

Theatre Historian Shows Vitality, Verve For Living

by Phyllis Gibbs

George Kernodle, famed theatre historian, looked dwarfed as he sat behind the desk in the theatre arts office. He had been besieged all morning by interviewers and one would think as it was nearing lunch that he would not continue.

Yet, speaking glibly and seemingly interested in the ideas of everyone who paced in and out, the conversation alighted on many topics.

I WAS subjective as everyone else who approached him with questions and favorite topics, because I was observing George Kernodle—the man.

Occasionally, one comes in contact with a person who seems to have an extraordinary verve for life. It not only arises in conversation about a particular topic but is, rather, reflected in a point of view, in a general en-

joyment and fascination with life.

This was George Kernodle, as he talked about people who give up as they get older and no longer read, settle for lack of adventure and lack of creativity as an accepted course of events. "Life is too precious from beginning to end to allow that to happen," he was saying.

IN QUESTIONING Kernodle about which aspect of theatre history he had a particular fondness, he answered that he was interested in all periods. He has studied them all, and has written articles or books on most.

He did admit, however, that he felt a particular affinity for Elizabethan theatre. "It gives you a sense of man's dignity and importance as well as the aristocratic tradition of which he was so proud."

"History is very important in a study of theatre, because it

shows us not only what man's position has been through the centuries, but more important it has caught the ideals of what man has strived to be.

It is this reminder of man's capabilities that modern times give us little glimpse of."

This is one of the problems with the Absurdist playwrights—whose philosophy, says Kernodle, is "I stink, therefore, I am. It appeals to human degradation."

It is just as important to show us that in the past we have captured human dignity, pride, sensitivity, he went on to say. "Complete discontinuity," the premise upon which modern drama is based, "is false because a movement which exposes only evil does not give a true picture."

KERNODLE IS the product of Auburn University, Carnegie Tech., Yale, University of Chicago, and Columbia. Each summer he has spent some time as

a visiting instructor at a college away from his home base — University of Arkansas—in such states as Michigan, Iowa, Colorado, California, British Columbia, Hawaii and now Illinois.

Kernodle is directing S. I. Hsiung's "Lady Precious Stream," a traditional Chinese drama for the last production of the summer theatre program.

Of this form he says that it displays the "simple mutual respect and 'politeness' between people," which he finds refreshing amidst 20th-century emphasis on the coarser aspects of life.