the moment, not for the ages. They were the kind of melodrama or farce—or as often both—in which nothing succeeded like excess. But the productions were for, by, and about black folks; and their audience wasn't much inclined to check them against their Stanislavsky anyway." They still aren't.

Today, working- and middle-class black Americans in the roughly 40 cities on the Chitlin Circuit go to see plays such as the one Gates saw in Newark, New Jersey: Adrian Williamson's *My Grandmother*

Prayed for Me. As art, Gates says, the play makes the TV sitcom *Good Times* "look like Strindberg." Yet the play deals with matters—gang violence, crack addiction, and teenage pregnancy—of pressing concern to the Newark audience, as its members' intense engagement with what was happening on stage demonstrated.

The play's comic moments, Gates says, put "all the very worst stereotypes of the race . . . on display, larger than life." The exclusively black audience was able to laugh uninhibitedly, without having to worry that whites might mistake the portrayal for an accurate depiction of black life. "You don't want white people to see this kind of spectacle; you want them to see the noble dramas of August Wilson, where the injuries and injustices perpetrated by the white man are never far from our consciousness," Gates observes.

The people responsible for the Chitlin Circuit shows, he writes, "tend not to vaporize about the 'emancipatory potentialities' of their work, or about 'forging organic links to the community': they'd be out of business if black folks stopped turning up. Instead, they like to talk numbers." Some of the plays have grossed \$20 million or more. (However, these large sums have attracted some criminal "investors," Gates notes.)

The "most successful impresario" of the Chitlin Circuit, Gates says, is a man named Shelly Garrett, who claims that his 1987 play *Beauty Shop* has been seen by more than 20 million people, and that he himself is "America's No. 1 black theatrical producer, director, and playwright." Garrett has never met August Wilson; Wilson has never heard of Garrett. "They are as unacquainted with each

The End of the Eternal?

Writing in *New Perspectives Quarterly* (Fall 1996), George Steiner, a professor of comparative literature at Oxford University, detects “a slow, glacial shift in Western culture’s attitude toward death,” with profound consequences for the traditional conception of literature.

Literature, as we have known it, springs out of a wild and magnificent piece of arrogance, old as Pindar, Horace, and Ovid. Exegi aere perennius—what I have written will outlive time. Stronger than bronze, less breakable than marble, this poem. Pindar was the first man on record to say that his poem will be sung when the city which commissioned it has ceased to exist. Literature’s immense boast against death. Even the greatest poet, I dare venture, would be profoundly embarrassed to be quoted saying such a thing today.

Something enormous is happening, due in part to the barbarism of this century, perhaps due to DNA, perhaps due to fundamental changes in longevity, in cellular biology, in the conception of what it is to have children. We cannot phrase it with any confidence, but it will profoundly affect the great classical vainglory of literature—I am stronger than death! I can speak about death in poetry, drama, the novel, because I have overcome it; I am more or less permanent.

That is no longer available. A quite different order of imagining is beginning to arise, and it may be that when we look back on this time we will suddenly see that the very great artists, in the sense of changing our views—of what is art, what is human identity—are not the ones we usually name but rather exasperating, surrealist, jokers. Marcel Duchamp. If I call this pisoir a great work of art and sign it, who are you to disprove that? Or, even more so, the artist Jean Tinguely, who built immense structures which he then set on fire, saying: “I want this to be ephemeral. I want it to have happened only once.”

other as art and commerce are said to be.”

In an America that is mostly white, it is inevitable that the audience for serious plays

is mostly white, Gates points out. “Wilson writes serious plays. His audience is mostly white. What’s to apologize for?”

Selling the Arts

“Crisis in the Arts: The Marketing Response” by Joanne Scheff and Philip Kotler, in *California Management Review* (Fall 1996), Univ. of California, S549 Haas School of Business #1900, Berkeley, Calif. 94720-1900.

For nonprofit performing arts organizations, the bright lights have dimmed. Corporations, foundations, and government agencies have become more tight-fisted, and attendance at plays, concerts, and dance performances has stopped growing. Scheff and Kotler, who teach at Northwestern University’s Kellogg Graduate School of Management, have some advice for the managers of arts organizations: learn to market the “product” better.

Such skills weren’t needed in the golden era that began in the mid-1960s. Professional orchestras increased in number from 58 in 1965 to more than 1,000 recently; professional regional theater companies went from 12 to more than 400; dance companies, from

37 to 250, opera companies, from 27 to more than 110. Ticket sales (adjusted for inflation) jumped 50 percent between 1977 and 1987. By that year, Americans were spending more on tickets to concerts and other arts performances than on tickets to sports events. And foundations and corporations were contributing vast sums (\$500 million in 1990).

But that era is gone, Scheff and Kotler say. Audiences are no longer expanding, and in many cases are shrinking. Nearly half of all the regional theaters in the country are operating in the red. “Increasingly, funders—especially government agencies and foundations—are restricting their grants for specific purposes and less funding is available for general operating support. Corporate support is