

Theatre: Giver of Light



Anne Bancroft, left, and Patty Duke as they appear in a scene from William Gibson's play "The Miracle Worker."

'The Miracle Worker' Opens at Playhouse

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IN "The Miracle Worker," acted at The Playhouse last evening, William Gibson is writing about a giver of the light. It is the story of Annie Sullivan's first week with Helen Keller.

Since Anne Bancroft gives a glorious performance as Anne and little Patty Duke is wonderfully truthful and touching as Helen, the scenes of the giving and the lighting are profoundly moving. They constitute the essence of "The Miracle Worker." The fact that Mr. Gibson has not translated his drama out of the idiom of television into the idiom of the theatre cannot be ignored. But it does not destroy the emotional power of the essential struggle in the drama.

For struggle is what it is. Although the results of Annie's teaching are noble and have given America one of its noblest citizens, it is stubbornness and a certain degree of callousness that get the teaching started. "The Miracle Worker" is not a tale of virtuous social service between ladies.

Before the teaching makes an impression, the blind, deaf and mute child of the Keller family is a ferocious little beast. Unaware of the civilized world, she makes life miserable for everyone around her.

Coming directly from an orphan asylum and the Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston, Annie brings a fierce determination to make her way in the adult world. She knows how to fight. "The Miracle Worker" is full of fights — civilized fights between Annie and her employer, savage fights between Annie and the wild creature that only a knowledge of words can tame.

As Helen, little Miss Duke is altogether superb—a plain, sullen, explosive, miniature monster whose destructive behavior makes sympathy for her afflictions impossible, but whose independence and vitality are nevertheless admirable. Just as Mr. Gibson has refused to sentimentalize the part, so Miss Duke keeps the faith in her performance. Although it is necessarily wordless it is completely articulate.

From the crude but engaging Gittel of "Two for the

The Cast

THE MIRACLE WORKER, a play by William Gibson. Staged by Arthur Penn; scenery and lighting by George Jenkins; costumes by Ruth Morley; presented by Fred Coe; production stage manager, Porter Van Zandt. At the Playhouse.

Doctor	Roger De Koven
Kate Keller	Patricia Neal
Captain Keller	Torin Thatcher
Martha	Miriam Butler
Percy	Caswell Fairweather
Viney	Beah Richards
Helen Keller	Patty Duke
James Keller	James Congdon
Aunt EV	Kathleen Comegys
Anagnos	Michael Constantine
Annie Sullivan	Anne Bancroft
Children: Lori Heineman, Dale Ellen Bethea, Rita Levy, Lynn Schoenfeld, Eileen Musumeci, Donna Pastore.	
John	John Marriott
Mary	Juanita Bethea

Seesaw," Miss Bancroft has now moved up to the unlovely Annie Sullivan—the giver of light, not out of a noble spirit, but out of a blind drive for conquering a job at hand. Since Annie has a pert, Irish tongue, the character is amusing

But Miss Bancroft makes her fiery, too. Annie is a young woman burning with determination. In Miss Bancroft's darting, aggressive performance she is also a young woman of awareness and enlightenment.

If the journeymen who made an acceptable play out of "Two for the Seesaw" had gone to work on "The Miracle Worker" they could probably have made something more acceptable than the disarray that is now on the stage. It has the loose narrative technique of a TV script. It is afflicted with embarrassing off-stage voices and gratuitous bits of local color; and George Jenkins, laboriously following the wanderings of the script, has endowed it with enough scenery—good scenery—to float a musical show.

But this is apparently the way Mr. Gibson wants it. Under Arthur Penn's perceptive direction, Patricia Neal gives an excellent performance as Helen's anxious, loving mother whose heart is torn between pity and fortitude. As the father, short-tempered but eager to do the wise thing, Torin Thatcher is also excellent.

There are several other good actors in a well-chosen cast, and they all fit their parts neatly into the pattern of the performance. Four of the most winning are blind children borrowed from The Lighthouse. But it is Miss Bancroft and Miss Duke who carry the burden of this untidy but moving drama. They are involved in one of the most honorable of man's activities; letting light into the darkness of an uninformed mind.