The allure of the theater — that magic that is created onstage the moment the house lights dim and the curtain rises — will be the theme of Baylor Theater's second production of the 1981-82 season "A Harlequinade" and "The Real Inspector Hound."

The two one-act plays will be presented Tuesday through Saturday at 7:30 p.m. in Theater B of the Hooper-Schaefer Fine Arts Center on the Baylor campus.

During the plays, director Patricia Cook, said the cast members will give audiences an intriguing closer look at the "seductive power" of the theater. "Theater's appeal is universal," she said. "At some point in our lives, we all want to act — and we all fancy ourselves as critics. These two plays will give the audience a chance to revel in the 'trappings' and 'idiosyncrasies' of the theater, and the result will be, I hope, an evening of just plain fun."

Terrence Rattigan's "A Harlequinade" was written in the 1950s, and portrays a touring company that is performing "Romeo and Juliet" in England. "The stars of the play are really too old to be touring any more, and the stage manager is disgusted with the whole show and ready to kiss the theater goodbye," Ms. Cook said. "The play revolves around what happens between these characters as the tour progresses."

Tom Stoppard's "Hound," on the other hand, is set in contemporary times. The story is about two critics who are reviewing a play — and we'll actually have a play within a play. The more well-known of the two critics is in love with the leading lady, while the second wants to kill the first so that he can become more famous. "The play within a play is a murder mystery, and by a strange turn of events, one of the critics actually becomes involved in the play he's reviewing. There are several unexpected twists which take place before the story resolved," she said.

Ms. Cook said she has wanted to do two one-act plays back to back for some time. "A Harlequinade" and "The Real Inspector Hound" seemed to be selections that she believed might complement each other in performance. "The plays are double cast, so the audience can say, 'Oh, there's so-and-so — he was a young man in the first play and now he's old.' Of course, that means rapid costume and makeup changes for the cast, but that's theater!" she said.

To add continuity to the two performances, songs by Noel Coward will be performed before the shows, during intermission, and after the shows. "A Harlequinade" and "The Real Inspector Hound" will be the first performances in the new thrust theater of the Fine Arts Center, which opened in June. Ms. Cook said that having a new theater facility made her choice of plays seem even more appropriate. "Here we are still learning about our new theater and doing plays about the very essence of why we're in this new building," she said. "From a technical point of view, it's been very challenging. We'll have a Venetian street scene for 'A Harlequinade' which will be transformed later into an English manor house. 'A Harlequinade' uses a fake parquet floor, which we'll flip over to become a carpeted floor when we create the proscenium set and the critic's box for 'Hound,'" Ms. Cook said.