In the matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer, at the Nuclio Eclectic, 216 Hanover St. (in the North End), Boston. Open Wednesday - Sunday, through May 22. Admission $5.

The protagonists' soliloquies fail on two counts. Rothauer's blocking upsets the characters from their positions in the hearing room, bringing them downstage to speak directly to the audience. Rather than promoting closeness to the audience, this device impairs the continuity of the play as players dash out behind their tables to center stage.

These discourses seem superficial and, indeed, misplaced. The drama begins with Oppenheimer (Eugene K. Bolick). Heinitz first time he entered the hearing room, establishing him as a first-person presence. When members of the security board hear the case and opposing counsel speak to the audience, a fish-on-the-wall perspective is suggested. This question of perspective is never resolved by playwright Kipphardt. The substance of the soliloquies cannot justify the ambiguity; they serve only to force-feed the audience all-too-locuro ideas and questions.

Bolick's portrayal of Oppenheimer is superb. He convincingly presents the central character as honest, quietly eloquent, unobtruding in his being, and firm in his "scruples." Unfortunately, many of the other players were mired in overacting. Board member Thomas A. Morgan (Edwin Thorton), defense attorney C. A. Wollander (Thomas Joseph), and Major Nicholas Radzi (Merion Aspinwall) all seem to come off the central casting shelf as the stereotypical industrial giant, the stereotypical Air Force officer, and the stereotypical Air Force officer, respectively. The stereotypes provide an inadequate base for shallow, undeveloped characters.

Physical Edward Telller (Michael Frank) and Isador Isaac Rabi (Woody Sato) perform admirably, transcending stereotypes to create complex, human characters. Questions about the role of the scientists in the social responsibility of scientists for the consequences of their discoveries are nicely presented in the dictionary of Telller, on one hand, and Oppenheimer and Rabi, on the other. Telller believes that scientific and military decisions should be left to the politicians and the military, abdicating any responsibility for his role in the development of the atomic and hydrogen bombs. Rabi and Oppenheimer defend the application of "moral scruples" to their work.

It is quite clear that both playwright and director side with Rabi and Oppenheimer. A gratuitous bit of scenery, looking remarkably like a six-grade science fair diorama, depicts a mushroom cloud over a demolished Boston skyline, identifiable only by the cracked golden dome of the State House. It is conspicuous, but placed downside up. It is never used, never explained, never part of the play; it serves only as a graphic reminder of the purpose of this drama — to serve not art, but politics.

Hans Bethe (J. D. Kimmel) testifies, "Good ideas are expensive, and I like to eat well. Not all good ideas are expensive. Hone: Save the $5 and eat a good dinner upstairs."

Barry S. Surman

The Seagull, by Anton Chekhov, directed by Jane Armitage, at the Peoples Theater, Cambridge. Thursdays through Sundays to May 22. Tickets $5.50 (Thurs. & Sat.), $7.00 (Fri.).

"Why do you always wear black?" "I'm mourning for my life. I'm unhappy."

Thus begins Anton Chekhov's subtle comedy of triangular love relationships, The Seagull. Centered about a family of actors and writers, this play depicts the conflicts between generations of artists and the frustrations of unrequited love.

Konstantin Treplev, played by Stevenon Carbach, is a young aspiring playwright and the son of a vain provincial actress, Mme. Arkadina (played by Renee Miller). In love with the stage school daughter of a wealthy neighbor, he writes a play in which she stars. The play, falling miserably, is mocked by Arkadina, thus upsetting Konstantin. Seeing little worth in such an obscure writer, the daughter, Nina (played by Kate Falk), falls in love with Vladimir (played by Murray Biggs), the founder of the MIT Shakespeare Ensemble. He is a famous novelist in his late thirties and lover of Nina. Arkadina.

As the play progresses, relationships become more complex, and the string of more frustrating when tragedy occurs and the play ends leaving the audience with "implied" insight into the fates of the characters. At the Peolrys Theater did a halfway decent job. The interpretation of the play was a bit different, at times, from what Chekhov had written, but nevertheless, some semblance of a plot could be found. "To know the writer's role, "Arkadina was effective. You did feel comfort for her superficiality, but I couldn't help thinking that I knew of some people that could have portrayed the role much better without trying. Chekhov, Chekhov! Konstantin came off as an exaggerated Shakespeare's Hamlet. It was hard to decide whether it was Chekhov's writing or Armitage's directing that made the part seem so shallow. Nina was acting fine, but Nina came off as more "spoiled brat" than merely innocent and impres-