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MODERN ENGLISH DRAMA



SHAW'S " SAINT JOAN " (OLD Vic THEATRE COMPANY)

Joan receives the Archbishop's blessing.

Photo John Vickers

FT.

MODERN ENGLISH DRAMA

A Survey of the Theatre from 1900

by

ERNEST REYNOLDS

B.A. (Lond.) Ph.D. (Cantab.)

LECTURER IN ENGLISH IV THE UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM
AUTHOR OF "EARLY VICTORIAN DRAMA" ETC.

With a Foreword

by

PROFESSOR ALLARDYCE NICOLL

With Fifteen Half-tone Plates

NEW EDITION, REVISED



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FOREWORD

IT is a double pleasure to have the privilege of writing a foreword for this book—first, because Dr Reynolds is a colleague and a friend, and, secondly, because his subject is one of such immediate interest.

We are all interested in the modern drama. Although we do not possess a National Theatre, there is a common feeling among us that in some way our drama is a national heritage: Shakespeare is a symbol of England, and we could well wish to have another Shakespeare in our midst to express the spirit of the world of our day. Eagerly we search around us for signs of pre-eminent promise, and in this search we need to have behind us, for guidance and for purposes of comparison, a record of what actually has been accomplished.

Rightly, Dr Reynolds has made this record cover a period of half a century. When we look back from our present vantage-point in time the year 1900 may seem very far away, 1914 may appear remote, and even 1939 may be receding rapidly; yet, in so far as the theatre is concerned, the roots of the modern drama are set in Edwardian, even in Victorian, soil. It is not merely that the greatest dramatist of our age, George Bernard Shaw, starts his playwriting career in the nineties of the last century and completes his latest work to-day; it is that the styles dominant in 1949 ultimately may be traced back to those of 1900-10.

These styles, of course, are many and diversified; they extend from the realistic to the poetically imaginative, from the profound to the trivial. In the world of the theatre are many realms, and all of them must be surveyed by an historian of the drama if he wishes his account to be complete. One excellent feature of Dr Reynolds' work is the interest he displays not merely in the 'literary' drama, but also in entertainments of lighter import, not only in the plays themselves, but also in the theatrical conditions that gave them birth. No doubt, in the end the glory of the stage is seen to reside in the dramatic word, but the author who focuses all his attention on the word

I cannot pretend to have covered the field completely. The more one delves into the history of our drama during the past fifty years the more inexhaustible a mine does it show itself to be. Just as no one man can be said to know the streets of London perfectly, so no one writer can hope to chronicle everything of importance in the twentieth-century drama of England. Moreover, in writing of something so close to modern life the cool, objective detachment of a history of Greek drama or the Jacobean stage cannot be achieved. Personal knowledge and preference must clearly count for something in a history of things seen in one's own lifetime. We are too near to our subject to attempt to see its work yet as a perfectly rounded chapter in dramatic history. All we can do is to travel with enthusiasm through its richly stocked countryside, admiring its beauties as Stevenson admired the beauties of the Cevennes, though I hope comparisons will not be made between this book and the patient, plodding Modestine.

It remains for me to thank all those who have helped me with advice during the preparation of the work. To Professor Allardyce Nicoll my debt, like that of so many students and historians of the theatre, is incalculable. And Professor Nicoll has added special kindness, not only in writing a foreword, but in assisting me on a number of occasions from the astonishing stores of his own knowledge of the British stage. My further thanks are due to the Birmingham City Library staff for their endless patience in dealing with many queries, and to Mr A. W. Tolmie and *The Stage* office for information generously given.

For permission to quote from copyright works I am deeply indebted to the following: Messrs Constable and Co., Ltd, for extracts from the plays of Gordon Bottomley; Messrs George Allen and Unwin, Ltd, for extracts from J. M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*, *Riders to the Sea*, and *Deirdre of the Sorrows*; Messrs Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, Ltd, for passages from *Stage Lighting*, by Harold Ridge and F. S. Aldred; Messrs John Lane, The Bodley Head, Ltd, for extracts from Stephen Phillips' *Paolo and Francesca*; Messrs Martin Seeker and Warburg, Ltd, for extracts from Lascelles Abercrombie's *The Staircase*

and *Phanix*; and Messrs Faber and Faber, Ltd, for passages from T. S. Eliot's *The Family Reunion*.

The illustrations have been chosen not only as pictures of plays referred to in the text, but as showing methods of staging in England during the twentieth century, together with one or two representative views of typical English theatres. For help in connexion with these pictures I am greatly indebted to the following: Mr Ernest F. Woods and Messrs Howard and Wyndham, Ltd, for illustrations of theatres; Mr Michael Wood, of Covent Garden Opera House; Mrs Gabrielle Enthoven and the Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum; Messrs Leslie Hurry, Paul Shelving, and Osborne Robinson, for examples of their designs; and for other valuable help Miss Frances Stephens, of *Theatre World*, and Mr Eric Johns, of *The Stage*. For the loan of the picture of *Murder in the Cathedral* I have to thank Mr E. Martin Browne and Mr Vincent Pearmain.

E. R.

THE UNIVERSITY,
BIRMINGHAM
1949

NOTE TO THE SECOND EDITION

FOR this revised edition I have taken the opportunity of adding a few passages and of making one or two minor alterations. These include a reference to the work of Christopher Fry, which had not come into prominence when the book was written, some additions to the note on J. B. Priestley, a short selection of books on ballet, and a directory of the members of the Little Theatre Guild of Great Britain. Extra references to books have also been inserted here and there in the text and a few changes made in the theatre list at the end. My thanks are due to several correspondents for some of the additional information now incorporated.

Inevitably, in a survey of this kind, the work of many excellent dramatists has to be passed over with a mere mention, or even in silence. The plays described throughout this book are chosen mainly as typical of whole classes of modern drama, and numerous unnamed others may well be equally important. For example, plays of such calibre as those of Emlyn Williams, Rodney Ackland, and Ronald Mackenzie are quite as significant as many included here, and their omission is a testimony to the *embarras de richesses* which modern English drama provides for the student and the historian.

E. R.

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CHAPTER I

THE ENGLISH THEATRE FROM 1900

(i) *General View*

ACADEMIC divisions of literature by century and half-century have a certain natural advantage. This is particularly evident with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which possess an integral quality manifesting itself in all the main departments of their literature. *The beggar's Opera* and Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* belong as plainly to the early and late Georgian era as do *Wuthering Heights* and *Salome* to the early and late years of Victoria. And in considering the literature of the twentieth century, particularly its drama, the beginning in 1900 marks as good a dividing-line as the historian needs.

For with the death of Victoria it is no mere literary fancy to say that a radical change came over the theatre. The end of her reign was the symbol of a break-up of the Victorian conception of the stage, almost as the death of Diaghileff in 1929 closed a definite epoch in the history of the Russian Ballet. The political stability of England during the nineteenth century had centred round the throne, and the theatre reflected that stability in a striking degree. The whole dramatic principle of the age had been one of entertainment. The theatre was a civilized comfort, a feast of the senses, an agreeable amusement, a stimulus for the love of the macabre or the exotic, much as the cinema is regarded now.

Even the Shakespearean revivals of Charles Kean and others were so lavishly upholstered that the primary appeal was made to the senses rather than to the mind.¹ Melodrama, comic opera, burlesque, light comedy, farce, pantomime, pageant plays, these were the stock-in-trade of the Victorian manager. Meanwhile, until the very last years of the nineteenth century, the serious drama in England, as we understand it,

¹ An exception should be made of Fechter's revolutionary conception of Hamlet at the Princess's Theatre in 1861.

hardly existed. From *Our Boys* and *The Silver King* to *IoIanthé* or *San Toy* and the Irving productions at the Lyceum, Shaw searched in vain, in the days of his criticism, for any real signs of the intellectual fire. Gilbert and Wilde had some claims, but their province was not the serious drama. Shaw remarked even of Pinero that there was nothing whatever in his work to show that he was a contemporary of Ibsen. And if this was true of Pinero it was a hundred times truer of the average Victorian dramatist.

It was not until the new century that the drama broke from its swaddling-clothes and began to grow up. Yet by 1900 a very high level of stage prosperity had been reached. An examination of the theatrical wills of Victorian impresarios shows the rich harvest that was often gathered from plays of doubtful or mediocre literary merit. Sir Charles Wyndham, for instance, left £197,035, Sir Squire Bancroft £174,535, Sir George Alexander £90,672, J. L. Toole £79,984, and from the Savoy light operas the principal triumvirate amassed considerable fortunes—D'Oyly Carte £240,817, Gilbert £111, 971, and Sullivan £54,527. (Sullivan spent heavily during his lifetime, otherwise this figure would have been much higher.) George Edwardes left £49,780. Allowing for the changes in the value of money, these fortunes were comparable in many ways to the sums amassed in the modern cinema, though they hardly scaled its recent heights.

It is often urged that pure literary considerations can never be the sole criterion of achievement in the theatre. This may be so, but it does not affect the fact that Victorian drama had consisted largely of pieces which were of little worth outside the walls of a theatre. The two great exceptions—the operas of Gilbert and the comedies of Wilde (with a little of Pinero and Jones)—are almost all that deserve the active remembrance of constant revival and literary study, apart from the early plays of Shaw. The main charge against the late Victorian age, in fact, is that it started the commercialization of the theatre, and it is against a background of rising commercial success that one must view the drama of the twentieth century. With its gigantic satellite the cinema, which has now dwarfed its parent body in mass-influence and monetary triumphs,

entertainment has become a vast industry employing thousands of people and involving millions of pounds. Fortunately, though the dragon's teeth of this commercial monster were sown during the Victorian era, and though the twentieth century has seen the full development of the monster's power, there has been a parallel literary development quite beyond the range of anything in the Victorian stage conception. To a great extent this has mitigated the commercial evil.

In a word, disruption has set in, and what we shall have to consider in this survey are two main streams of theatrical work—the commercial drama and the art drama which has been evolving side by side with it, together with certain works which stand midway between.

Naturally this division into commercial and artistic drama is not a purely modern development. Until the Theatre Act of 1843 there had for long been 'major' and 'minor' theatres, where 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' dramas were respectively staged. The elect patronized Covent Garden and Drury Lane, while the populace went to the Surrey and Sadler's Wells. And even after 1843, when free trade was established in the theatre, the patent houses continued to be decorous and stately, while the transpontine drama grew ever wilder and more flamboyant. None the less the real cleavage into commercial money-making and artistic money-losing drama is largely a modern growth. This is true notwithstanding the fact that there have always been wretched plays which have made fortunes and fine plays which have lost them. Consequently the history of the theatre as a business and the history of the drama proper need to be considered separately from about 1900. Before that time it is not really necessary to divide them.

On the one hand, then, we have the steady development of the entertainment world itself, the vast commercial expansion which has led from the days of Boucicault's £300 fee for *London Assurance* (1841) to the present age, when *Blithe Spirit* can run for five years at a West End theatre. On the other hand, there is the growth of experimental theatres (often of artistic significance), such as the Festival Theatre at Cambridge under Terence Gray in the late 1920*5. Midway between these two

extremes lies a vast and amorphous mass of drama, the despair of the historian who seeks to classify it, but all ultimately inclining to one or other of the two main camps of commerce and art.

No doubt such a separation can never be rigid. Success in the theatre is so completely bound up with the economic factors that, as has been well said, the drama must succeed as a business if it is not to fail as an art. Some form of regular paying audience is a necessary condition for all dramatic performances above the level of an amateur production. But perhaps the most hopeful sign in the theatre of the past half-century has been the presence in it (to an extent unparalleled since the days of patronage) of men of ability, content with a bare living in order to work at real drama rather than commercial entertainment.

A vigorous amateur movement has also grown up along with the repertory theatres. Many dramas of worth are brought to production in this way. An experience of amateur acting is now, in fact, so common that many of the audience at professional performances must themselves have had some firsthand acquaintance with the stage.¹

Along with this growth of repertory theatres and amateur societies has developed the notable modern revival of ballet. This, the product of the last twenty years, has flowered from humble beginnings into a major artistic phenomenon. It has its own theatre, its own public, and its own voluminous and lavishly produced literature. And ballet, in its essence a pure art form, has invaded the territory of the commercial stage. Almost every musical play and revue now introduces something which (often with outrageous artistic offence) masquerades as a ballet, so popular has the art become.

The theatrical structure, then, which has developed during the past fifty years is a complex thing. Specialized worlds have

¹ The modern serious amateur has no parallel in stage history. No doubt there have always been good individual amateur actors, but for a vital amateur contribution to the drama of its own time the theatre has had to wait until the present century. There are even towns in England where amateur groups, by intelligent choice of play and careful production, have sometimes outstripped the local repertory company, which, for economic reasons, may have sunk to the mere imitating of London successes.

grown up in the theatre—the worlds of repertory, experimental drama, ballet, Shakespeare, modern comedy, crime drama, revue, musical play, opera, poetic drama, variety, Gilbert and Sullivan, pantomime. Careers are built up in particular types of acting, in specialized forms of singing and dancing, in production, in costume design, in scenic art, in lighting, in theatre orchestras, in conducting, stage management, ballet creation, operatic work, etc., to an individualized degree hardly known before this century. The old type of all-round actor, capable of anything from *East Lynne* to *Hamlet*, survives now only in small repertory companies where versatility is still an essential.

(ii) *The Victorian Legacy*

In the year 1900 Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde were both forty-four years of age. W. S. Gilbert was twenty years older; Sullivan, a dying man, was fifty-eight. Pinero was forty-five, Henry Arthur Jones forty-nine. Ibsen was seventy-two; Swinburne was still living; Hardy was at the height of his powers; Marie Corelli and Rider Haggard were being read by millions. Meanwhile the London theatre had already seen *Widowers' Houses*, *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*, *The Importance of being Earnest*, and *Lady Windermere's Fan*. Shaw's campaign on behalf of Ibsen had been waged with brilliant irony in the pages of *The Saturday Review*. *A Doll's House* had appeared (June 7, 1889) on the stage, followed by *Ghosts* and *Hedda Gabler* in 1891. William Archer's translations had been published, along with those of Eleanor Marx Aveling. In 1893 six of Ibsen's works were produced in London. J. T. Grein, a strong Ibsen enthusiast, had founded the Independent Theatre.

But this serious dramatic enthusiasm was a specialist cult, and did not immediately affect the English stage in general. It was essentially a minority movement, confined to small coteries of London playgoers. The stage as a whole was still swamped with melodramas, farces, and musical comedies. Even a work like *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*, although an enormous advance on the average social drama of its day,

was cast in the accepted mould of Victorian technique. It drew down heavy criticism from such pioneers of the new spirit as Shaw.

The achievement of the 1890's, in fact, was only that of an Advent season. The Shakespearean productions of Irving at the Lyceum and of F. R. Benson at the Stratford Memorial Theatre and elsewhere may have stimulated a serious interest in dramatic literature. The Ibsen campaign undoubtedly caused new ideas to ferment in the brains of the younger generation. The gradual percolation into England of new Continental theories, such as those of Strindberg and Maeterlinck, was having its unseen effect. The fresh tone of dramatic criticism, heard particularly in Shaw's essays, was rousing the dramatic conscience. There were the plays of Wilde. There was Pinero. There was Jones. There was early Shaw. It was no mean total.

But, when all is said, the solid result of the nineties in real drama is very slight in comparison with what was to follow.¹ The English theatre, indeed, remained, up to the very last days of the nineteenth century, fundamentally adolescent. The Savoy operas, with their peculiar blend of romantic colour, fantasy, perfect craft, and light musical charm, form an excellent epitome of Victorian theatrical taste as it was in general up to 1900. In their agreeable pleasaunces, as in the equally delectable but more horrific fields of Adelphi melodrama, real life was excluded. No social problems worth mentioning obscured the horizon. The theatre was, as already stated, mainly an apanage of Victorian political stability, an amusement, an exhibition, an entertainment. Sometimes it was dressed up, as in the Shakespeare revivals, in gorgeous pageants, glittering in the gaslight, but it was always an entertainment. its melodramas, for all the difficulties of its virtuous protagonists, were no more problem plays than the modern crook drama. Nobody went to the theatre to think, any more than they go to the cinema for that purpose to-day. Robertson, in *Caste* and *Society*, had touched the fringe of the continent of social drama, but not in such a way as to affect seriously

¹ The development of repertory theatres will be dealt with later under the drama of ideas (see Chapter V).

the theatre at large. And Shaw, before 1900, was hardly a power.

Meanwhile, however, a high degree of efficiency and organization in the theatrical profession had been secured. By 1900 every large town in Britain had built its theatre, sometimes two or three or even more. And inside those red-bricked, slated, rather grim erections, their facades bedizened with festoons of Cupids and balustraded windows, companies all over the country assembled. From Glasgow to Dundee, from Portsmouth to Bristol, from Birmingham to Manchester, they resounded to the noise of *The Bells* and *The Silver King*, *Les Cloches de Corneville*, *The Geisha*, and *La Mascotte*. They stand to-day, in many cases almost untouched, their outside walls only a little grimmer, their upholstery renovated only here and there.

The years 1880-1900 were the great period of theatre-building in England. Curiously, it was quite untouched by the Gothic revival which laid so heavy a hand on Victorian architecture, flowering cumbrously in railway station and insurance building, university college, brewery, church, and chapel. There seem to have been no Gothic theatres, except the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-on-Avon (1879).¹ They were all in exuberant Victorian rococo, spangled with mirrors and heavy chandeliers, brass-railed, floral-carpeted staircases, gilt vestibules, and flock-papered private boxes.

It was into this atmosphere of amusement, gold-fringed red-velvet curtains, painted act-drops, gaudily coloured garden scenes, cut-paper snowstorms, gas-lamps, and plush-lined dress circles that the new movement to restore the mind to the theatre was born.

(iii) *The Playhouses*

To present an adequate picture of the theatre itself in any period no detail of actual conditions should be considered irrelevant. For dramatic history is, of all departments of literary study, perhaps the least bookish, and it must be considered against its background of economics, critics,

¹ See Appendix III, (3).

censorship, touring companies, auditorium requirements, machinery, costumes, and even the bricks and mortar of the theatre itself. In this chapter, therefore, little or no mention will be made of the drama *per se*, but an attempt will be made to show how the theatrical profession worked. We shall be, then, immediately concerned with how the profession has been housed, how it has been organized, how it has toured, how it has been paid, what scenery has been used, how its stage mechanism and lighting have evolved, and, not the least, what new arrangements have been made in the auditorium for its patrons.

Clearly, only a selection from available documents and information can be presented, and no strict chronological sequence is possible in a survey of this type. But there is one unifying factor to which we may turn at once, and that is that the theatres themselves have altered little during the period. Apart from a small group of modern playhouses in London, of which the Duchess and the Cambridge are perhaps the best specimens, the theatres of England are largely late nineteenth-century fabrics. A number were built during the early years of the twentieth century, but almost always in the style of their predecessors. Only occasionally, as in the Birmingham Repertory Theatre,¹ was there any break with tradition in the arrangement of fabric and decoration.

The vast majority of Opera Houses, Lyceums, Grand Theatres, Hippodromes, Palaces, Prince of Wales's Theatres, and Empires of England are pure Victorian rococo, either in date or in style. Soundly and impregably built, they have called for little or no structural alteration. Their very solidity

¹ For a description of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre by its architect, S. N. Cooke, *vide* Bache Matthews, *A History of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre* (Chatto and Windus, 1924), pp. 156-162. The step-auditorium was an innovation in the English playhouse, as was also the simplicity of the decorative scheme: "Brown was chosen as the dominant colour, the drop curtain being brown velvet, the seats brown leather, and the walls dark oak with panels of gold canvas. The oak round the gallery and over the proscenium opening was inlaid with ebony and satinwood. The ceiling was enriched with large panels, the centre of each panel being brown. The vestibule entrance and staircase were marble, white Sicilian and brown Napoleon being used. The lounge at the back of the theatre had a marble floor and skirting, the walls were covered with brown paper, the idea being to use these walls for hanging water-colours and prints. All the fittings, etc., were dark oak."

has discouraged tampering with their massive prosceniums and elegantly gilded upper circles.¹

Apart from details of decoration and size of stage, they are all very much alike. The Theatre Royal at Birmingham may have eighteen private boxes, whereas the Northampton Opera House has only two; the Nottingham Empire, side by side with the Theatre Royal, may have a more square auditorium and a less generous allowance of red-velvet curtains to box and corridor; one house may boast of a classical colonnade, another of a stone festooned facade or a gilded dome. In a few cases, as at Drury Lane and the Old Vic, the Bristol Theatre, the Bath Theatre, and the former Festival Theatre at Cambridge, an old and historic fabric has been preserved or merely rearranged. Here and there a total rebuilding, as at Sadler's Wells (1931), has destroyed an old playhouse. Occasionally, as at the New Theatre, Oxford, a thorough reconstruction has been made of an earlier building, but this is rare. The new Stratford-on-Avon Theatre (1932) is perhaps the most striking instance of a totally different Phoenix arising from the ashes of its sire. A few historic theatres have been demolished to give birth to new cinema-temples. Daly's Theatre and the Alhambra in Leicester Square have been transmogrified into the Warner Cinema and the Odeon.

There have been many problems for those working under the out-of-date conditions of most English playhouses. Violent objection to their picture-frame prosceniums and glittering ceilings has, of course, been made by 'advanced' groups of actors and producers. A theatre such as the Festival at Cambridge (1926-33) abolished the whole paraphernalia of the Victorian theatre. It deliberately threw overboard everything that savoured of drop-curtain or proscenium arch. The actors often entered through the auditorium. There was no proper dividing-line between stage and stalls, no orchestra-pit, no side-boxes, no gilding, no Cupids. There were no fire or tableau curtains, no chandeliers. The stage was usually set and waiting as the audience entered. But such a theatre as this was possible only under special university conditions, and it had finally to be abandoned. Such experiments, of the highest

¹ See Appendix III, (1).

interest to the connoisseur, have had little or no effect on the structure of the Grand Theatres and Lyceums of England, although their methods of production have had great influence.

The theatres of our country, then, have been, and are, mainly a legacy from the last century.¹ There can be no doubt that their atmosphere of old-fashioned elegance and family comfort has strongly affected the commercial drama of our time. Experiment and progress have always come from the few theatres which have discarded the mock Louis Quinze trappings and concentrated on the play itself. Fortunes and commercial success have remained in the soft light of the chandeliers and the smiling Cupids.

An examination of a list of the West End theatres of London shows that they suffered considerable casualties during the period of the Second World War. The last pre-war edition of John Parker's *Who's Who in the Theatre*, for example, contains particulars of a number of houses which no longer figure in the newspaper advertisements. The Alhambra and Daly's were demolished before the War, but others, such as the Little, the Shaftesbury, the Queen's, and the Old Vic were victims of enemy attacks. Two of the big West End houses have descended to other uses, the Lyceum having become a dance-hall and the Dominion a cinema.

And of the metropolitan playhouses which are still in use, although a number have actually been built within the twentieth century, very few are subsequent to 1914-18, when the new spirit in theatre design began to take form in Europe. Consequently, of London's theatres at the present time only some half-dozen bear any marks of the advanced movement about them. For the red-velvet and gilt-stucco atmosphere of the Victorian stage lingered long in theatre-building, and to this day it forms the drama's normal background in England. Thus a theatre like the Prince's, although built as far into the twentieth century as 1911 differs in no essential from such a house as the Palace (1891). And the Coliseum (1904), apart from its modern technical equipment behind the stage, shows little structural advance on Covent Garden, dating from 1858. Occasionally, as at the Adelphi and the Savoy, there has been

¹ See Appendix III, (2).

a clean sweep of the style of rococo decoration and a radical rearrangement of the house. Even so, it has hardly touched the fabric of the theatres, except in such cases as the building of Sadler's Wells (1931), where a virtually new house was erected. But the changes of spirit may be studied in a few completely new theatres, such as the Cambridge, though even there the old picture-frame type of stage was retained.¹

There was a revolution in theatre decoration after the 1914 War—it would have come earlier, but the war held it up—and it aimed its shafts as much at the Victorian red-and-gold colour scheme as at its gilt proscenium and chandeliers. Crimson curtains and upholstery became one of the chief targets for the wrath of the reformers, and they were ruthlessly swept away in most new plans. In their place rather insipid and dreary browns and greys were substituted. Green was employed very little, surprisingly in view of its known restful qualities, which should have harmonized well with the psychological aims of the new decorators. Seats were upholstered in various neutral shades of beige, light blue, and russet, the one unifying aim apparently being to break from the tradition of red. Chandeliers and dress-circle bracket-lights vanished. Lighting was either concealed or disguised under modern and angular shades. The proscenium lost its gilt mouldings and became a plain opening, sometimes deeply curved, as at the Cambridge. The drop curtain disappeared, and heavy tableau curtains, usually without decoration, took its place. Red floral carpets were removed from corridor and vestibule and grey or brown laid instead. Upper circles and galleries were no longer festooned with plaster cherubs. Red flock or cretonne-style wallpapers were stripped from passage and private box, and plain cream or beige-coloured walls appeared in their place.

The restriction or complete disappearance of private boxes in the new designs was an important symptom of the age. It pointed to two things. First, to the invasion of the theatre by democratic ideas, and, second, to the new concentration on the drama itself, the audience being one with the stage and not an elegant show on its own. It thus struck two separate blows at the Edwardian conception of the theatre as a place of

¹ See Appendix III, (4).

fashionable amusement. It was no longer good form to parade in a side-box in elegant evening clothes. The stage was no more an apauage to polite society, nor a slave to its code of conduct.

It must again be emphasized that these reforms, beginning in art and repertory theatres, such as Birmingham, affected very few of the commercial houses, even in London. And in the provinces reform scarcely touched the fringe of the great network of Opera Houses, Grand Theatres, and twice-nightly Empires. It showed up only here and there in repertory and experimental groups, who sometimes converted parish halls for their purpose.

The figures of seating accommodation and stage measurement in Mr Parker's list are also of interest. It will be noted that while the London theatres vary very much in capacity, the greater number are large houses seating over a thousand. The Ambassadors', the Duchess, the Court, the Criterion, the Embassy, the Fortune, the Whitehall, the Playhouse, the St Martin's, the Royalty, the Little, the Kingsway, the Westminster, and the Vaudeville are the only ones below the figure of seven hundred. The rest are above this figure, and extend up to the enormous capacity of the Lyceum, which, with its 2891 seats, heads the list. The Dominion (now a cinema) runs it very close with 2800, followed by the Golders Green Hippodrome with 2500, the Palladium with 2388, Drury Lane with 2342, the Coliseum with 2200, and the Stoll with 2090. These are the only theatres with above 2000 seats, Covent Garden, rather surprisingly, not reaching this figure with only 1952. But the average capacity of the others is about 1200, some of them, like the Winter Garden with 1800, being well above this number.

These plain statistics are important. Large theatres have large expenses, and to fill them to capacity managements cannot afford to take risks. Moreover, a large theatre with a large stage, such as the Coliseum, becomes associated in the public mind with lavish production. In consequence a particular brand of entertainment has often developed at a particular theatre, and the public has been intolerant of any change. This is as true of the small theatres as of the large ones. The Ambassadors' Theatre, for example, became associated almost

from the beginning with a special type of intimate revue which undoubtedly developed under the restricted conditions of its diminutive stage (width 24 feet 6 inches, height 17 feet 10 inches) and small auditorium (490 seats). Straightforward comedy, with conventional interior sets, has been developed at small-to-average theatres, such as the St Martin's, with a seating capacity of only 600 and a stage of 26 feet width and 18 feet height. And so one might proceed through the list, culminating in the big houses, such as the London Hippodrome, with its proscenium width of 40 feet, or the Lyceum (width 41 feet 8 inches), which have obviously been favourable to the production of spectacular work of the Drury Lane type.

Generally speaking, the serious drama has been kept alive more by the smaller theatres than by the larger ones. It was, for instance, the Court Theatre (seating 642; stage 21 feet by 18 feet) which saw the inauguration of the memorable chapter in English dramatic history when the Vedrenne-Barker management began to produce the plays of Shaw. The Westminster Theatre, again (seating 680; stage 27 feet 6 inches by 16 feet), added some very noteworthy productions to the London stage under Anmer Hall and others.

(iv) *The Commercial Basis*

The subject of theatre accommodation leads us naturally to a consideration of the economic background of the drama during this period. In the Victorian era the theatrical profession was still mainly a closed corporation. Managers were normally professional men of the theatre, and, under the actor-manager system, often famous performers also. But with the twentieth century a fresh economic phenomenon began to develop. The multiplication of London and provincial theatres led to greater financial rewards and greater temptation for capital to be drawn in from outside. Since 1900 the underlying aim of the London stages has too often been for a play to run for two, three, or four years regardless of its real value as a dramatic work. Of course, it is easy for the armchair critic to fulminate against the long-run system, to attack its effect on actors and its monopoly of important theatres while

other plays (perhaps better plays) are kept waiting. But people in the theatre—a precarious profession enough—must seize their chances when they come, and if the public insists on packing a playhouse for years to see a farce while fine work cannot get a hearing, then that is hardly the managers' responsibility. In the theatre, as in everything else, the demand creates the supply. And the long run, whatever its disadvantages from an artistic point of view, has at least one merit. It does introduce a measure of security in providing the profession with long engagements, though many an actor, saying his lines for the thousandth time, must often feel that he has been saying them since he was born.

It may be urged that the long run is not a purely twentieth-century development. It is not. It arose in late Victorian times, the first notable instance being the run of *Our Boys*, which played for over four years (1875-79), followed by the remarkable successes of the Savoy operas and the George Edwardes musical comedies at Daly's Theatre in the 1890's. But the halcyon days of the long run have dated from the war-time of 1914-18, when *Chu Chin Chow*, running for 2238 performances, drew in to His Majesty's Theatre £700,000. The production cost of *Chu Chin Chow* was only £5300, and it was seen by 2,800,000 people. Later long runs have included *The Beggar's Opera* (Lyric, Hammersmith, 1920) 1463 performances, *The Farmer's Wife* (Court, 1924) 1324, *Tons of Money* (Shaftesbury, 1922) 737, *Rose Marie* (Drury Lane, 1925) 851, *White Horse Inn* (Coliseum, 1931) 651, *Ten Minute Alibi* (Embassy and Haymarket, 1933) 878. Several of the Second World War successes ran for three years or more.

As against these figures, with their concomitant profits, we may compare the more modest rewards of the late Victorian and Edwardian manager. Sir George Alexander, for instance, at the St James's Theatre, made only £10,946 out of Pinero's extremely successful *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*, which delighted all London in 1893, only £10,483 from Anthony Hope's *The Prisoner of Zenda*, again a very great success, while much smaller sums accrued from plays which were none the less considered as triumphs. Alexander's greatest success, Pinero's *His House in Order*, made only £23,443, though other profits from

provincial tours finally swelled the total to £36,638. Money certainly had a higher value in those days, but it must also be realized that these sums represented the very pinnacle of financial success in the theatre of their time.

And such amounts, alluring as they might have seemed to early- and mid-Victorian managers, are as nothing to the fortunes earned by the twentieth-century combines, with their modern publicity resources. Costs of production are, of course, higher to-day. Musical plays can involve anything up to £30,000 in preliminary expenses, though that amount may be taken in six or eight weeks at a big theatre. Rents and salaries have increased. The lease system, whereby a chain of four or five sub-lettings of one theatre may be involved, requires profits for middlemen who have no kind of creative influence on the stage.

Again, the team system of authorship for musical works necessitates profit for perhaps half a dozen writers, instead of one. *A Night in Venice*, for example, revived at the Cambridge Theatre during the Second World War, was described on the programme as "an operetta by Johann Strauss, orchestrated by Erich Korngold. Book by Lesley Storm, after Henrik Ege's adaptation, and translated from the German of F. Zell, R. Genée, and Ernst Marischa. Lyrics by Dudley Glass." Similarly, *Song of Norway* (Palace, 1946), an operetta based on the life and music of Edvard Grieg, had its "musical adaptation and lyrics by Robert Wright and George Forrest. Book by Milton Lazarus, from a play by Homer Curran, by arrangement with Edwin Lester, producer of the original American production. Orchestral and choral arrangements by Arthur Kay." At the other extreme are the musical plays of Noel Coward, who acted as sole author and composer of works like *Bitter Sweet*.

In the face of this rising tide of expense in the theatre it is surprising that so much fine work has been achieved in various fields. Governments have shown little interest in the drama, and have only very rarely subsidized any work of educational value, as when the Sadler's Wells and Old Vic organization received a subsidy in the form of a remission of entertainment-tax. A project for a National Theatre was

pushed as far as the acquisition of a site in South Kensington, opposite the Victoria and Albert Museum, but the Second World War held up its development.

In fact, the art drama of the twentieth century has been dependent entirely on private enthusiasm, occasionally helped out, as at the Glyndebourne Opera Festival, by a rich connoisseur. The achievement of the British repertory, art, and experimental theatres and the progress made in non-commercial developments like the One-Act Play movement and the Sadler's Wells Ballet and Old Vic Shakespeare productions are all the more remarkable in view of the commercial phalanx of the ordinary stage. In the dramatic history of the last fifty years a phenomenon like the Cambridge Festival Theatre of 1926-33 stands out as a symbolic achievement. Its productions were seen by only a handful of people at Cambridge, but it exerted a powerful influence on the intellectual development of many a young Cambridge student and serious actor. The Festival Theatre will be dealt with in more detail later. Here we are concerned with it only as an example to show that the story of the English drama during this period is not entirely one of commerce swamping art.

(v) *Scenery and Stage Mechanism*

The early twentieth-century stage was so much dominated by the Victorian conception of scenery that some preliminary account of it is necessary for our study. Elaborate splendour was the keynote of nineteenth-century theatrical art. The archaeological productions of Shakespeare by Charles Kean in the 1850's had been simply glittering stage pageants of a richness never previously seen.¹ With the Bancrofts much reform was effected in the setting of comedy. Details of furniture, locks to doors, proper carpets and cushions, were carefully introduced. Under Richard D'Oyly Carte at the Savoy an elaborate reproduction of details gleaned from the Japanese Village Exhibition at Knightsbridge in 1885 was incorporated into the first performance of *The Mikado*. The

¹ See my *Early Victorian Drama* (1936), pp. 34-38.

scenic wonders of Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelungs* at Bayreuth in 1876 had contributed not a little to the international sensation it soon became. The scenes under the Rhine, the steam-curtain effects, the fire-girt rock of the Valkyrie, the rising of the river and engulfing of the castle at the end of *Götterdämmerung*, together with the collapse of Valhalla in flames, were magnificent mechanical triumphs of a kind which the English stage had often emulated.

Gauze effects, panoramas, lakes of real water, misty forests, castles on fire, gardens of magic flowers, transformations, and Gothic cathedrals had all attained, by about 1880, the utmost degree of splendour and 'realism.' By the time of Irving's Lyceum productions of Shakespeare the climax of picture-frame magnificence was reached. His production of *Faust*, with its marvellous Brocken episode, was perhaps the high-water mark in the history of painted scenic effect.

But the underlying artistic aim of all these gorgeous efforts, even those of Wagner, was always the same: to present living tableaux within a picture-frame proscenium whose very gilding increased the pictorial illusion. As far as one can see, there was never at any time during the nineteenth century an attempt at symbolical colour harmony or anything of what we now call psychological atmosphere in stage scenery. The glitter of history, tinsel pasteboard splendour, pedantic copies of half-timbered houses and Gothic turrets, forests in which every leaf was laboriously painted and cut out in canvas wings and sky-borders, wondrous snowstorm and shipwreck scenes with rolling waves, market squares whose fountains ran sparkling in the gaslight—such were the background to Victorian drama. Their glories have been chronicled in various memoir books, notably in J. W. Cole's *The Life and Theatrical Times of Charles Kean* (2 vols., 1859) and A. Brereton's *The Lyceum and Henry Irving* (1903). Only in a very occasional Shakespearean production was there any attempt at artistic simplicity—for example, Webster's *Taming of the Shrew* at the Haymarket, as early as 1844, which was played with curtains in the Elizabethan manner.

However, in the 1890's this rich and heavy decorative tradition began to take on, at the better theatres, a more artistic

hue. A faint suggestion of something higher than mere picture-frame splendour can be detected in some of the prints that survive of the Lyceum scenery under Irving. One of the back-cloths for *Faust*, for instance, shows a brooding and overwhelming quality, with a wonderful sense of dominance of the Gothic spires and towers over a humble garden wall. Some of the effects in *King Arthur* were clearly very beautiful. They must have provided a rich commentary to the action, though not in any way in the spirit of later expressionist theory.

The opening of Her Majesty's Theatre in 1897 was the beginning of the end of Irving's reign, though not of his influence. In the following year a fire at the Lyceum decimated Irving's magnificent stock of Shakespearean scenery. It left Herbert Beerbohm Tree at Her Majesty's in more or less complete possession of the field as Irving's successor. In 1899 he staged a splendid revival of *King John*. It was in the direct line of succession from Charles Kean's archæological pageants and Irving's pictorial effects. If anything, it had even more of the colour-photograph atmosphere than the Lyceum productions of Irving's version. With its steam-vapour Brocken it scaled new heights of realistic stage effect. In his arrangement of crowd scenes Tree anticipated the cinema triumphs of Cecil B. de Mille, and there seems to be no doubt that his methods showed much industry, but little art.

It was against this paraphernalia of stage pageantry and tinsel trappings that Shaw had fulminated in the days of Irving. It was soon to meet with open mutiny at the hands of Granville-Barker and Gordon Craig.

In the opening decade of the new century there was still little to show what was to come. Indeed, it is not too much to say that the Victorian tradition of painted scenery had scarcely been affected, at all events in England, up to the War of 1914. It was in Germany that the seeds of the revolution in stagecraft had been sown, and it would seem that ultimately this revolution must be traced back, like so many things in the modern theatre, to the work and ideas of Wagner. Although the scenery devised for the first production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* at the Bayreuth Festspielhaus in 1876 was of the ordinary painted type, and not in itself 'advanced,' yet the

whole underlying spirit of the Wagner Festival was revolutionary. For one thing, it was a completely new conception, a new synthesis of music, drama, scenery, and philosophy. It had all been conceived in one brain, and presented in a theatre which was the antithesis of the conventional gilt-and-plaster temple.

Instead of the normal ascending tiers of circles and boxes, Wagner introduced a single sloping floor of seats. There was a sunk orchestral pit, so that all obstruction was cleared from the spectator's view. And from this new theatre design revolutionary conceptions of theatre art sprang and possessed the minds of the progressive Continental producers. The immense achievement of Wagner caused artists to begin to take an interest in the stage. Again, men of advanced ideas in the theatre, such as Bernard Shaw, were ardent Wagner disciples, and there is no doubt that he was an international cultural influence in the late nineteenth-century theatre world.

Wagner, more than anyone, revolutionized the conception of the theatre as a place of polite amusement. In the Wagner Festspielhaus a new spirit made itself known, the spirit of reverence for the work itself. An unusual (though not entirely new) step was the lowering of auditorium lights during the performance. Applause was discouraged until the curtain fell. Everything was subordinated to the magic of the Wagnerian music-drama. And it was from this new spirit of concentration on the dramatic object itself that modern ideas of stagecraft derived.

But in England the new theory took long to percolate, despite touring visits of *The Ring of the Nibelungs* to London, in 1882 and later, under the impresario Angelo Neumann. Irving had inklings of what it was all about, but his own egotism prevented their ever getting beyond the chrysalis stage. He was too much in love with the Victorian conception of the dominant stage figure to break with the old traditions of picture-frame splendour.

There were, however, lonely pioneers in the early twentieth century who were preparing the way in England for something higher than picture-frame scenery. And it was a curious irony that made Edward Gordon Craig, son of Irving's leading lady,

Ellen Terry, a leader of the revolt against the scenic tradition. Craig was, indeed, the first serious thinker in the history of English stage scenery, and to do justice to his achievement a whole volume would be needed. His early artistic experiments with stagecraft, including costumes and lighting, date from the very beginning of the century, from the production of *Dido and Æneas* in 1900. He had appeared as a young actor with Irving in the Lyceum shows, but in 1898 he began his studies of drawing. Going to Germany, he produced in 1904 the German version of *Venice Preserved* (*Das Gerettete Venedig*), and in the following year did designs for Eleanora Duse in *Electra*. It was also in 1905 that he published his *Art of the Theatre*, and in 1911 he directed a notable revival of *Hamlet* at the Moscow Art Theatre. His later volumes on the art of the theatre were translated into Russian and French, and had great influence on Continental methods of production. In 1922 he opened the International Exhibition of Theatrical Art in Amsterdam.

Craig's influence, extending to many European producers, was reflected back into his own country when European methods began to influence the English experimental stage. Briefly, his ideas centred in imagination rather than representation. He revolted against the photographic conception of scenery, and turned to simple symbolism. Through the use of intelligent suggestion Craig made his sets start the imagination working, and by means of effective groups of actors and suggestive shadows he brought a new meaning to poetic drama. He employed cubes and steps, simple columns, plain dark curtains, and platforms giving the effect of several levels of action. Costumes and lighting played an important part in the whole synthesis of decor, which all proceeded from one mind, as opposed to the army of Victorian dressmakers, carpenters, and daubers who usually combined efforts to decorate a play.

Along with the experiments of Craig must be remembered the Shakespearean productions of Granville-Barker at the Savoy in 1912. Simple and symbolic effects were stressed in a manner quite foreign to the Irving-Tree traditions. Barker also commissioned Charles Ricketts to design both sets and

costumes for the memorable production of Maeterlinck's *Death of Tintagiles*, in which a true medieval spirit was caught in the dresses.

But it was not until the cross-fertilization of ideas from the Russian Ballet visit to London in 1913 that any substantial progress in West End decor can be discerned. This, perhaps more than any other single event in the history of English scene design, stimulated a revolution. And the psychological influence of the war, which broke out the next year, was to reinforce the conception of a new spirit. There was to be a determined break with the effete pantomime splendours of the past, at all events in the progressive houses, and the introduction of the work of real artists as opposed to mere scene-painters.

Appropriately, the first manifestation of the new idea of staging in the West End was in the new form of entertainment. This was the revue, itself characteristic of the new war-time conditions. The first significant revue—significant, that is, from the viewpoint of stagecraft—was *More*, produced at the Ambassadors' Theatre on June 18, 1915. French impressionist and futurist ideas were brought into the sets—clear, bright colour effects, simple objects in red, green, and blue, with the sort of backcloths that were associated with the Diaghileff ballet. And it was at the Ambassadors' Theatre that, shortly afterwards, the Hanako Japanese Company introduced to London the Japanese conception of stagecraft, in itself akin to the new German ideas of symbolism.

In the Japanese No Drama, such as *Aya No Tzuzumi* and *Ki-Musume*, properties acquire an associative meaning. A bamboo-stick held by the property-man connotes a bridge; a simple flower suggests a garden; stage movements have a meaning almost as in ballet. The Japanese revolving stage, too, with its swift presentation of different scenes, was a new conception to Western ideas. Japanese technique was, in fact, a revelation to London. It was not, of course, that a Japanese background was in itself anything novel. *The Mikado*, *The Geisha*, and, more recently, *Madame Butterfly* had familiarized audiences with a toy-box atmosphere of paper chrysanthemums, fans, kimonos, lanterns, and stage cherry-trees. But the idea

of making an audience use its imagination so extensively was completely new. Indeed, for one object to represent another was a revolutionary theory, and as foreign to Victorian and Edwardian stage tradition as it would be to a modern suburban-cinema audience.

From about 1915 the conception of symbolic simplicity began to spread in imaginative circles. It must again be emphasized that it was still confined to a few progressive minds. But it was beginning to make itself felt. The War of 1914-18 actually helped it, for economy of stage materials soon became a necessity. In some of the Continental theatres the bare stage and constructivist sets of plain wooden frameworks were simply the outgrowth of lack of equipment. As a result of war damage or shortage there was often no canvas or paint available, no tableau curtains, no furniture. Producers had to use their wits, and the audience had to use theirs.

But the really 'advanced' constructivist ideas did not affect England for some time. Such improvements as there were in scenery were largely due to the introduction of new ideas in painted cloths, such as those already mentioned in the revue *More*. Some of Sir Thomas Beecham's experiments with the artist Vladimir Polunin show the influence of the Russian Ballet. For several of his early operatic productions at Covent Garden he commissioned new scenes from Polunin. And, though these had to make their way intermixed with other cumbrous sets inherited from the Covent Garden lumber-room, they played their part in bringing about a change of outlook. But no English artist, unless we except Craig, could in the 1914 epoch vie with the Russian Ballet for decorative brilliance. The work of Bakst, Larionov, and Benois, with its astonishing colours and significant line, was a true revelation to England. However, it reached only a limited artistic circle in London. For ballet in this country had at that time only a fraction of its present enormous following; the idea of a permanent ballet home in London or of regular touring companies of ballet would have been thought wildly improbable.

None the less the seeds of new decorative ideas were being sown, and results began to appear here and there. The memory of the symphonic colouring of Bakst's *Scheherazade* lingered in

the minds of the new generation of scene-designers. Painters like Paul Shelving at the newly opened Birmingham Repertory Theatre began to use pure blues and greens and yellows, as in the wonderful Garden of Eden setting for Shaw's *Back to Methuselah*, with the serpent coiled around a sinister tree. This was not until 1923, but even during the war-time period there had been London productions showing Russian influence. In fact, the gleaming Orientalism of *Scheherazade* had found successors in Arthur Weigall's brilliant Egyptian settings at the Alhambra in 1915, and the heavier and more commercial exoticism of *Chu Chin Chow* at His Majesty's in 1916.

A later and more interesting development of Oriental influence, which also shows traces of *Scheherazade* in a new application, was the work of George Sheringham. His lovely act-drop and settings for Playfair's revival of *The Duenna* at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith (October 1924), had an almost Chinese quality in their exquisite detail and colouring.¹

Claude Lovat Fraser was another fine designer associated with Sir Nigel Playfair. His settings for *The Beggar's Opera* (1920) were conceived in a different spirit from the traditional pantomime conception of the eighteenth century. With their clear, simple effects, they did much to restore the true atmosphere of the time of Congreve and Gay to the London stage.

The splendours of Max Reinhardt's work and the decor of Ernst Stern were, of course, foreign importations, and do not strictly belong to English stage history. But productions such as *The Miracle* and *White Horse Inn* proved very popular in London, and Stern did some of his most ambitious work for London impresarios, notably C. B. Cochran. As early as 1911 Stern's sets were being seen in England in the drama without words *Sumurun*, produced at the Coliseum. *The Miracle*, an elaborate medieval fantasy with music by Humperdinck, produced at Olympia, under C. B. Cochran's management, dates from the same year. In 1912 came *A Venetian Night* at the Palace Theatre, with all the then novel excitement of a revolving stage and highly original lighting. It was under Stern that

¹ They will all be found beautifully reproduced in the *édition de luxe* of *The Duenna*, published by Constable in 1925.

some beautiful symbolic colours were obtained from lighting. They were important, along with the pioneer work of Gordon Craig and Granville-Barker, in opening up new decorative ideas to England.

For almost the first time in London, 'commercial' productions were enlisting the service of an international master of scenic art, even though some of the later splendours of Stern tended towards a lavish, almost pantomimesque glitter, as in *Follow the Sun*, *Bitter Sweet*, *White Horse Inn*, and *Can-Can*. In fact, *White Horse Inn* (Coliseum, 1931), for all its modern wonders, was really in the lavish tradition of Kean, Irving, and Tree. Its mountain storms, real animals, steamers, and revolving Tyrolese landscapes were only carrying on the banner of the Victorian diorama and the Carlton-kitchen steam Brocken¹ of *Faust* at Her Majesty's under Tree.

Again, *Can-Can* (Adelphi, 1946), an operetta based on the melodies of Offenbach, was little more than a pantomime in effect. Its culminating splendour was a fantasy on *The Tales of Hoffmann* performed as a ballet, with a Nuremberg toy-shop setting, followed by a magnificent palace in elaborate Venetian Gothic. The atmosphere of *Cinderella* and *Aladdin* was never very distant in all the riot of light and colour; the whole production showed only too clearly that it had cost many thousand pounds.

The same must be said of many of the sumptuous works that appeared at Drury Lane during the period, such as *Decameron Nights* (1922), *Rose Marie* (1925), and *Crest of the Wave* (1937), though in a few cases, as with *Rose Marie*, the music proved of some intrinsic interest.

The truth is that the cinema has so much outstripped the theatre in scenic wonder that mere stage display makes now very little impression on an audience. And, since the development of Technicolor films and the marvels of Disney technique, most lavish stage pictures seem frankly childish in comparison. In fact, any villager going to the nearest local picture-house can now see glittering coloured splendours far surpassing anything which the Lord of the Manor may have seen on the

¹ The steam effects were derived from the kitchens of the adjoining Carlton Hotel.

London stage. Nothing in the *Chu Chin Chow* stage tradition can equal the screen's *Thief of Bagdad*, nor can any memories of Drury Lane pantomime compete with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* or the splendours of *Fantasia*.¹ The great days of mere spectacle in the theatre would seem to be doomed.

(vi) *Lighting*

It is outside the scope of this work to deal in detail with such technical developments as the progress of stage lighting, but a few points may be noted. It is a far cry from the days of the Victorian gas-man to those of the modern electrical director, yet only some sixty years separate them. Between the Sunlight and Stage Gas Works of 1880 and the focus lamps and Stelmar lanterns of 1940 a whole new profession has grown up. Whereas the Victorian gas-man was little more than a stage carpenter in status, the modern electrician is often a sensitive artist, capable of influencing a production in many ways. And, though many modern producers realize so fully the value of a knowledge of lighting that they are themselves able to plot their own lighting and then hand on their ideas to the expert, the electrician is none the less an important figure.

A perusal of Ridge and Aldred's *Stage Lighting* (1935) will at once reveal the technical complexity of the subject. All aspects of theatre lighting are considered there, from flood-lighting, acting-area lanterns, battens, and floats, to resistance and reactance dimmers, cyclorama lighting, and parabolic reflectors. This complex apparatus began to grow up with the general development of electrical devices after the 1914 war, and its history belongs more to the history of electricity than to that of the stage.

¹ The theatre can, of course, still produce wonderful stage effects denied to the cinema when it enlists the service of a really fine painter. This has been done on a number of occasions recently, and a modern painter-designer of great interest is Leslie Hurry. His rich glooms and sombre splendours first attracted real attention in the setting for the Sadler's Wells *Hamlet* ballet, and he has notably added to this well-known achievement with designs for *Le Lac des Cygnes*, for *Turandot* at Covent Garden, and for John Gielgud's revival of *Medea*. Mr Hurry's work has the same insistence on magnificent colour masses as the designs of Léon Bakst, and though the two painters have many differences of outlook and style, such work as the *Hamlet* setting recalls in a more profound and darkly glowing mood the exotic fire of Bakst's *Schéhérazade*.

The real introduction of electric light to the theatre dates from the opening of the Savoy Theatre in 1881, when D'Oyly Carte introduced it as a novelty. (It had been employed as far back as 1878 by John Hollingshead, who kept six arc lights burning in front of the Gaiety, but retained gas inside the house.) D'Oyly Carte referred to the innovation apologetically: "This is being done as an experiment, and may succeed or fail." But it was long in establishing itself in favour. For one thing, until the invention of the dimmer it was not possible to secure the subtlety of the old gas lighting, with its misty yellow quality. (Gas could be regulated by the opening and closing of valves. Very beautiful effects appear to have been obtained with the co-operation of gauze screens. The atmosphere of foggy moonlight associated with the nineteenth-century "Ballet Blanc," such as *Les Sylphides* and *Giselle*, owed much to subtle gas effects.) But early electric light was glaring and harsh. An actress such as Ellen Terry objected to it strongly in its first days. Moreover, it was limited to simple footlights and battens, having nothing comparable with the modern switchboard and control panel. Its introduction may well have seemed a retrograde step, artistically speaking. However, experiment was not lacking, and the pioneer work of the Schwabe system in Berlin soon spread its influence. Glass and colour filters and stage lanterns were gradually introduced, and with the invention of the dimmer the path was clear for more subtle effects.

A most valuable account of modern apparatus at work is to be found in Ridge and Aldred's *Stage Lighting* (pp. 112-115). As it has the advantage of being written by experts, it may be quoted here in full. It describes the lighting of a production of *King John*, by Giles Playfair and Hugh Hunt for the Oxford University Dramatic Society at the New Theatre, Oxford. Following on a description of the general decorative purpose of the production, the lighting is thus reviewed:

Certain hired plant was installed to supplement the theatre apparatus, which included three colour floats and battens, the usual dips and wing floods, perch arcs and floods, and a switchboard controlling this apparatus with dimmers and master-control. There were no front-of-house lighting units, and it was

not considered worth while to erect any temporarily. Short scenes played in front of the draw-tabs were effectively lit by the floats and one perch arc. The hired apparatus comprised twelve 1000-watt spot lanterns slung above No. 1 batten, and five 1000-watt acting-area lanterns suspended a little more than half-way upstage and as close together as possible, the height being adjusted so that when they were used together the whole acting-area was covered, but the side and back scenery was left unlit....

In addition there were two 50-amp. arc "Effects Lanterns," and eight wide-angle floods of 1000 watts each, the latter for use behind the ground rows. Unlike the portable apparatus standing on the stage, colour mediums in the spots and acting-area lanterns could not be changed during the performance, and so colours suitable for blending or use alone had to be selected. In practice, this amounted to using pairs of complementary colours in the outside acting-areas and white in the centre lantern, while the spots on the batten were focused on to various portions of the stage with varying beam-spread angles. Actually, therefore, all the spots used together covered the entire stage, though the intensity varied considerably over the whole area, and the resultant colour of the light under such conditions approached a warm white.

The authors go on to describe in detail the colour scheme and the working out of the drama scene by scene. The whole account should be studied for an expert's first-hand picture of stage lighting at work, but even from this extract it will be seen how much care and thought are involved in modern lighting in the art theatre.

Elaborate lighting effects soon spread from the art theatre to the commercial stage. Subsequent to about 1925 almost every musical comedy and revue has introduced coloured electrical shading to give variety and contrast to groups and scenes. Striking effects have been obtained from the simple device of rotating perforated screens before coloured lanterns, so that different beams of light play rapidly on to the stage. Dawn, twilight, sunset, lightning, all have been managed with ever-increasing efficiency by the dimmer apparatus, and some beautiful results have been obtained, even in very small theatres. Gorgeous effects have been secured in pantomimes by "electrical poses" and "electrical fantasies." On a darkened

stage illuminated figures and marionettes are manipulated with changing colours and sudden disappearances. Glittering magic forests and Cinderella coaches are a further feature of the electric blaze of modern pantomimes. Some of the best effects, however, have been derived from lights playing on to simple curtains and emphasizing their natural folds.

An interesting modern development of lighting and scenery combined is the G.K.P. projector apparatus.¹ By a system of coloured lantern-slides scenes are projected on to a plain surface from the wings of the stage. Such a method obviates all scene-changing, and even all scene-painting, since an artist merely colours the lantern-slides. Thus almost any number of scenes could be employed in one play, fifty or a hundred if wanted, since the only cost is in the slides and the only changing involved is in the lantern itself. But the structure of English theatres makes it improbable that such a method could be much used here, and emphasizes once more how the mortmain of the old buildings holds up experiment and advance.

(vii) *Art Drama—The Cambridge Festival Theatre*

A nucleus for the propagation of new ideas in stagecraft, midway through our period, was the Cambridge Festival Theatre (1926-33). It cannot, however, be styled "a typical art theatre of the twentieth century." For it was in every way exceptional. But we may take it for special consideration here in view of its very great importance, and also because it has rarely had justice done to it by writers on modern drama. Neither was justice done to it in its lifetime. Its situation away from London, the spasmodic nature of its performances—it was open only during the Cambridge University terms—and its many eccentricities caused it to be neglected by influential London critics and playgoers alike. It was, indeed, in direct opposition from the beginning to the methods of the West End stage. Its position at Cambridge had something of the quality of Bayreuth, a Festival Theatre away from the theatrical corruption of the great city.

But, although it reached only a limited public, that public,

¹ The initials are those of the inventors, Gayling, Kann, and Planer.

together with its acting personnel, was to carry its ideas far and wide. It was a nursery of great talents. Its audience, although mainly very young men (the undergraduates of Cambridge, with a sprinkling of dons and townspeople), was the future intellectual generation of England. An audience thus drawn from the colleges of Cambridge offered unrivalled opportunities for experiment. Moreover, that particular generation, midway between the two World Wars, was a highly receptive and intelligent one, perhaps one of the best potential audiences an art theatre could have.

Even so, the theatre was never a financial success, and was not even properly supported by Cambridge itself in term-time. A note of increasing bitterness can be detected in its programme articles as time went on, and the ultimate debacle in 1933 was not unheralded or unexpected. But it should never be thought of in normal economic terms. Its memory and influence must remain as an artistic monument to the peculiar gifts of its organizer, Terence Gray.

Its importance lies in the fact that it was not only the audience that was affected by its new doctrines. It affected itself. It influenced its own actors and producers. Designers, electricians, choreographers, all came under its spell. And just as the disruption of the Diaghileff company after 1929 sent its seeds far and wide when its members dispersed all over the world, so, when the Festival Theatre broke up, its doctrines lived on in those who had passed through its stimulating fire.

Some faint shadow of what the theatre meant to the rising generation at Cambridge from 1926 to 1933 can still be recaptured by examining its extraordinary programmes. There is probably nothing to compare with them in English programme history. They were really more in the nature of weekly magazines. They reached a high standard of typography and presentation, including the famous black transparent character-lists that could be read in the dark by holding them against the light of the stage.

Red and black modern designs, such as those entitled "Law and Justice" (January 23, 1932) and "Noise" (April 29, 1933), enlivened the pages. Articles of the greatest interest and value on modern drama and stagecraft appeared week by week.

Occasional verses, correspondence, biographies, drawings, and caricatures made these programmes attain a standard never reached before or since in England. The following are a few titles of essays, culled at random from their pages:

Relativity in Unity: (1) Victor Hugo und der Expressionismus;
(2) Herod and Arlecchino.

Some Plays of W. B. Yeats.

Schnitzler-Corneille.

An Examination of Modern Dramatic Values (Mechanics,
Decor, etc.).

Shakespeare and his Producers To-day.

The Author's Place in the Theatre.

Talma and the Revolution.

The Theatre in Paris, Christmas, 1932.

There were also interesting notes on all the plays produced, ranging from Strindberg's *Gustav Vasa* and Wilde's *Salome* to O'Neill's *Marco Millions*, Shaw's *Back to Methuselah*, Gogol's *Government Inspector*, Capek's *Makropoulos Secret*, and the *Oresteia* of Æschylus.

The theatre itself and its equipment were of the greatest interest. The stage was connected with the auditorium by groups of steps. There was no drop curtain. Painted scenery in the ordinary sense did not exist. In its place was the cyclorama (a curved white wall at the back of the stage), on to which extraordinary colour and shadow effects were projected from an unrivalled lighting apparatus. In front of this various constructions were built—solid cubes, columns, circular flights of steps, miniature ziggurats, different levels of stage. These were usually of a neutral colour, mostly silver-grey. On to them the lighting played in constant variety, endowing them with astonishing tints and colour combinations, much more beautiful than anything achieved by ordinary painted scenery. Moreover, by a skilful blend of costumes with the setting, there was never any suggestion of monotony, even though a single setting for each play was the rule. The whole production often had a choreographic quality. It was significant that the most famous of all English choreographers, Ninette de Valois, was one of the early dance directors at the Festival Theatre.

There were unconventional productions of Shakespeare which shocked the conservative, much as Komisarjevsky's effect of "little red gasometers" for *Macbeth* was to shock audiences at Stratford-on-Avon. Mime effects were introduced into *Henry VIII* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Portia delivered the "quality of mercy" speech in a full-bottomed wig, standing in a swing. But through everything done at the Festival, even in its most extravagant moments, could be sensed a fine aesthetic quality, mostly built up by plain masses of colour and three-dimensional staging, galvanized by superb lighting.

Above all, the doctrine of the Festival Theatre was that a play consists of an artistic synthesis in which text, settings, costumes, music, lighting, and audience all participate. Such a conception comes close to the underlying principle of ballet, and, indeed, the predominant effect of many a Festival show was that of choreography. It is perhaps not too much to suggest that many developments of the ballet in England derive from the germ of Festival productions, particularly in view of the close connexion of Ninette de Valois with it in its earlier years.

The Festival Theatre was, of course, not alone in propounding these new theories. Many Continental and Russian theatres (notably the Moscow Art Theatre under Meyerhold) had been developing the whole paraphernalia of expressionism which we shall have to consider later. But the Cambridge Festival was the first theatre in England to be completely influenced by the new technique of drama, and as such it is entitled to an honourable place in the history of our stage.

Since its break-up in 1933 the ideals for which it stood have been disseminated in various directions. It has a successor, in a sense, in the Cambridge Arts Theatre. But its original producers, choreographers, actors, and designers were scattered. Some went to work in ballet, some to the ordinary commercial stage, some into normal repertory theatres. But though many of them carried the ideas they had imbibed, and spread them in their new work, no other theatre has developed in England so completely refreshing a spirit and technique. Indeed, from the point of pure staging, nothing important at all beyond the

Festival Theatre's ideas has since arisen in England. Most of the devices and subtleties of such 'advanced' productions as London and the provinces have seen in later years were anticipated in Cambridge.

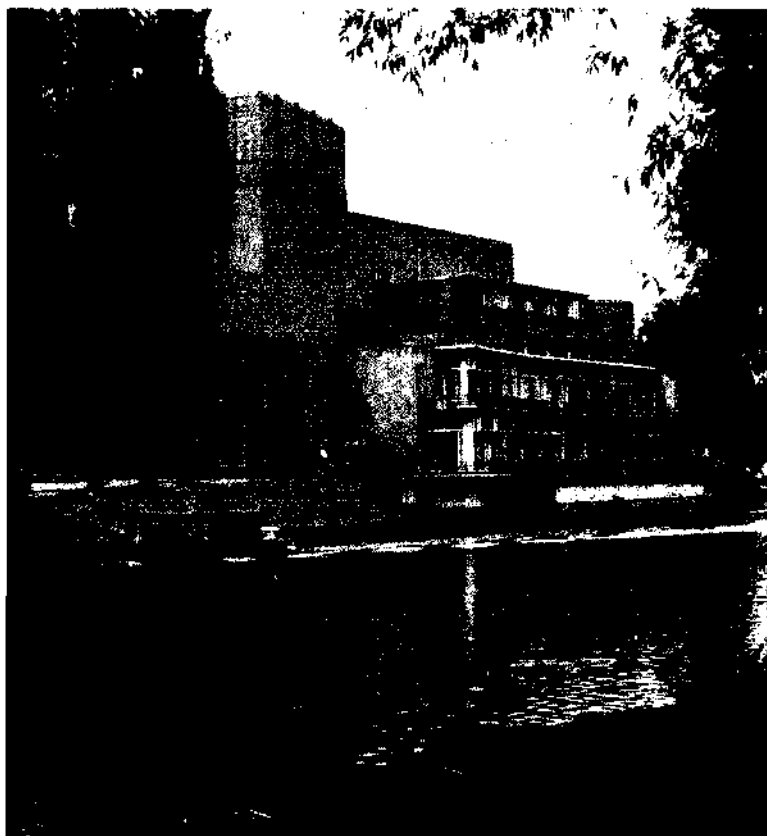
Meanwhile, in the ordinary drama, both commercial and repertory, there has been something of a return to the old type of painted scenery (if we may speak of a return where there was never a real breaking-away). Perhaps it was that expressionist and symbolist ideas were unable to stand up to the overpowering atmosphere of our plush-and-gilt theatres. At all events, 'advanced' scenery has been, in the last decade, increasingly rare. Ground rows and painted sets are again firmly established in normal productions.

A faint historical patina has begun to settle on expressionism and its type of decor. It would indeed seem to be the fate of all futurist movements that they soon become old-fashioned.

(viii) *Summary*

Clearly, the theatre of the twentieth century has seen far-reaching changes. Although the actual housing of the drama has only developed here and there in modern buildings, stagecraft itself has undergone a revolution. Curious anomalies have arisen. The *Oresteia* of Æschylus, for example, might be given an 'advanced' production in a Victorian-built theatre, so that an ancient classic drama appeared with modern cyclorama lighting in a house full of gilt Cupids and plush curtains. On the other hand, some tawdry, old-fashioned musical comedy, with sets and costumes in the worst Edwardian taste, might visit such a fine modern theatre as the Coventry Hippodrome, gleaming with an elaborate modern switchboard. Again, the repertory theatres, the real custodians of the drama outside London, may be Victorian playhouses unaltered, as at Northampton (1884), early twentieth-century designs, as at Birmingham (1913), or completely new buildings, as at Oxford.

At Stratford-on-Avon the festivals were conducted for the first twenty-six years of the century in a Victorian structure dating from 1879. When this was destroyed in the disastrous fire of 1926 a new theatre, embodying all the latest principles of



THE NEW CONCEPTION OF THEATRE ARCHITECTURE
The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon.

Photo A. T. Reynolds



THE ROYAL LYCEUM THEATRE, EDINBURGH

From the Collection of Messrs Howard and Wyndham, Ltd



**THE OPERA HOUSE, MANCHESTER:
AUDITORIUM**

Photo Stewart Bale



**THEATRE ROYAL, NEWCASTLE-
ON-TYNE: AUDITORIUM**

Photo Francis Caird Ingles

**FINE EXAMPLES OF THE VICTORIAN TRADITION OF
THEATRE-BUILDING STILL IN USE**

construction, was erected on the site of the old building. Terence Gray's theatre at Cambridge was a very old house. One of the outstanding artistic phenomena of the twentieth-century stage, the Sadler's Wells Ballet, was housed at first in a historic theatre rebuilt, afterwards at an ordinary West End theatre (the New Theatre, dating from 1903), and, thirdly, at the great Victorian playhouse of Covent Garden (1858).

The developments of stagecraft, then, have on the whole far outstripped progress in theatre-building. Meanwhile the picture-frame stage and the Victorian red-plush, gilt-stucco atmosphere of most English theatres has undoubtedly exercised a mortmain over many attempts at reform. It seems unlikely that the high artistic ideals of the art theatres will ever percolate very far into the average West End or provincial playhouse. Quite apart from commercial considerations, to which these theatres are firmly wedded, with no hope of a divorce, their very structure precludes real experiment. And it is from experiment alone that progress can come.¹

¹ Dramatic experiment, however, may be independent of experiment in staging. This has recently been shown afresh by Sir Laurence Olivier's production of *Venus Observed* (1950), by Christopher Fry, at the St James's Theatre, one of the most old-fashioned theatres in London, both in its actual fabric and in its acting tradition. *Venus Observed*, a verse-comedy of a kind quite fresh to twentieth-century London, was thus produced with picture-frame settings (very beautiful of their kind) in a theatre dating from 1835, whose charming red-seated horseshoe auditorium and elegant white-and-gold pedimented proscenium gives out the very aroma of last century. Yet this atmosphere did not in any way detract from the sense of creative freshness and experimental originality which the play itself exhaled. For the novelty was here in the text of the drama, which derived none of its effects from stage devices. It was essentially an experiment in writing rather than an experiment in production.

CHAPTER II

ENGLISH DRAMA FROM 1900: GENERAL SURVEY

OUR modern English drama is not a mushroom growth, like the cinema. Its roots stretch back into the past, and often the process of its development is plain enough to trace. The play of ideas, for example, with its insistence on intellectual and psychological battles, as opposed to the drama of clashing swords and the cape-and-dagger school, is a legacy bestowed on the English theatre largely by Bernard Shaw, who developed his dramatic doctrine from the Ibsen of *Ghosts*, *Osmerholm* and *Hedda Gabler*. Again, the present-day musical comedy of the London stage derives from the George Edwardes tradition of fifty years ago, with some reminiscence of French *opéra bouffe*. George Edwardes derived from Savoy opera, Gilbert from J. R. Planche, and Planché from the French *folie féerie*, which itself had a long ancestry. Further, modern crook plays are the clear progeny of Victorian melodrama, whose exotic blossoms sprang from Pixérécourt and the Waverley Novels. Scott, in turn, developed from the Tale of Terror and the Gothic Revival of the eighteenth century, while the whole melodramatic genre can ultimately be traced back to Seneca and the Tragedy of Blood.

Other examples could easily be cited. Twentieth-century accuracy in historical stage costume owes much to the archaeological productions of Charles Kean in the 1850's, which sprang from the germ of Kemble's revival of *King John* in 1820. Many modern domestic plays are in the direct line of descent from the 'cup-and-saucer' school of Robertson, whose comedies have for literary parentage the dramas of Lillo, such as *George Barnwell*, the *Bürgerliches Trauerspiel* of the German theatre, and Elizabethan models, such as *Arden of Feversham*. Our recent ballet makes extensive use of the nineteenth-century tradition, and even of its repertoire, including such masterpieces of choreography as *Le Lac des Cygnes*, itself deriving from earlier "Ballet Blanc," like *Giselle* (1841). And Society

comedy, of the kind associated with Coward and Lonsdale, has obvious forerunners in the plays of Sheridan and Colman, which were derived from Congreve and Farquhar.

Some of our best poetic drama, such as *Murder in the Cathedral*, openly confesses its debt to the past by its medieval atmosphere and Catholic themes. Meanwhile revivals of earlier specimens of English drama—Shakespeare, Jonson, Goldsmith, etc.—are constantly to be seen both in London and at the provincial repertory theatres, so that the great literary tradition of the English stage is never in real danger of being forgotten. And even our Christmas pantomimes (a persistent feature of the twentieth century) have preserved traditional stories with a marked ritual of stage business and characterization, together with a flavour of their literary and historical origins. *The Babes in the Wood*, for instance, with its echoes of the Robin Hood legend and its supposed derivation from the incident of the Princes in the Tower; *Dick Whittington*, with its reminiscences of the merchant trade of medieval London; the Oriental group derived from *Arabian Nights*, such as *Aladdin*, *The Forty Thieves*, and *Sinbad the Sailor*; the pantomimes based on Grimm's fairy-tales, and those of French extraction, such as *Cinderella* and *The Sleeping Beauty*—all are reminders of the historical and cosmopolitan literary traditions of the English drama.

The widespread dramatization of fiction in the twentieth century, however much it may be deplored as evidence of lack of originality, is yet another link with literary tradition. There have been dramas based on the life and work of the Brontës, such as *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, on the Brownings (*The Barretts of Wimpole Street*), on Jane Austen (*Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*), on Mrs Gaskell's *Cranford* and Trollope's *Barchester Towers*, and on Russian novels, such as *War and Peace* and *Crime and Punishment*, all testifying to the strong literary interests of the English playgoing public.

None the less the English stage of the twentieth century has produced (on the whole so far) 'theatrical' rather than 'literary' drama. That is to say that its plays, if we except the work of a handful of great writers, such as Shaw and Eliot, have been composed more for the theatre than for the

study. And since, among literary historians, there is always a tendency to consider drama more in terms of its literary accomplishment than of its acting quality, many modern plays are likely to be severely treated by critics of future generations, for their virtues are often not apparent outside the theatre walls.

The best drama, indeed, reads as well as it acts. *Hamlet* certainly does. So do *Peer Gynt* and *The Beaux' Stratagem*. But in surveying English drama from 1900 we shall look in vain for the purely literary splendours of the 'great ages of drama'. On the other hand, it must be remembered that literary qualities may abound in a work which would none the less empty even the smallest theatre in a couple of nights. And consequently the Victorian closet-dramas of R. H. Home, Beddoes, Browning, Tennyson, Sir Henry Taylor, Swinburne, and C. J. Wells may with justice be considered inferior to many modern plays of the type we shall have to consider, which can hold an audience irrespective of their paper qualifications. And in the last fifty years there has been a flood of works which have at least succeeded in bringing prosperity to the English theatre. Never has it been so easy to make a fortune on the London stage. The climax was reached about the time of the Second World War, when an American showman is reported to have said, "I know how to make a success in the West End. Get a theatre and find out how the doors open."

But, whether we are considering the smaller section of 'literary' plays or the larger section of 'theatrical' plays of this century, it remains true that they all, in varying measure, represent the outcome of a long dramatic tradition. Every time the curtain rises at Sadler's Wells or the Haymarket, at Drury Lane or Covent Garden, or for that matter at the Golders Green Hippodrome or the Dewsbury Empire, there are ghosts of the past visible on the stage for those who have the necessary psychic dramatic sense. Of course, no one will deny that, during our period, a vast amount of the dramatic material has been totally unworthy of those distinguished ghosts and of that unrivalled dramatic tradition. That strip-tease and boogie-woogie can invade the stages of a capital city that once gave the world *Hamlet* and *King Lear* can only make the judicious

grieve. Similarly must the true scientist feel dismay when he hears the inanities of the modern radio, and thinks of the centuries of patient scientific toil that preceded its invention. Was it for this, he may well ask, that men poured out their talent in the past?

Fortunately one of the greater glories of the serious English drama during this century has been its tenacity, its ability to survive in small repertory theatres and converted parish halls, in private groups and diminutive London playhouses, while the West End has been increasingly given over to lavish amusement and after-dinner comedy. The spirit of Hroswitha and the Coventry mystery plays is not quite dead yet. On the other hand, it would be pedantic and one-sided to assume, as so many writers on modern drama do, that the real history of modern English theatre progress has been entirely confined to a few houses outside the West End—theatres, that is, like the Court under the Vedrenne-Barker regime, or the Birmingham Repertory Theatre under Sir Barry Jackson, or the Westminster under Anmer Hall, or the Cambridge Festival Theatre under Terence Gray. It would be equally idle to pretend that advance has come only from special groups like the Old Vic Company or the Sadler's Wells and Rambert Ballet, or only from theatres with a definite policy, like the Mercury at Notting Hill, where so much recent poetic drama has seen the light.

To these theatres and groups all honour is due. But there has, notwithstanding, been much courage, vision, unselfishness, fine drama, great acting, beautiful scenic and costume effect, even artistic direction, on the ordinary commercial West End stage since 1900. In the infinite variety of its comedy, tragedy, experimental plays, poetic drama, productions of Shakespeare, Ibsen, and Shaw, in its revival of ballet and extension of its territory, in its often scholarly and beautiful versions of period plays, and even in the riotous magnificence of some of its revues, pantomimes, and musical comedies, surely an abundant dramatic vitality has been shown. Commercialism may have exercised a very strong influence over the London theatre, but it has not extinguished the flame of our drama, and is to be ardently hoped that it never will.

(ii)

The cultural background of modern drama, its intellectual, literary, social, and ethical basis, is a subject altogether beyond the scope of the present work. For one thing, it would be necessary to write a complete history of twentieth-century society to deal with it properly, since every facet of life has found expression on the twentieth-century stage. 'Whereas in Restoration times, as Professor Nicoll has noted, the drama represented the opinions and ideas of only a tiny minority of the English nation, clustered around the King and Court at Whitehall, in our own period all classes of the community have been clearly mirrored.

Shaw, for example, has ranged from the flower-seller of *Pygmalion* and the Salvation Army girl of *Major Barbara* to the professional gentlemen of *The Doctors Dilemma* and the up-to-date monarch of *The Apple Cart*, from Annajanska, the Bolshevik Empress, to the Hushabyes of *Heartbreak House*. Galsworthy depicted sections of English society at work in such things as its system of justice; Granville-Barker wrote plays of business life, such as *The Madras House*. The tawdry aristocracy of the First World War period found an acid chronicle of themselves in Somerset Maugham's *Our Betters*. Spiritualist quackery was exposed in Aldous Huxley's *The World of Light*. The flotsam and jetsam of the 1920's were well reflected in the comedies of Noel Coward. Lancashire life had earlier found its Boswell in Stanley Houghton's *Hindle Wakes* and *The Younger Generation*, and provincial funeral hypocrisy in a one-act masterpiece, *The Dear Departed*. Suburban frustration was depicted with exquisite comic insight in the miniature *Grand Cham's Diamond* of Allan Monkhouse. Adolescence and its problems formed the theme of John Van Druten's *Young Woodley*; the acuter psychological troubles of another stratum of society found expression in Mordaunt Shairp's *The Green Bay Tree*. The mental strain of life in the trenches was well brought out in R. C. Sherriff's *Journey's End*. The callous and corrupt side of modern feminine society found a pitiless exposition in Clare Boothe's *The Women* (American in origin, but equally applicable in London).

In a word, no aspect of modern life has escaped the hands of the dramatic reporter. And behind the society which has been portrayed lie some of the most far-reaching social and psychological changes in human history. Since 1900 England has survived the two greatest of all cataclysms, and has been peopled by the men and women who fought in them and whose standards of conduct and thought have been profoundly affected by them. The period has also seen the overthrow of innumerable cherished beliefs, the almost complete paganization of the populace, the infiltration of the ideas of Marx into the popular political consciousness, and of those of Freud into the emotional and literary consciousness. The Victorian conception of parental authority has been cast to the winds: sons and daughters have kicked up their heels and gone wild.

Moreover, the literary and artistic world (with which drama has always been so closely connected) has gone through cataclysms as revolutionary as the social upheavals. Literary romance and illusion have been shattered. There has been an increasing drift away from all romantic themes, and the subject-matter of Tennysonian and Pre-Raphaelite poetry has been held in ever more and more contempt. Art and architecture have alike stripped themselves of ornament, and have concentrated on form and design. Sculpture produces figures with flattened heads and vast, bulging thighs. Portraits often look squint-eyed and knock-kneed. Buildings are functional, hard-headed, white-walled. All representational beauty, as the nineteenth-century artistic world understood it, has been slaughtered by naturalism, realism, expressionism, and other 'isms.'

Most serious, from the point of view of dramatic history, is the fact that poetry has become almost completely divorced from the ordinary stage. Many causes have contributed to this. For one thing, full-blooded picturesque acting of the old poetic type has been at a discount now for a quarter of a century or more. (There have been a few great Shakespearean actors, it is true, but the style as a whole is dead.) Significant dramatic gesture, the playing on the human voice as on the stops of an organ, the fine wearing of a splendid costume, the cultivation

of a distinctive stage presence, well-modulated stage movement, all have been overwhelmed under the modern naturalistic school of acting.

Again, the whole subject-matter of so much twentieth-century drama, ordinary conversations in ordinary rooms (a legacy, in many ways, from the small repertory theatres where the style developed), has damped down and repressed the entire art of histrionic display. In the course of an evening's acting many a performer has had no gesture to make above the level of cigarette-lighting or hand-shaking, no remark to make instinct with the faintest flicker of emotional tension as the past understood it, no walk except from the window to the sofa or from the cocktail cabinet to the radio. Often there has been no glimmer of individuality in costume or make-up, nothing but what might be seen in the street or suburban sitting-room every day of the week. Plays have sometimes run in London in which the conversation has been far flatter than that of ordinary life, in which the single setting was more drab than that of many a back-room tenement, in which from curtain to curtain there was not merely never a whisper of poetry, but never a spark of wit. Such plays were particularly noticeable between 1930 and 1940. Doubtless these are extreme cases, but modern 'social' drama has been for many years now concerned with groups of ordinary men and women talking on an everyday level in a single everyday room which the audience must look at for three acts, whether it likes it or not.

As a result this 'naturalism' and 'realism' have not only driven poetry away from the commercial stage, but have fostered a school of acting in which all clear-cut picturesque playing of the Irving tradition has become taboo. In fact, histrionics as an art has been held in contempt, a contempt which links it with the excesses of Victorian melodrama. (It is worthy of note in passing that Victorian melodrama did not, in any case, consist entirely of whiskered villains and snowed-up heroines, as its satirists have pretended. Its philosophy and aesthetic were far more complex, and are deserving of better critical attention than they have so far received.)

An unfortunate by-product of this stage naturalism has been that few modern actors can speak poetry at all. Trained in

what used to be called the 'cup-and-saucer' style, but which might now be termed the 'whisky-and-wireless' manner, they are too often incapable of full-throated speech or of graceful movement. And this shortage of actors in the great tradition has meant increasing lack of opportunity for poetic playwrights and lack of familiarity of audiences with poetic drama.

Of course, poetic tragedy as commonly understood was already moribund at the beginning of this century, when naturalism was starting to develop. With the dramas of Stephen Phillips, such as *Paolo and Francesca*, *Herod*, and *Ulysses*, the Shakespearean style of writing for the theatre came to a close. Only spasmodically has verse-drama held up its head again since then. Flecker's *Hassan*, produced in 1923, raised high hopes that a renaissance of dramatic poetry was at hand. But its success was ephemeral, and was in any case accidental, since the crowds at His Majesty's were attracted as much by the glamour of the production, with its Beggars' Ballet and Arabian Nights' opulence, as by the emotional experience of listening to its fine language. Twelve years later T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* attracted great attention from the cultured minority, and again high hopes were raised. But it was, none the less, a minority success, even though it brought into the theatre certain unwary detective-fiction devotees, under the impression that they were about to witness a modern crook drama with an original setting. (For this the wording of the title must be held at least partially responsible.)

The little Mercury Theatre at Notting Hill has struggled valiantly to bring about a recrudescence of interest in poetic drama, and its success in keeping its doors open might seem to be a very hopeful sign. But even if a play continues there for some months the house capacity is so small (less than 150 seats) that a long run is no real criterion of a revival of interest in poetic drama in London. It needs something more than that. In fact, not until a modern dramatist can fill one of the great metropolitan theatres with a poetic play, and keep it running for at least six months, will it be possible to speak of a real stage poetry renaissance.¹ Certainly nothing approximating to the recent rebirth of ballet can yet be claimed for poetic

¹ *The Lady's not for Burning* has now achieved this feat. See pp. 707-10.

drama, though perhaps this very success of ballet at Covent Garden and Sadler's Wells has a significance here which we should not overlook. For the main appeal of ballet is, after all, a poetic one. It "liberates the mind," as Yeats said the ideal theatre should do. And among the thousands in those audiences who have made the English ballet into a major triumph there must have been many who found in it the poetic impulse which modern drama has in general failed to supply. Ballet has indeed had little or no competition to fear in poetic rivalry from the West End and big provincial theatres in the last decade or two.

It would seem that this renaissance of ballet is one of the stage's great answers to the screen. As we have already stressed in Chapter I, the theatre cannot hope to vie in pictorial effect with the wonders of the cinema, and yet an art such as ballet can offer an aesthetic experience which the screen can never provide. (It is true that ballet has on occasion been filmed, as when the *Capriccio Espagnol* of Rimsky-Korsakov was done with Massine and other Diaghileff luminaries, but half the glamour was missing.)

(in)

Some critics have compared the modern period of drama with that of the Elizabethan stage renaissance. It has certainly been a great age for the theatre, if not for the highest forms of drama. Theatres have sprung up in almost every town since about 1880. Amateur dramatic societies have achieved a kind of millennium. Books, pamphlets, lectures, clubs, magazines, drama-centres, all flourish. Fortunes are constantly made on the London stage. Vast numbers of the English people have become theatre-conscious in the last fifty years, so much so that it is rare now to find anyone of education who has not at least a superficial interest in the stage. But public interest in the theatre does not of itself make a great age of drama, and if we are seriously to claim that our period has been comparable with the Elizabethan era we must be able to show that it has produced dramatic masterpieces worthy of comparison with the work of yEschylus, Aristophanes, Marlowe, Shakespeare,

Molière, Congreve, Beaumarchais, Pushkin, and Ibsen, to name but a few. In musical drama we ought to be able to show a strong rivalry with the operas of Mozart, Weber, Wagner, Verdi, Bizet, Gounod, and Meyerbeer. In comic opera we should be able to balance the names of Gilbert, Sullivan, Strauss, Offenbach, and Planquette. For our Elizabethan theatre led the world, and we should, if we adopt this comparison, be able to show that our modern English drama has done the same in all its branches.

Can this be done?

Before trying to answer this question we must note an obvious difficulty in forming an estimate. We are too close to the period to make a good decision. This is particularly true with works of pressing social import which interest us because of their urgency, but which will not interest our successors any more than, say, Douglas Jerrold's *The Rent Day* or *The Factory Girl* interest us to-day.

Plays of topical social flavouring may be quite effective dramas. They may fill theatres. They may provide opportunities for discussion, or even, as with Galsworthy's *Justice*, bring about actual social reform. But, surveying the great names of drama in the past, we cannot say that they evinced similar signs of a passion for reforming the world. There are no new sociological implications in *Hamlet*. Nor in *The Way of the World*. Nor in the *Oresteia*. Nor in *Boris Godunov*. Even Ibsen, one of the world's dramatic giants, survives for his technical and psychological skill, and for the poetry of *Peer Gynt*, not for his success as a dramatic pamphleteer. The battles waged in *A Doll's House* and the rest are no longer interesting as a burning cause. They were settled long ago. And Shaw, the dramatic propagandist *par excellence*, is much more likely to go down the centuries as the author of the colourful *Saint Joan* and *Caesar and Cleopatra* than as the would-be solver of the social problems of *Getting Married*.

This, however, is getting us on to dangerous and argumentative ground. We are not here concerned with the value or otherwise of sociological drama, but with stressing that its significance may well be ephemeral, making it difficult for us to decide on its final importance. If it has solid dramatic

qualities, as the plays of Ibsen have in abundance, it will survive and ultimately adorn the world history of drama. If, however, it is mere dramatic pamphleteering, devoid of real human interest, it cannot hope to do so.

Many plays of the twentieth century have been only partially disguised essays in sociology. The influence (and perhaps the great commercial success) of Shaw's dramas have tempted a legion of playwrights to make their characters stand up and expatiate on pressing social problems. Meanwhile the play is kept waiting, and the Aristotelian canon of the central importance of plot in drama is put into cold storage. Other twentieth-century plays, on the contrary, have been plot-dramas and nothing more. Yet others have dissolved themselves in an aura of beautiful lines, reminding one of Arnold's criticism of Shelley as a beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating his wings in vain.

This brings us to the question of what classification we are to adopt in making our survey of modern drama. Is it to be as comedy and tragedy? Or as a period of plays by specific authors, each receiving a separate account? Or by decades? Or as pre-World War I, World War I, post-World War, etc.? Might it be possible to classify types of drama in a better way than any of these?

(iv)

There are, in effect, four elemental types of drama: (1) That which tells a story. (2) That which states a case. (3) That which is an amalgam of poetry and fine words. (4) That which explores human character. Let us examine this postulate and expand its suggestions a little.

Under (1), drama which tells a story, we would naturally include melodrama, detective drama, and the chronicle play. The story may thus be either fictitious or true, or a combination of fiction and truth, as in Shakespeare's *Henry the Fourth* or Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*. This narrative form of drama was the dominating type in England in the earlier nineteenth century, until the reforms of Robertson, and later of Shaw, introduced a fresh element of social implication into the dramatic structure.

Under (2), drama which states a case, would be included not only all "sociological propaganda plays, but plays concerned with the symbolic representation of a single idea as it affects a group of the *dramatis personæ*; in other words, group-idea dramas. This is the only one of the four headings under which Shakespeare could not be included. *Othello* might seem to be an exception in that it is a tragedy of *idée fixe*. But it none the less remains a drama of personal conflict and emotional obsession. It does not deal with a group-idea. It is too much concerned with individual actions and reactions to become a real dramatic object-lesson of the Ibsen kind. And it is highly improbable that performances of *Othello* have ever brought about any reduction in the number of *crimes passionnels*.

(3) Drama which is an amalgam of poetry and fine words. This would embrace most of the products of stage romanticism proper, such as Maeterlinck's *Blue Bird* or Wilde's *Salome* or Phillips's *Paolo and Francesca*. It would also include certain comedic blazes of wit, such as *The Way of the World*, where the characters move *in vacuo*, dazzling centres of verbal pyrotechnics, brilliant Catherine-wheels emitting showers of diamond sparkles.¹

Under (4), drama which explores human character, come the works of the great masters of human psychology, Shakespeare, Molière, Ibsen, Chekhov, and Strindberg. In this category would come much classic and modern comedy, including satirical comedy, for satire is mainly concerned with human character. Farce, however, belongs half to this division and half to (1). Comic situation, on which farce depends, is itself dependent on a process of events leading up to a comic climax.

Now, if these four 'elemental' types are admitted to be valid, we must note at once that they are permuted and combined in ever-varying degree in all drama worthy of the name. We may go further and suggest that it is a mark of a poor drama to contain only one of these elements; that all good drama contains at least two of them; that the greatest drama

¹ It will be convenient to deal with ballet and opera under this heading of poetic drama (see Chapter III), although ballet might almost equally well be considered as pure spectacle.

usually contains three and possibly all four, but with one of the elements normally predominant over the others. For instance, *Getting Married*, one of the duller of all Shaw's plays on the stage, is a pure example of only one element, the second. *Sweeney Todd* is merely element (1). Wilde's *Salome* is a combination of (1) and (3). *The School for Scandal* combines (i) and (4), with a touch of (3). Flecker's *Hassan* is (1) and (3). *Lady Windermere's Fan* is (i), (3), and (4). So is *Hamlet*. So is *Peer Gynt*, with an added flavour of (2). Chekhov's plays might at first sight seem to contain only element (4), and so be a confutation of the general principle. But the writing in Chekhov is so fine, the sense of style and dramatic harmony so exquisite, that element (2) must also be admitted to find a place in his work.

A fifth elemental type, if we were to allow it, would be spectacle drama, to include all forms of theatrical entertainment based on show, such as pageant plays, pantomimes, musical comedies, revues, and even some historical dramas. But mere show is extraneous to drama proper, and cannot be really considered as forming an elemental type at all. It is not of itself one of the skeletal bones of drama, and so is not allowable along with the preceding four.

None the less it may be an integral part of the action. This is particularly true of some of the great scenes in opera. For instance, the triumphal pageant in Act II of *Aida* is essential to the development of the story. So is the spectacular finale of *Götterdämmerung*, where all the elements of the fable are brought to a powerful climax. Again, the Court masques of the seventeenth century were ingeniously contrived as vehicles for display in such a fashion that the spectacle seemed to spring naturally from the action. Up to a point it is true that spectacle enters into all theatrical art. Even the drabest propaganda play requires something in the way of scenery and dresses, though there have been many modern productions which reduced these to a minimum reminiscent of Hans Andersen's Emperor.

In a word, though show is not a real basic element of drama, it will be convenient here to use the term 'spectacle drama' as a supplementary fifth to the four other elements, especially in

dealing with the 'illegitimate' stage of this century. Its output has been so abundant that it cannot be glossed over as of no importance, an attitude taken by so many writers on modern dramatic history. The musical dramas of Drury Lane, for instance, from *Rose Marie* to *Pacific 1860* have been primarily spectacles. The pantomimes which cover England in their glittering net every winter are mainly mere excuses for miles of silver braid and spangling forests, though much of their splendour was shorn by the austerity years of the Second World War. The revues of Cochran made a strong appeal to the eye. So did pageant plays like *The Miracle*, Coliseum wonders like *Casanova*, and re-upholstered Offenbach operettas like *Can-Can*.

Bearing, then, this fivefold classification in mind, and not, of course, pretending that it can be too rigidly applied, we may turn to a consideration of the drama of the twentieth century. Instead of the customary divisions into comedy and tragedy, we may review it in the light of our five elements, always with the proviso that the fifth is not so much an element as an agreeable excrescence. We shall thus have: (1) Narrative drama; (2) theory drama, or drama of symbolic ideas; (3) literary drama; (4) character drama, or drama of personal interplay; and (5) spectacle drama, or drama of the eye.

The above order represents perhaps the approximate chronological development of drama in general, but for our purpose here, in considering the twentieth-century stage, it will be convenient to -alter its sequence somewhat, and to begin with the literary drama. We may then go on to examine the spectacle drama, including musical comedy and revue, pass to the drama of ideas and theories, next survey the play of character, including comedy and tragi-comedy, and finally treat of narrative drama, chronicles, and historical plays.

CHAPTER III
THE LITERARY DRAMA—BALLET—OPERA

(i) *Stephen 'Phillips*

IN the sphere of verse-drama the twentieth century opened with the extraordinary successes of Stephen Phillips (1864-1915).¹ Critics, eminent and obscure, alike lost their heads and proclaimed Phillips as the Messiah of the poetic stage. Glittering rivers of encomium flowed as *Paolo and Francesca*, *Herod*, and *Ulysses* appeared. Churton Collins, for instance, pronounced *Paolo and Francesca* to claim kinship with Sophocles and Dante. William Archer, in *The Daily Chronicle*, called the play "A thing of exquisite poetic form, yet tingling from first to last with intense dramatic life. Mr Phillips has achieved the impossible. Sardou could not have ordered the action more skilfully, Tennyson could not have clothed the passion in words of purer loveliness." The critic of *Punch* said, with obvious enthusiasm, "I know of no work of modern times, no actors' drama of any age, that better combines the passion and glamour with the restraint of classic traditions." James Douglas, in *The Morning Leader*, considered that Phillips had succeeded "where Leigh Hunt, Silvio Pellico, and many others failed. He has performed a feat from which even Byron shrank. ... It places Mr Phillips in the front rank of English Dramatic Art."

These panegyrics have a melancholy literary interest. They serve only too well to show how unreliable the contemporary estimates of a poet's work can be. All that Phillips really did was to shake the dying bones of pseudo-Elizabethanism into a slightly less hollow rattle than Tennyson had done in *Queen Mary* and Swinburne in that monstrous dramatic dragon *Bothwell*. R. H. Home and Marston had also spent years in similar Elizabethan endeavour. And most of the earlier romantic poets had tried their hand at Shakespearean-Italianate

¹ The date of Phillips's birth is given by some writers as 1864, by others as 1867 or 1868.

tragedy, only Shelley in *The Cenci* coming anywhere near success.

In fact, Phillips is the last of a rather sorry line, and *The Christian World* seems to have had some subconscious inkling of this when it said that *Paolo and Francesca* was a notable addition to the literature of a waning century.

In my *Early Victorian Drama* the subject of pseudo-Elizabethanism is discussed at some length. It was noted there that the carrying on of the Shakespearean tradition need not necessarily be fatal to the production of fine poetic drama; Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*, based on the chronicles of Karamzin, is a glowing example of Shakespearean methods applied to Russian history. *Boris* is indeed one of the world's greatest poetic dramas, as Chaliapin realized when he made the regicide Tsar, in the operatic version, the mainstay of his life's repertoire.

In England, however, it must be admitted that the Shakespearean cult of the nineteenth century was disastrous and led only into a blind alley. Even so, it would be unfair to class Phillips's dramas with the unactable closet tragedies of the Victorian era, for many of those, such as Taylor's *Philip Van Artevelde* or Wells's *Joseph and his Brethren*, had no real acting qualities at all. The work of Phillips at least held audiences in the early 1900's, though, as later with Flecker's *Hassan*, it was probably the glamour of the acting and the decor that drew the crowds.

In *Paolo and Francesca*, the best-known of Phillips's plays, good use was made of the splendid story narrated by Dante, and familiar to modern music-lovers through the symphonic poem of Tchaikowsky, *Francesca da Rimini*. (This was later adapted as a ballet by Lichine, and seen at Covent Garden in the 1930's.) Another fine musical version is Zandonai's opera, *Francesca da Rimini*. There had been an American play with the same title in 1855, and Gabriele D'Annunzio's *Francesca da Rimini* appeared in 1901.

A chorus of praise greeted the production of Phillips's tragedy on March 6, 1902, at the St James's Theatre under George Alexander. A magnificent cast included Alexander himself as Giovanni Malatesta, Henry Ainley as Paolo, the

beautiful-voiced Evelyn Millard as Francesca, and the intensely dramatic Elizabeth Robins as Lucrezia. The published text, which had appeared some time before the St James's production, had earned the most lavish tributes, and the *Era*, when the play finally reached the stage, added an enthusiastic account of the performance to its already considerable laurels. After some brief criticism of the characterization, it thus described the production:

As Giovanni Malatesta, made up to suggest mastiff-like resolve and hard and rugged manliness, he [Alexander] held the audience in the grip of his genius from the first time that he appeared on the stage wearing the heavy sword that "Lo Scanciato" knew so well how to wield. . . . Miss Elizabeth Robins raised the audience to a state of hardly-to-be-repressed enthusiasm by her magnificent interpretation of Lucrezia degl' Onesti. The commanding power, the bitter scorn, and the elocutionary excellence of Miss Robins's embodiment in the earlier acts had a splendid pendant in the irresistible outburst of affection in the last division of the piece, when the childless woman's heart softens and she melts in mother-like love over the erring young wife who appeals to her for help.

The modern reader, however, has come to think *Paolo and Francesca* old-fashioned. A reading of the text proves, on the whole, disappointing. One looks in vain for the Sophoclean and Dantesque passages which the Press panegyrics lead one to expect. There is not even the lavish nebulosity of Swinburne, only an occasional glamour of phrase rising up here and there, as in:

Our souls would flash together in one flame.

Or Francesca's:

Is there a step
A light step, or a dreamy drip of oars?
Is there a stirring of leaves, or ruffle of wings?
For it seems to me that softly, without hand,
Surely she touches me.

There is also some effective stichomythia at the crisis. And the celebrated passage in Act IV, when Paolo and Francesca are seen for the last time before their assassination, certainly has a vague Pre-Raphaelite charm:

- PAOLO. Remember how when first we met we stood
Stung with immortal recollections.
O face immured beside a fairy sea,
That leaned down at dead midnight to be kissed!
O beauty folded up in forests old!
Thou wast the lovely quest of Arthur's knights—
- FRANCESCA. Thy armour glimmered in a gloom of green.
- PAOLO. Did I not sing to thee in Babylon?
- FRANCESCA. Or did we set a sail in Carthage bay?

There is also some fine writing for Lucrezia, especially in the speech in Act I where she laments her lack of children:

Bitterness—am I bitter? Strange, O strange!
How else? My husband dead and childless left,
My thwarted woman-thoughts have inward turned,
And that vain milk like acid in me eats. . . .

Does great God
Expect I shall clasp air and kiss the wind
For ever? And the budding cometh on,
The burgeoning, the cruel flowering:
At night the quickening splash of rain, at dawn
That muffled call of birds how like to babes:
And I amid these sights and sounds must starve—
I, with so much to give, perish of thrift!
Omitted by His casual dew!

As a stage play *Paolo and Francesca* has frequently held its own. It treats the well-known story with a certain measure of dramatic art, developing the action in the following way: Paolo has brought Francesca as wife to his elder brother, Giovanni Malatesta. As in the tale of Tristan and Iseult, it is the bride-bringer who captures the heart of the bride, not the lawful husband. Finally, over a reading of the legend of Lancelot and Guinevere, Paolo and Francesca declare their passion. Giovanni discovers their secret, and in an overmastering fury murders the two in their chamber. To these three central characters of a passionate triangle Phillips adds an effective fourth—Lucrezia degl' Onesti. It is her dramatic function to arouse Giovanni's suspicions of Paolo in a scene recalling a little too strongly the temptation of Othello by Iago. The sudden melting of her bitterness in a wave of love

for Francesca is an effective theatrical stroke, the more so as it comes too late to save the lovers from Giovanni's rage.

The play suffers from a certain overcrowding of incident. But it is admirably brief, and does at least avoid the maundering technique of the Victorian dramas in this style, even though when viewed against dramatic masterpieces like *The Duchess of Malfi* or *The Cenci* it is as thin milk to rich wine. There are some well-planned scenes and contrasts, as in Act II, Scene II ("A Wayside Inn out of Rimini. View of Rimini in distance, towers flushed with sunset"), which provides a welcome tavern scene as a relief to the emotional tension of the Malatesta palace. An exotic touch is given by the scene in the Apothecary's shop, with its inevitable suggestion of *Borneo and Juliet*: "The walls and ceilings are hung with skins, sharks' teeth, crucibles, wax figures, crystals, charms, etc." Lamps, potions, lighted braziers, and purses of gold contribute to the atmosphere of wizardry and impending evil.

The last act has several good opportunities for stage effect. There is the romantic love-scene for Paolo and Francesca before they pass through the curtains to their fate. And finally there is the off-stage murder, with the frantic ordering of wedding candles by Giovanni to fill the palace as the corpses of the lovers are brought in on a bier. A macabre marriage feast is arranged, and in a confusion of tapers and frightened servants the tragedy ends. Only in the very last lines is the tension lowered as Giovanni, like the Duchess of Malfi's brother, speaks his remorse in a moving conclusion:

She takes away my strength.
I did not know the dead could have such hair.
Hide them. They look like children fast asleep!

The chorus of adulation which greeted Phillips soon faded away, and he died in poverty, having been obsessed for many years with a sense of failure. At one time his royalties had been as much as £150 a week, but when he died the only remainder of his fortune was £5.

His poetical stock has also sunk to something very far down on the roll of fame. He was, as it now appears, merely the last flicker of the dying Victorian candle of Elizabethan-style

drama, even though he himself knew that the school of Shakespearean pastiche was outmoded. With his death in 1915 the type became virtually defunct. Subsequent poetic drama has been far less old-fashioned in its inspiration, though here and there, as with *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) and *This Way to the Tomb* (1945), medieval religious sources have again shifted the focus back in time rather than forward.¹

(ii) *James Elroy Flecker*

J. E. Flecker² (1884-1915), twenty years younger than Phillips, died in the same year. For several reasons their names may be coupled in the history of twentieth-century drama. For Flecker's two plays *Hassan* and *Don Juan*, although in a different style from those of Phillips, had the same poetic surface brilliance, and achieved a comparable success in the theatre. Moreover, it was at His Majesty's, the scene of most of Phillips's triumphs, that *Hassan* appeared, gorgeously attired, in 1923. The scenic glories of *Chu Chin Chow* had only recently departed from that stage—its five years' run went on until 1921—and there is no doubt that it was a similarly glamorous production which made *Hassan* such a theatrical success.

We said that *Paolo and Francesca* and *Herod* were the last links with the dying pseudo-Elizabethan tradition of the

¹ The following is a list of Phillips's most important plays: *Herod* (Her Majesty's, October 31, 1900), *Ulysses* (Her Majesty's, February 1, 1902), *Paolo and Francesca* (St James's, March 6, 1902), *The Sin of David* (Stadttheater, Düsseldorf, September 30, 1905), *Nero* (His Majesty's, January 25, 1906), *Pietro of Siena* (October 10, 1911, by the Drama Society), *Faust* (His Majesty's, September 5, 1908), *The King* (1912), *Armageddon* (New Theatre, June 1, 1915). There was also the prose drama, *The Bride of Lammermoor* (King's Theatre, Glasgow, March 23, 1908, produced by Martin Harvey). For further information about Phillips vide William Archer, *Poets of the Younger Generation* (1901); also Sir Sidney Colvin, in T. Humphry Ward's *English Poets*, vol. v (1918), and in *The Bookman*, March 1916. Of the *Faust* which Phillips prepared in collaboration with J. Comyns Carr for production by Tree at His Majesty's in 1908, scenic encomiums can be found in many reports of the time. *The Era*, for example, said, "Especially to be admired was the scene of the Prologue, in which the feeling of vast and mysterious space was created in a manner which has seldom been equalled on our stage. Pile upon pile of clouds led the eye away into infinite distances; and the Angels were no mere lay figures, but beautiful and impressive personalities."

² On Flecker see Douglas Goldring, *James Elroy Flecker: an Appreciation* (Chapman and Hall, 1922).

Victorian stage. Similarly, *Hassan*, produced by Basil Dean, was the last full-scale West End performance of a new English poetic drama. Subsequently, except for rare Shakespearean revivals, the poetic play has had to find a home in smaller 'group' theatres, such as the Mercury at Notting Hill and, on occasion, the Old Vic. Nothing in the sumptuous picture tradition has been seen since *Hassan*.

For ten years Basil Dean had endeavoured to bring *Hassan* to London, and when at last his ambition was achieved it was in as splendid a fashion as even Tree or Irving could have desired. The production of September 20, 1923, was, as it would seem, the *Götterdämmerung* of large-scale poetic drama in England, but if so, it certainly went to its end in a blaze of distinguished names. Henry Ainley appeared as Hassan, Esmé Percy as Selim, Malcolm Keen as the Caliph Haroun al Raschid, and Leon Quartermaine as Ishak. Cathleen Nesbitt was the Yasmin and Laura Cowie the Pervaneh. There was, besides, a miniature army of subsidiary characters—soldiers, police, dancing-women, beggars, mutes, attendants, merchants, camel drivers, Jews, pilgrims, torturers, and casual loiterers. Among these were many afterwards destined to make a name for themselves on the London stage. Elaborate and very beautiful incidental music was composed by Frederick Delius and conducted by Eugene Goossens. There were ballets by Michel Fokine. The settings and costumes were by George W. Harris, and the whole production was supervised by Basil Dean.

Henry Ainley as Hassan recited Flecker's well-known *Golden journey to Samarkand* as a Prologue. *The Stage* (September 27, 1923) described some of the scenic splendours in glowing terms, and referred to the whole production as a "stupendous and truly Oriental spectacle which has been ignorantly grouped with other plays of similar locale, but of infinitely less poetic value and calibre." It went on to say that the performance was

full of stage surprises, from the scene in which Hassan, jeered at from Yasmin's balcony by that wanton and his treacherous friend Selim, is succoured by Haroun al Raschid's Court Poet and Minstrel from the hills, Ishak, and is sent up aloft in the deftly

managed basket to join the Caliph and his Vizier, Jafar, in Rafi's abode without a door, "The House of the Moving Walls," the fall of the iron walls to make Haroun and the rest prisoners being also arranged adroitly. This followed on the dances for the supposedly crippled Beggars of Bagdad, and also for supple and nimble dancing-girls, splendidly performed, with George Wolkowsky heading the male contingent, and pointing plainly to the master-hand of Michel Fokine.

The stage crowd, controlled by the Master of the Caravan, was described as

one of the most impressive and best-grouped scenes one has ever witnessed, even on the vast and spacious stages of His Majesty's and Old Drury, for instance.

Delius's most appropriate and generally sombre, though by no means untuneful music, less abstruse than some he used to write, was rendered ably (as far as the chattering audience let one hear) at the opening performance by a special orchestra conducted by Mr Eugene Goossens.

It is obvious from a perusal of these extracts that there was not much room left for the audience to concentrate on the text of *Hassan*. We are clearly in the world of Charles Kean and Tree, with a flavouring of the Russian Ballet and a Lyceum pantomime. In fact, *Hassan*, written as a poetic drama (despite the fact that much of it is in richly coloured prose) became in performance a mere spectacle-play. It might, indeed, be classed in our fifth division of drama rather than here. But its merits earn it a place at least beside the plays of Phillips and Drinkwater, and so it will be best considered in their company.

The theme of the play is repulsive, and has come in for much criticism. It treats of two lovers, Rafi, the King of the Beggars, and Pervaneh, who has been captured by the amorous Caliph Haroun al Raschid. Rafi has formed a plot to assassinate the Caliph, which Haroun overhears in a Bagdad house while on one of his amorous private adventures. Hassan, a confectioner, disappointed in his passion for the heartless Yasmin, befriends the Caliph and contrives his escape from the clutches of Rafi. Finally the Beggar King is seized and brought to book. Haroun gives the lovers the alternative of living, but with permanent

separation, or of dying together after a night of love. They decide on death, and the tragedy closes with the macabre Procession of Protracted Death, which the sensitive Hassan is compelled to witness. At the end he leaves Bagdad on the Golden Journey to Samarkand, horrified at the Caliph's cruelty and desiring only to forget what he has seen.

On this sordid and sadistic story Flecker rears a beautiful superstructure of fine words. It is a strange kind of beauty, cruel and kaleidoscopic, owing not a little to Wilde's *Salome*. Indeed, the whole play, well constructed as it is, seems like an echo from the fantastically morbid world of the aesthetic nineties. Aubrey Beardsley should have done the decor; the first-night audience should have worn green carnations in their buttonholes. But the brilliant colour and the Beggars' ballet bring us into the orbit of Bakst and Diaghileff, and *Hassan* has its own significance as one of the first English poetic dramas to utilize the possibilities of choreography in the Russian manner. (It was pointed out at the beginning of this survey that 'dance-drama' of the kind associated with Terence Gray's Festival Theatre at Cambridge in the 1920's was an important aesthetic development of the English stage. It was a pioneer movement which helped to pave the way for the recent great revival of ballet. And *Hassan* contained in itself even earlier seeds of dramatic choreography.)

Primarily, however, *Hassan* is a great festival of words. Exotic romanticism runs wild in its pages. Hassan describes Yasmin in terms of truly Wildean sensuousness reminiscent of *A House of Pomegranates*, and when the play breaks into verse it is musical, almost Swinburnian, and richly chromatic. From time to time, however, the seamy side of Bagdad appears, as in the Beggars' chorus. And though the verse is mostly dreamy and luxuriant, it occasionally rises to great heights of imaginative vigour, culminating in the Soldiers' chorus of Act III. And at the last, after the horrors are over, the tragedy closes in Greek style with a lowering of the emotional tension, and to the music of *The Golden Road to Samarkand* the macabre climax fades away.

Flecker's other play, *Don Juan* (written 1910-11), was intended by its author to be his life's great work, rivalling *Faust*

and *Peer Gynt*. The story of Don Juan is presented in an unusual manner against a background of modern English life. There are scenes in Gloucester and off the coast of Wales. The dramatis persons include Lord Framlingham, the Conservative Prime Minister, Robert Evans, a Radical-Socialist Leader, Miners, a Chauffeur, and the Captain, Mate, and Seamen of a Tramp Steamer. We are often reminded of Shaw's method in the passages of sociological argument with which the drama abounds. This is specially noticeable in the duologue between Robert Evans and Don Juan when the subject of mass unemployment is being discussed.

Don Juan is a curious medley. It is far removed from the opulent world of *Hassan*, yet it has a grand sweep and shows a grasp of modern problems which puts it at once in a higher class as a play of ideas in poetic form. It reminds us, in fact, as Flecker obviously wished it to do, of *Peer Gynt*. It is a blend of the various elements in our fivefold classification of drama. For it is a play of narrative, of poetry, of ideas, and of character, with an admixture of spectacle. Unfortunately the blending is not satisfactory and the general effect is rather of a hotch-potch. Flecker never lived to complete the work according to his own plans of revision. It was finished in Corfu in the summer of 1911, and he became absorbed in the composition of *Hassan*, putting *Don Juan* aside. Only at the end of his brief life, in 1914, did he take up the idea of revision once more. Nothing came of it, and Flecker died in the following year, leaving the play to be published in 1925 in the 1911 text.

Despite its faults, *Don Juan* is a work of special interest to the student of dramatic history. For in it we can see the dying ashes of nineteenth-century poetic drama mingled with the new fire of the Shavian play of ideas. *Hassan*, for all its introduction of choreography, looked backward. (Even the dance effects were part of the His Majesty's production rather than a deliberate feature of the drama itself.) But *Don Juan* looked forward. It was halting. It was a muddle. But its head was at least pointed in the right direction. In spite of its rambling and inchoate structure, Flecker here showed himself more aware of the true spirit of dramatic adventure than in the glittering golden palaces of old Bagdad.

(iii) Davidson—Hardy's "Dynasts"

Another poet of the early twentieth century whose dramas reflect something of the spirit of *Peer Gynt* was John Davidson¹ (1857-1909). He went much deeper than did Flecker in *Don Juan*. In fact, his tragedies really belong, like Hardy's *Dynasts*, to the theatre of the mind. Arrangements were made for the production of several of them, but they were all finally shelved, and Davidson died, as is generally thought, by suicide, as frustrated and tragic a figure as any he had imagined. The bulk of his philosophy is to be found in his "testaments," but his essential ideas are in his dramas too. His main doctrine was epitomized in his own final words: "Men are the universe become conscious; the simplest man should consider himself too great to be called after any name."

Davidson was in some ways a forerunner of D. H. Lawrence. To him conventional Christianity and chastity were alike anathema. On emerging from his repressed life in Glasgow into the full blaze of the erotic London of the nineties Davidson bathed his spirit to the full in the new fire of its intellectual and emotional freedom. Some of his earlier plays had been comedies and "tragic farces," such as *Smith* (1883) and *Scaramouch in Naxos* (1889). But in the opening years of the twentieth century—he died in 1909—he was occupied with serious poetic dramas such as *The Theatrocrat* (1905) and the *Mammon* trilogy, of which only two parts were completed—*The Triumph of Mammon* (1907) and *Mammon and his Message* (1908).

The Theatrocrat is shot through and through with sexual obsession. It deals with an actor-manager who stages a disastrous production of *Troilus and Cressida*. He becomes estranged from his wife, who attempts to make him poison himself. An extraordinary irreligious Bishop becomes involved in the action. He tries to restore the wife's happiness, but succeeds only finally in driving her to a renewal of passion with her former lover, an actor. This man, Groom, eventually murders the actor-manager. The wife commits suicide, and the unconventional Bishop, having excited a hostile audience

¹ For a general study of Davidson see H. Fineman's *John Davidson: a Study of the Relation of his Ideas to his Poetry* (Philadelphia, 1916).

to frenzy, is assassinated in the theatre while expounding his new and quite anti-Christian ideas. It is a gloomy and corpse-strewn drama. But, to a much greater extent than Flecker's *Don Juan*, it shows a marked advance on the flatly Elizabethan and purely literary play of the Stephen Phillips type. For the *poetic' playwrights of the Victorian school had all written as though Ibsen had never been born. They were plot-dramatists, dressing up their stories in Shakespearean peacock-feathers. And it was not until Shaw's preaching of Ibsenism in the nineties had begun to take effect that there was any appreciable stirring of English poetic drama towards a new synthesis of social expression. Phillips and his kind were completely unaffected by it. But plays like Davidson's *The Theatrocrat* and, later, the two parts of the *Mammon* trilogy show how the new ideas of Ibsen (and, up to a point, of Nietzsche) were beginning to percolate into English drama.

In true Ibsen fashion, for instance, Davidson makes his Bishop and actor-manager in *The Theatrocrat* into martyrs for the new cause of a materialistic philosophy. The *Mammon* plays are even more frankly revolutionary in being openly hostile to Christianity and in celebrating the paramount principle of the world as an all-pervading sexualism.¹

But the invasion of poetic drama by philosophy revealed itself to the full in Hardy's² *The Dynasts* (1904-8). Fundamentally unactable, it was none the less presented in a stage adaptation by Harley Granville-Barker at the Kingsway Theatre on November 25, 1914. But it belongs, like Davidson's dramas, to the theatre of the mind, and it can be only lightly touched on here, where we are primarily concerned with the living stage. The mournful ant-hill conception of human life which runs through this vast work is, in any case, not a good basis for dramatic effect. The characters of this historic

¹ Davidson himself considered the philosophy of Nietzsche insufficient, but on this subject vide Gertrud von Petzold, *Joan Davidson und sein geistiges Werden unter dem Einfluss Nietzsches* (Leipzig, 1928).

² For a study of Hardy's ideas see Amiya Chakravarty, *The Dynasts and the Post-war Age in Poetry* (Oxford University Press, 1938). Also Florence Emily Hardy's *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy* (Macmillan, 1928) and *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy* (Macmillan, 1930).

pageant of the Napoleonic Wars are deliberately shrunk into midgets against the ponderous impersonal background of Spirits of the Pities, Ancient Spirit of the Years, Ironic Spirits, and Choruses and Semi-choruses. As in the Wessex novels, Hardy creates an atmosphere of blind insensate Force overriding human will like the waves of the sea. Nelson and Napoleon, George III and the Empress Josephine, together with all the crowd of regal and governmental personages that throng the pages of the drama, are as nothing against the tides of circumstance. Consequently, we are never really interested in them. There comes a time in historical drama when the canvas gets too wide and the spectator cannot see the trees for the wood.

When Tolstoi's *War and Peace* was adapted for the stage at the Phoenix Theatre during the Second World War there was a similar feeling of nebulosity about the whole affair, a nebulosity increased by having a commentator on the stage who read aloud passages from the novel as a kind of Chorus.

The films may cope with a vast historical drama, and, indeed, may better the original for sheer pictorial effect, as happened with Sir Laurence Olivier's *Henry V*. But the stage can never manage things like *The Dynasts*. How, for example, could lines like the following be given any dramatic value to an audience?

On things terrene, then, I would say that though
 The human news wherewith the Rumours stirred us
 May please thy temper, Years, 'twere better far
 Such deeds were nulled, and this strange man's career
 Wound up, as making inharmonious jars
 In her creation whose meek wraith we know.
 The more that he, turned man of mere traditions,
 Now profits naught. For the large potencies
 Instilled into his idiosyncrasy—
 To throne fair Liberty, in Privilege' room—
 Are taking taint, and sink to common plots
 For his own gain.

(Fore Scene. Part First)

The difficulty of staging *The Dynasts* is not a mere question of unmanageable length. After all, Wagner's great operatic

dinosaur, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, has held audiences rapt over a period of seventy years. And *Back to Methuselah*, lumbering and heavy-going as it is, has proved itself a perfectly possible stage-work, even at so small a playhouse as the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, where it had its première. But these works are dynamic and instinct with vital theatrical force. *The Dynasts*, on the other hand, is the product of a mind obsessed with the hopelessness of human existence. Its texture is interwoven with an essentially undramatic pessimism. If there is no armour against Fate, how can we feel any concern for the Warriors? Greek tragedy was Fate-obsessed, it is true. But the *Agamemnon* or the *Eumenides*, the *Hippolytus* or the *Antigone*, still preserve a strong human interest. Man (and woman) is great and noble in a struggle against destiny. His grandeur is dramatic. But in *The Dynasts* he is an ear of corn under a tractor. Not even the drama of the mind can hope to make much music against a tractor's inexorable roar.

The Dynasts is an outstanding example of the general deepening of the intellectual gloom of poetic drama in England in the twentieth century. The neo-Elizabethan plays of Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne, Wells, Home, and Marston certainly had heavy and often tragic themes. But they are not written in any deeply gloomy spirit. They frequently contain riots of fine language. And in the work of their successors, such as Wilde's *Salome* and Phillips's *Herod*, the tragic basis is overlaid with a positively brilliant mosaic of golden phrase. They are, in short, Elizabethan in their exuberance; there is no denial of the beauty of life. It is tragic to die precisely because life can be so sweet.

But, with the spreading of the Ibsenian depression into English minds and the obsession with problems of social conduct, the riddle of the painful earth became the alpha and omega of our poetic dramatists. It culminates in *The Dynasts*, but it is strong in Davidson's dramas also. And sometimes, as in Flecker's *Hassan*, it breaks through the magnificence of the verbal tapestry and streaks it with a macabre and sadistic pattern.

(iv) *Gordon Bottomley*

It is interesting to observe how the fascination of the past has gripped our poetic dramatists. With the neo-Elizabethans it took the form of direct imitation of Shakespeare. With Phillips it was still a Shakespearean formula, but with a certain nebulous charm of phrase that gave it a pale individuality. With Flecker it was the chromatic tableaux and golden-imaged poetry of ancient Bagdad. With Hardy the inspiration was the Napoleonic Wars seen as part of a great cosmic process, with Spirit-choruses to add an Æschylean flavour.

With Gordon Bottomley (1874-1948) we are on a different plane. Both *King Lear's Wife* (1915) and *Gruach* (1921) are not merely Shakespearean in origin. They actually introduce Shakespearean characters, as St John Ervine was to do later in *The Lady of Belmont* (1925), based on *The Merchant of Venice*, and the Sadler's Wells Ballet in their fine choreographic continuation of the tale of Hamlet.

None the less it would be a mistake to class Bottomley with the neo-Elizabethans. For the main force behind him is not Elizabethan literature, but the world of Celtic and Northern legend and the world of a still pagan ancient Britain.¹ Hence the Shakespearean characters who fascinated him most were the dim figures of *Macbeth* and *Lear*, The brilliant southern colours of *Othello* and *Borneo and Juliet* were alien to his poetic landscape. For his is the world of gloomy and fearful night. There is evil abroad in the air of his dramas, unseen but constantly sensed. More than any of the poets so far discussed here Bottomley understands the power of poetic suggestion. For instance, outside the cottage in *The Crier by Night* (1902) we can feel a teeming horde of evil things that never actually appear. Almost from the beginning the atmosphere of dim supernatural foreboding is caught in Blandid's song:

¹ The influence on Bottomley of the Japanese symbolist technique of the No drama should not be overlooked. As early as 1900 a Japanese company had visited the Coronet Theatre at Netting Hill, and the literary world was further familiarized with Japanese ideas in 1913 when a volume of translations of No dramas appeared. See also Osman Edwards' *Japanese Plays and Playfellows* (Heinemann, 1901).

The bird in my heart's a-calling through a far-fled tear-grey sea
To the soft slow hills that cherish dim waters weary for me,
Where the folk of rath and dun trail homeward silently
In the mist of the early nightfall that drips from their hair like
rain.

The bird in my heart's a-flutter for the bitter wind of the sea
Shivers with thyme and woodbine as my body with memory;
I feel their perfumes ooze in my ears like melody—
The scent of the mead at the harping I shall not hear again.

The theme of *The Crier by Night* is itself instinct with subtle suggestion. It is a tale of remote antiquity, and reminds us of the first act of Wagner's *Walküre* in its setting. Blamid is a drudge to the Norse woman Thorgerd. The master of the house, Hialti, looks on Blamid with growing affection, and this arouses the fierce jealousy of Thorgerd. When the Spirit of the Marsh, the Crier by Night, begins to entice Blamid to go with him into the near-by lake, she decides to do so, but only if her lover Hialti can drown with her. This is agreed, and the Crier first ensnares Hialti and then returns to take Blamid. But her fear overmasters her, and she implores help from the stony Thorgerd. The mistress refuses her assistance. Finally Blamid yields to the Crier's importunate cries and goes out into the night to the stormy lake.

The plot owes something, perhaps, to Ibsen's *JLosmersholm*. But there is infinitely more poetic suggestion in the working out, quite apart from the fact that the medium is verse and not prose. The first sound of the Crier's Voice is managed with great dramatic skill: Hialti has been speaking, and he is suddenly interrupted "by a distant wailing which is heard through the storm":

THE VOICE. Ohey! Ohey! Ohohey!

BLANID. Master, I hear one calling in the night.

HALTI [*in a subdued voice*]. It is the wind across the chimney-slates.

THE VOICE. Ohey! Ohohey!

BLANID. Master, a man is calling in the night.

HALTI. An owl, storm-beaten, drowns down the long mere.

THE VOICE [*sounding nearer on a gust of wind*]. Ohohey! Ohohey!

BLANID. Master, one lost is helpless in the night.

THORGERD [*gently and with an eager smile*].

Ay, lass, good lass; go, lass, and seek for him—
 Maybe he sinks amid the marshy reeds;
 Bring him to warmth and supper and a bed.
 I'll shut the door; the light will only daze you.

From this point onward the theme develops powerfully to its climax as Blánid passes out into the glimmering half-world of the wild marsh.

A similar air of twilit antiquity broods over *The Riding to Lithend* (1909), set in Iceland in A.D. 990. Here we are reminded of the tales of the *Heimskringla*, of *The Rattle of Maldon*, and of the northern music of Ossian. The play tells of Hallgerd, a strong-minded woman who cannot be content to pass her life "with peasants and aged women":

Must I shut fast my doors
 And hide myself? Must I wear up the rags
 Of mortal perished beauty and be old?
 Or is there power left upon my mouth
 Like colour, and lilt of ruin in my eyes?
 Am I still rare enough to be your mate?
 Then why must I shame at feasts and bear myself
 In shy ungainly ways, made flushed and conscious
 By squat numb gestures of my shapeless head—
 Ay, and its wagging shadow—clouted up
 Twice tangled with a bundle of hot hair,
 Like a thick cot-wife's in the settling time?

In one of those fierce and interminable wars that seem to be the permanent mainspring of Northern legend, Hallgerd's husband, Gunnar, is slain. She had refused to assist him in the fight, and at the end finds herself confronted by the raging Rannveig, Gunnar's mother, who threatens to murder her. Hallgerd breaks herself loose from the old woman's grip and rushes off into the night, leaving Rannveig alone with the corpse of her son.

In *Gruach*, which deals with the early life of Lady Macbeth, and in *King Lear's Wife*, the atmosphere is equally grim. The second of these is one of Bottomley's finest dramas. Lear is shown as having wearied of his queen, Hygd. A wanton servant-girl, Gormflaith, has aroused his passion. Lear's

daughter Goneril is enraged by the sight of her mother's neglect and subsequent death, and she slays Gormflaith. Lear learns too late that Gormflaith was both unworthy and unfaithful, and recognizes in Goneril the "true daughter" who has suitably avenged her mother.

Goneril is a particularly fine piece of characterization. Throughout she is presented as a firm, granite-like figure, and her final contempt for Lear is poured out in a torrent of ice-cold words:

I do not understand how men can govern,
Use craft and exercise the duty of cunning,
Anticipate treason, treachery meet with treachery,
And yet believe a woman because she looks
Straight in their eyes with mournful, trustful gaze,
And lisps like innocence, all gentleness.
Your Gormflaith could not answer a woman's eyes.
I did not need to read her in a letter:
I am not a woman yet, but I can feel
What untruths are instinctive in my kind,
And how some men desire deceit from us.
Come; let these washers do what they must do:
Or shall your Queen be wrapped and confined awry?

With this Goneril turns away, and the tragedy closes with a wonderfully effective and gruesome dialogue between the two body-washers wrangling about a pair of pennies to weight the dead queen's eyes.

Bottomley is both interesting and important. He is interesting because his verse is of a high standard, and far removed from the "gramercy, dame," school of poetic drama. He is important because he introduced to the English theatre what Yeats introduced into Ireland, the world of Northern twilit legendry, with its "light that never was, on sea or land," its haunted marshes and wind-borne voices. Perhaps of all Bottomley's plays *The Crier by Night* is the most significant. The Shakespearean experiments were novel in attack, while *Midsummer Eve* (1905) catches the very spirit of an English June. But *The Crier by Night* remains the masterpiece of the series for subtle suggestion. Its moaning voice and "rain-coloured, rain-soaked figure" of the Crier were something new

in English drama. At last a dramatist was able to make use of the past without tying himself down to an archaeological reconstruction of a particular period or an imaginative version of a particular historical event. *The Crier by Night* is universal in its appeal. It is set in the dim weird past of the human race; it belongs to no country, to no epoch. It has that quality of permanence which all great poetry should have, for it is not in any way dependent on accidentals of setting. The night, the storm, the marsh, human passion, human hatred, rain, voices in the wind. These are the true stuff of poetic drama, and of these the play is composed.

Indeed, in this miniature masterpiece the wheel of English poetry seems to come full circle. We seem to be, not in 1900, when the play was completed, but back in 900 and earlier, back in the centuries of *Beowulf* and *The Seafarer*, of *Deor's Lament* and *Widsith*, where the gannets scream and the frost-wind blows, where hearts grow stronger as the fight grows keener, and where wyrd is more powerful than man.¹

(v) *Binyon—Masefield—Gibson—Abercrombie—
Drinkwater*

None of these five writers made any very original contribution to English poetic drama, but each achieved a certain distinction. We may consider first the work of Laurence Binyon (1869-1943), since he belongs in spirit to the dying school of Phillips, of whom he was a relative.

The significance of a poet like Bottomley is the more apparent when we compare him with the traditional romantics of the type of Binyon. The dramas of Binyon, in fact, were not much more than historical fustian, though always with a careful scholarliness in the writing. *Attila*, for example, produced at His Majesty's in 1907 by Oscar Asche, was a very pretentious and unoriginal work. *Arthur*, another piece in the

¹ The following is a list of Bottomley's more important dramatic works, with dates of publication: *The Crier by Night* (1902), *Midsummer Eve* (1905), *The Riding to Lidthend* (1909), *Laodice and Danae* (1909), *King Lear's Wife* (1915), *Gruach* (1921), *Britain's Daughter* (1921), *Scenes and Plays* (1929), *Lyric Plays* (1932), *The Acts of St Peter* (Exeter Cathedral Festival Play, 1933), *Kate Kennedy*, a comedy (1945), *Choric Plays*, also many one-act dramas.



THE REVOLUTION IN SCENE DESIGN

C. Lovat Eraser's setting for *The Beggar's Opera* (Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, 1920).

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{Seep. 37}



GEORGE SHERINGHAM'S ACT-DROP FOR "THE DUENNA"
(LYRIC THEATRE, HAMMERSMITH, 1924)

Victoria and Albert Museum: Enthoven Collection
[Seep. 37]

Tennysonian tradition, appeared as late as 1923 at the Old Vic. This was written for Sir John Martin Harvey and had music by Sir Edward Elgar. It dealt with the Lancelot and Guinevere story in episodic fashion, but revealed nothing that had not been said before on this much used theme. Some of the verse has distinction, but both its imagery and its philosophy are, on the whole, rather threadbare.¹

The same must be said of Binyon's *Ayuli*, published in the year following (1924) the staging of *Hassan*. Like Flecker's play, it has an Oriental theme, that of a King who gives up his kingdom for a woman, the entrancing Ayuli. We are dimly reminded of Rafi and Pervaneh—Ayuli is murdered, and only her ghost appears to the King again, like Pervaneh in the last act of *Hassan*—but there is none of the lavishly coloured mosaic of Flecker's Bagdad. The ideas are trite, and the tints somewhat faded.

With Masfield's *Tristan and Isolt* (1927) we are in a different world. The old legend is given a vigorous and homely twist by the episode of Tristan and the pig-keepers, Hog, Sowkin, and Pigling. Tristan temporarily takes the place of the swineherd to enable him to communicate a message to Isolt. Some of Tristan's enemies appear, and the swineherd succeeds in plastering them with dirt. We are reminded of the comic interludes of pre-Shakespearean drama. Even the love-poetry has a direct strength about it far removed from the glimmering

¹ The fascination of the Arthur cycle is perennial. After having run through Victorian lyric poetry almost like a leitmotiv, appearing in Tennyson, Arnold, and Swinburne and a score of lesser poets, it emerged again in dramatic form in the twentieth century. No doubt the popularity of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* and the Grail operas, *Lohengrin* and *Parsifal*, had something to do with this. Phillips had a long reference to the Lancelot and Guinevere episode in *Paolo and Francesco*—Irving produced a Guinevere and Arthur drama by J. Comyns Carr at the Lyceum on January 12, 1895 (vide G. B. Shaw's *Our Theatres in the Nineties*, vol. i, pp. 12-18); there appear to have been some beautiful stage pictures in this production. One of the most interesting of modern symbolists, Arthur Symonds, brought out a *Tristan and Iseult* in 1917, and a fresh outburst of Arthurianism resulted in Rutland Boughton's Arthurian operas, Hardy's *The Queen of Cornwall* (1923), Binyon's *Arthur* (1923), and Masfield's *Tristan and Isolt* (1927). Welsh legendry also found a musical exponent in the work of Joseph Holbrooke (1878-), whose trilogy of operas, *The Cauldron of Anwyn*, attempted to do for Wales what Wagner did for Germany in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

glooms of *Paolo and Francesco*, or the silvery clouds of Swinburne's *Tristram of Lyonesse*.

Masefield's theory of drama¹ is obviously Greek in inspiration, though traces of the influence of the Japanese No technique may be observed, as with Gordon Bottomley. In a preface to *The Tragedy of Nan* (1909), he says: "Tragedy at its best is a vision of the heart of life. The heart of life can only be laid bare in the agony and exaltation of dreadful acts. The vision of agony, or spiritual contest, pushed beyond the limits of the dying personality, is exalting and cleansing." Elsewhere he shows sympathy with the theories of Aristotle. There is certainly room, amid the distractions of the twentieth-century stage, to say nothing of its cinema, for a poet whose ideal of drama is that of classic simplicity. And Masefield holds that simplicity in drama can best be achieved by an adherence to the much discussed but little practised Aristotelian unities of time, place, and action.

The simplicity of Biblical themes attracted Masefield strongly, though sometimes he gives them an original twist. In *A King's Daughter* (1923), for example, he treats the character of Jezebel in a novel manner and makes her into a strong-minded and heroic woman. In the two Christian dramas, *Good Friday* (1916) and *The Trial of Jesus* (1925), there are also deviations from the Gospel narratives. The story of Our Lord is presented in an unusually simple and direct way, and these two plays are not unworthy of a place in the long line of Christian poetic drama which began with the medieval cycles and brings us up to our own day with Yeats's *Calvary*, Bottomley's *The Acts of St Peter*, Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, and Charles Williams's *Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury*.

Something akin to Masefield is Wilfrid Gibson (1878-). Like Masefield, he believes in poetic simplicity, and his characters are largely drawn from the industrial classes. The vigorous, direct, masculine fellow is Gibson's delight. Hence in his plays furnace-workers and countrymen take the place of the

¹ On Masefield (1878-) see W. H. Hamilton, *John Masefield: a Critical Study* (Allen and Unwin, 1922); Cecil Biggane, *John Masefield: a Study* (Heffer, 1924); I. A. Williams, *Bibliographies of Modern Authors*, No. 2: *John Masefield* (L. Charndy, 1921); C. Pellizi, *English Drama* (Macmillan, 1935).

exotic figures of conventional poetic drama. He began with a volume of plays in verse, entitled *The Stonefolds* (1907), following this up with *Daily Bread* (1910) and *Kestrel Edge* (1924).

The Stonefolds deals with the primitive facts of life and death in a country district. Works like *The Furnace* and *The Night Shift* are verse-plays with an industrial setting. Often Gibson's dramas are naively melodramatic, as in *Kestrel Edge*, with its murder and suicide, and the stage is corpse-strewn at the close. Gibson's importance lies in the fact that he attempted to do for poetic drama what Stanley Houghton and the Manchester School were doing in prose—that is, to bring the life of the English workers into the theatre.

A similar turning away from romantic and pictorial subjects is evident in the dramas of Lascelles Abercrombie (1881-1938). He is at his best in his *Four Short Plays* (1922), for he shows little power of maintaining dramatic interest in a full-length work. These four miniature dramas, *The Adder*, *The Staircase*, *The End of the World*, and *The Deserter*, introduce characters of rustic life who are certainly a relief from the stylized heroes of much early-twentieth-century poetic drama. *The Staircase*, for instance, opens as follows:

A small room in an empty cottage without furniture. . . A young joiner is alone in the room. . . .

THE JOINER [*looking at his work: in a sort of chant*].

Hammer and nails, gimlet and screws,
Bradawl, chisel, mallet and plane,
A will to work, and health in my thews,
And seasoned wood of a good clean grain
Shaping under my hands and skill,
And obeying my master-will. . . .

[*speaking*] And I alone: that's the best of it here. These book-read folks won't beat that song of mine, I warrant. I'll have a right tune for it some day:

Hammer and nails, gimlet and screws,
Bradawl, chisel, mallet and plane. . . .

But Abercrombie's longer plays, *Deborah* (1912) and *Phanix* (1923), form a mutual contrast. *Deborah* opens with the

tragedy of a fishing community struck down by cholera. There is a powerful prelude, but the long lapse of time supposed to take place between it and Act II, when the child of the first scene has become a man, destroys the continuity of interest. The last act is a welter of storms, shipwreck, and hysteria.

In *Phænix* there is a return to the more conventional poetic atmosphere of ancient Greece. The drama here arises from the fight between a royal father, Amyntor, and his son, Phoenix, for the love of Rhodope, a slave. The Queen, resenting Amyntor's undignified passion, spurs on Phœnix in his love for the slave. Disillusion comes for the young prince on learning of Rhoclope's entanglement with his father. The slave is finally caught in an amour with one of the king's soldiers, and both father and son realize that they have been thrown over for a commoner. *Phænix* is an important play, because in it the mawkish heroics of pseudo-classic and romantic drama have given way to a naturalistic verse-dialogue. Towards the end there is a touch of the sadism that marred Flecker's *Hassan*, but the story is unfolded in straightforward fashion, with no attempt at the jewelled phrase. The life of ancient Greece is depicted in a clear and almost prosaic manner:

THE QUEEN. Now then, you two: I'm bound to interrupt you.

You can finish the story at the feast.

RHODOPE. O you must tell it me all over again!

PHÆNIX. I will!

THE QUEEN. Plenty of time for that to-night.

You'll not be out of earshot of each other
Until the stars go out. Off with you now,
Phœnix: your father's sure to need your help.
And you have things of your own to mind; the pelt—
Have your men brought it? Is it drest for you
To wear to-night? The feast would be a joke
Without you in your lion-skin. But first
You ought to wash.

PHÆNIX. My soul! I had forgot
The filthy state I'm in!

Phænix was dedicated to John Drinkwater, with whom Abercrombie had obvious sympathies. Drinkwater (1882-1937) was another rebel against the pantomime-tinsel type of

poetic play, and in his earlier years he did much to toughen the spirit of English verse-drama. But his themes were often historic or romantic in setting. *The Storm* (1915), for example, has a background familiar enough in poetic melodrama—the tempest-beaten mountain cottage. But the wild fury of the elements is presented as it appears to two very different types of character, and it is in this that the originality of the drama lies. To the two women, Alice and Sarah, it is a presage of disaster; they are bitterly conscious of what the shepherd, Alice's husband, is enduring out in the snowdrift. For the boisterous traveller who seeks shelter in the cottage the tempest has no terrors. It is even picturesque and romantic. But the women have scented catastrophe aright, and we realize but too well what has happened when the leader of the search-party comes back with no news of the lost shepherd.

X-O, described as "A Night of the Trojan War" (1917), has a conventional poetic background, but the treatment is realistic, almost mathematical, as the title suggests, and we feel ourselves in a different atmosphere from that of Phillips's *Ulysses* or Binyon's *Attila*. There are two Greek soldiers, Pronax and Salvius, and two Trojans, Ilus and Capys. In the course of their respective nocturnal prowlings Pronax kills Capys and Ilus kills Salvius. The remorseless futility of war is well brought out by this logical denouement; at the time of the play's production (1917) it was very much of a *Tract for the Times*.

Rebellion (1914) has the time-worn theme of the conflict of love and duty, but it is given a novel twist. It reminds us in some ways of the plot of Verdi's *Aida*, and this comparison is made more striking by the exotic names of the dramatis persons, King Phane, Queen Shubia, and Narros, the politically minded poet. In *Aida* (based on Racine's *Bajazet*) the heroine is torn between affection for the enemy captain, Rhadames, and love for her native Ethiopia. She is finally the unwilling instrument of Rhadames's betrayal and delivery into the hands of the Egyptian High Priest as a traitor. In *Rebellion* Narros is in love with the Queen Shubia, although the party he leads have formed a conspiracy against the throne. In the events which ensue Narros is seized, but released when the conspiracy is ultimately victorious. The monarch and his

queen are driven from the throne, and Narros finds that though his party has succeeded his heart is broken.

Throughout Drinkwater's verse-dramas the diction is economical and very sparing of ornament. We may be in the world of legend or remote history, and the characters may have fine names, but there is nothing of stock romanticism about the phrasing. The following passage from *Rebellion* will give an indication of the somewhat cold quality of Drinkwater's style:

SHUBIA. I will not think that death shall touch you yet,
And so I'll watch you shift the harness off
That hired men wear and will not be afraid.
But I have heard so many years the tale
Of thrift and have housed with unadventurous craft
So long now that I weary. I would swing
The straight oar now till the sun burns on my skin
The pressure of his old barbarous covenant.

The poetry of Drinkwater, indeed, is sometimes rather too reminiscent of versified prose, and it is not surprising that he won his greatest successes in the theatre with prose plays such as *Abraham Lincoln*, *Oliver Cromwell*, and *Mary Stuart*.

So far we have encountered in our survey of poetic drama no figure of the first magnitude. Phillips was a pallid, though often beautiful Elizabethan ghost. Flecker was a brilliant literary confectioner, like his own Hassan. Davidson and Hardy were dramatic philosophers, not poetic dramatists. Binyon was a romantic survival; Masfield an honest craftsman, but not splendid enough to shine with the great constellations. Gibson, Drinkwater, and Abercrombie were competent poets, but rather prosaic in outlook. Only Bottomley had brought anything really arresting to the poetic stage, and though his was a fine contribution he was a genius of the miniature rather than of the full-length drama.

With the plays of Yeats and Synge, and later of Eliot and Williams, we pass into a new and more charmed circle. Their dramas have been very successfully performed and have attracted a new type of thinking, highly intellectual audience. But for all their success on the stage, they are mainly dramas

of the mind. In them, we feel, modern English poetic drama has learned to grow up and to cast off the mortmain of an overconscious traditionalism.

The chronology of Yeats and Synge with regard to this more recent development of poetic drama is a little misleading. For Yeats's first play, *The Countess Cathleen*, dates from 1892, while Synge's *Shadow of the Glen* appeared in 1903. But they were really dramatic prophets well ahead of their time. And just as in the realm of lyric poetry it is customary to think of G. M. Hopkins as an essentially modern poet, although he belongs in date to the nineteenth century, so we may best consider Yeats and the Irish School as belonging to the adult phase of twentieth-century poetic drama which began about 1930. The place of *Deirdre* and *The Countess Cathleen* is obviously with *Murder in the Cathedral*, not with *Paolo and Francesca*.

(vi) *Yeats, Synge, and the Irish School*

With W. B. Yeats (1865-1939) English literary drama entered its second spring. The tyranny of neo-Shakespeareanism was shaken off and a new form of dramatic art was born. While the London critics were lauding Stephen Phillips as the modern Sophocles, Yeats was developing his ideas in Dublin, and laying the foundations of the Irish Dramatic Movement which was to put to shame the poetic plays of the London stage. His own articles on the subject, reprinted from *Samhain*, a publication begun to defend the new movement, will be found collected in *Plays and Controversies* (1923). They mostly date from the early years of this century. Together they form a manifesto of the highest interest, and they should be consulted as a first-hand account of the Dublin renaissance by its greatest protagonist.

The essence of Yeats's new dramatic theory was simplicity. Like Gordon Craig, he revolted against the trappings of picture-frame staging and Irvingesque splendour. The theatre had, in his eyes, become suffocated under a weight of tinsel and canvas, and the drama itself had lost its way in trite dialogue and pompous rhetoric. All that must be abolished. Dramatic poetry must link itself again with music, and should itself have

an inherent musical rhythm. Stage make-up should be supplemented or replaced by beautiful masks. Costumes should be simple, with harmonious colour masses. Painted scenery was an anachronism, and it should give way to a symbolic background which should blend with the drama and not be a thing apart. These views were summarized in a paper entitled "The Reform of the Theatre" (*Plays and Controversies*, p. 45), and in it Yeats states concisely his position with relation to the contemporary stage: "I think the theatre must be reformed in its plays, its speaking, its acting, and its scenery. That is to say, I think there is nothing good about it at present."

He goes on to make four main points. First, that the theatre should be "a place of intellectual excitement—a place where the mind goes to be liberated." In order to achieve this, more beautiful and more appropriate language must become the staple of modern drama. Second, dramatic speech must become musical. An actor should so "cherish the musical lineaments of verse or prose that he delights the ear with a continually varied music." Third, acting itself must be simplified. Fourth, in decor all representational effect, as of trees or hills, must be struck out. The "restless mimicries" of the contemporary stage were but signs of decadence and of "an art of fading humanity."

Yeats found a sympathetic stimulus to his own ideas in the Japanese No drama, which also influenced Bottomley and Masfield. The technique of No, with its masks, symbolic properties, and generally simplified action fascinated Yeats. Moreover, its approximation to the art of dance interested him so much that he wrote *Four Plays for Dancers* on the model of No. In a note to *At the Hawk's Well*, he describes his relation to "that most subtle stage," the stage of Japan. He even made use of a Japanese dancer, Mr Itow, in the performance of the drama. Special music was composed for an orchestra consisting of a flute, a harp, a drum, and a gong.

Yeats's ideas of simplification have gained such general acceptance in the art theatre of our time that it is difficult to realize how uprootingly original they were at the date of writing. In those very years Tree and his school were busy with their processions, pageants, and steam Brockens, and with the

jewelled heaviness of *Herod*, *Ulysses*, and *Paolo and Francesca*. London had not yet seen the Russian Ballet at all. None of our modern effects of cyclorama and Stelmar lighting had been introduced. The idea of a fusion of music, poetry, and drama was quite outside the orbit of contemporary dramatic theory. Wagner had advanced a similar idea at Bayreuth, but that was in the sphere of opera and under very special and hard-won conditions. In England only Gordon Bottomley, as we have seen, was sounding a new tune on the well-worn dramatic pipes, while the ideas of Gordon Craig were still as the voice of one crying in the wilderness.

It is interesting to trace the influence of the new "dance-dramas" of Yeats on the similar experiments of Terence Gray at the Cambridge Festival Theatre from 1926 to 1933, and the subsequent great revival of ballet in England which we shall speak of later. It is significant that Ninette de Valois' early work in the 1920's was done for the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, and the Cambridge Theatre, both homes of dance-drama. This was before she emerged as the valiant Boadicea of the Sadler's Wells organization. And if modern ballet could somehow link itself with poetry again and re-establish the partnership of dance-drama on a large scale, then the pioneer ideas of Yeats would indeed have a splendid apotheosis on the modern stage.

We noted, in discussing Bottomley, how the fascination of the past has gripped many of our poetic dramatists. For Yeats it was not so much a fascination as an actual projection of himself into the world of Celtic legend. The beautiful misty poetry of ancient Ireland, its eponymous and legendary figures that move through it like characters on an arras rustled by evening wind, these became for Yeats the real and intense world more than that of modern life. As with Shelley, however, there was a practical and political side to Yeats's nature. Just as the author of *Alastor* and *Adonais* was deeply versed in Godwinian rationalism, and appealed later to the Chartists as one of the "trumpets that sing to battle," so Yeats threw one side of his genius into the Irish Nationalist Movement, and was himself a prominent political figure. He reminds us not only of Shelley, but of Byron, who might, had he lived,

have become the poet-king of an emancipated Greece. Yeats was, in fact, an uncrowned poet-king of Ireland, and his labours in the cause of his country assure him of a high position in its political history as well as on its poetical roll of fame.

Perhaps Yeats's best play was, like Bottomley's, his earliest, *The Countess Cathleen*, which dates, as we have seen, not from this century at all, but from 1892. Its theme is that of an almost divine compassion. At a time of famine, when two merchant-demons are selling their bread in return for human souls, the Countess Cathleen sacrifices her own soul to redeem those who are lost. She dies, but is ransomed in heaven, and the drama closes with a vision of angels, one of whom tells how the Countess "is passing to the floor of peace." The simple yet profound beauty of the play finds its supreme expression in a good performance. And, though Yeats has been accused of being too undramatic for the modern stage, no one can see *The Countess Cathleen* well acted without being deeply moved. It is based on an old French ballad which was itself adapted from an Irish tale:

Pour sauver les pauvres qu'elle aime
 Ketty donna
 Son esprit, sa croyance meme:
 Satan paya
 Cette ame au dévouement sublime,
 En écus d'or,
 Disons pour racheter son crime,
 Confiteor.

In *Four Plays for Dancers* there is a wonderful blend of philosophy and legend, especially in *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, which sprang from an Eastern theory of the twenty-eight incarnations of the soul, corresponding to the phases of the moon. The technique of Japanese No is strongly apparent in this drama, with its masks, musical instruments, ghost of Cuchulain, and imaginary fire. The mask and clothes of the Woman of the Sidhe "must suggest gold or bronze or brass or silver, so that she seems more an idol than a human being. This suggestion may be repeated in her movements. Her hair, too, must keep the metallic suggestion." In the production of these dance-dramas Yeats had the assistance of the artist

Edmund Dulac, who not only designed the masks, but composed the music for *At the Hawk's Well*. (This is contained, together with illustrations of the masks and costumes, in *Plays and Controversies*.)

Yeats's blend of various elements, philosophy, word-magic, and legend, with the decorative arts, music, and dance, into one dramatic synthesis was a most important landmark in theatre history. Sometimes, as in *Deirdre* (1906), there was a fairly clear plot, but with Yeats the action was usually subordinated to other things. The story of *Deirdre*, on which Synge also worked, is a variant on the well-worn triangle theme. *Deirdre* is betrothed to an elderly king, Conchubar, but elopes with Naisi and lives with him in idyllic seclusion. Conchubar induces the lovers to return with fair words of pardon, but kills Naisi when *Deirdre* declines to wed him. *Deirdre* then takes her own life.

With an elemental theme like this, seen through the misty prism of the Celtic literary imagination, Yeats was completely at home. He made of the simple story a drama as permanently interesting as the tales of Tristan and Isolde or Paolo and Francesca. Of action, as ordinarily understood, there is very little. Neither is there much characterization. The play is more the evocation of symbolic imagery, and it induces a state of mind similar to that brought into being by Debussy's musical version of *Pelléas and Mélisande*. The figures dream; they do not act. And the audience dreams with them. Like Porphyro with Madeline in *The Eve of St Agnes*, we melt into the dream and surrender ourselves to it. It may not be drama, but it is a very fine aesthetic experience.

As with ballets such as *Giselle* or *Le Lac des Cygnes*, *Deirdre* has no concern with verisimilitude. It has no hard ring of truth, and we do not desire that it should have. It is enough that it fuses together the elements of a racial dream and presents them in a kind of mistily tinted trance. To pull such work to pieces in the cold light of dramatic criticism is simply to shatter the dream.¹

¹ On Yeats see H. S. Krans, *William Butler Yeats and the Irish Literary Revival* (Heinemann, 1905); Jethro Bithell, *W. B. Yeats* (1913); Lady Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre* (Putnam, 1914); Lloyd R. Morris, *The Celtic Dawn* (Macmillan, 1917); St John Ervine, *Some Impressions of my Elders* (Allen and Unwin, 1923);

In the hands of John Millington Synge (1871-1909) dramatic prose received a new and luminous baptism in the spring of poetry. As with Virginia Woolf, whose prose shines with a clear radiance that makes much so-called poetry resemble evening journalism, the writing of Synge has the quality of a prism. The prose sentences, apparently so simple, contain a world of fire, of rich emotional and poetic suggestion. And though Synge was technically a prose-writer, no dramatist mentioned in this work more plainly deserves the title of poet.

It is not merely that his words have their own music. That they have in abundance. But it is in the profound rightness of phrase, the flash of insight which fits the word to mood and character and circumstance, that Synge reveals his greatness. If the critics who compared Phillips with the Greeks had looked a little farther afield they might indeed have found one who claims kinship with Sophocles.

Synge's plays date from the decade 1900-10. During these years came *The Shadow of the Glen* (1903), *Riders to the Sea* (1904), *The Well of the Saints* (1905), *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907),¹ and *Deirdre of the Sorrows* (appeared posthumously, 1910).

"On the stage," wrote Synge in his preface to *The Playboy of the Western World*,

one must have reality, and one must have joy; and that is why the intellectual modern drama has failed, and people have grown sick of the false joy of the musical comedy, that has been given

Thomas McDonough, *Literature in Ireland* (Unwin, 1916); W. G. Fay and Catherine Carswell, *The Fays of the Abbey Theatre* (Rich and Cowan, 1935); A. E. Malone, *The Irish Drama* (Constable, 1929); Louis MacNeice, *The Poetry of W. B. Yeats* (Oxford University Press, 1941); Una Ellis-Fermor, *The Irish Dramatic Movement* (Methuen, 1939). This last work is an excellent study in every respect.

The following is a list of Yeats's plays: *The Countess Cathleen* (1892), *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894), *The Shadowy Waters* (1900), *Diarmid and Grania* (with George Moore, 1901), *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), *The Pot of Broth* (with Lady Gregory, 1902), *Where There is Nothing* (1903), *The Hour-glass* (1904), *The King's Threshold* (1904), *On Bailees Strand* (1904), *Deirdre* (1907), *The Unicorn from the Stars* (with Lady Gregory, 1907), *The Golden Helmet* (1908), *The Green Helmet* (1910), *The Player Queen* (1916), *At the Hawk's Well* (1916), *The Dreaming of the Bones* (1919), *The Only Jealousy of Emer* (1919), *Calvary* (1921), *The Words upon the Window-pane* (1934), *The Cat and the Moon* (1935), *The Resurrection* (1935), *Fighting the Waves* (1935), *The King of the Great Clock-tower* (1935).

¹ For a note on *The Playboy of the Western World* see Chapter VI, p. 163.

them in place of the rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality. In a good play every speech should be as fully flavoured as a nut or apple, and such speeches cannot be written by anyone who works among people who have shut their lips on poetry. In Ireland, for a few years more, we have a popular imagination that is fiery, and magnificent, and tender; so that those of us who wish to write start with a chance that is not given to writers in places where the spring-time of the local life has been forgotten, and the harvest is a memory only, and the straw has been turned into bricks.

Throughout Synge's dramas runs a deep nature-mysticism, something akin to Wordsworth's pantheistic philosophy, and reminding us also of D. H. Lawrence's insistence on the prime importance of elemental things. Yet to speak of Synge in terms of philosophy is hardly appropriate. It was rather that in him the primitive poetry of ancient Ireland lived on and the sense of communion between men and nature, which was so strong in the Irish peasants, simply found spontaneous expression in his work. He is not, in any sense of the word, a philosophical dramatist. He is rather a combination of dramatic poet and nature-interpreter, with something of the musician in his mind.

For him, though, Nature was not always the teacher and guide of Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* and *Intimations* ode. In *Aiders to the Sea* the dominating force behind the tragedy is the sea itself, which is the true villain of the drama, remorseless, cold, omnivorous, blind. As with Hardy's sense of cosmic forces in the Wessex novels and *The Dynasts*, there are powers at work which reduce man to impotence. The pitiless ocean which has claimed all of Maurya's sons is made powerless only by satiation as it takes the last, and the tragedy finds its supreme expression in Maurya's cry:

They're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me.

Perhaps never in drama have such simple words meant so much. The whole phrase, direct, elemental, monosyllabic, not only sums up the tragedy in a line, but it universalizes it as only the greatest drama can do. It has been said of Ibsen that his power really lay in the universalizing of realistic situation,

so that the humdrum sitting-rooms of Norway become the world, and Nora, Mrs Alving, and John Gabriel Borkman become the human race in its struggle.

Similarly, Maurya in *Riders to the Sea* is transfigured into a *mater dolorosa*. She is every mother who has lost her sons, whether by the sea or by sickness or by violence or by accident. And this universalizing is achieved by the simplest possible words. There is no conscious symbolism, no kind of philosophical comment. It is stark prose realism, and at the same time the greatest dramatic poetry. In a mere one-act domestic drama Synge takes his place with the creator of *King Lear*:

They're all together this time, and the end is come. May the Almighty God have mercy on Bartley's soul, and on Michael's soul, and on the souls of Sheamus and Patch, and Stephen and Shawn [*bending her head*]-, and may He have mercy on my soul, Nora, and on the soul of every one is left living in the world.

And as the crying of the old women dies away Maurya's last words bring the tragedy to an end:

Michael has a clean burial in the far north, by the grace of the Almighty God. Bartley will have a line coffin out of the white boards, and a deep grave surely. What more can we want than that? No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied.

In *Deirdre of the Sorrows* Synge employs the same theme as that used by Yeats. The characters are the same, except that Conchubar appears as Conchubor. Throughout there is a strong sense of the loveliness of nature which makes it a sharp contrast to *Riders to the Sea*. Deirdre speaks of "waking with the smell of June in the tops of the grasses, and listening to the birds in the branches that are highest," and of having been "one time the like of a ewe looking for a lamb that had been taken away from her, and one time seeing new gold on the stars, and a new face on the moon." Naisi describes their journeying "as the thrushes come from the north, or young birds fly out on a dark sea."

In *Deirdre* we are at the opposite pole from the country of Tennyson's *Harold* or Comyns Carr's *King Arthur* as produced by Irving. The Victorians drew their inspiration from the

past, as did Synge, but it was the past consciously decorated and seen from outside, like a lighted room glimpsed by a passer-by in the night. Synge, we feel, was actually inside the room and one with the characters of it. Nature itself never changes, and it is in his interpretation of the permanent qualities of nature that Synge achieves his dramatic power. *Harold* and *King Arthur* are merely poeticized spears and coats-of-mail. But *Deirdre* is the immutable moon and the apple-trees, the gold on the stars and birds in the trees, clear woods, water and wind, and the sun for ever shining on a soft blue sea:

I was in the woods at the full moon and I heard a voice singing. Then I gathered up my skirts, and I ran on a little path I have to the verge of a rock, and I saw you pass by underneath, in your crimson cloak, singing a song, and you standing out beyond your brothers are called the Flower of Ireland.

There's reason all times for an end that's come. And I'm well pleased, Naisi, we're going forward in the winter the time the sun has a low place, and the moon has her mastery in a dark sky, for it's you and I are well lodged our last day, where there is a light behind the clear trees, and the berries on the thorns are a red wall.

I see the flames of Emain starting upwards in the dark night; and because of me there will be weasels and wild cats crying on a lonely wall where there were queens and armies and red gold, the way there will be a story told of a ruined city and a raving king and a woman will be young for ever. [*She looks round.*] I see the trees naked and bare, and the moon shining. Little moon, little moon of Alban, it's lonesome you'll be this night, and to-morrow night, and long nights after, and you pacing the woods beyond Glen Laoi, looking every place for Deirdre and Naisi, the two lovers who slept so sweetly with each other.¹

Lord Dunsany (1878-) is in the line of exotics. His plays have affinities with Wilde's *Salome* and the tales in *A House of*

¹ On Synge see P. P. Howe, *J. M. Synge: a Critical Study* (Seeker, 1912); F. Bickley, *J. M. Synge and the Irish Dramatic Movement* (Constable, 1912); M. Bourgeois, *John Milhngton Synge and the Irish Theatre* (Constable, 1913); Hans Krieger, *J. M. Synge* (1916); A. Rust, *Beitrage zu einer Geschichte der neukeltischen Renaissance* (1922); D. Corkery, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* (Longmans, 1931); H. Frenzel, *J. M. Synge's Work as a Contribution to Irish Folklore and to the Psychology of Primitive Tribes* (1932).

Pomegranates, with Flecker's *Hassan* and the *Arabian Nights*, with Edward Knoblock's *Kismet* (1911) and with *Chu Chin Chow*. Although an Irish dramatist, he stands apart from the Irish Nationalists, Yeats, Synge, Lady Gregory, and the others, who found their inspiration in Ireland itself. Dunsany's inspiration was the Orient. It may be the life of ancient Egypt, as in *The Queen's Enemies* (1916), or the vengeance of a group of jade idols, as in *The Gods of the Mountain* (1911), or the arrival of a terrifying Oriental image in an English setting, as in *A Night at an Inn* (1916).

The titles of his plays themselves sufficiently indicate their generally exotic atmosphere: *King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior* (1911), *The Tents of the Arabs* (1914), *The Prince of Stamboul* (1918), *The Compromise of the King of the Golden Isles* (1920), *The Amusements of Khan Kharuda* (1925), *The Jest of Hahahaba* (1929). In *If* (1921) the Oriental motif again appears. John Beal is assisted by a talisman to recover the past and catch a train which he had missed some time before. A startling new turn is given to his life, and he becomes a Persian monarch, surrounded with Oriental splendour. This glamorous adventure, however, has only the substance of a dream, and John Beal finds himself at length back home, only a day having elapsed since the beginning of his journey into time. (A somewhat similar theme was employed in Walter Hackett's *Ambrose Applejohn's Adventure*, where the hero dreams himself back into the days of his piratical ancestors.)

Perhaps the best known of Dunsany's works is the one-act drama *A Night at an Inn*. Here the Oriental element is doubly effective, since it is superimposed on to an ordinary tavern background. There are three adventurers and their chief, who, having robbed an Eastern god of its eye, have been pursued by three of its priests to their lair at an inn. "The Toff," the leader of the gang, formulates a plan whereby the three priests are murdered, but at last the Image of the God itself appears and seizes its own eye. The Idol calls out the names of the adventurers in a menacing tone, and one by one they leave the inn, finding themselves forced to respond to its threatening call.

This macabre strain of Orientalism comes out equally in



MOVABLE SCENERY

A permanent setting for *Sir Martin Mar-All* designed by Osborne Robinson for the Dryden Festival at Northampton Repertory Theatre (1937)-

Photo Henry Bale



MODERN POETIC DRAMA

T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* as produced by E. Martin Browne, with Robert Speaight as Becket.

Photo Lionel Fitzgerald

plays like *The Queen's Enemies*, where a queen of ancient Egypt gives a kind of Borgian dinner-party, after which she drowns the entire assembly through a secret means of flooding the hall from the waters of the Nile.¹

Edward Martyn (1859-1923) was another writer of the Irish School whose plays reveal a rich strain of poetry. There may be a realistic background to his dramas, but often, as in *Maeve* (1900) and *An Enchanted Sea* (1902), there are overtones from the spirit world. It is this power of blending realism with the world of faery which gives Martyn his distinction. In *The Heather Field* (1899) he displays his gifts at perhaps their best. Here there is depicted a symbolic struggle between Garden Tyrrell and the heather-fields around his home which he wishes to clear. Nature is too strong for him, and he at last gives in, his courage crushed as his son enters and offers him a bunch of the heather which he had gathered during his play. Synge's *Riders to the Sea* was to make use of a similar symbolic idea of conflict between nature and man.

Martyn's other plays include *The Tale of a Town* (1905), revised by George Moore as *The Bending of the Bough*-, *The Place Hunters* (1902); *Grangecobnan* (1912); *The Dream Physician* (1914); and *The Privilege of Place* (1915).²

(vii) *Later Poetic Drama: Eliot—Auden and Isherwood—
Duncan—Williams—Fry*

T. S. Eliot (1888-) is both lyric poet and dramatist, like Yeats. But he has carried the process of dramatic simplification a stage farther than did Yeats in *Deirdre* and *The Countess Cathleen*. He has turned his back not merely on the dramatic rhetoric of the nineteenth-century stage convention, but on the whole conception of glamorous language and musical diction as the past understood it. The result is an economy which

¹ On Dunsany see E. H. Bierstadt, *Dunsany the Dramatist* (Boston, 1917); E. A. Boyd, *Ireland's Literary Renaissance* (Maunsel, 1916); Percival Wilde, *The Craftsmanship of the One-act Play* (Allen and Unwin, 1924); C. Pellizi, *English Drama* (Macmillan, 1935).

² For the plays of Sean O'Casey see Chapter V, p. 155.

some find frigid, and a too frequently desiccated style, with many bare catalogues of objects and facts, such as the following:

The treble voices on the lawn
The mowing of hay in summer
The dogs and the old pony
The stumble and the wail of little pain
The chopping of wood in autumn
And the singing in the kitchen
And the steps at night in the corridor
The moment of sudden loathing
And the season of stifled sorrow.¹

Much has already been written, both encomiastic and critical, about this distinguished poet's work, but there can be no doubt that Eliot's most famous play, *Murder in the Cathedral*, has become for many poetry-lovers a kind of *Hamlet* of our times.

In *Murder in the Cathedral* a protagonist of Shakespearean or Greek calibre accepts martyrdom, and the drama revolves around his own spiritual struggle in making the great decision that culminates in his death. Written as a Festival Play for Canterbury Cathedral, *Murder in the Cathedral* is easily the best of the Becket dramas, of which George Darley's (1840) and Tennyson's (1884) were the most competent earlier specimens. There is in Eliot's play, as might be expected, no attempt at romantic historical colouring, and the drama achieved much of its success by its interpretation of modern ideas through a religious and medieval theme. Fundamentally *Murder in the Cathedral* is a drama of Christian theology, almost an act of worship in which the audience participates. A sermon is directly preached to the spectators by Becket, and the Four Knights who take the audience into their confidence provide a further bond of intimacy between the two parts of the theatre. Further, the choric effects, as in Greek tragedy, provide a mouthpiece for the expression of the communal emotion stirred up by the events of the play.

Perhaps these choruses in *Murder in the Cathedral* represent Eliot's finest achievement in dramatic poetry. They have the restraint of Sophoclean tragedy, and the simplicity and depth of their imagery makes them poems of permanent interest.

¹ *The Family Reunion*.

In stage history this play has a special importance, since it was the first poetic drama since *Hassan* to achieve a long run in London and to be an outstanding success both as a book of verse and as a stage work. In addition to its performances at Canterbury Cathedral, it was played many times in London, both at the Mercury Theatre, Notting Hill, and at the Old Vic. Mr Robert Speaight had the triumph of his career in the part of Becket, which he played in all the important productions. The drama has also been performed on tour and by smaller and private groups, with several successful revivals. It has indeed established itself as the most famous poetic play of the present generation.

The Family Reunion (1939) is another of Eliot's poetic plays which has been much performed and discussed. A great deal of it, however, can be called poetry only by implication. There are whole stretches of extremely flat verse-conversation, which, of course, have their place in the author's scheme of portrayal of the deadness of modern society, but are none the less far removed from what is commonly meant by poetry. The following passage, for instance, is typical of many in which Wordsworth's dictum about prose and verse receives a rather uninspired expression:

We are very glad to have you back, Harry.
Now we shall all be together for dinner.
The servants have been looking forward to your coming:
Would you like to have them in after dinner
Or wait till to-morrow? I am sure you must be tired.
You will find everybody here, and everything the same.
Mr Bevan—you remember—wants to call to-morrow
On some legal business, a question about taxes—
But I think you would rather wait till you are rested.
Your room is all ready for you. Nothing has been changed.

It would, however, be short-sighted to take these episodes at their apparent value. In *The Waste Land* Eliot had earlier achieved astonishing effects by the juxtaposition of passages echoing the insipidity and corruption of modern life against lines full of evocative suggestion of the power and beauty of life in former ages. Similarly, in *The Family Reunion* there is an undercurrent of spiritual and religious suggestion which gives

point and vision to the whole theme of evil and its expiation. The treatment of the modern atmosphere, with its dull material interests, the talk of plumbers and lorries, hot baths, gas-fires, deck-chairs, cocktails, and cigarettes, is a deliberate interpretation of the temper of present-day society, as much through the trivialities of its conversation as through a recording of its deeper thoughts.

In essence *The Family Reunion* is a drama of psychological tension which at times recalls the methods of Ibsen. Not that the psychology or the structure are Ibsenian. But in the underlying purpose of an intense interpretation of contemporary society to itself there is perhaps a valid comparison with works like *Pillars of Society* and *Rosmersholm*.

There are passages in this play which certainly have a new rhythmical basis, if not a genuinely new musical quality. Indeed, the actual writing of the drama, as well as its approach to its subject, produces a sense of a completely new technique of verse-drama, something utterly unlike anything that has gone before. The play has been successfully produced and has attracted much attention from audiences and critics. And partly because it confines its expression to modern idiom it has won a place for itself as an effective exposition of modern reactions to the permanent problems of personal guilt and fear.

The dramas of W. H. Auden (1907-), written in conjunction with Christopher Isherwood (1904-), have also interpreted contemporary life in verse. *On the frontier* (1938), for example, described as a melodrama, opens with a chorus of eight workers who are grouped "as if waiting for the gates of a factory to open." Their first couplets run as follows:

The clock on the wall gives an electric tick,
I'm feeling sick, brother, I'm feeling sick.

The sirens blow at eight; the sirens blow at noon;
Goodbye, sister, goodbye; we shall die soon.

The subject-matter of the verse is strictly realistic: there are references to industrialists, bankers, G.H.Q.'s, motor-tyres, barbed wire, overalls, and hand-grenades, and we feel

about as far away from *Deirdre* or *Salome* as we could very well be. This play, like *The Dog beneath the Skin* (1935) and *The Ascent of F.6* (1936), is a mixture of prose and verse, and frequently one is not sure which is which. For example, it is only the typographical arrangement of the lines which divides:

Tourists to whom the Tudor cafes
Offer Bovril and buns upon Breton ware
With leather work as a sideline

from

Ladies (or may I call you Sisters?). On this day of national
sorrow, my woman's heart bleeds for you. I too am a mother.

The Ascent of F.6, a tragedy in two acts, is a blend of the real and the symbolic. Its theme is the conquest of a demon-haunted mountain, F.6, by a climber, Michael Ransom, and his party. There is a pause in a monastery on the mountain glacier, and ultimately Ransom gets to the top of the mountain alone. He meets a Veiled Figure, who proves to be his mother, and he dies at her feet. As a contrast to this adventure there is a kind of choric comment from Mr and Mrs A., who murmur against the drabness of their circumscribed lives in a suburban house.

The poetical dramas of Stephen Spender (1909-) belong to the same school as those of Auden and Isherwood. Perhaps the most effective of Spender's works for the stage is his *Trial of a Judge* (published in 1938), in which he symbolically introduces choruses of Red and Black Prisoners against a background of Fascism and other elements of the modern political scene.

Louis MacNeice (1907-) is another poet whose plays show an affinity with the methods of Auden. A characteristic example of his idiomatic, clipped, almost cinematographic technique was *Out of the Picture*, a Group Theatre production of 1937.

A very successful poetic drama of 1945 was Ronald Duncan's (1914-) *This Way to the Tomb*, produced at the Mercury Theatre, Netting Hill, and afterwards transferred to the Garrick Theatre for a series of matinee performances. Taking, perhaps, a hint from the technique of *The Waste Land*, the author very

skilfully contrasted the spiritual richness of medieval days with the boogie-woogie inanities of modern civilization. The play was divided into two parts, and the sudden transition from the beautiful philosophy of Catholic times was achieved with startling dramatic effect. Mr Duncan's verse was of a very high quality, and contrasted favourably with much of the prosaic dullness which has in recent years passed itself off as poetry. Like *Murder in the Cathedral*, this drama attracted attention both as a book of verse and as a theatrical success. It takes its place with the best of modern dramas as a work of literary quality which has contributed not a little to the movement to restore poetry to the English stage.

Murder in the Cathedral was only the first of a series of religious dramas produced at Canterbury Cathedral. Its successors were *The Zeal of Thy House*, by the popular novelist Dorothy Sayers (1893-), and a work of real poetic distinction, Charles Williams's *Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury*. This last play achieved a fusion of philosophy and poetry reminiscent of Donne, and, though its ultimate place must be with the dramatic poem, rather than with drama proper, it will always be highly thought of by those who value intellectual subtlety in verse and who can take a connoisseur's pleasure in the dramatic experiments of a really fine mind.¹

Christopher Fry (1907-), whose earlier plays, such as *A Phoenix Too Frequent* (1948), had given ample promise of future brilliance, produced in *The Lady's not for Burning* (1949) a verse-comedy of exceptional distinction. Its theme is that of a fifteenth-century soldier, sensitive, disillusioned, who wishes to be hanged and does his utmost, without success, to persuade the Mayor of a small town to arrest him and order his execution. Contrasted with his disillusion is the struggle of a young woman, Jennet Jourdemayne, whose arraignment and fight for her life form the mainspring of the drama. Finally, the *deus ex machina* appears in the person of the old man whom Jennet Jourdemayne had been accused of changing into an

¹ Two interesting works on the literary drama are Priscilla Thoulless's *Modern Poetic Drama* (Blackwell, 1934) and Ronald Peacock's *The Poet in the Theatre* (Routledge, 1946).

animal, and the evidence against her collapses. She is clearly no witch after all, and she and the soldier are freed to depart and find happiness together as man and wife.

Although there was a streak here and there of Shakespearean pastiche, the closely packed texture of the phrasing was in complete contrast with the loose, nebulous romanticism of nineteenth-century pseudo-Shakespearean drama. There was no spectacle at all, merely one interior scene with plain, everyday medieval costumes. Concentration was on the brilliant, almost pyrotechnic text, whose fantastic and elaborate verbal conceits recalled the diction of the Elizabethans and the metaphysical "strong lines" of Cleiveland or the meteoric and penetrating flashes of Donne, with a suggestion occasionally of the atmosphere of Shaw's *Saint Joan*. After the drab austerity of much recent so-called verse-drama it was a joyous relief to find again a poetic play that shone and sparkled so beautifully with its own zodiacal light.

Below the surface of many modern poetic dramas can be sensed a feeling of deep disgust for twentieth-century city life and civilization. In order to express this disgust authors now find it necessary to depict the things they criticize, and not to escape from them into a remote world of legend, as did Yeats, or into a mock Shakespearean paradise, as did the Victorian poets, or into an exotic blaze of imaginative colour, as did Flecker. Unfortunately a poet (to perhaps a much greater extent than other writers) is inevitably associated with the subject-matter of his verse. Pope or Shelley, Crabbe or Tennyson, Swinburne or Lawrence, live in the mind in permanent association with the scenes, characters, moods, and phenomena which they describe. Consequently, if poets choose for themselves an atmosphere of motor-tyres, hand-grenades, barbed wire, and overalls, they must expect their poetry to take its quality from these things. The question at issue is whether true poetry can be made in such an atmosphere. Many modern poets say that it can, but Mr Duncan appears to have answered the question himself in *This Way to the Tomb*, where all the finest verse is concentrated into the medieval half of the drama.

Certainly poetic drama should deal with contemporary life if that life has in it the inherent stuff of poetry. Life in the Heroic Ages obviously had it. So it had in the days which built Rheims Cathedral and Warwick Castle. The Shakespearean age abounded in it. But it is very seriously open to question whether modern civilized life has it at all.

For the tissue of contemporary existence is inextricably involved with the material background. And that background is an amalgam of conferences, rationing, atom-bombs, concentration camps, wireless-sets, factory legislation, typewriters, offices, power-stations, buses, cinemas, cabarets, drainage problems, chain stores, dog-tracks, black markets, and football pools.

Modern poetic dramatists who derive their poetical stock-in-trade from this amalgam are finding themselves hard put to extract poetry from it. The easy and flowing rapture of a Yeats, with his lovely misty landscape, is not for them. Modern life is harsh, metallic, confused, and brutal. And the poetry which springs directly from it is bound to be harsh, metallic, confused, and brutal too.

The only alternative is escape, and the very word is anathema in most poetry circles to-day. But constructive escape is a very different thing from romantic escape of the kind associated with Pre-Raphaelitism, Andersen's fairy-tales, and *The Lost Chord*. And a form of poetic drama which pointed to a better mode of living through the imaginative recreation of beauty would do a far finer service than that which seeks its music in poeticized family conversation and its imagery in motor-tyres and overalls. Perhaps we must wait until the quality of civilized life improves before poetic drama can really revive.

(viii) *Pallet*

This seems an appropriate place to say a little about the recent history of English ballet. For ballet has closer affinities with poetic drama than with any of the other types in our five-fold classification, and occasionally, as in Fokine's choreography for *Hassan*, it has even joined forces with it. It is really, of course, a separate art from drama, and normally would have

no place in a dramatic history. But its recent achievements in England have been so notable that no survey of the theatre during the last half-century would be complete without at least a brief mention of them.

The renaissance of ballet in London has been indeed astonishing, and it has been entirely the product of the last twenty years. In fact, up to the death of Diaghileff in 1929 there was no real English ballet at all. Year by year the splendours of the visiting Russian companies and of special stars of the dance had given English performers a feeling of inferiority. There was, besides, no central focus in London where choreographers and artists could meet potential dancers. English ballet was still something associated with an Alhambra or Coliseum divertissement, or with an elaborate His Majesty's show, or with Carl Rosa performances of *Faust* and *Samson and Delilah*. It was in much the same position as English opera, a poor relation which could not hold a candle to the foreign wonders that glittered on Covent Garden stage every summer during the London social season.

There to the international fame of Diaghileff was added the lustre of the eminent names of European music—Borodin, Tchaikowsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, De Falla, and Stravinsky. The orchestral excitements of *Petrouchka* were mingled with the glowing chromatics of *Scheherazade*. Superb designers, Bakst, Benois, and Larionov, galvanized the background of Russian Ballet into a thing of exquisite beauty. Wondrous greens and purples shimmered and waved in costumes that threw the balletomanes into a frenzy of admiration. Besides, the immense experience and awe-inspiring tradition of the Moscow and St Petersburg schools were behind all this. Ballet seemed to be as firmly Russian as opera was Italian.

Consequently, what hope was there for the few enthusiasts in England who dreamed of the creation of an English ballet that would one day occupy the stage at Covent Garden and fill the great theatre as the Russian contingent was doing then? Diaghileff himself had always had a high opinion of the capabilities of the English dancers. It was the organization and centralization of English choreographic talent into a definite home of the dance that had been lacking.

In 1929 Diaghileff died, and the great Russian legend began to disrupt. The Tsar of ballet was gone, and the company proceeded to scatter all over the world. The stars of this disintegrated constellation went as far afield as Chicago, Buenos Aires, New York, and Paris, and they took sparks of the Diaghileff spirit with them wherever they went.

Among the English dancers who had had experience with Diaghileff was Edris Stannus. As Ninette de Valois her name and work were to become familiar to audiences of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, and the Festival Theatre at Cambridge. For she left the Russian company to develop her own individual work in dance-drama, and she was to be in charge of some of the extraordinary experiments which we noticed earlier in describing the work of the Cambridge Theatre.¹ She also formed her own Academy of Choreographic Art.

But it was not until 1930, when the Camargo Society was formed, that she emerged as a real choreographer. Among her ballets were the *Origin of Design* and *Job*. Then followed her association with Lilian Baylis at the Old Vic, and from this partnership sprang the creation of the Sadler's Wells Ballet in 1931. From that date onward English ballet has never looked back. With the assistance of Alicia Markova, an English dancer who had, like many others, adopted a Russian orthography for her name, Ninette de Valois built up a public for English ballet at the newly opened and reconstructed Sadler's Wells Theatre in Rosebery Avenue.

This is not the place to attempt a chronicle of what has been achieved by the company of that theatre. Many books have already told its story. Perhaps the outstanding triumph has been the transference of the whole organization to Covent Garden, so that the remote dream of the early enthusiasts has been at last realized. On the stage where once the Diaghileff company drew all artistic London the Sadler's Wells company now does the same.

The variety of the repertoire has been extraordinary. There have been excellent performances of the classics—*Le Lac des*

¹ See Chapter I. In the history of English ballet the work of Marie Rambert, wife of Ashley Dukes, should also be gratefully remembered. She founded the Ballet Club, which was the first real centre of choreography in London, and there her own productions were staged.

Cygnés, *Giselle*, *Les Sulphides*, and *The Sleeping Princess*, with fine renderings of the orchestral scores under the leadership of Constant Lambert. There have been agreeable novelties, such as *Les Rendezvous*, to music by Auber, and Meyerbeer's skating ballet, *Les Patineurs*. But most important, from the point of view of English dramatic history, have been the completely new creations, *The Rake's Progress*, *Checkmate*, *Horoscope*, and the extraordinary dance-drama of *Hamlet* to the symphonic poem of Tchaikowsky.

The Rake's Progress (1935) is perhaps the most important of all. A completely English subject (based on Hogarth), with specially composed and very fine music by Gavin Gordon, with decor and costumes by Rex Whistler and choreography by Ninette de Valois, danced originally by Walter Gore and Markova (later by Robert Helpmann and Elizabeth Miller), with the Sadler's Wells corps de ballet, this work is a major dance creation with no foreign elements whatever. *Checkmate* (1937), another fine ballet, dealing with the Red and Black Kings, Queens, and Knights of the chessboard in symbolic fashion, was similarly an English product. *Horoscope* was one of Constant Lambert's own compositions, with choreography by Frederick Ashton, and was a small masterpiece of harmonious teamwork.

The triumph of the Sadler's Wells Ballet has been, in brief, one of the most striking features of the twentieth-century English stage. As suggested earlier, no success in the sphere of poetic drama can yet approach it. Immense popular enthusiasm and the virtual creation of an English ballet public have accompanied its very considerable artistic achievements. It has added a new chapter to the history of the English theatre. We should, however, note the fact that its success has not been confined to Britain. Its international appeal has been proved in Paris and elsewhere. It is, indeed, one of our major cultural ambassadors, and as such is entitled to a high place in the history of our stage.

Some of the acuter modern dramatists have realized the significance of this truly extraordinary growth of English interest in ballet. As a result there are signs that the dance-drama of Terence Gray and other pioneers in the 1920's may

yet come into being as a major factor in the English theatre. Ballets such as *Death on the Green Table* (Kurt Jooss) had also paved the way to dramatic expression in modern choreography several years before the Second World War. The Sadler's Wells *Checkmate* was another step in the same direction. It would seem that if ballet and poetic drama could be persuaded to go hand in hand in the future some striking results might be achieved. An interesting experiment in this connexion, though only a personal one, was Robert Helpmann's appearance in *Hamlet*, both as a drama and as a ballet. Many lovers of Shakespeare questioned the advisability of this, just as they objected to a choreographic version of *Twelfth Night* by the International Ballet. But they were puddings that stood the proof. And any experiment which might help to bring poetry back into the theatre, and to interest large audiences in the poetic possibilities of modern entertainment, is to be welcomed and not deplored.

Ballet, indeed, may prove itself to be the channel through which a great romantic revival floods the English artistic and literary scene. More and more are painters, costume-designers, and musicians turning to ballet as a medium of expression. Its public grows with every year, and it would be scarcely an exaggeration to call it the major artistic phenomenon of the twentieth-century stage in England. Certainly it has been the most successful, if success may be measured in terms of winning over a formerly indifferent nation. Its influence is spreading to all classes of society, and it is particularly popular with the rising generation. It has even been suggested as part of the educational programme of the British Forces, so that W. S. Gilbert's artistic Captain Recce and his luxury-loving sailors may yet be an actual fact.

In countless ways ballet is proving an influence in romanticizing modern aesthetic taste. The artistic pendulum was in any case ready for a swing from the intellectual nudism of the last twenty or thirty years, a nudism that has proved increasingly chilly in the modern psychological breezes. Generally, as is well known, the theatre follows intellectual fashions. It does not lead them. Audiences do not, as a rule, go to a theatre to learn. They go to hear current ideas expressed, or maybe

given a novel turn. They go to enjoy the satirizing of others or of themselves. They go for aesthetic experience, for excitement, for escape, for laughter. But not to acquire new theories.

None the less the theatre may and does influence the spread of new ideas in life, art, and literature, and it can do this well through the medium of such a highly composite form as ballet. And ballet, being essentially illusive, fantastic, escapist, chromatic, nebulous, everything, in short, that connotes romanticism, has undoubtedly begun to play a part in the romanticizing of English artistic ideas.

(ix) Opera

English opera during this period has not made anything like the great stand of ballet. In any case opera as a whole came to a kind of dead-end after the death of Puccini in 1924, and the international repertoire has not been increased since *Turandot* was posthumously produced in 1926. This is not to say that opera has not enjoyed popularity, even in England, the "land without music" of so many European gibes. Regular international seasons at Covent Garden under Sir Thomas Beecham and others enlivened the English summers right up to the beginning of the Second World War. There was a break from 1914 to 1919, but apart from this there had always been a season of opera either in progress or in preparation from 1900 onward. Generally the procedure was to have a German season first, consisting of cycles of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, with *Tristan*, *Parsifal*, and *Die Meistersinger* alternating, together with a few other German operas, sometimes earlier Wagner or Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*. This was followed by an Italian season, in which works like Verdi's *Aida* and *Rigoletto* were conspicuous, together with occasional performances of Mozart. English opera rarely, if ever, got a hearing.

When Sadler's Wells was reopened as a home of opera and ballet in 1931 high hopes were raised that a new native school of opera would come into being in London. But, apart from a few venturesome productions, the company found that it was forced to play a safe programme of established favourites. Thus, though it managed to keep its doors open in a temporary

home right through the Second World War, it was to a monotonous tune of *La Bohème*, *Rigoletto*, *The Barber of Seville*, and *Madame Butterfly*.

Earlier high hopes had been similarly dashed. The spectacular failure of D'Oyly Carte's Royal English Opera House (now the Palace Theatre, Cambridge Circus) at the end of the last century had been a great disappointment to opera-lovers. It had a success with the opening opera, Sullivan's *Ivanhoe* (1891), but there was nothing to follow it up, and the whole venture came to a disastrous end, just as W. S. Gilbert had somewhat sarcastically prophesied.

However, the story of English opera from 1900 onward is not one of unrelieved failure: a few landmarks stand out against a rather depressing sea of foreign competition and importation. Prominent among these there are a number of Shakespearean operas, such as Stanford's *Much Ado about Nothing* (1901), Nicholas Gatty's *The Tempest* (1920), Vaughan Williams's *Sir John in Love* (1929), on the theme of Falstaff, and Lawrance Collingwood's *Macbeth* (1934). There have also been works of individual enthusiasts, such as Dame Ethel Smyth's *The Wreckers* (1909), a post-Wagnerian opera originally produced in Leipzig in 1906, Delius's *The Village Romeo and Juliet* (1910), Rutland Boughton's Arthurian operas, his Christmas opera, *Bethlehem* (1916), and his very successful *The Immortal Hour* (1914; revived 1922), Stanford's *The Travelling Companion* (1926), and Vaughan Williams's *Hugh the Drover* (written 1911-14; produced 1924). These have all kept the flag flying, while in more recent years Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes* (1945) made every music critic in London lose his head and proclaim that the Messiah of English opera was at hand. Its reception was very reminiscent of the breathless chorus of praise that greeted Stephen Phillips's poetic dramas, and one critic even pronounced it to be "equal to anything in the repertory of Sadler's Wells." In view of the fact that this repertory includes Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* and *The Magic Flute*, such praise was perhaps somewhat exaggerated.

Hugh the Drover was one of the most successful of the above-mentioned operas. It had a number of performances at Sadler's Wells, and was always received with acclamation. An excellent

libretto by Harold Child (the distinguished scholar of so many chapters in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*) provided a sound basis for Vaughan Williams's melodious score. It was set in England in Napoleonic days, and gives a convincing musical and dramatic picture of village life in those vigorous times. A feature of the opera is the boxing-match in Act I, and this, together with the old English flavour of the tunes, gives the work a strong individuality. It has had performances at the Royal College of Music, at Sadler's Wells, and by the British National Opera Company. Other operas of Vaughan Williams include *The Poisoned Kiss* (1936) and *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* (1922), both of which have great musical distinction.

Some very fine writing went into Joseph Holbrooke's trilogy of Welsh-legend operas, *The Cauldron of Annyn*, with libretto by Lord Howard de Walden. The overture to one of these, *Bronwen*, is a magnificent piece, Wagnerian, but with its own character, and almost comparable with the final pages of *Götterdämmerung* as an example of orchestral architecture.

English opera is a very different thing from opera in English. There had always been a public for the latter, especially in the provinces and the outlying London theatres, such as the King's, Hammersmith, the People's Palace, and the Golders Green Hippodrome. The Carl Rosa¹ and the British National Opera

¹ The history of the Carl Rosa Opera Company has a special interest for the student of English drama, for it is the oldest touring company in the country, and probably even in the world. No other theatrical organization (not even the D'Oyly Carte) has such a long and honourable record of work. Of all the Victorian Grand Opera groups, such as the Pyne and Harrison, the Moody Manners, and the Turner Opera Companies, the Carl Rosa is the only one to survive into the present day, and thus to offer a fascinating example of theatrical continuity from one century to another. Founded in 1869, it has regularly supplied the towns of England with well-produced opera, achieving a very high standard under the exacting conditions of weekly touring.

Generally it has played only the standard operas, but it has often bravely produced works less well known to the public, such as Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* (originally produced by the company as far back as 1876) and *Rienzi*, Johann Strauss's *Der Zigeunerbaron*, and modern operas like those of Goring Thomas, Sir Charles V. Stanford, Sir Alexander Mackenzie, Isidore de Lara, and Joseph Holbrooke. It also gave the first English performance of *Carmen* when Bizet's work was a startling novelty.

As a nursery of singing talent the company has been the nearest thing England has ever had to a School of Grand Opera, and the list of fine singers who have

Companies, together with the smaller groups like the Godwin, the Allington Charsley, and the O'Mara, have helped to keep up a love for opera all over England. But they have played only the safe international repertoire, such as *Faust*, *Carmen*, *The Tales of Hoffmann*, and *Il Trovatore*. Occasionally there might be an experiment, as when the Carl Rosa did De Lara's *Messalina* and Holbrooke's *Bronwen*. But the public never wanted these works. For much the greater part of their tours these companies have been obliged to perform standard operas in their endearingly naive translations. The English version of *Don Giovanni* has some of the most unfortunate couplets of all, including Leporello's "Whiles lurking cosy Came this expose." The *Faust* of Henry Chorley and the *Car wen* of Henry Hersee are perhaps the best of the Victorian opera translations still in use. They have been utilized now for several generations, and must have provided an introduction to the world of opera to thousands of people.

Native English opera, it must be admitted, makes a poor show against the works of Mozart, Wagner, Verdi, Mussorgsky, Bizet, Weber, and Strauss. From time to time a composer appears and may even have an ephemeral success. But there seems never to have been sufficient enthusiasm for the creation of a serious English repertoire of opera comparable with what Sadler's Wells has achieved in the world of ballet, though in the realm of comic opera England has assembled such a repertoire in the Savoy Operas and the D'Oyly Carte organization.

An English Grand Opera Company is still a dream for composers to toy with. It may come. It is very much to be hoped that it will. But at present, even though an occasional favoured opera can now get a chance at Covent Garden, the outlook for opera-writers is far from being inviting.

graduated from it ranks at least with that of the actors who graduated from Benson's Shakespearean Company and the pioneer Repertory theatres. It should never be forgotten that the annual visit of the Carl Rosa to the towns on its touring list has been for some eighty years an event to be eagerly anticipated and enjoyed by countless theatre-goers all over Great Britain. And, in the days before radio and the gramophone made music easily accessible, the 'Carl Rosa week' was the only form of contact with singing and good orchestral playing which many towns enjoyed. In fact, in some of our darkest industrial cities, as well as in the fairer resorts and in the suburbs of London, this valiant organization has brought annual glimpses to the people of that greater world of international music-drama which lies beyond the common round of drawing-room comedy, melodrama, and twice-nightly revue.



SURREALISM APPLIED TO BALLET I "HAMLET" (SADLER'S WELLS COMPANY)

From the Collection of Robert Helpmann

[See pp. 106-107]



LAVISH OPERA AT COVENT GARDEN: "TURANDOT" (1947)

Photo Baron

EXAMPLES OF THE WORK OF LESLIE HURRY



PANTOMIME SPLENDOURS AT DRURY LANE

Scene from *The Sleeping Beauty* in 1900.

Victoria and Albert Museum: Enlhoven Collection

CHAPTER IV

SPECTACLE DRAMA: MUSICAL COMEDY—LIGHT OPERA—REVUE—PANTOMIME—SPECTACULAR DRAMA

THE London stage has for long been a home of scenic splendour and mechanical marvel. There were the pageants and masques of the Jacobean theatre and the living history-book shows of Charles Kean. Aquatic melodrama at Sadler's Wells delighted generations of adults, just as pantomime at Drury Lane, with its jewel caves and fairy castles, delighted generations of children. Irving and Tree 'upholstered' Shakespeare in royal fashion, while the Savoy Theatre attired its Mikado and entourage in dresses of Liberty silk and its Peers for *Iolanthe* in velvet robes worthy of the House of Lords. At Daly's, under George Edwardes, there were flower fetes and Chinese palaces till the stage shimmered with purple wistaria and yellow chrysanthemums or blazed with red kimonos and white cherry-blossom. And in the realm of opera at Covent Garden there were the storms and wild mountain-passes of *Der King des Nibelungen*, the eerie ghost-ship of *Der Fliegende Hollander*, the menagerie effects of the Triumph Scene in *Aida*, and the smoky splendours of *Les Huguenots* and other sanguinary battle-operas.

This sumptuous tradition was well maintained in the earlier years of the twentieth century, but more recently there has been a growing tendency to simplification of visual effect in all but the biggest theatres. This simplification has been the result partly of a shift of artistic taste in that direction and partly of economic pressure. Also the two World Wars made lavish production difficult, although, paradoxically, it was during the first that *Chu Chin Chow*, one of the most famous of all stage spectacles, had its premiere.

On the whole, the twentieth-century record of what one might call 'visual drama' has been substantial, though with less emphasis on mere display than that which prevailed in Victorian times. Spectacular productions have included,

besides *Chu Chin Chow* and other glamorous Oriental shows like *Hassan*¹ and *Kismet*, a long string of lavish musical comedies, such as *The Maid of the Mountains*, *Rose Marie*, *White Horse Inn*, *Casanova*, and, more recently, *Song of Norway* and *Can-Can*. There have also been the Cochran revues and such pageants as *The Miracle* (produced in 1911; revived in 1932), while the Russian Ballet brought to London the peacock-feather colourings of Bakst and others in *Scheherazade* and *Petrouchka*.

Since, generally speaking, the spectacular tradition in London has been so closely linked with musical comedy, we can consider at this point the progress of this form of entertainment in the period under review.² 'Musical comedy' is a wide and convenient designation which we may use here for a large variety of types of play, all more or less dependent on stage show. There is comic opera of the Savoy type, musical drama (not necessarily comic), pantomime, the romantic play with a few songs interpolated, pure spectacle, such as some of the Coliseum productions, and, finally, the type which is really only a revue, but which has a faint thread of story running through it.

In 1900, when our period opens, the well-constructed comic opera of the *Yeomen of the Guard* class was already giving way to the lighter and more frankly visual musical comedy, as popularized by George Edwardes at Daly's Theatre. *The Geisha* and *San Toy* had proper plots, it is true; so had the more conscious imitations of W. S. Gilbert, such as *The Rose of Persia*, by Basil Hood and Sullivan, or *The Nautch Girl*, by George Dance and Edward Solomon. In fact, after the disruption of the triumvirate of Gilbert, Sullivan, and D'Oyly Carte, the Savoy management endeavoured to continue with the brand of comic opera established in popular favour by the famous series which began in 1875 with *Trial by Jury* and went on till 1896 with *The Grand Duke*.

But the constructive genius of Gilbert was lacking in his imitators, and this may well explain why later comic opera, and its offshoot, musical comedy, tended on the whole to become

¹ For *Hassan* see the section on J. E. Flecker, *ante*, p. 67.

² See the Appendix to this chapter, p. 210.

merely spectacular and tuneful at the expense of plot and characterization. A good example of this is the still popular *Merrie England* (1902). An obvious imitation of *The Yeomen of the Guard*, it cannot, of course, hold a candle to it for dramatic construction. (In a recent revival the original libretto of Basil Hood was fantastically distorted, and a wholly incredible farrago of Spanish spies and Mermaid Tavern haunters was grafted on to the already impossible plot.) The main appeal, in the long run, has proved to be the melodious score of Sir Edward German, but it was also clearly designed in the first place as an opportunity for an Elizabethan show whose splendours should cover up the paucity of its dramatic theme.

Again, the plots and characterization of such successes of the 1900's as *Miss Hook of Holland*, *A Chinese Honeymoon*, *The Merry Widow*, and *The Belle of New York* were extremely flimsy when measured against the standard of the Savoy Operas. Their main appeal was clearly through eye and ear: there was no dramatic construction worth mentioning.

Musical comedy is, of course, by nature fundamentally exotic, and consequently a foreign setting is a very frequent source of its charm, since in this way brilliant dresses and scenery are easily interwoven with the story. China, Japan, India, Holland, and the pleasantly fabulous Ruritania were extensively drawn on by the librettists of the early 1900's. And this type of lavish musical play, so eloquent an echo of Edwardian social luxury, reached its apotheosis a few years later in *Chu Chin Chow* (1916-21). Here there was no attempt at an original story at all, only a rechauffe of the familiar Arabian Nights tale of the Forty Thieves being served to the vast five-year audiences at His Majesty's. *Chu Chin Chow* was indeed only a gorgeous pantomime, but with a properly composed score, whose songs became very popular during the First World War and after. "The Cobbler's Song" was worthy of comic opera of the *Rose of Persia* class, but much of the music was not in any way above the level of *San Toy* or *The Balkan Princess*. The main attraction of the work was undoubtedly in its miles of glowing scenery and its warehousefuls of silk and silver braid.

However, there have not been lacking in the twentieth

century musical plays which, while being generously spectacular, have also had a consistent plot. Sometimes they have been quasi-historical, like *The Vagabond King* (1927), a musical drama of medieval France in the time of the poet Villon, or *The Rebel Maid* (1921), an agreeably romantic work set in England at the time of the 1688 Revolution. Other plays of this type were *The Pompadour* (1924), with its Louis XV background, and *The Three Musketeers* (1930), a Drury Lane piece with a score by Rudolf Friml. Around 1928-29 this kind of historical musical comedy was still popular in London, as in *Blue Eyes*, which had for its milieu the 1745 Rebellion.

Sometimes there has been a fairly coherent modern story, but with novel and spectacular background, as in *Rose Marie* (1925), another Drury Lane success, where an astonishing Totem scene provided a most original North American effect.

Yet another kind of musical play, very popular about 1930, was that with a sequence of scenes ranging over a period of years, as in Noel Coward's *Bitter Sweet* (1929) and *Cavalcade* (1931). And on at least one occasion a distinguished dramatist has permitted one of his plots to be made into a basis for a musical comedy, as when Shaw sanctioned the use of *Arms and the Man* for the scenario of *The Chocolate Soldier*, by Oscar Straus (produced in 1910).

The elaborate musical plays of Ivor Novello, such as *Careless Rapture* (1936) and *Crest of the Wave* (1937), have been enormously popular in the last dozen years or so, though their sickly brand of sentimentalism, reaching a climax in the very successful *Perchance to Dream* (1945), has made them somewhat distasteful to the eclectic.

A noteworthy feature of musical comedy is that it has been much more feminized than were comic operas of the *Ruddigore* and *Gondoliers* class. Savoy Opera had at least as many good parts for men as for women. Jack Point, the Lord Chancellor, the Mikado, Ko-Ko, Pooh-Bah, Bunthorne, and the rest are quite as outstanding as Elsie Maynard, Iolanthe, Yum-Yum, Patience, and the whole feminine corps of the series. In *The Gondoliers*, of course, the balance is perfect, Marco, Giuseppe, the Duke, and Luiz matching exactly their counterparts, Gianetta, Tessa, the Duchess, and Casilda. But with the coming

of musical comedy there was created a whole string of exclusively feminine title-roles—*The Geisha*, *San Toy*, *A Gaiety Girl*, *The Shop Girl*, *The Circus Girl*, *A Runaway Girl*, *The Pearl Girl*, *The Earl and the Girl*, *The Quaker Girl*, *The Cherry Girl*, *The School Girl*, *A Country Girl*, *The Girls of Gottenburg*, *Florodora*, *Three Little Maids*, *My Mimosa Maid*, *Dorothy*, *Peggy*, *Betty*, *Laay Madcap*, *The Dollar Princess*, *The Balkan Princess*, *The Duchess of Dantzic*, *Miss Hook of Holland*, *The Belle of New York*, *Our Miss Gibbs*, *The Lady Slavey*, *The Maid of the Mountains*, *A Southern Maid*, *The Rebel Maid*, *Rose Mane*, *No ! No! Nanette*, *Mercenary Mary*, and a host of others.

Closely linked with the musical comedy, and making a similar visual appeal, is the pantomime. There have, in fact, been productions, as we noted with *Chu Chin Chow*, which have combined the qualities of the two forms in one. In London the glories of pantomime have shone largely at Drury Lane and the Lyceum, and it still flourishes at some of the other West End theatres, such as the Adelphi, while in the provinces it is as firmly rooted as ever. The favourite subjects have remained fairly constant: *Cinderella*, *Dick Whittington*, and *Aladdin* have pride of place, though *The Babes in the Wood*, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, and *Robinson Crusoe* have been very frequently performed. *Mother Goose*, *Jack and Jill*, *Puss in Boots*, and *Humpty-Dumpty* have also been popular, while sometimes, as at Birmingham (1946-47), there have been pantomimes on the stories of Simple Simon and Goody Two Shoes.¹

The great days of the really glittering pantomime, with its wondrous transformation scenes and lakes of real »water, would now seem to be over. But flying ballets, 'electrical poses,' and magic gardens still contrive to bring a glimpse of colour to the icy atmosphere of most English towns at Christmas-time. Often there is still a chorus attired in cloth of silver or a 'specialty' gleaming with gold and variegated lights. *Aladdin* usually retains its time-honoured garnishing of "A Garden of Chrysanthemums," "Aladdin's Disappearing Palace," "The Street of Lanterns," and "The Cave of Gems." *The Babes in the Wood* has its "Ballet of Falling Leaves" and its "Chorus of Robins," and frequently of "Living Flowers"

¹ See A. E. Wilson, *Pantomime Pageant* (1946).

that leave their beds and begin to dance. *Dick Whittington* has its Oriental magnificence in the Court of Morocco scene. *Cinderella* glitters with electric lights as the magic coach departs for the Prince's Ball. Giants in boots that tower to the top of the proscenium enliven *Jack and the beanstalk*. Moonlit tropical islands with war-dances of the natives adorn *Robinson Crusoe*.

In *Simple Simon* at the Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham, in 1946 a real roundabout and swings, gorgeously illuminated, appeared in the Fair scene, and the company mounted the galloping horses, which started to move at full speed as the curtain fell. Flights of doves and pigeons were sometimes released from the back of the dress circle to fly through the auditorium and land on the stage, as in *Santa Claus* at the Aston Hippodrome (i 946-47).¹ Circus ponies, snowstorms, "human parrots" and "ladies-sawn-in-two," trap-door effects and "Phantom Guards," fire-eaters and sword-swallowers, the musical glasses and illuminated mouth-organs, Chinese jugglers and fat boys, "Rhapsodies in Silver" and "Fantasies in Gold"—in short, all the paraphernalia of revue and variety assembled in one splendid apotheosis—have formed the attraction at hundreds of English theatres at Christmas-time during the present century.

Akin to the pantomime is the revue, whose appeal is also mainly to the eye. Often, as in the revues of C. B. Cochran, there have been some artistic stage-pictures. *Wake Up and Dream* (1929), for instance, had a very beautiful dream scene, introducing a blue bird, Venus, goblins, Columbine, a medieval page, Queen Elizabeth, Pelleas and Melisande, the Lady of the Moon, and some marionettes. There was also an impression of the ballet of *Coppelia* as performed at the Empire, Leicester Square, in 1910, and a scene of the San Francisco Gold Rush of 1849.

Often the twice-nightly revues touring the provinces in the

¹ This device was known at least as far back as the early years of the eighteenth century, for *The Spectator* (No. 5, March 6, 1711) records, in describing stage sparrows: ". . . there have been so many flights of them let loose in this Opera that it is feared the House will never get rid of them; and that in other plays they may make their Entrance in very wrong and improper Scenes, so as to be seen flying in a Lady's Bed-chamber, or perching upon a King's Throne; besides the Inconveniences which the Heads of the Audience may sometimes suffer from them."

late 1920's and early 1930's were sumptuously staged. Some of those of Jack Taylor, such as *The Wonder Show* (1927), with its glittering silver pictures, and *Un Vent de Folie* (1928), with its "China," "The Tent of Cleopatra," "The World of Temples" (Egyptian, Siamese, and a Cathedral), and its final "Cascade of Gold," were only a shade less magnificent than their London prototypes.

A novel kind of spectacular revue was the *Cavalcade of Mystery*, as toured by the Great Lyle in 1942, with its "Magic Milliner," "Flying Gramophone," "Magic Chocolates," "Night in the Palace of Peking," "Mandarin's Pagoda," "Chinese Rice Magic," "Oriental Paper Act," "Crystal Clock," "Walking through a Sheet of Glass," and "The Bride in the Air" ("she floats in the air and shrivels away in full view"). Another mystery revue was the show of the magician Dante, entitled *Sim Sala Rim*, which appeared in London in 1946 after extensive touring. This was a parade of legerdemain very elaborately staged against several very rich sets of Oriental curtains.

Ballet has already been considered in the chapter on poetic drama, but, of course, most ballets have a strong spectacular appeal also. Sometimes, as in *The Sleeping Princess*, which was one of the major triumphs of the Sadler's Wells company at Covent Garden in 1945, there is a close resemblance to pantomime, and the ballet becomes as much decor as choreography. Ballets like *Le Lac des Cygnes*, *Checkmate*, *Scheherazade*, and *Hamlet* have all had a brilliant spectacular side.

Something has also been said earlier on the subject of actual developments in scenery and lighting effects during this period (see Chapter I), and of the work of the art pioneers in theatre aesthetics, from Gordon Craig to the Cambridge Festival Theatre. It was also noted there that the theatre no longer has a monopoly of spectacle, since the cinema, with its "gorgeous Technicolor," has become a most powerful rival. The days when a Drury Lane transformation scene represented the very pinnacle of scenic wonder have gone for ever. The lavish splendours of the cinema are far more alluring, with the added advantage for many patrons that there is no endurance of hard seats in uncomfortable pits and galleries waiting for the curtain

to go up. There is, besides, no break in the spell while scenes are being changed, as must always be the case in the theatre, however efficient the stage mechanism may be.

For these and many other reasons it is unlikely that spectacle-drama as a genre will ever return to the theatre. It was always a risk, and now it has a rival. Consequently London may never see another *Hassan*, and never another *Chu Chin Chow*. Significant omens of the collapse of spectacle and of a change in the technique of the musical play have indeed already appeared. Perhaps the greatest Drury Lane success of recent years has been *Oklahoma!* (1947), which was the very antithesis of the great spectacular dramas associated with the Drury Lane tradition.

Instead of a romantic plot, assisted by enormous built-up sets and hundreds of glittering costumes, *Oklahoma!* concentrated on a simple American cowboy story of the early 1900*5, simply dressed and almost plainly staged. Its secret lay in a brilliant team performance by an American cast whose zest and sparkle lent an air of first-night enthusiasm to every repetition of the show. These features, allied to some unforgettable tunes such as *Oh! What a beautiful Mornin'* which the whole country was soon singing, made Drury Lane history during the hot summer of 1947, when the piece consolidated its initial success. The play was so produced that every character in it had the precision of movement and the clear-cut outlines of a figure in a ballet; the whole show gleamed like a streamlined engine shining in the morning sun. The crowd scenes were perfectly handled, and the verve of the ensemble had to be seen to be believed.

Annie, Get your Gun (1947), another American piece and the Coliseum rival to Drury Lane's *Oklahoma!*, was rather more spectacular. It had an elaborate stage picture in the Red Indian initiation ceremony and some costly effects in the Buffalo Circus scenes. But even here it was plain to see that the vast audiences at the Coliseum were not swept in by the gingerbread spectacle: it was the vigorous and original tunes and the sharp-shooting technique of Annie with her gun that drew the crowds.

Spectacle of the old-fashioned type is clearly doomed, but it

dies hard, and the patient amateur may still, with diligent searching and good luck, be rewarded with some glittering glimpses of former glory. For example, a wondrous aquatic spectacle, entitled *Waterfalls of Scotland*, has been touring the twice-nightly provincial theatres. It was cleverly engineered by a mass of pipes and tanks, and the collapse of the rocky glen and "transformation of the stage into a raging torrent" reminded one of the damp splendours of old-time productions of *Das Rheingold* and *Götterdämmerung*. A similar triumph of the hose-pipe wielder's art could be seen at the Tower Circus, Blackpool, in the summer of 1947, when a glistening *Water Finale* was beautifully staged. This was entitled "The Bridge of Avignon." The circus-ring filled with water; a vast central fountain arose, with four fine satellites; the water shone green and blue under the lights as a procession of figures in silk and spangles crossed a great bridge spanning the ring. And for a moment one was transported in spirit to the Victorian water-dramas of Old Sadler's Wells as the water glittered and the fountains sparkled and the band played *Sur le Pont d'Avignon*.

Of recent achievements in staging a high place must be accorded to the Covent Garden Opera Company's productions of *Turandot* (1947) and *Boris Godunov* (1948). The effects in *Boris Godunov* were some of the finest seen in any theatre. Notable among these were the Clock Scene, with its relentless pendulum swinging from the roof and a horde of sinister figures outside against a background of the Kremlin domes; the Polish Episode, with its procession of silhouetted dancers behind a line of lighted windows; and the great dramatic triumph of Boris's death, managed with a series of closing double doors along a vista of corridors, gradually shutting out the view, and culminating in an overwhelming central portal with a vast haloed head of Christ whose piercing eyes slowly dominated the darkening scene. Other fine effects were the dimly lit Pimen's Cell, where an impressive and towering line of Byzantine icons stretched up into the proscenium like a glory of archangels, and the final snowy landscape of the Revolution Scene, which subtly suggested an infinitude of empty wasteland. The kaleidoscopic Russian crowd was splendidly handled, excellent use being made of colours,

particularly in the semi-barbaric crimson costumes of the Boyars and the red-and-green uniforms of the Tsar's agents against the perfectly designed scene of the Tavern on the Lithuanian frontier. The production was by Peter Brook, and the altogether astounding decor and costumes by Wakhevitch. It took one back to the great days of Bakst and Larionov to see again a superb piece of Russian art mounted in a manner worthy of its greatness.

CHAPTER V

THE DRAMA OF IDEAS

(i) *Bernard Shan'*

THESIS-DRAMA has probably as many enemies as it has friends. For every one who maintains that the theatre should inculcate morals there could in all likelihood be found an opponent who would say that the place for preaching is the pulpit, not the stage. The main difficulty of presenting a sociological idea in dramatic form is that it tends to become a trumpet for the author's own views, with the result that the characters are mere puppets. And it is not only the characterization which appears artificial, but the plot (that Aristotelian backbone of drama) often suffers also. The thesis-dramatist, in fact, like the novelist of the *roman à thèse*, elevates himself into a literary Calvin: his persons are saved or damned before the curtain goes up.

English literature has never, as a whole, taken very kindly to this form of dictatorial predestination. Most of the glories of our fiction—Fielding, Jane Austen, Scott, the Brontës, Thackeray, Trollope, Virginia Woolf—are singularly free from it. Even Dickens takes his final place, not as a sociologist, but as a master of humoristic narrative. Our poets, apart from a few such as Milton, Shelley, and Morris, have also done very little social preaching; some of the very greatest, including Keats, did none at all. And English drama, whether in the age of Marlowe and Jonson, Wycherley and Congreve, Colman and Sheridan, or *Jane, the Licensed Victualler's Daughter*, showed extremely little disposition to tamper with its normal function of holding the mirror up to nature.

English creative literature was, in short, never a very powerful agent for social reform until the present century. Reform, on the other hand, came from the pamphleteers and the politicians, from the philanthropists and the social agitators, from private effort and personal example, from unsung sociological martyrs and uncanonized sociological saints.

As a result, the vast achievements of Bernard Shaw (1856-) consisted primarily of forcing English drama, unwilling ostrich as it was, to draw its head out of the comfortable golden sands of farce, pageantry, and poetic melodrama into the rational air of discussion and intellectual progress.

Herein lay the principal difficulty. It was not that Englishmen disliked discussion of social problems in public; English Parliamentary history, on the contrary, proves that this country had always led the world in such matters. It was not that we had no great literary tradition of sociology; *Areopagitica* and the *Tractate on Education* would alone discountenance such a suggestion. It was that our *creative* literature, poetry, fiction, and drama, had previously been so sparing of sociological fruit. It therefore needed a Titan to bring questions of social reform into such an atmosphere as that of the red-plush and gilt nineteenth-century playhouse.

This is what Shaw succeeded in doing. He prepared his own path, with typical adroitness, by tilting against Irving and the whole school of toy-box drama in the days of his own apprenticeship to the theatre as a critic. *Our Theatres in the Nineties*, which represents in three volumes the sum-total of his dramatic criticism, is unwearied in its attack on the entertainment business which the theatre had become. Shaw, fired by the examples of Ibsen and Wagner, the two great streams of intellectual sustenance from which he drew, fulminated like a prophet at the tripod against pseudo-Elizabethanism, *comédie larmoyante*, tin-soldier stage shows, star actors (including Irving), second-hand French farces, and well-made Sardou melodramas. Finally he emptied the baby with the bath by attacking Shakespeare too. As Shaw saw the matter, English drama had been adolescent for too long, and he was determined to be the stimulus which should persuade it to become adult.

He was prepared to bide his time. His dramatic career did not begin until he was thirty-six, when, in 1892, his first play, *Widowers' Houses*, was produced. His earliest herald in England had been T. W. Robertson, whose domestic 'cup-and-saucer' comedies, *Caste.*, *Play, School, Ours*, and others, had introduced a breath of real life into the silk-fringed air of the London theatres in the 1860's. Pinero, Jones, and Grundy had also

paved the way for a revolt against the Victorian stage tradition. In Europe, however, Shaw had other and more immediate forbears. Apart from the Norwegian colossus, there had been the dramatic experiments of André Antoine's Theatre Libre, founded in Paris in 1887, and the Freie Bühne of Berlin in 1889. The European dramatic air, indeed, was charged with revolution.

But in England the theatre, despite the work of Robertson and a few others, still slumbered, like the Sleeping Princess, in its enchanted forest. Shaw was to be the Prince who woke it up. He early realized that his task of emancipation would not be a smooth one. In the European capitals, such as Paris, there had never been the repressed emotional atmosphere of nineteenth-century England, and the discussion play was, on the whole, easier to launch. Ibsen, of course, had met with a torrent of abuse abroad as well as in England, but, none the less, a play such as *Ghosts* would encounter a more tolerant psychological climate there than in Victorian London.

Shaw's main device in waging his battles was to write comedies, not gloomy dramas of the *Rosmersholm* calibre. Whenever he wished to attack a specially cherished English institution he always coated his dose of poison in a sugaring of wit, or even horseplay. W. S. Gilbert had shown the way in his tilts at the Navy in *H.M.S. Pinafore*, at æstheticism in *Patience*, and at the House of Lords in *Iolanthe*. *Utopia, Limited*, which followed a year after Shaw's first play, was the satirical climax of the Savoy series, and its reference to Christy Minstrels at the Court of St James's probably did much to retard Gilbert's knighthood until 1907, long after Queen Victoria was in her grave. Shaw much admired *Utopia, Limited*, and, indeed, there is more than a touch of Gilbertianism in many of his own plays.

But the main dramatic influence on Shaw was undoubtedly Ibsen, just as the main musical influence was Wagner and the main political influence was Marx. *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* was a lucid exposition of the Norwegian's dramatic doctrines, and in addition there are constant panegyrics of Ibsen in the pages of *The Saturday Review* which will be found reproduced in *Our Theatres in the Nineties*.

Writers on the theatre often speak of Shaw as the direct heir to the Ibsenian patrimony, and their two names seem as likely to be linked in future histories of literature as those of Dryden and Pope, or Congreve and Sheridan. Yet it is too often forgotten that Ibsen was a poet and Shaw is not. A certain kaleidoscopic flamboyance of setting has perhaps given some of Shaw's plays a poetic veneer, but when it occurs it is really pantomimic and operatic in its final effect. "Do remember, ladies and gentlemen," said Granville-Barker once when rehearsing a Shaw play, "that this is Italian opera." The pageantry of fifteenth-century France in *Saint Joan*, the musical-comedy atmosphere of *Arms and the Man* (which transferred itself so well into the light opera *The Chocolate Soldier*), the picturesque lace ruffles and Nell Gwynne setting of *In Good King Charles's Golden Days*, the Lohengrin-like figure in *Geneva*, the touch of *Aida* in *Cesar and Cleopatra* and of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in *Man and Superman*, to say nothing of the Wagnerian-cycle style of *Back to Methuselah*, all point to Shaw's apprenticeship as a music critic and to his essentially operatic style.

With Ibsen it was different. There were the real masterly touches of pure poetry in his work, of which Shaw shows little if any trace. There were the Troll Castle in *Peer Gynt*, the White Horses of *Kosmersholm*, and the misty Northern melancholy of *The Lady from the Sea*. Ibsen was, in brief, not merely a poet, but a great poet, whereas Shaw is not merely not a great poet, but no poet at all.

Shaw belongs, chronologically, as much to the nineteenth century as to the twentieth, but in spirit he is of this century alone. In the 1890's he was as far ahead of his time as Wagner was in the days of *Tristan and Isolde*, and he was constantly looking forward. Yet by the opening year of the period with which we are concerned here he was already forty-four. His mind had developed and matured in the Victorian age, and a number of his plays are, historically speaking, Victorian dramas.

But it is the period from 1900 that has seen the real expansion of his genius, the international growth of his fame. This has reached to such an extent that Mr Hesketh Pearson, at the

conclusion of his study of Shaw, suggests that the present will probably be known to the future as the Shavian age.

It was early in the twentieth century that Shaw encountered his first major piece of good fortune, the meeting with Granville-Barker and the inauguration of the seasons of his plays at the Court Theatre in Sloane Square (1904-7). A previous Shavian benefactor had been Miss Horniman, who financed *Arms and the Man* in 1894, but with the Vedrenne-Barker management Shaw truly entered into his kingdom of conquest.

Of the long series of plays which has poured out since that time from his magnificent pen only the briefest mention can be made here. Their names are familiar to all the English-speaking world, the more particularly since *Pygmalion*, *Major Barbara*, and *Cesar and Cleopatra* have been successfully filmed. Outstanding as a literary achievement is the "Metabiological Pentateuch" *Back to Methuselah* (1921), which, with its tremendous Preface, forms perhaps Shaw's major work. In the theatre it has, like *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, its longueurs, and not even the brilliant performances at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, with Paul Shelving's fine settings, could redeem parts of it from mortal dullness. But as a Philosophy of Creative Evolution, which is what the work professes to be, it ranks high. The principle of the Life-force, as opposed to the Darwinian doctrine of Evolution, had been adumbrated by Shaw in *Man and Superman* (1903). But in *Back to Methuselah* he surveys with a cosmic sweep the process of man's development.

Beginning in the Garden of Eden, the cycle of events moves to the period of the First World War, on to the year 2170, then to 3000, and finally to 31,920, "as far as thought can reach." The main tragedy of human life, as Shaw sees it in this pentateuch, is that it is too brief. Consequently the primary aim of the human race should be to increase its span of years. If this could be done the follies of one generation would not be repeated in the next, as they are at present; man would have time to learn from his mistakes, and not die as he now does, just when he is beginning to come to years of intellectual discretion. So vast a theme as this calls for endless exposition

and discussion. As a result, *Back to Methuselah*, while being a *tour de force* of creative philosophy, is hardly suited to the stage. Five evenings must be spent by a patient audience, listening to disquisitions as voluminous as those of any Puritan Divine. And it is often difficult to see what is being added by theatrical production to what could be just as well studied at home.

Apart from this great imaginative essay, Shaw has confined himself to dramas of manageable length. In all of them there is the same passionate seizing of opportunities to preach practical Socialism. Sometimes the historical background is brilliantly and eloquently depicted, as in the treatment of the Restoration which gives such sparkle to *In Good King Charles's Golden Days*. On rare occasions, as in *Saint Joan*, history inspires in Shaw something akin to poetry. Again, in some of the political extravaganzas, like *The Apple Cart*, there may be an unexpected panegyric of monarchy.

But running through the entire Shavian series the gospel of Socialism appears and reappears as the most powerful leitmotiv. Man is to be regenerated through intelligent co-operation, and this can be achieved only by the abolition of class barriers, economic justice for all grades of society, the eradication of political hypocrisy, and a firm determination to see things as they are, stripped of the halo of romantic sentiment. The path will not be easy. Abundant faith in the power of the Life-force to realize its highest purpose in man will be needed. In the working out of this purpose the evolution of the Superman will represent a stride forward comparable with that when man's intelligence first outstripped that of the anthropoid apes. But the immediate tasks are practical, and lie mainly in the purging of society of its vices. Using the drama as his instrument, Shaw attacked these vices seriatim: he had begun with an onslaught on respectable rentiers whose income was drawn from slum property (*Widowers' Houses*);¹ this was followed by an exposure of the business side of prostitution (*Mrs Warren's Profession*). Other things against which Shaw tilted in his nineteenth-century days were the false glamour of

¹ An interesting earlier play on a similar theme was Douglas Jerrold's *The Kent Day* (1832).



THE RUSSO-BYZANTINE DECOR FOR "BORIS GODUNOV" DESIGNED BY
WAKHEVITCH FOR THE COVENT GARDEN OPERA (1948)

Photo Edward Mandinian

[See pp. 121-122]



PAUL SHELIVING'S SETTING FOR THE GARDEN OF EDEN IN
SHAW'S "BACK TO METHUSELAH"
(BIRMINGHAM REPERTORY THEATRE, 1923)

Photo George Dawson, Birmingham

[See p. 37]

war (*Arms and the Man*), the stolid respectability of the clergy (*Candida*), parental authority (*You Neper Can TV*), and the conventional view of the great figures of history (*The Man of Destiny* and *Cesar and Cleopatra*).

But it is from the opening of the twentieth century, and particularly from the time of the Court Theatre successes, that Shaw's real period of greatness may be said to date. The earlier plays had been excellent theatre-pieces, clear-headed, precise, accurate exposures of their particular problems. But greater and far more comprehensive work was to follow, and to the published texts of his plays Shaw decided to add lengthy Prefaces containing the quintessence of his own philosophy as applied to the drama in question.

Man and Superman (1903) stressed the need for eugenic planning in order to breed the great race of the future who will make the present generation appear as pygmies.

The Doctor's Dilemma (1906), with its caustic preface, attacked the voodoo of modern medical science, its inoculations, vaccinations, operations, and expensive drugs. *Major Barbara* (1905), with its Salvation Army background, *Pygmalion* (1912), an amusing modern version of the Pygmalion and Galatea theme, and *Androcles and the Lion* (1913), which dispelled the aura around the early Christian martyrs, were other brilliant successes. The Preface to the last-named, entitled "On the Prospects of Christianity," is one of Shaw's most brilliant polemics. *Heartbreak House* (1921), described as "a fantasia in the Russian manner," came as a fine exposure of the political and intellectual drift which had precipitated Europe into war.

In *Back to Methuselah* (1921) Shaw's strength as a philosopher of creative evolution reached its climax, and in *Saint Joan* (1923) his strength as a dramatist. As in *Androcles and the Lion*, there is no attempt to rhapsodize over Christianity or to limn the Saint in stained-glass attitudes. Joan is a strong-minded peasant, vigorous, homely, speaking her dialect without embarrassment and living her simple life among everyday village objects. The character is Shaw's masterpiece, and Joan must assuredly always have a place in the list of great English dramatic heroines. She has the distinction of Cordelia and

Portia, the power of Beatrice Cenci. In her Shaw comes as near to poetry as he has ever done, and the final scene when her ghost visits the Dauphin puts the drama into the field with Æschylus and Euripides for poetic effect.

The Apple Cart (1929) contained in the part of King Magnus a tremendous actor's opportunity. The King, pitted against his Cabinet, who are only the corrupt shadow of a genuine democracy, finally outwits them by sheer personal cleverness. *On the Rocks* (1933) showed the conversion of a British Premier from Liberalism to Socialism, and the refusal of the people to believe that such a transformation is genuine. *Geneva* (1938) satirized the European political machine as it was on the eve of the Second World War. Characters typifying Hitlerite Germany, Fascist Italy, and Spain and representatives of the League of Nations were introduced, the theme being the unwisdom of building up an "international peace-organization" that was not truly international at all. *In Good King Charles's Golden Days* (1939) was one of Shaw's very finest plays. Without being so much of a thesis-drama as most of the others, it contained a brilliant portrayal of English life in the second half of the seventeenth century, with a most effective final duologue for Charles II and Catherine of Braganza.

In 1945 the Socialism which Mr Shaw had preached with such eloquence for half a century became an accomplished fact in England. Whether Socialism will remain as the guiding force of British history can only be a matter for speculation, and in any case its discussion has no place in a history of drama. But one fact of the highest significance in dramatic history is this: Mr Shaw is the first English playwright to have exercised a decisive influence on the national political thought, and to have helped to foster a revolution by the dissemination of his doctrines. There is no doubt that his long life's work has aroused in countless minds the first seeds of political consciousness of a Socialist flavour. And, whether one likes Socialism or not, it is plain that Mr Shaw's works contributed not a little to the events of July 1945, when the Socialist Government was returned.

There are Shavians and non-Shavians; but, as with Wagner, even the most hostile critic must pay homage to the size of

Shaw's achievement. He is a literary giant, perhaps the last of the race. For the very democracy which he has preached is opposed to the Great Man in any walk of life. Its shafts are aimed as much at the intellectual aristocrat as at the Duke and the Capitalist. Consequently, a rich, successful dramatist like Shaw, towering head and shoulders above every one else in the literary world, will surely not be tolerated in a logical democracy. To such a paradoxical climax may things move, and Shaw may find himself

as a god self-slain on his own strange altar.

Indeed, reaction against Shaw may well reach the dimensions of the reaction against Wagner, once the idol of Bloomsbury and Chelsea, but now under an eclipse in those strongholds of art. Shaw's future reputation, however, cannot concern us here. His past achievement is in itself material enough for a three-volume treatise, while the Shavian bibliography has already attained bewildering proportions.

What is the quintessence of Shavianism? One of its qualities, surely, lies in an ability to make people think by making them laugh. The heavier the problems discussed the more amusingly does Shaw usually treat them. In this, again, there is a fundamental difference from what Mr Graham Greene has so brilliantly termed "the odour of spiritual paraffin" of Ibsen. There is certainly none of the gloomy Norwegian oil-lamp about *Androcles and the Lion* or *The Apple Cart*. They are as diverting as a pyjama comedy.

Another quality of Shaw's work is a kind of dramatic encyclopedism, giving the impression that there is nothing the author does not know. Shavian drama is a whole world of its own, or at least a mirror of the real world, reflecting from a particular angle every facet of its social and economic structure. This large-scale view of life, however, is very different from the Elizabethan world-picture of Shakespeare. For whereas we know next to nothing about Shakespeare from his dramas, we know next to everything about Shaw and his opinions, both from the plays themselves and from the voluminous prefaces. In short, Shaw's plays remind us of a marionette show where the master of the puppets talks all the time, disguising his voice

suitably to indicate Punch, Judy, or the Hangman, as the case may be. But with Shakespeare the marionettes, like Rossum's Universal Robots, acquire souls of their own.

A third quality in Shaw, which again brings to mind the operatic parallel, though here with opera of the Gilbertian kind, is his habit of ridiculing persons and institutions on the principle of topsy-turvy. Shaw's admiration of *Utopia, Limited*¹ with its strong vein of social satire, has already been noted, and others of his plays, such as *Cesar and Cleopatra* and *The Apple Cart*, reflect the method of Gilbert.

Yet a fourth Shavian quality is a penetrating knowledge of theatrical effect, manifesting itself in appropriate and picturesque backgrounds, opportunities for fine costumes, striking openings, and arresting curtain situations. Often, too, there are excellent chances of histrionic display, and above all, there is throughout an unflagging liveliness of wit expressed in a torrent of words that galvanize the audience into attention.

And, fifthly, Shaw shows an Olympian indifference to conventional dramatic construction. Often the characters talk for half an hour without there being any theatrical action, as the term is commonly understood. This was, in part, a reaction against the 'well-made' play of Sardou and Pinero, against which Shaw had thundered in the pages of *The Saturday Review* in the 1890's. But it was probably also the result again of operatic influences, and in the disquisitions of the Shavian characters the fanciful may like to find a parallel in the interminable duologues of Wagnerian music-drama which Shaw so much admired. This parallel suggests itself very strongly in *Back to Methuselah*.

These five qualities, if not Shaw's complete quintessence, certainly represent an important part of it. They are the things that give his work its salt and sparkle, and that have made him, in the eyes of the world at large, the greatest figure in English drama after Shakespeare.¹

¹ The following is a list of Shaw's plays: (a) Nineteenth century: *Widowers' Houses* (1892), *The Philanderer* (1893), *Arms and the Man* (1894), *Candida* (1895), *The Man of Destiny* (1897), *The Devil's Disciple* (1897), *Cesar and Cleopatra* (1899). (b) Twentieth century: *You Never Can Tell* (1900), *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* (1902), *Mrs Warren's Profession* (1902; written 1894), *The Admirable Bashville* (1901), *Man and Superman* (1903), *John Bull's Other Island* (1904), *How*

(ii) *Other Exponents of the Drama of Ideas: Galsworthy—Granville-Barker—Houghton—The Manchester School—St John Ervine—Pinero—Hankin*

Like Figaro, Mr Shaw made haste to laugh for fear he should be obliged to weep. As a result most of his plays have a rich fund of comedy to balance the sociological teaching. But, generally speaking, the other English dramatists who have essayed the presentation of social problems have adopted a much gloomier style, and the laughter in their plays is at best only spasmodic. John Galsworthy (1867-1933), for instance, expounds his themes with almost the heavy hand of Ibsen. *The Silver Box* (1906), *Strife* (1909), *Justice* (1910), *The Skin Game* (1920), and *Loyalties* (1922) all show a mind as keenly alive to injustice as Shaw's, and as determined to use the stage as a platform for the remedy of public abuses. But the atmosphere is never one of witty battles or of the Italian opera which Granville-Barker discerned in Shaw. None the less Galsworthy had, in *Justice*, at least one major triumph in the field of direct sociological consequence; its exposure of the callousness of the criminal law and of English prison conditions led almost at once to State action and reform. Perhaps no other play in the history of our theatre could point to such clear results or could so plainly vindicate the cause of the drama of ideas.

Opponents of this type of play maintain that social reform is the business of social reformers, not of dramatists. The drama, they hold, should certainly raise the level of the public intellect

He Lied to Her Husband (1904), *Major Barbara* (1905), *Passion, Poison, and Petrifaction* (1905), *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906), *Getting Married* (1908), *The Shewing-up of ftlanco Posnet* (1909), *The Glimpse of Reality* (1909), *The Fascinating Foundling* (1909), *Press Cuttings* (1909), *The Dark "Lady of the Sonnets* (1910), *Misalliance* (1910), *Fanny's First Play* (1911), *Overruled* (1912), *Pygmalion* (1913), *Androcles and the Lion* (1913), *Great Catherine* (1913), *The Music Cure* (1914), *O'Flaherty V.C.* (1915), *Augustus does his bit* (1916), *The Inca of Perusalem* (1917), *Annajanska, the Bolshevik Empress* (1917), *Heartbreak House* (1921), *Jitta's Atonement* (translation; 1922), *Back to Methuselah* (1923), *Saint Joan* (1924), *The Apple Cart* (1929), *Too True to be Good* (1932), *Village Wooing* (1933), *On the Rocks* (1933), *The Six of Calais* (1934), *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles* (1934), *The Millionairess* (1936), *Geneva* (1938), *In Good King Charles's Golden Days* (1939), *Buoyant Billions* (1949). The Shavian bibliography is too vast to be even lightly touched on here. One of the best studies is Hesketh Pearson's *Bernard Shaw: His Life and Personality* (Collins, 1943).

and contribute to the general happiness of the community, but it can do this best by directly causing pleasure, imaginative, aesthetic, or intellectual, not by making the theatre a miniature House of Commons. Another argument against sociological drama of the type of *Justice* is that the life of modern man is often depressing enough in any case, without his having the gloom deepened when he visits the theatre. After a day spent in an office, factory, or shop, which is where the bulk of the community pass their working-time, men and women should be entitled to turn to the theatre for liberation, for poetry, for colour, for laughter, for wit, for intellectual pleasure, for visual enjoyment, for dramatic presentation of history, for literary appreciation—in short, for delight of some kind or other according to their mental make-up.

This controversy of the pros and cons of thesis-drama is likely to rage for as long as the theatre lasts. The final word would seem to be with the supporters rather than with the critics, since, as they argue, those who do not approve of this type of play can seek their entertainment elsewhere and leave the field free for those who do.

Galsworthy's work, at all events, is uncompromisingly on the side of problem-drama, and it has proved very popular with both professional and amateur companies. Its problems are always stated very plainly: *The Silver Box* deals with the inequalities of the law as it affects different classes. The dramatic contrast here is between Barthwick, a robber of means, and Jones, a robber of none. And although Galsworthy is far from being a symbolist, as the term is commonly understood, yet in a play like *The Silver Box* his characters do acquire a sociological symbolism and become representative of whole classes of modern society.

Strife depicted the clash between employers and employed, that struggle of capitalism against the workers which has formed the theme of so many literary works, dramatic and non-dramatic, since the appearance of Marx's *Das Kapital*. But there is an almost Greek sense of tragic futility underlying *Strife*: after the battle has waged and exhausted both sides nothing is settled, and in the end, as with modern warfare, the victors lose as much as the vanquished.

Justice perhaps shows Galsworthy's method at its best. The protagonist—he is very far from being a hero—is a clerk who has yielded to the momentary temptations of embezzlement. He is tried and sentenced to prison, where tragedy in the form of suicide finally overwhelms him. It is a theme at once grim, symbolic, and humdrum. Here is no Othello piling up Pelions of agony on to Ossas of crime, no pride, pomp, and circumstance of disaster, no grim-visaged Fates or Spirits of the Years such as those who glide dimly through Hardy's *Dynasts*. There is only Galsworthy himself to manipulate the sad puppet-show, with his own ironic pity constantly breaking through. There is not even any conscious villainy. It is merely that the entire apparatus of judicial machinery is obsolete and cruel, and no single character acts otherwise than according to his lights. Falder is no criminal, but merely a weak and pitiful youth. His offence is not spectacular enough to raise him to the levels of the villains in melodrama and tragedy; his character is not strong enough to arouse the pity summoned up by the fatal flaw in the Shakespearean protagonists. He is simply one of the thin-faced, macintosh-clad millions who throng daily over London Bridge and pack the buses in Cheapside. And the audience can neither love him nor hate him. Neither can they love or hate any of the other characters in *Justice*. Each is a cog in the great wheel. And whichever way the wheel moves the cogs must move with it.

In his other plays Galsworthy similarly harps on a theme. In *The Mob* it is the jingoism which was so rampant at the time of its writing (1914); in *The Pigeon* (1912) it is the endless problem of rich and poor; *The Skin Game* depicts the conflict between the landed gentry and the newly rich middle class, while a similar theme runs through *Loyalties* in the dramatic clash of a young Jew and an English officer. Ibsen's *A Doll's House* looms large in the inspiration behind *The Fugitive* (1913) and *The Eldest Son* (1912), where the social emancipation of woman is the underlying idea.

Throughout all these plays there is an impartiality which many have found dramatically admirable, but which, none the less, militates against real sympathy being aroused. One feels, as with the modern bureaucracy, that no one is to blame for

all the misery caused: it is the system which is at fault, not the individual members of it. This, indeed, is an ironic comment on the whole structure of contemporary society. Men are no longer the individuals of *Antony and Cleopatra* or *The Duchess of Malfi*. They have none of the grand isolation of an Œdipus or a Samson; they are not even in the grip of the Nornir or the Eumenides. They are caught in the coils of a Frankenstein, and, having themselves made the monster of social injustice, they must themselves destroy it or perish. It is no longer any use crying out against the gods.

This is Shaw's thesis too: man's wrongs and political failures are to be remedied by man only. But no two dramatic reformers could be more dissimilar in their methods than Shaw and Galsworthy. Shaw captured his enormous audiences largely through the means of generously blending instruction with highly spiced amusement. The "not bloody likely" of *Pygmalion* and the antics of Androcles and the Lion were essential ingredients in the Shavian recipe for preaching the gospel of a rational Socialism. With Galsworthy, however, the gloom is thick, and the fog of social injustice chokes down the laughs, except on rare occasions. Fortunately this lack of humour is compensated for by a high order of theatrical skill, and Galsworthy's dramas show a careful schooling, not merely in Ibsen, but in the 'well-made' tradition of Sardou and Pinero. Most effective from a theatrical point of view, for instance, are the Trial Scene in *Justice* and the full-stage assembly of strikers in *Strife*. Moreover, the plots of his dramas are always coherent and the incidents of sufficient importance to be interesting to an audience. There is never any dramatic mist in Galsworthy's plays; whether one likes them or not, it must be admitted that they are admirably clear-cut, getting their curtains up and down, their characters on and off, and their stories expounded and developed with an obvious sense of dramatic effect.

And it is to this theatrical quality that they have owed much of their popularity. For their characters, taken as a whole, are not an exciting or memorable cross-section of modern society, and would not of themselves have made much appeal. Falder, De Levis, Captain Dancy, Clare Dedmond, Stephen More, Hornblower, Hillcrist, Bill Cheshire, and the rest make a poor

show against the great figures of English drama, both in past times and in the modern age. They are not merely many circles below Faustus or Romeo or Vittoria Corombona in dramatic interest, but well below the St Joan or Becket of recent times.

It may be urged that no kind of comparison with such characters is possible, and that Galsworthy was not, in any case, attempting to scale the heights of *The White Devil* or *Murder in the Cathedral*. But, even on a lower plane, Galsworthy's characters still suffer when compared with, for instance, Maurya in *Riders to the Sea*, or Masefield's Nan, or even Maugham's Nurse Wayland in *The Sacred flame*. The human race, one feels after seeing a Galsworthy play, is an effete thing, stumbling along in the dark and unable to strike a light to see its path, even though all the time it has a candle and matches in its pocket.

Harley Granville-Barker (1877-1946) was another tower of strength to the twentieth-century thesis-drama. The modern theatre in England is so much in Barker's debt for such manifold services that his plays are too often neglected in appraisals of his importance. His work at the Court Theatre with Vedrenne in laying the foundations of Shaw's enormous popularity, his beautiful productions of poetic drama at the Savoy in the years preceding the First World War, his scholarly *Prefaces to Shakespeare* and admirable critical writings on the theatre, were all only other aspects of his truly creative dramatic mind.

Barker's plays, although occasionally fantastic, like *Prunella* (1904) and *The Harlequinade* (with Dion Clayton Calthrop, 1918), were more usually of the strong thesis type which we are here considering. *The Marrying of Ann Leete* (1899; produced 1902), *The Voyage Inheritance* (1905), *Waste* (1907), and *The Madras House* (1910) are the best known of these. In *The Marrying of Ann Leete* the New Woman of Tennyson's *Princess*, Ibsen's dramas, and Girton College is seen revolting against the stifling conventions of polite society. She throws herself, mentally and physically, into the arms of John Abud, a gardener, to the horrified stupefaction of Sir George and Lady Leete. It is the theme of Robertson's *Caste*, with the sexes changed.

The leitmotiv of the drama is the working of the life-force, the overmastering passion which is too strong for social barriers, a theme which Shaw was to transfigure into a major work of philosophical and dramatic art in *Man and Superman*.

The Voysey Inheritance was even more in the Robertson manner, its dialogue extending to the banalities of everyday conversation in order to create a powerful effect of realism. Edward Voysey has inherited from his father a business rotten with fraud. An idealist, he is moved to cast off the whole weight of the unsavoury affair and go to prison to satisfy his conscience. He is finally persuaded by Alice Maitland to avoid such a line of action with its futile consequences, and the moral lesson of the drama is clearly that men must serve society, however mean it may be, and not run their heads against it in a passion of righteous self-dramatization. One of Barker's most telling characters is Beatrice Voysey, whose apparent intellectual liberty is subtly shown to be only a veneer, her real spirit being soured by poverty.

Waste, a drama with strong emphasis on sex, is perhaps Barker's most powerful play. Comparisons with Shaw and Galsworthy are inevitable, but Barker's dialogue has a poignancy of its own as he develops his theme of the waste of a brilliant life. Henry Trebell is a rising politician, an idealist, a forceful thinker, a really fine character. His entanglement with an Irish woman, Amy O'Connell, and her destruction of herself and the unborn child through an illegal operation, bring both scandal and disaster to Trebell. He is denied the coveted promotion to Cabinet rank through the outraged righteousness of a High Churchman, Cantelupe, and the drama depicts his subsequent tragedy of depression and ultimate suicide. Trebell is a much nobler character than any of those we encounter in Galsworthy's plays, and, indeed, as a study of a fine individual sinking in conflict with overpowering social forces, *Waste* achieves something of the effect of Greek tragedy, and even of Shakespeare.

The Madras House is a play of several themes, a kind of satirical dramatic symphony. It may be questioned whether the various elements are successfully blended, but there can be no doubt about the sincerity of the underlying purpose. Here

Barker shows two cross-sections of early-twentieth-century society, the first being a respectable suburban home at Denmark Hill, and the second the drapery store of Messrs Roberts and Huxtable. In each the primitive natural feelings of the inmates have been repressed. In the domestic sphere the younger generation, Julia and Philip, are shown crushed under the weight of suburbia's chains. At the drapery establishment the unfortunates who "live in" are shown under their dragon, Miss Chancellor, equally repressed and emotionally crushed, but occasionally breaking out, like Miss Yates, into illicit passion as a result of this unnatural confinement. Only Philip and Constantine, the apparent moral reprobate, see the rottenness and hopeless frustration of the life around them, especially as it influences the unfortunate women who are incapable of changing their lot.

The Madras House is typical of many plays of the early twentieth century which used the theme of rebellion as their dramatic pivot. In some cases it was a revolt against parental authority, as in Stanley Houghton's (1881-1913) *The Younger Generation* (1910). Here the action turns on a struggle between the intolerant and puritanical Mr Kennion, head of a suburban household in Salchester (clearly intended for Manchester and Salford), and his rebellious children, Reggie, Arthur, and Grace. However, it is no one-sided conflict, and the dramatist is careful to be fair to the older as well as to the younger generation. When a thesis-play presents both sides of the picture, as Houghton does here, the gain from the point of view of pure drama is considerable. Another of Houghton's plays, *Hindle Wakes* (1912), shows a similar struggle between old and young, again in a suburban home. On the one hand is the wealthy cotton magnate, Jeffcote, whose son, Alan, has had a week-end in Llandudno with a working girl, Fanny Hawthorn. This comes to the ears of Alan's father, who declares that Alan must marry Fanny. The position is complicated by Alan's engagement to Beatrice Farrar, who enjoys the same privileges of wealth as the Jeffcotes. Events move rapidly in the direction of a marriage between the erring week-enders, but suddenly Fanny declares that she has no wish to

marry Alan. This completely upsets the plans of the older people, particularly Fanny's mother, Mrs Hawthorn, who had been seeing in her daughter's union with Alan a perfect opportunity for a move up in the social scale. In *Hindle Wakes* it is Fanny who emerges as the really vital character. Alan Jeffcote is a cowardly, vacillating individual who excites no sympathy; one feels that Fanny was obviously right in refusing to marry him.

Another drama in which the conventions of suburbia were attacked was Elizabeth Baker's *Chains* (1909). Symbolic of the stifled desires of millions in their dreary street homes is Charley Wilson's craving to escape to Australia. His wife, Lily, however, has no such rosy dreams. And when at last he has made up his mind to break his town chains and set off for a new life abroad he is presented with a child by his affectionate wife. He realizes bitterly that escape is, after all, impossible, and settles down again into the soul-destroying round of suburban life.

The Price of Thomas Scott: (1913), also by Elizabeth Baker, has a similar theme of psychological conflict. Thomas Scott, a respectable business man, finds himself confronted with a fierce personal problem. An inveterate Puritan, he is offered a substantial price for his business by a company of dance-hall promoters who are anxious to acquire the site. He at length resists the temptation and refuses to sell, even though his own circumstances were deteriorating and the sale would have benefited his wife and children. Again the clash between the moral strictness of the older generation and the licence of the young is plainly delineated.

A theme not unlike this actuates Githa Sowerby's celebrated piece *Rutherford and Son*, produced at the Court Theatre in 1912. The chief character is yet another hard-headed business man, John Rutherford, whose sole passion in life is his firm, the glass works of Rutherford and Son. Struggling against his sour ideals of profit are his children, Richard, a clergyman, and Janet, his no longer young daughter. At last Janet's nature breaks into open rebellion, and she finds satisfaction in the love of her father's foreman, Martin. In a burst of rage the

dour John Rutherford expels her from home and dismisses the foreman. One by one the old man's children desert him, and he is ultimately left alone in heart-broken misery. This theme of a fight between different generations and the impossibility of reconciling their outlooks was also treated very effectively by Arnold Bennett in his *Milestones* (1912).

Many of these domestic-revolt dramas had a North Country setting, and a number were originally produced in Manchester at the Gaiety Theatre, under the aegis of Miss Horniman. In a sense they were the heirs of the Irish Movement at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, for the Manchester School of Stanley Houghton, Allan Monkhouse, Harold Brighouse, and others was inspired by the desire to do for the Industrial North of England what Synge and his fellow-workers had done for Ireland.

Later plays which reflect the influence of the Manchester School were Charles McEvoy's *The Likes of Her* (1923) and Ronald Gow and Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole* (1935), while the plays of St John Ervine (1883-) show a similar preoccupation with the problems of practical life in modern English towns. *Jane Clegg*, for instance, produced at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, in 1913, dealt realistically with the difficulties of a wife whose weak-minded husband, after proving unfaithful, continued to pester her with requests for money to meet his betting debts. Ervine's other plays have all an element of dramatic clash. In *Mixed Marriage* (1911), first produced at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, the theme is a riot between Catholics and Orangemen in which Nora, a Catholic engaged to Hugh, son of a strong Protestant, is killed. One is reminded of a similar plot mainspring in Meyerbeer's fine opera *Ives Huguenots*, where the romance of Valentin and Raoul is terminated by the religious massacre of St Bartholomew.

Another of Ervine's plays, *The Orangeman* (1913), a one-act work, also has the theme of religious troubles in Belfast. And the strict Protestantism of Ulster, together with the characters it bred, are the backbone of *John Ferguson* (1915), and in the title part Ervine created a vigorous portrait, showing the

spiritual strength which could be derived from even the most intractable Puritanism.

Yet a further variant on the theme of father and son in conflict was *The Ship* (1922), where a shipbuilder, unable through illness to travel on the maiden voyage of his latest masterpiece, the *Magnificent*, persuades his son, much against his will, to take his place. The ship runs into an iceberg, and the son is drowned, leaving the father a prey to the bitterest remorse. Further, this clash of ideas between the father and son is given a symbolic significance, for the father represents machinery and industry, while the son, who had taken up farming (from which he was reluctantly dragged), represents the younger generation's revolt against mechanism.

The dramatic conflict of personalities was again revealed in *Robert's Wife* (1937), where the action springs from the clash between a clergyman and his modern-minded wife who refuses to give up her birth-control clinic to please her husband.

St John Ervine belongs almost as much to the Dublin School as to that of Manchester, and other writers for the Abbey Theatre, such as Lennox Robinson (1886-) T. C. Murray (1873-), and Padraic Colum (1881-), showed a similar interest in plays with a definite idea running through them.

Several of Lennox Robinson's dramas, such as *The Clancy Name* (1908), *The Cross Roads* (1909), *Harvest* (1910), turn around problems of domestic life. In *The Clancy Name* the theme is family pride, Mrs Clancy fearing that her name will go down to posterity with a permanent stain, since her son has committed a murder. *The Cross Roads* shows the tragedy of a woman who has placed her country before her own domestic happiness. *Harvest* teaches the lesson that culture forced on peasants can bring as much discontent as satisfaction. Later plays of Lennox Robinson were based on Irish nationalist topics, such as *The Patriots* (1912), *The Dreamers* (1915), which had the revolt of Robert Emmet for its theme, and *The Lost Leader* (1918). This last play was a strangely effective treatment of the legend that Parnell was alive long after his reported death, much as the Portuguese King Sebastian was reputed to haunt Portugal years after the battle of Alcacer-Quibir.

T. C. Murray's tragic plays, such as *Birthright* (1910) and *Maurice Harte* (1912), are very powerful dramas of psychological conflict. *Birthright* rings some fresh changes on the father-and-son-in-conflict theme, while *Maurice Harte* shows the disaster which can result from forcing an unwilling mind into paths that it wishes to shun. Here the tragedy arises from the struggle between a mother and her son, the mother forcing her boy to continue with his studies to be a priest, only to find that the young man's brain is torn in two by his own psychological disharmony.

Other Irish domestic dramas are those of Padraic Colum, whose *The Fiddler's House* (1903) shows the degrading effect of drink and a love of noisy clamour on Conn Hourican, an Irish fiddler, while in *The Land* (1905) the theme of the irreconcilability of parents and children again finds expression. *Thomas Muskerry* (1910) is a realistic treatment of the problems of an Irish workhouse.

Although the English thesis-drama has come to full flower in the present century, it had begun to blossom in the 1880's and 1890's. Shaw began his dramatic career in 1892, while Sir A. W. Pinero's *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* and *The Notorious Mrs Ebbsmith* and H. A. Jones's *Michael and his Lost Angel*, *The Triumph of the Philistines*, etc., also date from the nineteenth century. Now, of all forms of drama, the play of ideas must keep abreast of the times, and if the thesis-dramatist fails to do this his work stands little chance of success. Shaw proved equal to the task of adaptability, but neither Pinero (1855-1934) nor Jones (1851-1929) had such elasticity of mind.

Both of them, however, continued writing plays in the opening years of the period here under review, Pinero even going on up to 1932, when *A Cold June* appeared. After *Iris* (1901) Pinero produced the following: *Letty* (1903); *A Wife without a Smile* (1904); the celebrated *His House in Order* (1906), one of Alexander's most profitable productions; *The Thunderbolt* (1908); *Mid-Channel* (1909); *Preserving Mr Panmure* (1911); *The "Mind the Paint" Girl* (1912); *The Widow of Wasdale Head* (1912); *Playgoers* (1913); *The Big Drum* (1915); *Mr Livermore's Dream* (1917); *The Freaks* (1918); *Monica's Blue Boy* (1918);

Quick Work (1919); *The Enchanted Cottage* (1922); *A Seat in the Park* (1922); *A. Private Room* (1928); *Dr Harmer's Holidays* (1930); *Child Man* (1930); *A Cold June* (1932).

Up to a point Pinero may be said to have reflected the changed temper of society in these later plays. But every one of his dramas betrays the style of *the pièce bienfaite*; the spirit of Sardou and the theatrical carpentry of nineteenth-century melodrama are too closely intermingled with their texture for them to challenge serious comparison with the work of Shaw or Granville-Barker as thesis-dramas. They are too much mere opportunities for star actors of the school of Mrs Patrick Campbell; their curtains and situations are too cleverly contrived. Shaw had been right in discerning a fundamental staginess in *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*, and that staginess (though eased and oiled in some of Pinero's later plays, notably the charming fantasy *The Enchanted Cottage*) was present to the end. *His House in Order*, for example, though an excellent piece of theatrical craftsmanship, is only a variant on the 'strong situation' drama of the preceding century. Superficial criticism has coupled Pinero's plays with those of Ibsen, but a closer examination shows Pinero as parochial where Ibsen is universal. No doubt the theme of *His House in Order* is skilfully worked out: it shows the antagonism of the family of a man's first wife towards his second choice, and the martyrdom of her married life until some conveniently discovered letters show this first wife to have been no saint after all, for she had committed adultery with one of her husband's guests. The climaxes are well-timed; the dialogue is crisply dramatic; the device of raking up the dead wife's past is cleverly managed. And the play can still hold an audience, just as *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* can. But it is too much 'theatre' to be great drama. The author is clearly playing for stage effect, and consequently the characters seem to be playing for it too.

If stage-carpentry was a fault with Pinero, it was an obsession with Henry Arthur Jones. His twentieth-century plays, even more than those of Pinero, show a clinging to the late Victorian dramatic tradition. *Mrs Dane's Defence* (1900), for instance, was built up entirely around a theatrically effective trial scene in which Mrs Dane's morale was broken down by the eminent

lawyer Sir Daniel Carteret. The drama was evolved with consummate technical ability, but the great climax of the cross-examination scene was artificially contrived. The melodramatic school in which Jones had won his early triumph of *The Silver King* had left its mark on his style, and this is equally apparent in later plays, such as *The Lie* (1914).

Jones, indeed, like Pinero, was a static, not a progressive force in the twentieth-century theatre, and nothing that either of them wrote in the period we are reviewing calls for extended mention. Their plays have little even of the literary merit of some of the 'old-fashioned' dramatists whose work we noted in dealing with poetic drama. They were supremely competent craftsmen of the theatre, but none of their ideas strikes deep and none of their dialogue reaches the level of really tragic or powerfully emotional tension. They were effective after-dinner playwrights, serious enough in their profession, but not ideologists of the Shavian stamp.

E. C. St John Hankin (1869-1909) was much closer to Shaw than either Jones or Pinero. But his dramas are shot through with a cynical pessimism quite alien to the spirit of Shaw, and they make even the heaviest Ibsen play seem comparatively good-humoured. His was certainly a great talent, but perhaps no other English playwright has shown such a complete lack of faith in human nature. And since human nature must always be the main fount of sustenance for drama, it follows that the constant stressing of man's unpleasantness will produce a repellent type of play. Hankin's work is inspired, like Shaw's, by a reaction against the sentimentalism of the nineteenth-century stage. But Hankin has none of Shaw's constructive genius: his attacks crumble their targets, but they build up nothing in their place.

In *The Two Mr Wetherbys* (1903) there is an almost Gilbertian

¹ The following is a list of Jones's plays subsequent to 1900: *The 'Lackey's Carnival* (1900), *Mrs Dane's Defence* (1900), *The Princess's Nose* (1902), *Chance the Idol* (1902), *Whitewashing Julia* (1903), *Joseph Entangled* (1904), *The Chevalier* (1904), *The Heroic Stubbs* (1906), *The Hypocrites* (1906), *The Goal* (1907), *The Evangelist* (1907), *Dolly Reforming Herself* (1908), *The Knife* (1909), *We Can't be as Baa' as All That* (1910), *Fall in. Rookies* (1910), *The Ogre* (1911), *Lydia Gilmore* (1912), *The Dii'ine Gift* (1913), *Mary goes First* (1913), *The Lie* (1914), *Cock o' the Walk* (1915), *The Pacifists* (1917).

cynicism in the denouement. James Wetherby is the forgiving, accommodating type of husband, mated with an uncongenial companion. His principles prevent him from breaking away from her, and he is more or less resigned to his fate. (There is a touch of Colman's *The Jealous Wife* about this part of the plot.) Richard Wetherby, on the other hand, radiant with self-satisfaction, has separated from his wife owing to a similar incompatibility. James is at length induced by Richard to stand up to his wife, but she is horrified when he reveals his true nature and proposes to leave him. Richard's wife, however, has begun to sue for a resumption of their partnership. In the end James and his wife are reconciled, but Richard refuses to resume his married yoke. Thus, where James seeks to return to his wife, Richard's wife wants to return to her husband.

The Return of the Prodigal (1905) is the acme of cynicism. Eustace Jackson has wasted £1000 of his family's money, and calmly informs his outraged father and elder brother that he has no intention of reforming. He points out that if they cast him off their own reputations and careers will suffer, since he will then be reduced to the rank of a pauper. Finally they are obliged to submit to his proposals, and he is made an allowance of £250 a year. Thus the Prodigal Son theme is given a cynical twist, and the conventional ending of nineteenth-century melodrama is turned upside down.

The Charity that began at Home (1906) is another bitter comedy satirizing indiscriminate charity. On the one hand are the sentimental, charitable Lady Denison and Margery. On the other there are the selfish Verreker and Mrs Eversleigh. Throughout the play the conventional soup-kitchen type of charity is subjected to withering sarcasm of the Shavian type, but unfortunately without the remedial constructiveness which always accompanied Mr Shaw's most vitriolic assaults on society.

Perhaps the most famous of Hankin's plays was *The Cassilis Engagement* (1907). Here there is a veritable panorama of unpleasantness; nobody has any redeeming qualities at all. Mrs Cassilis is determined to open her son's eyes to his folly in selecting the scheming Ethel Borridge for his wife. To this

end she deliberately heaps hospitality on Ethel and her mother, hoping thereby to let her son have a taste at close quarters of what he is proposing to live with. Her plan succeeds, but in a surprising way, since it is Ethel who breaks off the match, unable to endure the tedium of country life in the Cassilis home. Here indeed is an abyss of petty intrigue, a society whose rottenness reminds us of the world of Somerset Maugham's *Our Betters*.

In *The Last of the De Mullins* (1908) things are little better, though there is a faint ray of redemption gleaming in the character of Janet. It is yet another version of the old-versus-young theme, the De Mullin family tradition pitted against the New Woman in the person of Janet. This independent young lady had broken away from the De Mullin stronghold, and had chosen to earn her own living in a manner shocking to the family pride. For once Hankin created in Janet a character whom he did not despise. Janet glories in her fight against the effete forces of tradition, and finds in her motherhood more than compensation for the bitterness of her struggle.

There is no doubt that Hankin possessed great dramatic gifts. But his genius was marred by too much insistence on cynical themes, and his characters are twisted, as in a distorting mirror, into ugly shapes and monstrous attitudes. Society, especially of the rich, leisured, match-making, fox-hunting type has no special claims to virtue; but it is only a small section of the real world, and even in that small section goodness cannot be quite as rare a bird as Hankin seems to imply. The plays of Hankin, in fact, are an outstanding example of what the thesis-drama can lead to in unsympathetic hands. There is no point in destructive criticism of society unless a remedy is suggested. Shaw and others pointed out a path through the Sargasso Sea of social iniquity. Hankin did not.

A recent drama which in some ways recalls the methods of Granville-Barker and Hankin is Terence Rattigan's *The Winslow Boy*, which received the Ellen Terry Award as the best play of 1946. Here the theme, based on a famous legal struggle of over thirty years before, is the accumulation of trouble which can result from a small initial mistake. A young naval cadet at Osborne is expelled for supposedly stealing a postal-order,

whereupon his father throws all his energies into the battle to establish his son's innocence. In this relentless pursuit the happiness of the entire family is jeopardized; the elder son's Oxford career is spoilt, and the father himself almost reduced to penury. Through the determined efforts of a brilliant advocate the boy's character is finally vindicated and the Winslow name cleared, but not before the whole matter has become a House of Commons affair. This apparently unpromising theme is made the vehicle of a powerful play with good characterization; a particularly effective scene is that in which the boy declares his innocence of the theft which affects his whole family's life.

(iii) *Repertory Theatres and Amateur Groups*

The drama of ideas has been intimately connected with the growth of the repertory movement, for many of the best-known English thesis-dramas were originally produced in small experimental playhouses outside the commercial West End ring.¹ In London the Independent Theatre of J. T. Grein and the seasons at the Court under the Vedrenne-Barker management led the way. Later ventures were the Embassy Theatre at Swiss Cottage, from which many serious plays of ideas have been launched, and the Q Theatre, Kew Bridge, Brentford, where for many years new plays have been given a trial run. The Mercury Theatre at Notting Hill, originally opened as a home for ballet, afterwards developed a policy of verse-drama experiments, and its outstanding successes have included T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* and Ronald Duncan's *This Way to the Tomb*.

Open-air repertory was inaugurated at Regent's Park by Sydney Carroll in 1933. Concentration was on Shakespeare,

¹ Norman Marshall's *The Other Theatre* (Lehmann, 1947) is a most valuable survey of the activities of the non-commercial groups and playhouses in England during the last twenty-five years. Mr Marshall, himself a distinguished producer of pioneer work, writes with knowledge and discrimination of such ventures as the Stage Society, the Phoenix Society, the Three Hundred Club, the Oxford Playhouse, the Gate Theatre, the Cambridge Festival Theatre, the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, and the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. All of these were begun by bands of dramatic enthusiasts eager for experiment and prepared to pit themselves against the forces of the commercial stage.

but plays of other dramatists, including Milton's *Comus* and .Bridie's *Tobias and the Angel*, proved equally successful. The Old Vic, the most famous of all London's repertory theatres, was also primarily a home of Shakespeare, and under the management of Lilian Baylis the remarkable feat of producing every play in the Shakespearean canon was accomplished. A repertory of opera and ballet was established at Sadler's Wells in 1931, and from the nucleus of that theatre's company the Sadler's Wells Ballet grew into such a major artistic triumph that it ultimately transferred to Covent Garden, leaving a secondary company in its former home.

In Ireland the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, was inaugurated in 1904, and this distinguished playhouse, the outcome of the Irish Literary Theatre directed by Yeats, Martyn, and others, was to prove itself one of the main props of the repertory movement. It owed much to the generosity of Miss Horniman, as did the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, at which the Manchester School of dramatists were encouraged to bring Northern English life on to the stage in vigorous dialect dramas.

Liverpool also inaugurated a notable repertory theatre when, in 1911, Basil Dean and Alec Rea joined forces at the Playhouse. From 1923 the theatre was under the direction of William Armstrong, who staged many interesting and thoughtful productions, including a generous selection of original one-act dramas.

The Cambridge Festival Theatre (1926-33) has already been separately noted (see Chapter I), but although it was chosen for special mention in this work, it was not by any means alone in making of itself an artistic centre of drama for a whole district. The Maddermarket Theatre at Norwich, under the direction of Nugent Monck, and the Hull Repertory Theatre were other notable homes of the drama in the provinces. The Northampton Repertory Theatre, originating in 1927, has also to date a solid record of over twenty years' serious dramatic work behind it. At a theatre such as Northampton, where a new play every week is necessary, the work involved for the stage personnel is enormous, and it is to this theatre's credit that a particularly high standard of staging and decor,

under Osborne Robinson, has been maintained throughout the company's history.

Perhaps the most famous of all British repertory theatres has been that at Birmingham. Originating in 1907 in the Edgbaston Assembly Rooms as the Pilgrim Players, it later moved into a permanent home in Station Street, Birmingham, in 1913. This building was a pioneer in the movement for new ideas in theatre construction, and, though very small, it proved itself equal to Sir Barry Jackson's ambitious programme of serious and experimental drama. Shakespeare and Ibsen alternated with Shaw, Galsworthy, and Hankin, while the historical dramas of Drinkwater, such as *Abraham Lincol'n*, works of Mozart, such as *Così fan tutte*, and modern operas like Rutland Boughton's *The Immortal Hour* gave added variety to the repertoire. One of the outstanding events was the production of the complete cycle of Shaw's *Back to Methuselah* in 1923. Taken as a whole, over a period of some thirty years, the record of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre is perhaps the most impressive chapter in the history of British repertory.

An interesting offshoot of the Birmingham company's activities was the Malvern Festival, where the plays of Shaw received a summer-time apotheosis comparable with the festivals of Bayreuth and Salzburg. At Stratford-on-Avon the Memorial Theatre did valiant work for Shakespeare in the old Unsworth building until 1926, and later in the fine modern theatre which arose after the former playhouse was destroyed by fire.

All the theatres and groups so far mentioned were professional organizations from the start, though at Birmingham the Repertory Company had its nucleus in a band of non-professionals, the Pilgrim Players. But it should not be forgotten that England has been, throughout the present century, most liberally sprinkled with amateur societies, private theatres, and play groups whose productions are often quite as interesting as those of the professional companies. In fact, in most English towns to-day there are to be found good amateurs who intelligently produce the drama of ideas as well as more ordinary work, while, of course, the amateur operatic society has for long been an established feature of English provincial and suburban life.

The growth of the one-act play, so notable in the period we are considering, has owed much to these very numerous private groups, while many experiments in staging, lighting, and expressionistic drama have sprung from non-professional organizations. The amateur movement, indeed, is one of the most outstanding characteristics of the twentieth-century stage, and deserves a far more extended treatment than it is possible to give here.

Obviously England has become a hive of drama in the last fifty years. At the end of the seventeenth century there were only two or three playhouses in the whole country, and even at the end of the nineteenth there was only a ring of professional provincial play centres sedulously aping the successes of London. Since 1900, however, the amateur and semi-amateur group has developed and multiplied from Cornwall to Aberdeen, from Yarmouth to Swansea, from Canterbury to Wigan. A national organization for amateur activities is the British Drama League, with headquarters in London, and much important work has also been done in the fostering of provincial drama by the Arts Council. Almost every chocolate works and boot factory now has its amateur dramatic society; it is a similar regular feature in schools and colleges. The Church, openly associating itself in our own time with what it thundered against in the Victorian age, has, in innumerable parishes, its own play groups, producing not merely religious drama, but often enough West End comedy. The drama has indeed had its revenge on the Church since the early days of the nineteenth century, for it is recorded that in 1828, when the Brunswick Theatre caught fire, a sermon against theatres in general was actually preached in the smouldering ruins before all the sufferers had been removed.

(iv) *Experimental Dramas of Ideas: American and European Expressionism—English Experiments*

Despite the interest of many of the plays considered in this chapter, they make, on the whole, a less impressive show than the work of the Continental experimenters during the same period. The West End theatre, although it has given a hearing

to the plays of Shaw and other thesis-dramatists, has paid little attention to the new ideas of French and German playwrights, such as Lenormand and Sudermann, who were the heirs of Antoine's Theatre Libre and of the Freie Bühne. Tentative experiments have been made with radio drama, such as Tyrone Guthrie's *The Flowers are not for you to Pick* and poetic plays like those of Louis MacNeice and Christopher Hassall, but until the inauguration of the Third Programme in 1946 little real progress was made in this direction.

However, the European revolution in stagecraft which was described in Chapter I has had at least isolated repercussions on the London theatre, and a number of interesting works from abroad have reached England in translation. Such were the Capek play *R.U.R.* (1923), a powerful indictment of modern robot-mechanism somewhat in the manner of Butler's *Ere-vrhon*, and some German expressionist plays like Kaiser's *Gas* (1923). A few of the more advanced repertory theatres, such as the Cambridge Festival, have experimented with the psychological dramas of H. R. Lenormand, whose penetrating studies of the subconscious, *Le Mangeur de Reves* and *Ulrhomme et ses Fantomes*, are among the most original of modern dramas. The first of these (translated as *The Eater of Dreams*) deals with a young woman who places herself in the hands of a psychologist, and he, the eater of dreams, tracks her mental trouble to its lair in the events of her early childhood. (A very effective film, *The Seventh Veil*, had a similar theme, which proved itself admirably fitted to the technique of the cinema.)

Other Continental dramas which have been produced in England during this period are the Capeks' *Insect Play* ("And So On *ad infinitum*") and *The Makropoulos Secret*, which has a theme somewhat similar to that of Shaw's *Back to Methuselah*, the possibility of extending human life beyond its present limits. The German expressionists Kaiser and Toller have been represented in England by plays like *From Morn to Midnight*, *Gas*, and *Masses and Men*. The first of these shows, in impressionistic fashion, the impossibility of escape from the drudgery of civilized life for its protagonist, a city clerk, who is finally driven to suicide. In *Gas* the climax of the great gas explosion, instead of opening up to the miserable gas-workers

the chance of a new horizon as cultivators of the land, merely increases their gloom and sense of overwhelming disaster. *Masses and Men* shows a similar mass-frustration in the failure of a workers' rebellion against industrial tyranny.

Of other outstanding European dramatists, J. P. Sartre has recently (1948) been represented in London by *Crime Passionnel*, which was successfully transferred to the West End after a preliminary run at the Lyric, Hammersmith, the home of so many interesting plays with an experimental flavour.

Beside the plays already mentioned, the work of a few Italian, Belgian, and Spanish dramatists has had a hearing, and something of an influence, on the English stage. Luigi Pirandello broke from historical conventions in his *Henry IV*, and produced a much-discussed experimental drama in *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921). The Belgian dramatist Maeterlinck's fine play *The Burgomaster of Stilemonde* has been translated into English, and there have been effective dramas from Spain, such as Martinez Sierra's *The Cradle Song* and *The Romantic Young Lady*, together with the Quinteros' *The Lady from Alfaceque*. Oriental dramatic feasts were provided by the very successful Chinese play *Lady Precious Stream* and the beautiful and moving *Circle of Chalk*.

A French playwright whose dramas have been much admired in England is Jean-Jacques Bernard (1888-). A good example of his work is *Martine* (1922), a play with a delicate pathos curiously suggestive of the tunes of Debussy, such as "La fille aux cheveux de lin." It is a charming French idyll, an impressionist water-colour taking life on the stage and telling a simple story of a peasant girl who remains at heart truer to a Parisian journalist, although he afterwards marries a more cultured woman. The peasant girl meanwhile marries a countryman and settles down with him in apparent content, but the past refuses to be buried, both for her and her former lover. The play has a clear-cut and tidy construction (almost as well managed in its way as Somerset Maugham's *The Circle*), the tale of the two pairs of lovers revolving neatly around an old woman, the journalist's grandmother, who senses the tragedy of Martine and attempts without success to soften its pain. The play requires the most careful handling in production,

otherwise its overtones will be missed. Bernard's subtle impressionism does not lend itself easily to the atmosphere of the English stage, but under imaginative and sensitive direction, such as his work received at the Gate Theatre, it has an indefinable yet clearly French emotional charm.

We can take no account here of the enormous mass of American experimental plays of the present century, since this is a history of specifically English drama. But the works of Eugene O'Neill, Elmer Rice, and one or two others must at least be mentioned, since they have very frequently been performed in this country.

O'Neill's work is widely known in England. Perhaps his finest play is *The Emperor Jones* (1928), a brilliant essay in experimental technique which reaches a powerful climax in the episode of the Negro, despoiled of his kingly trappings, rushing in panic through a forest full of devils aroused by his own overwrought brain. But *Marco Millions* (1938), a fine piece of economic satire, runs it very close. Through Venice, Persia, and Tartary Marco Polo reaches the Court of Kubla Khan, and this final scene is a superb piece of dramatic writing. Astonishing effects were secured in *Strange Interlude* (1931) by the device of contrasting the thoughts of the characters with their actual utterances, and in *Desire under the Elms* (1931) by the simultaneous presentation of four streams of action in four rooms of a house. *The Hairy Ape* (1922), which also made a fine film, was a powerful delineation of the psychology of a stoker, and the great drama *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1937) had an overwhelming effect in its parallel with the spirit of Greek tragedy.

Elmer Rice's effective satire on mass-mechanism, *The Adding Machine* (1924), has also been much admired in English productions. The last scene, in which an unconventional characterization of the Devil exults in the progressive deterioration of mankind, is one of the high lights of American expressionism.

Maxwell Anderson is another American dramatist whose plays, such as *Winterset*, have attracted attention here, as have the comedies of George Kaufman, including the bustling and very diverting piece *Once in a "Lifetime"*.

Edna St Vincent Millay's smoothly flowing poetic drama *The Lamp and the Bell*, although rather too much in the manner of Swinburne and Stephen Phillips for modern taste, has been performed in this country with success. And Marc Connelly's study of Negro characters, *Green Pastures*, together with Susan Glaspell's domestic dramas, *Alison's House* and *Trifles*, have added to the very considerable debt the English stage has owed to America during the present century.

Of the British experimenters themselves perhaps Sean O'Casey (1884-) is the most brilliant, and his work more than preserves the great tradition of drama established by the Irish theatre at the end of the Victorian age. After *Juno and the Paycock* (1925) and *The Plough and the Stars* (1926), a powerful play dealing with the Irish Revolution of 1916, ensued the wonderfully moving war drama *The Silver Tassie* (1929), *Within the Gates* (1934), and *Red Roses for Me* (1946). *The Silver Tassie* was a brilliant blend of realism and expressionism, in which the soldiers were used with fine tragic effect as a Chorus, much in the manner of Greek drama. The play was a far finer comment on war than the much acclaimed *Journey's End* (1928), by R. C. Sherriff, which none the less made a powerful impression in the theatre when it was well acted. *Within the Gates* showed strongly the influence of expressionistic methods. This dramatic stream—it is scarcely a drama in the ordinary sense—takes for its material the endless flow of human merchandise through Hyde Park gates. It is an extraordinary work in every way, attracting a good deal of criticism on its production at the Royalty Theatre in London in 1934. It revolves around three main characters—a Bishop, a Dreamer, and a Prostitute. But they are mere boats on the great sea of striving, frustration, agony, crime, lust, hope, and fear which O'Casey sees Hyde Park to be. It is indeed a microcosm of modern civilization that he presents in this dramatic panorama, and, though it may be doubted whether the cinema rather than the stage is not the place for such a shifting whirlpool, there can be no doubt at all of the poetic power of the work, which is in the true line of descent from the great names of Irish drama—Yeats and Synge. There are four scenes: "On a Spring Morning," "On a Summer Noon," "On an Autumn

Evening," "On a Winter Night." Into these are poured the flotsam and jetsam of modern London, including an atheist, a whore, nursemaids, park attendants, and a chorus of down-and-outs. The whole play is a magnificent symbolic synthesis of present-day civilization, irradiated throughout with the vision of a true poet.

There are many other English plays of this period which have at least a tinge of experimental expressionism about them, but only a few of them can be mentioned here. Outstanding examples were Denis Johnston's charming Irish fantasy *The Moon in the Yellow River* (1934) and Aldous Huxley's psychological study of fathers and sons against a background of spiritualism, *The World of Light* (1931). An early semi-experimental play with a religious theme was Jerome K. Jerome's *The Passing of the Third Floor Back* (1908), and another was *Outward Bound* (1923), by Sutton Vane. In this last play the manner in which it is revealed that the liner which is outward bound is peopled by dead men and women on their way to judgment is a masterpiece of theatrical effect. A fine study of adolescence was John Van Druten's *Young Woodley* (1928), and of another psychological problem Mordaunt Shairp's *The Green Bay Tree* (1933) and the translation from the German *Mädchen in Uniform* (1932).

Challenging recent experiments in drama have been the plays of Dr James Bridie, such as *A Sleeping Clergyman* (1933), *The Anatomist* (1931), *Tobias and the Angel* (1932), and *Mr Bo/fry* (1943). *A Sleeping Clergyman* switched itself backward and forward with great skill, backward to 1867, forward to 1885. *The Anatomist* had the gruesome theme of the Resurrectionists, who dug up bodies from their graves for anatomical dissection. In some of Bridie's other plays, such as *Susannah and the Elders* (1937) and *Tobias and the Angel*, a most effective use was made of familiar Biblical themes, while in all of them there is lively writing, *King of Nowhere* (1938), *Babes in the Wood* (1938), and *The Golden Legend of Shutts* (1939) being other representative examples of Bridie's incisive style. The plays of this dramatist have proved extremely popular with the English and Scottish repertory theatres, and from the time of his earlier plays, *The Sunlight Sonata* (1928) and *The Switchback*

(1929), Bridie has built up for himself a large public, both in London and the provinces.

A number of his works are attempts to resuscitate the past. Their technique is often reminiscent of Shaw, presenting, for example, the figures of Biblical or Arthurian antiquity in a modern dress and speaking a closely clipped, idiomatic speech. In many of his dramas Bridie reveals a wide knowledge of the Old Testament, and there is in his style a curious blend of patristic eloquence with twentieth-century colloquialism. *Holy Isle* (1942), *Jonah and the Whale* (1932), *Tobias and the Angel* (1930), *The Dragon and the Dove* (1942), and *The Sign of the Prophet Jonah* (1942) all breathe an atmosphere of primitive religion. And in *Lancelot* (1945) the famous Arthurian figures of Galahad and Elaine, Lancelot and Merlin, are given a new lease of life. They are entirely despoiled of Irvingesque glitter, even revealing an original eugenic twist in Merlin's plans for a perfect human being. A good example of Bridie's method in handling a more modern theme is *Mr Bo/fry* (1943). Here, again, there is a religious atmosphere, the play turning on the conjuring up of the fiend Bealphares, alias Bolfry, by a group of bored young people billeted during the Second World War in a lonely Highland manse. The dialogue is very spirited and the magical incantation scene cleverly written. Throughout the play (which owes something, perhaps, to Chesterton's *Magic*) there is a thread of satire of Calvinistic pedantry in the person of the Scottish minister, McCrimmon. But, for all its good qualities, the drama lacks development. Its characterization is weak, and some of the dialogue has a strained and over-conscious modernism. Moreover, it is a situation rather than a drama: the fiend is merely conjured up, and that is all. It might have made a good one-act play, but in its present full-length form it only arouses expectations which are not fulfilled.

It is impossible to refer in detail to all the interesting plays of ideas which our period has brought forward—for example, C. K. Munro's fine piece of satire *The humour* (1922), in which the shady vested interests behind modern warfare were powerfully exposed. A most fascinating experimental play was G. K. Chesterton's *Magic* (1913), which has delighted for thirty years and more all audiences which can take pleasure in

intelligent drama. Described by its author as a "fantastic comedy," this mystical and very unusual play has a plot which is deceptively simple to outward appearance. A conjurer, performing in a duke's drawing-room, falls foul of a materialistic and Americanized young scoffer, and at length performs a trick which drives his critic into a delirium of bewilderment. He is finally prevailed on to explain the trick and restore the young man to his right reason. Beneath this theme there is a kind of spiritual undercurrent of fairies, elves, and devils who never appear, but who charge the conversation with a curious air of intellectual electricity. The play has a typically Chestertonian streak of wit running through it, but the main influence on it seems to have been the Celtic twilight of Yeats and the Irish School, for it shows a strong sense of the world of spirits hovering behind everyday appearances.

J. B. Priestley (1894-) is interesting as a playwright who, beginning with money-spinning comedies, later turned to more serious work and produced a number of plays impregnated with arresting but often insufficiently developed ideas. Sometimes there is a mere stream of talk, as in *Music at Night* (1938), but without that Shavian brilliance which is a necessity in dramas of this type. Sometimes, as in *They Came to a City* (1943), there is a determined pleading for a better social order, combined with clever and original technical devices. In *Time and the Conways* (1937) and *Johnson over Jordan* (1939) the normal time-sequence is challenged, and in the latter play very effective use made of masks. Priestley's works demonstrate an enormously wide, if somewhat superficial, knowledge of human nature, and as a whole they form an interesting cross-section of contemporary life, rather as did the novels of Trollope. The popularity of Priestley can probably be explained by the fact that he has interpreted the present age very well to itself. His plays are the work of a man who seems to be fundamentally a materialist, but whose materialism is shot through with threads of intellectual and spiritual interest. And this, after all, is no bad reflex of the British character and the British way of life.

It was Ibsen who first showed what a world of emotional life underlay the facades of Norwegian sitting-rooms, and

Priestley's plays have also shown that even the materialistic suburbs of mid-twentieth-century England conceal oceans of mental turmoil, and that in "Burmanley" and many another town there are Professor Lindens fighting a dramatic battle for what they believe to be worth while. In fact, *The Linden Tree* (1947) reminded one of Dr Stockmann and his conflict with public opinion in *An Enemy of the People*, showing a Professor of History in opposition to his university authorities and standing firm on his own convictions.¹

At the time of writing not very much new ground is being broken by English playwrights, and there seems to be a serious shortage of dramatists of the younger generation with both fresh ideas and an ability to write for the theatre. But the plays of Peter Ustinov (1921-) have originality and distinction. *The Banbury Nose* (1944), for instance, was a clever variant on the family-tree type of drama such as *Milestones*. Instead of going forward from one century to the next, the progress of the play was backward from one generation to its antecedent. The audience thus acquired in each act advance information of what the characters' actions would be. Besides *The Banbury Nose*, Mr Ustinov has proved his worth in other plays which show a true knowledge of character and the stage, such as *The Indifferent Shepherd* (1948). He is a dramatist who, given reasonable good fortune and support, may well go far.

¹ Priestley's output of plays is already enormous. The following is a list of some of the better-known pieces: *Dangerous Corner* (1932); *Taburnum Grove* (1933); *Eden End* (1934); *Duet in Floodlight* (1935); *Bees on the Boatdeck* (1936); *When We are Married* (1938); *Music at Night* (1938); *Johnson over Jordan* (1939); *They Came to a City* (1943); *An Inspector Calls* (1945); and, what many consider his best play so far, *The Linden Tree* (1947).

CHAPTER VI

DRAMA OF CHARACTER—COMEDY AND FARCE

DRAMA of character is perhaps less easy to segregate than other types. For it is obvious that all plays above the level of mere pageants have at least some element of characterization; even detective dramas of the Edgar Wallace school cannot concentrate entirely on the plot without an incidental analysis of the psychological motives and interaction of human personalities underlying it. But our purpose in dividing drama into these five categories was to obtain a broadly satisfactory working basis in which predominant elements could be used for grouping plays into their fundamental types. And if we place chronicle plays and crook dramas in the division of narrative, poetic plays in the group of literary drama, etc., then the type of drama based mainly on human character and conduct will be most clearly to be seen in the realm of comedy, which we have still to consider.

English comedy of the twentieth century has been frequently compared with that of the Restoration period, Somerset Maugham being sometimes styled the Congreve and Noel Coward the Farquhar, while Frederick Lonsdale was once even honoured in France with the title of "the English Moliere." Such comparisons may have their value, but they place an altogether false emphasis on the literary quality of modern English comedy, which cannot hold a candle to the late seventeenth century for comedic timbre and the building up of perfectly chiselled comic figures. And it is not only a question of literary grace or brilliantly turned epigram. Since the modern age is, on all showing, proportionately less graceful than that of William and Mary or Queen Anne, comic dramatists might well plead that their clipped, idiomatic style merely reflects modern times, as comedy should. Certainly we do not want another revival of elaborate archaeological comedies like Lytton's *Not so Bad as we Seem* (1851), which merely reproduced with painful fidelity the modes and manners of a former age.



SEMI-PERMANENT SET

Twelfth Night, designed by Osborne Robinson (Northampton Repertory Theatre, 1948).

Photo Eric Ager



LAVISH SPECTACLE AT THE LYCEUM THEATRE

Scene from *The Miracle* (1931).

Photo Sasha

[See p. 37]

But the matter goes much deeper than this. For the whole dramatic architecture of Restoration comedy was directed to the construction of memorable type-characters, each one a concentrated symbol, a quintessence of human frailty deriving from the old doctrine of the 'humours.' It was this power of supercharging each character with the complete psychological history, as it were, of his special type which made the late-seventeenth-century figures so foursquare and, of course, so much larger than life. The supreme example of this is Lady Wishfort in *The Way of the World*, in whose magnificent tirades whole generations of voluble viragos seem to be concentrated, and in whose Toilet Scene are accumulated the stored-up vanities of every battered female still "full of the vigour of fifty-five." And if we look to Moliere for examples there is a whole portrait-gallery of perfectly finished studies for the endless delight of future generations.

Modern English comedy does not make this impression of concentrated characterization. It takes, admittedly, the frailties of human character for its basis in the manner of the great comic writers from Aristophanes to Marivaux, but it somehow fails to universalize or epitomize them. Its ideas are frequently very amusing, its situations resulting from clash of character highly diverting, its plots hilarious, and its lines smoothly slick as the cocktail lounges and London flats in which so much of it takes place. But it is mostly a mere stream of clever talk flowing over the river-bed of an adroitly managed intrigue. The characters, however, run off the memory like water off a duck's back, and one feels too often that the authors have constructed their people around the play, and not the play, around their people. No doubt the major comedies of Shaw are an exception to this, but Shaw is in any case an exception to everything, and his work, already dealt with above, belongs much more to the drama of ideas than to that of character and comedy.

This is not the place to describe the history and development of modern comedy, which requires a volume to itself. But it is of interest to note that the great English comic tradition has been (at least in part) recaptured during the present century, whereas during the age of Victoria it came very near to

complete annihilation. After Colman and Sheridan comedy degenerated rapidly into nineteenth-century farce, and by early Victorian times the mantle of *The Beaux' Stratagem* and *She Stoops to Conquer* had been trailed into the muddy rags of *Did you ever Send your Wife to Camberwell?* (1846) and *How to Settle Accounts with your Laundress* (1847). T. W. Robertson effected the first great reform of comedy in England with plays like *Caste* (1867) and *School* (1869), helping to prepare the path for the later comedy of social problems and discussion, as exemplified in Wilde, Pinero, and Shaw. Meanwhile a high level of comic art was being displayed by W. S. Gilbert (who has been styled with some justice the English Aristophanes), deriving his style as he did from the exquisite burlesques and extravaganzas of J. R. Planche, such as *Theseus and Ariadne* and *The Discreet Princess*. But there has been a long and serious gap in the genuine tradition of the comedy of manners, so much so that comedy of no manners is a more fitting description of the great mass of farcical nonsense produced by the English stage in the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century.

The late Victorian age saw the beginnings of the recovery of the nearly lost tradition, and the present century has seen an even more notable advance, though, as we have suggested, modern comedy cannot yet compare with the great examples of the seventeenth century for either subtlety or solidity of comic characterization.

However this may be, a group of modern writers may at least lay some claim to consideration as followers in the footsteps of the dramatists of the Golden Age of English comedy.

Such are Somerset Maugham, Sir James Barrie, Alfred Sutro, St John Ervine, Noel Coward, and, more recently, Terence Rattigan. And in the realm of light opera A. P. Herbert has attempted to maintain the genre of Gilbert's Savoy operas with a series of delightful musical plays, produced at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, and elsewhere, such as *Tantivy Towers* (1931), *Derby Day* (1932), *Big Ben* (1946), and *Bless the Bride* (1947).

But it was perhaps a curious irony that made one of the finest of all twentieth-century comedies proceed from the pen of Ireland's great tragic dramatist, J. M. Synge, and it was

apparent in 1907 that with the production of *The Playboy of the Western World* a landmark in the modern revival of comedy had been reached. This vigorous and intensely original play was a tonic to the theatre of its time. Abandoning the Mayfair drawing-rooms of Wildean and Pineronian comedy, Synge went for inspiration to the bar parlour of a country public-house in a small village in County Mayo, Ireland. With his richly Irish characters, Margaret Flaherty (Pegeen), Michael Flaherty, Shawn Keogh, Christopher Mahon, and Old Mahon, all speaking the vigorously musical idiom of Ireland, Synge evolved a really humorous story, never allowing it, however, to dominate his characters as so many modern comedy writers do.

The Playboy of the Western World is indeed an exceptional work in every way, and it is perhaps the astonishing command of such humour, as well as of the deep tragedy of *Deirdre* and *Aiders to the Sea*, that has led many critics to see in Synge something of the universal power of Shakespeare, an ability to laugh as well as mourn, and in either mood to display supreme dramatic ability.

The plot of this play is itself rich in comic suggestion. Christy Mahon's coming to the small village where lives Pegeen Flaherty, affianced to the country yokel, Shawn Keogh, throws all the characters into a turmoil. It is supposed that Christy has murdered his father, but he speedily makes, with his airs and graces, conquest of the susceptible Pegeen. But his old father was, after all, far from dead, and his arrival and belabouring of Christy takes all the wind out of his sails. A second attempt on the father arouses the wrath of the village community, but even this does not succeed in disposing of the tough old man, and finally, after an Irish communal row such as no one has ever put on to the stage either before or since, Old Mahon sides with his son, and the two quit the tavern together, leaving Pegeen broken-hearted at the loss of her beautiful playboy.

It is unfortunate that so tremendous a break-away from the conventions of bedroom and drawing-room comedy as *The Playboy of the Western World* did not have more solid and influential results. For it pointed in a completely new direction,

and yet a direction which Shakespeare had known of in writing *Henry IV*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Ireland itself, however, was much* shocked at this frank and irreverent delineation of the Irish character, and the play was violently attacked in the country of its birth and setting, even though it soon established itself in England as a comic masterpiece. But in any case Irish comedy, except for amusing plays by Lady Gregory, such as *Spreading the News* (1904), was soon to be completely overshadowed by the enormous figure of Bernard Shaw, who brought an Irish topsy-turviness to his comedies, but with a studious avoidance of Irish settings or characterization.

And since the time of *The Playboy of the Western World* English comedy has kept itself largely within the confines of sophisticated rooms, only occasionally, as with Eden Phillpotts' *The Farmer's Wife* (1916) or Allan Monkhouse's *The Grand Cham's Diamond* (1918), going outside for dialect or cockney comedies and plays breathing the air of the countryside.

A new vein of fantasy, perhaps owing something to the Irish dramatic school, was worked into the technique of comedy by Sir James M. Barrie (1860-1937). His long theatrical career testified to his great command of the stage, and he has enjoyed enormous popularity with audiences all over the world. His style showed a blend of fantasy with sentiment, and on the whole his plays must be said to lack intellectual fibre. Compared with the work of Shaw they are like *café au lait* after champagne, sweetened to the last tolerable degree by a charm so constantly and thickly sprinkled that, as George Herbert is said to have cultivated saintliness, so Barrie, we feel, consciously cultivated charm.

Perhaps the true Barrie quintessence can best be discerned in three of his earlier plays, all dating from the beginning of this century—*Quality Street* (1902), *The Admirable Crichton* (1903), and *Peter Pan* (1904).

The first of these is an obvious piece of pastiche from Mrs Gaskell's *Cranford*. With its Blue and White Room, pattens, 'followers,' wedding-gowns, quadrille parties, and general atmosphere of beribboned, ladylike gentility, it clearly draws

its inspiration from the world of Miss Matty and Miss Deborah Jenkyns, Miss Pole, and the Honourable Mrs Jamieson. *Quality Street*, however, is far behind *Cranford* in humoristic character-drawing, and the effect it makes is of the sentimentality of an Edwardian household, rather than of the delightful kindly wisdom of the true Cranford homes. None the less the play can be effective enough on the stage if delicately handled, as it usually is, but its faint air of sweet lavender and eggshell china makes it an easy butt for those who like drama to have some masculine strength about it. It is a very popular play with amateurs and small repertory companies, and contains two good female parts in it—the Misses Susan and Phoebe Throssel.

The Admirable Crichton shows another strain of Barrie's fantasy, a Gilbertian fondness for topsy-turvy and the presentation of the dramatis personae in much altered circumstances. Lord Loam's perfect servant, Crichton, is shown as more than equal to his master and members of the aristocratic household when fate casts the whole company in indiscriminate shipwreck on a desert island, Lord Loam's steam yacht, the *Bluebell*, having been lost in a Pacific gale. In these altered circumstances Crichton gradually assumes control over the inept aristocrats, and in the third act he is seen after two years as virtual lord of the island. Not until a ship's gun is heard from the ocean, announcing the long-delayed rescue by an English ship, is the new arrangement of master and servants shattered. In the last act we are back at Lord Loam's house in London. The former relationships have been resumed, and Crichton is again the butler of his pre-island days. There is more than a touch of the philosophy of *The Gondoliers* or *Utopia, Limited* about this play, and once more we are reminded, as with Shaw's works, how far-reaching was the indirect influence of W. S. Gilbert, though a full appraisal of that influence has yet to be written.

Peter Pan, the best-known of all Barrie's plays, has become almost a permanent pantomime in the English theatre at Christmas-time. Here, again, the Gilbertian strain is apparent, for fairies and pirates, flying children and mermaids, are inextricably mingled in an atmosphere strongly redolent of *Iolanthe* and *The Pirates of Pen^ance*. The play, which has

proved itself a constant delight to children for over forty years, has very attractive settings—The Never Land, the Mermaids' Lagoon, the Home under the Ground, the Pirate Ship, and the Tree Tops at the end. Its elf-hero, Peter Pan, was a dramatic creation worthy of Gilbert himself, and the charming Wendy was so much taken to heart by audiences that she even set a fashion in children's names. Throughout the play Barrie's sense of colour and childlike delight in the gossamer of fantasy are epitomized in the character of the boy who never grew up. *Peter Pan* has the appeal of *Cinderella* and *Aladdin*, and is likely to remain a children's classic for ever in the company of *Alice in Wonderland* and the fairy-tales of Hans Andersen.

These three plays show the essential Barrie. In them there is competent theatrecraft, a sentimentalism that is too persistent to be welcome always, even to those who most admire it, a kaleidoscopic fancy, and a fondness for Gilbertian inversions of situation. The fundamental objection to Barrie is that his fantasies do not go far enough to be genuine fantasies. They are not the unabashed and swaggering incredible fictions of Gilbert; they are too often a mere fantasizing of real life, a wayward playing with existence of a kind which modern psychology has taught to be the work of an unsound mind. They are too near to sentimental wish-fulfilment to be acceptable to many modern theatre-goers. It has been urged that their level is that of musical comedy without its honest artificiality.

In *Mary Rose* (1920), for instance, there is a deliberate laying on of a rose-pink fantasy of Celtic fairies and unearthly island-music calling Mary Rose away from her husband, and at last bringing her ghost on to the stage in a curiously spectral finale. However, in *Dear Brutus* (1917) there was perhaps something of a corrective to this habit of rhapsodical fantasy, since the theme is that even a supernatural transference to the life we long for does not alter our nature or make us necessarily capable of more happiness. (*Dear Brutus* was an early example of an irritating modern habit of using clipped quotations and phrases for titles. The cinema has more recently taken up this tasteless custom, two of its worst examples being *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *In Which We Serve*.)

But on the whole the thickly plastered emotions of *Quality*

Street and *Mary Rose* were maintained right to the end, and in Barrie's other plays, such as *Alice Sit-by-the-Fire* (1905), *What Every Woman Knows* (1908), *A Kiss for Cinderella* (1916), and most of the one-act dramas there is the same sentimental admixture. Consequently in tracing in Barrie a connexion with the comic-opera fantasy of Gilbert we must note also something deriving from the same stock as the sentimental operas of Puccini—*Madame Butterfly* and *La Bohème*.¹

Apart from Synge and Barrie, there were many other writers who kept alive the craft of comedy in the earlier years of the twentieth century. Such were Alfred Sutro (1863-1933), whose comedies had a strong satirical twist, notably *The Walls of Jericho* (1904), where the code of morality of an Australian ex-miner was contrasted with the flimsy gaieties of London society, and *The Fascinating Mr Vanderveldt* (1906); also H. H. Davies (1869-1917), who contributed several notable studies of women to the stage, as in *Mrs Gorrings's Necklace* (1903) and *The Mollusc* (1907). There were also the charming comedies of Harold Chapin (1886-1914), such as *The Marriage of Columbine* (1910). During the First World War the English stage was given over almost entirely to inferior farces (apart from spectacle-dramas of the *Chu Chin Chow* type), though there were a few good comedies, such as Harold Brighouse's *Followers* (1915), Lennox Robinson's *The White-headed Boy* (1916), and J. Hartley Manners' *Peg o' My Heart* (1914).

But from about 1920 onward the comedy of manners in England notably revived, aided no doubt by the rich field of satire presented by post-war society, and the plays of Somerset Maugham, Noel Coward, Frederick Lonsdale, A. A. Milne, St John Ervine, C. K. Munro, and others have added a lustre to English comedy such as it has not known for many years.

The most distinguished of these writers is W. Somerset Maugham (1874-). His trenchant and yet exquisitely humorous satire has been displayed in many works, but never to

¹ On Barrie see H. M. Walbrook, *J. M. Barrie and the Theatre* (1922); B. D. Cutler, *Sir James M. Barrie: a Bibliography* (1931); and Walter Eschenhauer, *Sir James Barrie als Dramatiker: ein Beitrag zum englischen Drama des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts* (Halle, 1929). The definitive edition of the plays of Barrie was edited by A. H. Wilson in 1942.

greater advantage than in *Our Betters* (1923; produced in New York, 1917). This fine comedy is the play of Maugham most nearly comparable with the theatre of Wycherley and Congreve: It satirizes in masterly fashion the empty morality of a section of the London aristocracy at the time of the First World War. In the character of Pearl Grayston, one of the most unpleasant women ever introduced to the London stage, Maugham concentrates all his venom. The cold-hearted emotional imbroglio of her relations with her stockbroker admirer is managed with consummate theatrical skill, and the way in which the threatened social fabric is preserved after the degrading climax gives a specially cutting edge to the implications of the title. *Our Betters* may date—it is hoped that it will—but as an exposure of what London society was like at a particular epoch, it must always rank very high as an unpleasant comedy of manners.

But, excellent as this play is, an even more perfect piece of characterization is *The Circle* (1921). The title was again finely chosen, and the smooth, easy flow of the work, with its significant revolution of events, makes it a masterpiece of the comedic craft. It owes not a little to the manner of Wilde, and is also, like Restoration comedy, a perfectly clear mirror of contemporary society and its emotional entanglements. Arnold Champion-Cheney's mother had left her husband, and has for thirty years been living with Lord Porteous. Arnold's wife, Elizabeth, invites her to the family house, and Lady Kitty, now a rather frivolous and overpainted woman, proves a shock both for Elizabeth and her husband. Meanwhile Elizabeth has herself tired of her egotistic furniture-collecting, politically ambitious husband, and plans an elopement with a guest in the house, a young man who offers her a life abroad in the Malay States. Arnold, under his father's influence, attempts to buy her off with a display of mock devotion and self-sacrifice, but her lover's honesty and straightforward statement of what he offers her win the day, and she too finally leaves her husband, just as his mother had left hers. In the last scene the dramatist shows a true knowledge of the psychology of emotion when he makes Teddie say the one thing which finally clinches Elizabeth's faltering will to go off with him:

TEDDIE. But I wasn't offering you happiness. I don't think my sort of life tends to happiness. I'm jealous. I'm not a very easy man to get on with. I'm often out of temper and irritable. I should be fed to the teeth with you sometimes, and so would you be with me. I dare say we'd fight like cat and dog—[*she turns to face him*] and sometimes we'd hate each other. Often you'd be wretched and bored stiff and lonely, and often you'd be frightfully homesick, and then you'd regret all you'd lost. Stupid women would be rude to you because we'd run away together. And some of them would cut you. I don't offer you peace and quietness. I offer you unrest and anxiety. I don't offer you happiness; I offer you love.

ELIZABETH [*stretching out her arms*]. You hateful creature. I absolutely adore you.

In addition to *Our betters* and *The Circle*, other plays of Somerset Maugham which show his mastery of the craft of comedy are *Smith* (1909), *The Land of Promise* (1914), *Penelope* (1909), *The Constant Wife* (1927), and *The Breadwinner* (1930). In a more serious vein is *The Sacred Flame* (1929; produced in New York, 1928), a powerful play dealing with a mother's determination to end her son's shattered life by administering an overdose of a drug to him when she learns that his wife is about to have a child by another man. The son has become an incurable invalid as a result of a flying accident, and he is watched over with pathological devotion by a professional nurse, whose character is very skilfully drawn by the author. Further fine character studies were produced in the highly effective drama *Rain* (1925), originally in fiction form, but dramatized so as to provide a strong acting opportunity in the role of Sadie Thompson.

Maugham is, without doubt, one of the most competent craftsmen of the modern English theatre, and though it is too much to compare his dialogue seriously with the sapphire and diamond fire of Congreve and Farquhar, as is sometimes done, there can be no doubt that he has mirrored modern society with quite as much precision as did the Restoration dramatists. And, if modern society has not the rich qualities of its seventeenth-century ancestors of the time of Charles II or William

and Mary, and expresses itself in a less exquisite way, then the fault is society's, not Mr Maugham's.

The comedies of Frederick Lonsdale (1881-), who was also responsible for the libretto of *The Maid of the Mountains*, have affinities with those of Maugham, but they have not the same psychological subtlety. Plays like *Spring Cleaning* (1923), *The High Road* (1927), and *On Approval* (1927) have the power to charm audiences into a sense of delight by their easy-flowing lines, amusing situations, and adroit management of theatrical effect, while *The Last of Mrs Cheyney* (1925) was an original kind of crook comedy. Here the plot hinged on the association between Mrs Cheyney and a gentleman gangster in the theft of some precious pearls from a fashionable woman's bedroom, with the ultimate reform of Mrs Cheyney and the disruption of her crook partnership. The situations were cleverly handled, but, as with *The High Road*, where an old theme of a young aristocrat's love for an actress (which had been used by Robertson in *Caste* as long ago as 1867) was refurbished with modernistic devices, there was a sense of the incidents being insufficiently original.

The sentimental comedies of A. A. Milne (1882-) have proved extremely popular with repertory companies and amateurs. *Belinda* (1922), *Mr. Pirn Passes By* (1920), *Sarah Simple* (1937), *The Dover Road* (1922), *To Have the Honour* (1924), *Ariadne* (1925), and the rather more serious *Michael and Mary* (1930) have all won great success, but they cannot be said to be anything more than agreeable trifles. They have no fibre, no central core of dramatic strength, not a tithe of the satire of Maugham nor of the ideas of Shaw. They follow pleasantly in the path of Sir J. M. Barrie, and make little demand on the intelligence of audiences, which probably accounts for their popularity.

Of the many other writers of modern comedy—its financial rewards are such that it has attracted a veritable army of authors, and it would be quite impossible to give them all even the briefest mention here—a word must be said of a few of the more important. St John Ervine, although fundamentally a serious dramatist, produced a competent modern comedy in *The First Mrs Fraser* (1928) and an effective blend of comedy

and seriousness in *Robert's Wife* (1937). Other well-known modern comedies are C. K. Munro's *At Mrs Beam's* (1921); a Brilliant piece of 'regional' comedy, Harold Brighouse's play of Salford, *Hobson's Choice* (1916); J. B. Pagan's Pepys comedy *And So to Bed* (1926); J. H. Turner's *The Lilies of the Field* (1923); R. C. Megrue and Walter Hackett's *It Pays to Advertise* (1924); Walter Hackett's romantic *Ambrose Applejohn's Adventure* (1921); and, more recently, the comedies of Terence Rattigan, such as the very successful *French without Tears* (1936), Merton Hodge's *The Wind and the Rain* (1933), which had a run of a thousand performances, and Gerald Savory's amusing farce *George and Margaret* (1937), in which the characters of the title never appear.

In a lighter vein have been the farces associated with the Aldwych and other theatres, which have proved themselves the most financially successful of all types of play (and the most worthless from the point of view of dramatic history). Such were *Tons of Money* (1922), *Thark* (1927), *Plunder* (1928), *Rookery Nook* (1926), and *Banana Ridge* (1938). These and other "screaming farces," whose technique and intellectual level show little change from those of the days of *A Little Bit of Fluff* or *Up in Mabel's Room*, have attracted hundreds of thousands of theatre-goers, paying hundreds of thousands of pounds into the exchequer of the managements astute enough to control such certain paths to fortune. Farce, of course, has altered little in essentials since the nineteenth century, and in some recent examples, such as *Is your Honeymoon Really Necessary?* (1944), the very titles seem a throwback to such Victorian pieces as *Did you ever send your Wife to Camberwell?*

Finally, and in a class by itself, there remains to be considered the work of Noel Coward (1899-). That he belongs, at least as far as success goes, to the top rank of modern English comic writers cannot be denied. But perhaps never in theatrical history have such fame and wealth come to a man for such flimsy achievement.

A superbly accomplished gift for dramatizing the modern age and making it imagine that its insipid conversations are, in Gilbert's phrase, "coruscations of impromptu epigram," a mastery of every trick of the trade, so that his comedies and

musical plays are more like the exhibitions of a juggler than true dramatic creations, an unerring reflection of the moods and manners of the age, without, however, even a glimmering of an idea which might lead to social progress, a technique of quick-fire, staccato delivery, whose very rapidity veils the matchboard thinness of the underlying thought, an ability to exploit the conversational rhythms of modern music in a series of slick but banal musical plays, whose long run of commercial success has only recently broken down with the virtual failure of *Pacific 1860* (1946), these and many other indefinable qualities characterize the work of Mr Coward.

The reply to criticism of his plays is that society has itself during the last twenty-five years been flimsy and unsubstantial, and therefore, in reflecting it, Mr Coward and his like are only holding the mirror up to nature. But there are deeper implications to the matter than this, for surely the function of the theatre is, as Yeats said, to liberate the mind and not elevate the frailties of social life into a standard of conduct which audiences will seek to copy because they see it presented on the stage and think it smart.

Since the early 1920's Coward has poured out a flood of these slick, streamlined comedies, such as *The Vortex* (1924), *The Young Idea* (1923), *Easy Virtue* (1926), *Fallen Angels* (1925), *The Queen was in the Parlour* (1926), *The Marquise* (1927), and *Blithe Spirit* (1941), a thin farce with an absurd ghost theme which monopolized the stage of a London theatre for over five years at a time when good plays were unable to get a hearing. There has also been a succession of musical plays, such as *Bitter Sweet* (1929), *Operette* (1938), *Cavalcade* (1931), and the incredibly stupid *Pacific 1860*, with which the series has for the present come to an inglorious conclusion.

Coward's work, however, has amused millions of people, both in America and in England, and it would be idle to pretend that it has not been entertaining when it has proved so fantastically successful.

CHAPTER VII

NARRATIVE DRAMA—MELODRAMA

NEXT among our five elemental divisions of drama comes the type which tells a story, the drama of narrative, and this kind of play falls naturally into two main groups. There is the fictitious story (melodrama) and the true story (historical drama), and occasionally a blend of the two into 'truth-plus-fiction' (historical melodrama). There is even a further subdivision into 'more-truth-than-fiction' and 'more-fiction-than-truth.' However, to avoid too much of Hamlet's categorizing, we may confine our attention here to (a) melodrama and (b) historical drama. Under the first heading will come the modern heirs of Seneca, Tourneur, and *The Castle Spectre*, and under the second the successors of *Richard III*, *Louis XI*, and the adaptations from Sir Walter Scott.

Melodrama is an interesting dramatic form, and its historical emergence from the disintegration of formal tragedy in the eighteenth century has been all too little studied. In its æsthetic can be traced the breaking of the old literary bonds, symbols of revolt, and the dawn of theatrical realism in the age which preceded the French Revolution. The growth of melodrama coincided with the growth of technical stage improvements, and English melodrama, though deriving from the French form, soon outpaced it.¹ The craving for stage sensation and horror is, no doubt, elemental, and our dramatic literature is strewn with it from the earliest times. *Hamlet* itself has owed not a little of its long popularity with all classes of audience to its atmosphere of ghosts, daggers, poison, graveyards, and corpse-littered finale. Much the same is true of *Macbeth* and *Richard III*. Again, from the time of *The*

¹ The rise of French melodrama was due to various causes, including the decadence of tragedy, the influence of La Chaussee, Mercier, the *pantomime dialoguée*, Rousseau, and the impact from the German theatre of Schiller and Kotzebue, together with the effects of theories like those of Diderot on the *drame bourgeois* of Sédaine and Beaumarchais. (Other German influences on melodrama were the works of Adolph Mullner and Ernst von Houwald, the *Schauerstück*, and the plays of Bibra, Smets, and Schrockinger.)

Revenger's Tragedy to that of *Frankenstein* or *The Woman in White*, there was a clear strain of the horrifying running through our literature.

But the segregation of the actual type was a comparatively late process, and the term melodrama was not in use until the time of Rousseau, who coined it. This segregation was assisted in England by the divorce between major and minor theatres towards the end of the eighteenth century, and by the growing influence of the Gothic Revival as exemplified by Monk Lewis and Mrs Radcliffe.

Melodrama, as the nineteenth century came to understand it, had its own clearly defined structure, the characters being always subordinated to the plot. The essential dramatis personæ were four in number—a tyrant or traitor, a virtuous female, an honest man, a comedian. Lakes and castles were the normal scenes of action, *allegro agitato* accompaniments in the orchestra the aural background. Occasionally, though not very often, it developed a political significance, as is obvious from the calculated Jingoism of the early-nineteenth-century nautical melodrama.

Now it is a curious fact in dramatic history that the modern playgoing world, which has poured such scorn on Victorian melodrama and its style of acting, should yet have been so ready to welcome its twentieth-century successor, the crook and detective play. Melodrama, however ridiculous its railway crashes and snowstorms, had a definite ethic of its own, a real code of right and wrong, whereas the modern crook drama trades on the most appalling of all human interests, a frank and unabashed delight in crime. The stage, no doubt, in ministering to this craze, is only doing within its own limits what the detective novel and the gangster film have been doing for a quarter of a century in theirs. But never before the present age was there such an appetite for horrors by all sections of the community. Bishops and distinguished clergymen, university dons, high Government officials, M.P.'s and men famous in literature and the arts, all confess the fascination of the detective novel and the detective drama. It is clear that to a world which finds so much diversion in the solving of crossword puzzles there is something magnetic in the modern

criminal problem drama which rings the changes on a familiar pattern of murder and elimination of suspects.

The literary ancestry of modern detective drama is, on the whole, plain enough to trace, but there are one or two missing links in the chain. It is, as we have seen, undoubtedly the heir of Victorian melodrama in many ways, but at what point the ethics of melodrama collapsed into the modern Barmecide Banquet of criminal investigation it is impossible to define. Detective novels and stories with a mysterious criminal background which was slowly unravelled had, no doubt, been popular enough in the middle and late nineteenth century. Outstanding examples were Edgar Allan Poe's *The Purloined Letter* and *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, with, later, the novels of Wilkie Collins and works like *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. But they are written as short stories or novels, not as plays. And it was perhaps not until the time of Erckmann-Chatrian's *Le Juif Polonais* (adapted in English as *The Bells*, and performed, with Irving as Mathias, in 1871) that the stage had begun to appropriate to itself the specific technique of detective fiction.

From that time onward the crook-detective play began to oust the straightforward thrills of snowstorm melodrama, and by the opening of the present century the genre was more or less ready to enter into its vast kingdom.

A later reinforcement was the French Grand Guignol, which visited London in 1908, including in their repertoire the gruesome *Les Trois Messieurs du Havre*, which may have given Lord Dunsany a hint for the theme of *A Night at an Inn*. Meanwhile Hornung's *Baffles* had already been seen at the Comedy Theatre in 1906 with Gerald Du Maurier in the title part, and *Trilby* as far back as 1895. But with the exception of a few outstanding detective dramas, such as *The Thirteenth Chair* (1917), *Bulldog Drummond* (1921) and others, it was not until the advent of the crook plays of Edgar Wallace (1875-1932) that English detective drama really came into its own.

These extraordinary plays had an almost Chinese perfection of detail, a narrative skill which made all their melodramatic predecessors seem amateur and crude. Distinguished critics like Mr Desmond MacCarthy confessed to an admiration of

their technical brilliance.¹ Their knowledge of police methods, of criminal psychology, of dramatic means of arousing and maintaining suspense, of juggling from scene to scene with suspects until the audience was completely befogged as to the real criminal, placed Edgar Wallace at once in the front rank of the horrific school. His apprenticeship as a crime reporter and his incredible facility as a detective novelist were valuable assets to his dramatic career. In a sense he was the twentieth-century descendant of Mrs Radcliffe, whose *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian* had terrified so pleasingly the young ladies of Jane Austen's generation.

But it was not only the Catherine Morlands and Miss Andrewses of the 1920*8 who were fascinated by *The Ringer* and its successors. A wave of enthusiasm for dramas of the Edgar Wallace type swept over the whole London theatre, and cannot even yet be said to have spent its force. Dramatists searched, and still search, in the recesses of their brains for "the perfect crime" with as much devotion as if it were a sacred spiritual quest. Audiences in their thousands were and are drawn to see the most appalling crime sequence that has ever occupied the English stage. Murder most foul became the pivot, the leitmotiv, the alpha and omega, of these 'thrillers,' whose main aim was first to batter at the most elementary feelings with a well-planned murder, then to mystify the brain with a long thread of conflicting criminal evidence, and finally to unravel the skein with a rapid denouement based on clever shock tactics.

There is no space here to speak of the innumerable crook plays with which the London stage has been flooded since the time of Edgar Wallace. All have been, perforce, ingenious, and a few have shown real originality. One of the cleverest ideas was that contained in *The Ghost Train*, which actually antedated Wallace's years of vogue, being produced in 1925. Here a party of railway passengers were shown stranded for the night in the waiting-room of a lonely Cornish station. The

¹ Vide Mr MacCarthy's *Drama* (Putnam, 1940), pp. 311-312. The best-known plays of Edgar Wallace, and those which represent the quintessence of his dramatic methods, were *The Ringer* (1926), *The Terror* (1927), *The Squeaker* (1928), *The Flying Squad* (1928), *On the Spot* (1930), *Smoky Cell* (1930), and his masterpiece, *The Case of the Frightened Lady* (1931).



REALISTIC STAGING OF THE 1914 ERA

A scene from *Peg o' My Heart*.

Photo "Play Pictorial"



J. M. SYNGE'S "THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD"
AT THE MERCURY THEATRE

Photo Lionel Fitzgerald
[See p. 163]



PSYCHOLOGICAL MELODRAMA
Aldous Huxley's *The Gioconda Smile* (1948).

Photo Houston Rogers

action hinged on a deliberately contrived criminal hoax in which the station was represented to be haunted by a spectral train. The suspense was cleverly worked up, and the originally eerie atmosphere well maintained until the final revelation.

The detective plays of Dorothy L. Sayers and Agatha Christie (who has been styled "the Queen of Crime" by some of her more devoted admirers) have shown considerable skill in this very profitable form of play writing. One of Mrs Christie's later melodramas, *Ten Little Niggers* (1943), was a perfect example of the elimination of suspects technique, the method being to reduce the suspects to the inevitable one, whose final confession brings down the curtain. A new form of sensationalism found expression in Joan Temple's lurid drama *No Room at the Inn* (1945), a sordid story of child evacuees billeted in a brothel.

Some modern melodramas have shaped their stories in such a way that they come near to psychopathological tragedy. A notable instance of this was the very powerful *Gaslight* (1939), by Patrick Hamilton. Here the effect of the gas-lamps rising and lowering, with the footfalls of the murderer in the room above, was truly dramatic in its arousing of undefined terror.

One of the most interesting of modern melodramas was Aldous Huxley's like *Gioconda Smile* (1948). It was astonishing to find the subtle and sophisticated author of *Point Counter Point* and *Brave New World* indulging in what was, on the surface, unabashed melodrama, reminiscent of *The Bells* and other Victorian pieces. All the familiar ingredients were present. There was the hero accused of a murder he did not commit, and only saved from the scaffold in the very nick of time by the family doctor, who forced a confession from the real culprit. There was the snaky villaiiiness who poisoned the hero's wife by putting arsenic in her coffee. There was thunder and lightning in the second act and a prison cell with a striking clock in the third. There were hysterical outbursts from the wicked woman and a beautiful show of injured innocence from the suffering young wife. And yet, capably acted as the play was in London, it was gripping and tense. As contrasted with

the author's earlier play *The World of Light*, it proved surprisingly good and exciting 'theatre.' There were, of course, qualities in the writing that raised the whole play to a much higher level than that of its prototypes. In fact, as an essay in deepening and subtilizing the technique of melodrama, *The Gioconda Smile* must rank as an important play. For all its apparent throwback to the school of Edgar Wallace, it really pointed in a new direction and showed that the old bottles of melodrama could contain very stimulating new wine.

Despite the skill of many of these plays, however, it is a relief to turn from their corpse-ridden fictions to the other type of narrative drama—that which is based on historical truth. The chronicle-play of the twentieth century is indeed a surprisingly rich field, and of far greater interest than the slavishly accurate pageants of the Victorian stage under Kean and Irving. And what we may here designate as historical drama includes not only plays definitely based on history, such as Drinkwater's *Abraham Lincoln* and *Mary Stuart*, or Shaw's *Saint Joan* and *Cæsar and Cleopatra*, but also plays with a literary background, such as Rudolf Besier's *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*, Clemence Dane's *Will Shakespeare*, and St John Ervine's *The Lady of Belmont*. Here also belong pleasant costume fictions like J. B. Pagan's Pepys comedy, *And So to Bed*, and Ashley Dukes's *The Man with a Load of Mischief*. And some of the poetic plays already considered in an earlier chapter, such as Hardy's *The Dynasts*, Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, and Williams's *Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury* may also be ranked at least as imaginative historical dramas.

In fact, if we were to group together all the English plays of the last fifty years which attempt in some sort to reconstruct the past we should find that they constituted an impressive part of the total dramatic output. Here, however, we can do no more than note a few of the outstanding pieces.

The poetic historical drama, as has been already observed, virtually died out on the London stage with the plays of Stephen Phillips, and it was not revived until recent years with *Murder in the Cathedral* and other Mercury Theatre productions. But the prose historical drama began to come into its own at

the end of the First World War, when John Drinkwater's *Abraham Lincoln* (1918) achieved great popularity. *Mary Stuart* (1922), *Oliver Cromwell* (1922), and *Robert E. Lee* (1923) were other successes by the same writer, and in all of them there was the application of a poet's idea to history, but expressed in beautiful prose.

Abraham Lincoln, which was virtually a dramatic exhortation, seemed to put the lesson that good might arise even out of the evil of war if the nations could learn from their past mistakes what international quarrelling must always involve. *Mary Stuart* was a fine and original portrayal of Mary's love affairs with Rizzio, Darnley, and Bothwell, the sinister characterization of Darnley being especially effective. Mary is made wonderfully human, and in the hands of a good actress the part acquires something of that universalizing of emotion which was the great secret of Ibsen's success in the theatre. These chronicle-dramas of Drinkwater have been one of the great standbys of the British repertory theatres during the last quarter of a century, and when properly played they never fail of their due effect.

The historical plays of Clifford Bax have also included a dramatization of the story of Mary Stuart, and a very beautiful work, *The Rose without a Thorn* (1932), which has the Court of Henry VIII as its background.

Other twentieth-century dramas dealing with the Kings and Queens of England have included Gordon Daviot's *Richard of Bordeaux* (1932), and yet another play about Mary Stuart, *Queen of Scots* (1934). In 1937 Laurence Housman's very successful *Victoria Regina* was staged. It was really a series of cameos arranged in historical sequence, beginning with the announcement to Victoria of her accession to the throne at Kensington Palace in 1837, and proceeding through her reign up to the time of the Diamond Jubilee in 1897. Norman Ginsbury's *Viceroy Sarah* (1934) was a striking portrayal of the Duchess of Marlborough's ascendancy over Queen Anne, while the same author's *The First Gentleman* (1945) was an excellent picture of social life in the reign of George IV.

Great political figures (besides those dramatized by Drinkwater) have formed the material of other English plays of

recent years, such as *Clive of India* (1934), by W. P. Lipscomb and R. J. Minney. Reginald Berkeley's *The Lady with a Lamp* (1929) was a finely dramatic study of the career of Florence Nightingale.

And akin to these numerous historical plays was a group of dramas based on literary history, of which Rudolf Besier's *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* (1930) is perhaps the best known. Here there are some good opportunities for character-acting, and the story of the courtship of Browning and Elizabeth Barrett is presented against a background of parental tyranny of almost Ibsenian calibre. This play has been very successfully exported, as, for instance, in the Portuguese version, entitled *Miss Ba*, which was highly appreciated in Lisbon in 1944.

Clemence Dane's *Will Shakespeare* (1921), Alfred Sangster's *The Brontës* (1933), and Joan Temple's *Charles and Mary* (1930), dealing with the story of Lamb and his sister, were other dramas with a strong literary flavour. Numerous dramatizations of well-known novels, such as *Jane Eyre*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, have also been produced in London during the last twenty years.

One thing that is somewhat surprising is that plays about King Arthur have been given a rest of late. But Arthurianism is too deeply dyed into the English literary consciousness to be thrown over for very long (see *ante*, p. 81), and no doubt there will soon be another revival. It is, however, even more surprising that so little of the thousand years of British history up to 1066 has been exploited by our dramatists, past and present.

Certainly not very much is known of those dim Anglo-Saxon centuries of Beowulf and the Abbess Hilda, but Gordon Bottomley showed forty years ago how very effective plays based on our remote past could be. And there is always the classic example of *King Lear* to act as a stimulant.

There would seem to be, indeed, a fine dramatic opportunity waiting in early British history for any dramatist capable of bringing to life, for example, the Mission of St Augustine in the way that Eliot brought Becket to life in *Murder in the Cathedral*, or of dramatizing the stirring times of the Danish invasions, of going still farther back to Boadicea, or on to

the time of the Conquest and trying again the theme which Tennyson nearly succeeded with in *Harold*. The very scarcity of reliable historical facts during the pre-Conquest centuries would give the dramatist an attractively free hand for the creatures of his imagination. And the dim simplicity and ruggedness which the staging would involve would be in ideal harmony with modern trends of decor and grouping.

Perhaps this new form of historical drama will come, and we may yet have our dramatic *Hengist and Horsa*, or *King Alfred*.

Christopher Fry's *Thor, with Angels* (first produced at the Canterbury Festival, 1948) points in this direction, for it is set in "A Jutish Farmstead, A.D. 596," and has for theme the triumph of Christianity and the conception of the One God over the pagan deities Woden, Loki, Thor, and their Valhalla. The psychological conflict of the landowner Cymen, whose pagan instincts wrestle with the strangely disturbing new Christian ethic, is powerfully portrayed, and is made symbolic of the final collapse of Valhalla in the minds of men, just as in the last pages of *Götterdämmerung* the wild world of ancient savagery falls in flames before the redeeming splendour of love. It is a memorable play, with an odd, lively humour adumbrating the style of *The Lady's not for Burning*, and with a diction closely packed in texture, showing the influence of Eliot, but individual and curiously crisp.

CONCLUSION

IN surveying modern English drama from all these different angles the main impression which it produces is one of vitality and variety. If it has largely expelled poetry from the place of honour which it once occupied it has atoned for this in many ways. Its prose plays have been rich and exuberant. There have been magnificent stories of endeavour in the pioneer repertory theatres and in the production of many of the sociological dramas which circle like spiral nebulas around the powerful vortex of Bernard Shaw. Moreover, the modern English stage has seen a long and colourful pageant of musical plays and ballet, a valiant struggle to establish English opera against difficult economic odds, some fine Shakespearean productions and poetic drama experiments, and a vast field of activity on the provincial stage, with its playgoers' circles and amateur operatic societies. With such a record it cannot indeed be doubted that the vital traditions of English drama have been maintained in abundance.

And it must always be remembered that this great network of dramatic effort, both professional and amateur, has been virtually self-supporting, for Government subsidies have been niggardly in the extreme when compared with what has been done abroad for the encouragement of the theatre. Our drama has certainly proved itself a tree of many fruits, and a tree toughly rooted in the national soil, vigorous, resilient, brave. Through the period we have been considering here, through two human disasters of the first magnitude, through times of shortage and actual want, political turmoil, stress and tragedy, and in the face of the worst onslaughts which it has ever had to cope with in commercial corruption and competition from the cinema, the English theatre has added a rich chapter to its history since Victoria died. And even if the London stage is now largely in the grip of commercial success this state of affairs may be only a temporary halt in the progress of English drama. After the disruptions 1939-45 it must inevitably take some years for the theatre to adjust itself and to push out fresh tentacles into new seas of thought and accomplishment.

APPENDICES

I. THEATRE BUILDINGS OF 1900

AS was pointed out in Chapter I, modern English drama has been largely housed in old-fashioned theatres built in the Victorian convention. Below are given a number of accounts (mostly from files of *The Era*) which will show in detail the various types of theatre with which our English towns are studded. Most of the playhouses described here were built or reconstructed around 1900, and are thus typical of the art of theatre-building as it was at the beginning of the twentieth century. And, since our drama is likely to be staged in theatres of this type for many years to come, they merit study by all who are interested in the actual conditions under which modern plays are produced.

THEATRES MENTIONED ¹

Palace, Leicester	Covent Garden
Empire, Holloway	Apollo, London
Palace, Camberwell	T.R., Chatham
Terriss, Rotherhithe	T.R., St Helens
O.K., Dudley	Palace, Blackburn
Euston (now Regent)	Tower (Hippodrome),
London Hippodrome	Birmingham
T.R., Portsmouth	T.R., Hanley
Lyric, Hammersmith	New, Ayr
New, Ealing	Grand, Derby
Grand, Woolwich	Hippodrome, Aston
Grand, Clapham	Alexandra, Birmingham
T.R., Camden Town	Repertory Theatre,
T.R., Birmingham	Birmingham
Queen's, Keighley	O.H., Northampton
H.M., Walsall	New, Northampton
Carlton, Birmingham	T.R. Nottingham
Victoria, Broughton	Empire, Nottingham
Rotunda, Liverpool	Repertory Theatre,
New, Nuneaton	Nottingham

¹ The following abbreviations have been used: T.R. —Theatre Royal, O.H.—Opera House, H.M. = Her Majesty's.

We may begin with some account of the Oriental types, Moorish, Indian and Saracenic. On the opening of the Palace, Leicester, *The Era* (May 25, 1901) wrote as follows:

It has a fine stone façade of a massive Oriental design. The centre is carried up with a lofty pediment containing a wrought-iron panelled grid with the words "Palace Theatre" in electric letters. The establishment will be on the 'two shows a night' principle. Every part of the house is provided with two separate entrances and exits. Large waiting-rooms are provided, so that the money for the second performance can be taken before the first is over, thus reducing the interval to a few minutes. The principal entrance is through two pairs of polished walnut doors into a large vestibule with a balcony round it, finished at a great height by a richly designed Moresque dome, the walls being formed into panels and filled with embossed Oriental tiles brought specially from Spain. A wide marble staircase, divided by a marble column and brass rails branching off at each side of the main landing, leads to a crush-room or waiting-room, which is half circular with a glass-and-iron domed roof. The whole is fitted up as a winter garden with rockeries, fountains, and dripping wells, ferns and palms, and is lighted by small electric lights placed in crevices. A rustic smoking balcony overlooks this crush-room, and is provided with garden seats, the walls and ceilings being formed as grottoes.

There are raised promenades at each side of the stalls, with orientally designed railings; the walls surrounding the ground floor are covered with Moresque tiles, the ceiling being richly decorated in raised and painted ornaments. . . . The decorations have been designed by the architect with his well-known skill and artistic taste. They are Moresque, Mr Matcham having made a particular study of that rich and elaborate style. Gold and colour are effectively introduced, and the result, although gorgeous, is neither loud nor coarse, and certainly deserves admiration. The upholstery, carpets, curtains, and tableau curtains are all of one tint—copper—and the effect when the whole building is illuminated by the electric light from specially designed Moresque fittings will be rich in the extreme.

One of W. G. Sprague's theatres, the Empire, Holloway, employed Indian effects, and was thus described (*The Era*, December 2, 1899) on the occasion of its opening:

The auditorium, which is of spacious proportions, is most lavishly decorated in Indian style, the effect being greatly enhanced by the brilliant scheme of colour decoration and the rich hangings and furnishings, which are of two shades of gold. . . . The approach to the auditorium is from a magnificent crush-room, also decorated in Indian style, handsome marble steps leading to luxurious lounges, communicating with the main building. . . . The whole building is lighted by electricity, handsome and specially designed Indian electroliers and brackets being successfully introduced in the general scheme of decoration. Gas is supplied as a reserve to all parts, in the event of any failure of the electric light. At night the theatre is rendered conspicuous by brilliant electric lighting, and the name, each letter being illuminated, can be seen at a considerable distance in either direction.

Saracenic glories enlivened the Palace, Camberwell (architect, E. A. E. Woodrow), which contained some astonishing effects (*The Era*, December 2, 1899):

On entering the auditorium one is at once impressed with the bold manner in which the three private boxes at each side of the proscenium on the balcony tier have been designed. The architectural detail and the colouring is Saracenic. The chief tone of the ceiling is blue relieved with a strong red. The proscenium is gold with an old gold pelmet and drop curtain embroidered in a blue Moorish design. The drapery to the private boxes is of a soft blue embroidered with old gold, to afford a contrast, and, at the same time, to harmonize with the act drop. The carpet which covers the whole of the area floor is also of a blue tone, but to counteract the effect the whole of the chairs are of a rich red velvet and the walls at the back of the auditorium are covered in a deep red paper. The private boxes and front part of the house have, however, been very differently treated and a specially designed Moorish paper applied. . . . The building, including the Golden Lion public-house, is isolated on all sides, affording every means of providing an unusual number of exits. The structure is absolutely and entirely fireproof; and there are no columns, the modern method of construction with steel cantilevers being employed by the architect. . . . Reverting to the decorations, a departure has been made in the auditorium and bars by the liberal use of coloured leaded glass.¹

¹ The Hippodrome at Birmingham has a curious mosque-like minaret, capped with a domed cupola, which gives the facade an Oriental touch.

Oriental-type theatres, however, were the exception rather than the rule. The great majority of playhouses of this period have been built in the Renaissance and rococo tradition, many in our selected list being in the manner of Louis XIV-XVI.

Typical of the Louis XIV style was the Terriss Theatre at Rotherhithe (architect, W. G. R. Sprague), while theatres introducing Renaissance decorations of some kind were specially plentiful. For example, Italian-style Renaissance appeared at the Opera House, Dudley, English style at the Euston (exterior), and Flemish at the London Hippodrome.

The O.H., Dudley, was of red brick with dressings of terra-cotta, and built in Italian style. It contained oval panels in the facade with inscribed gilt Shakespearean quotations. Other decorations included a tessellated entrance-hall and an encaustic-tiled dado. The interior had a panelled dome with ivory-coloured mouldings, "the prevailing tint of the decorations being a shaded blue relieved by gilt and sprays of pink flowers." The walls of the auditorium were in Pompeian red with darker-shaded dados. The ceiling had a design of birds and foliage.

Red brick and terra-cotta were again used at the Euston Theatre, but in the manner of the English Renaissance, the facade being flanked by square towers.

The London Hippodrome, which was built on the cantilever system, was designed in the style of the Flemish Renaissance. The entrance façade was adorned with pilasters and columns, with seven-headed windows, the whole capped with a tower. This tower, embellished with open ironwork ornament, was surmounted with a bronze group of a chariot and horses. Above the parapet were placed Roman figures carrying hammered-work lamps on spears. In the ceiling was a large opening with a sumptuous colonnade, and "a handsome balcony front supported on large brackets, springing from the main ribs."

Curious and original naval decorations were most appropriately introduced into the T.R., Portsmouth, and into the saloon of the London Hippodrome. At Portsmouth:

The top of the theatre is now surmounted by a life-size figure of Neptune with a trident, which is used as a gas flambeau at

night. . . . The architect, in the decoration of the fronts of the upper and dress circles, has cleverly introduced ornaments suggestive of the naval and military importance of Portsmouth, and this well removes the theatre from the usual decorative groove. The boxes are divided by the bows of ships with figure-heads, and the dress-circle front is composed of dolphins, shells, mermaids, anchors, and life-belts. Even the electric-light fittings, which seem to be everywhere, are nautical, being formed of brass anchors from which the incandescent globes hang.¹

At the London Hippodrome the refreshment-room was fitted up as a ship's saloon, and even included artificial port-holes with a view of the sea outside.

In matters of external effect and stage equipment English theatres have never been able to vie with those of the Continent. The customary procedure here has been to build as good a façade as the funds would allow, but to leave the rest of the exterior plain even to grimness or squalor. England is, indeed, studded with a mass of dreary-looking playhouses which drag their slow lengths along many a High Street, or rear their dismal bulks over many a Market Square. The theatres in our list, however, include some interesting exceptions, and a brief summary of points of note is given below:

Terriss, Rotherhithe	Red brick exterior, faced with York stone. Pilastered front.
Lyric, Hammersmith	Front of yellow bricks. Red-stone ornamentation. Windows with leaded lights. Elaborate iron-work. Woodwork and doors of 'post-office red.' Entrance-hall of Hendon stone and faience.
New, Ealing	Doulton-ware. Biscuit-coloured mouldings. Fancy brickwork.
London Hippodrome	Granite piers. Seven-headed windows. Tower crowned with bronze group. Figures carrying lamps.
Grand, Woolwich	Classic facade. Red brick with Bath stone pilasters.
Grand, Clapham	Red brick and stone. Two turrets rising to 80 feet above the pavement.

¹ *The Era*, August 11, 1900.

T.R., Camden Town	"Handsome copper-covered dome" (36 feet high). Brilliant flambeau erected on top of this.
Euston	English Renaissance façade. Red brick and buff terra-cotta. Square towers.
T.R., Birmingham	Red brick. Façade "semi-classic style of the time of George III." Figures representing Comedy, Industries, Charity, Justice, Science, Tragedy.
Palace, Leicester	Oriental façade. Wrought-iron panelled grill.
Queen's, Keighley	"Handsome glass and iron veranda to shield the patrons of the theatre from inclement weather."
H.M., Walsall	French Renaissance façade. Red Ruabon bricks and stone. Copper dome over 70 feet from the pavement. Gilt heraldic figure over entrance.
Carlton, Birmingham	Name in terra-cotta letters. Octagonal turrets with ogee-shaped lead roofs, each bearing a flagstaff.
T.R., Portsmouth	Large iron and glass veranda on ornamental iron columns. Figure of Neptune carrying a gas flambeau.
Victoria, Broughton	Ionic pilasters. Red terra-cotta front. Copper dome with iron cresting. Canopy of hammered iron and leaded glass.

Terra-cotta was a favourite medium not only for external details. Terra-cotta-coloured hangings were often used inside as well, as at the T.R., St Helens, where "the prevailing colour of the decoration is pale terra-cotta, enriched with cream and gold lines." The Lyric, Hammersmith, also had "velvet curtains of a particularly rich terra-cotta colour."

Sometimes in external treatment the name of the theatre would be worked in, as at the Carlton, Birmingham, which bore its name in red terra-cotta while the facade was flanked with buff-coloured octagonal turrets, also in terra-cotta, but with ogee-shaped lead roofs.

Greco-classic designs could be seen at the Grand, Woolwich, which had a red-brick elevation with Bath-stone pilasters and dressings, side-turrets, and an iron corona over a roof with

central dome. Another Greco-classic playhouse was the ambitious and interesting New Theatre at Baling, which was also much in advance of its time in attempting a 'social centre' attached to the theatre:

The elevation to the Broadway is one of which the architects, Mr George Pargeter and Mr Walter Emden, may be justly proud. Doulton ware, the artistic merits of which are now almost world-famed, is used. The mouldings have been specially designed and executed in biscuit-coloured material. Four spacious doorways give entrance to the various sections of the building. The back elevation facing Haven Green is treated in fancy brickwork, the north-west corner being capped by an open-domed turret. The ambitious scheme includes a theatre on a scale capable of staging a Drury Lane drama; a restaurant which may justly be termed a miniature 'Holborn,' a ball-room suite which will be available for dances, concerts, at homes, etc., a small suite for minor social gatherings, a second large suite opening on to a balcony overlooking the Broadway, a Masonic Temple second possibly only in size to the magnificent new one at the Holborn Restaurant; a grill-room, a cafe, a billiard-room, and a buffet and reading-room. The ceiling is saucer-domed, and treated in the early Greco-classic style. This style, indeed, is the keynote of the whole interior decoration. The grand-circle front is divided into panels by small Corinthian columns. The panels are filled with Wedgwood representations of Thespian subjects. The panels of the family-circle front contain representations of the Fine Arts, and are separated by Grecian vases. The gilded proscenium frame is square, and forms a beautiful and fitting border for the act-drop, which represents a piece of tapestry from the famous Baranth collection.¹

An occasional departure was made from the familiar crimson upholstery. The usual alternative was blue, as at the Rotunda, Liverpool, the Palace, Camberwell, H.M., Walsall, and the New, Nuneaton. At the Rotunda, Liverpool, the upholstery and draperies were of "a rich azure blue," while the proscenium drapery was of pale blue, relieved with "azure-blue plush festoon valances and old gold trimmings, the colour being specially dyed to this uncommon shade." The private boxes were also curtained in blue, "giving that seclusion which

¹ *The lira*, December 16, 1899.

will be appreciated by habitués of this part of the house." A further air of "richness, elegance, and comfort" was provided by a luxurious peacock-blue Axminster carpet. Cambridge blue was employed at H.M., Walsall, while at the New, Nuneaton, "The ceiling, boxes, gallery fronts, and proscenium will be of richly designed fibrous plaster, and will be decorated in turquoise blue, cream, and gold."

Another departure in the colour scheme was at the reconstructed T.R. at Birmingham. Here the main tints were green, white, and gold, a rose-pink paper decorating the boxes, which were fitted with satin-wood and pink upholstery. The ceiling was in ivory white and gold, the auditorium being papered in green and gold.

"Rose du Barri" colouring was also occasionally used. There were examples at the Grand, Woolwich, and at the Palace, Blackburn, where "The decorative plaster-work and the scheme of colour decoration are very pleasing, the prevailing tone in the latter being Rose du Barri."

Pictorial and allegorical drop curtains were an important feature in the finished effect of theatre interiors of this time. There were interesting specimens at Rotherhithe, Derby, Walsall, St Helens, and Camden Town. At the Terriss, Rotherhithe, the act-drop represented Queen Elizabeth knighting Sir Francis Drake on board the *Pelican* at Deptford in 1579; the Grand, Derby, had a specially painted drop, designed by W. T. Hemsley:

The centre medallion represents a scene from *A. Midsummer Night's Dream*, and falling away from it is a very charming design in simulated lace curtains, while beneath the medallion are depicted the arms of the borough of Derby—viz. a buck couchant within park palings.¹

At the T.R., Camden Town, the act-drop, designed by Arthur J. Black, represented "A Tribute to the Dramatic Muse"; at St Helens W. T. Hemsley again designed a curtain based on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, while at H.M., Walsall, the subject was "allegorical cupids circling over a garlanded queen enthroned on a dais of masonry. This pretty picture

¹ *The Era*, August 11, 1900.

is enveloped by luxurious curtains in old gold within outer hangings of rich deep-blue plush."

A large number of the theatres described here can easily be studied at first hand, since they are still in use and likely to remain so for years to come. In many cases they have lost their pristine glitter, and their facades are deeply caked with the grime of half a century. But it is a simple enough imaginative exercise to recapture, as one looks at them, their former air of lavish exuberance.

The competition of the cinema and other commercial attractions has brought about a decline in their number. A city such as Birmingham, for instance, has now only five theatres for a population of well over a million, and even one of these, the Aston Hippodrome, is an outlying music-hall, while the Hippodrome in Hurst Street is a variety and revue house. This leaves but three fully fledged theatres—the Theatre Royal, the Alexandra, and the Birmingham Repertory Theatre—the last of which is very small. Around 1900 there were the following:

Tower, Hurst Street (now the Hippodrome)	Grand Ladywood, Palace of Varieties
Alexandra	Lyceum
Bordesley Palace	Prince of Wales
Carlton, Saltley	Queen's, Snow Hill
Coutt's	Theatre Royal
Empire, Hurst Street	Theatre Royal, Aston
Gaiety, Coleshill Street	

Similarly, Walsall at one time had three theatres open; it now has none, although its population is well over 100,000. Northampton in the early years of this century possessed three houses—the Opera House, the New Theatre, and the Empire. It has now only two, the Empire being derelict. Nottingham some years ago boasted five theatres; at present there are but three—the T.R., the Empire, and the Repertory Theatre. Further, the building of a new theatre is now almost unknown, even in London, while difficulties of obtaining materials as a result of the Second World War will tend to hold up plans for the reconstruction of such theatres as were damaged.

Stage equipment and machinery began to make big strides

in the early years of the twentieth century, and the following account of the London Hippodrome's installations¹ will be found of interest:

The arena occupies the centre of the ground floor, and the stall and fauteuil seats radiate from this back to the private boxes which surround these seats. It has a capacity of about one hundred thousand gallons, in girth is 230 feet, and the average depth 8 feet. It is made of steel boiler-plates, the weight of which when full of water is approximately 400 tons. . . . Entering the tank at the bottom are eight fountains, worked by the pressure of the water in the mains; these fountains force themselves to the top of the water in the tank and immediately commence playing, throwing up jets of water some 20 feet high. In addition to these there are fountain jets round the edge of the tank, set at such an angle as to throw the water in a graceful curve to the centre of the tank. Round the outside of the tank a series of eight hydraulic rams are placed, upon the tops of which circular lengths of railings are fixed working in guides. By the simultaneous working of the rams a large silver grill which surrounds the ring fences rises, enclosing the arena. There are three entrances to the arena, one opposite the stage and the other two at the sides of the proscenium, the latter being arranged so that the water flows through them, and thus boats can be rowed in and naval displays of all character can be carried out.²

At Covent Garden, in the 1901 reconstruction of the stage, an attempt was made to incorporate some of the newer Continental devices. Iron girders were introduced to replace the cumbersome and dangerous old wooden frameworks. The apron was removed from in front of the curtain; the stage itself was reboarded with new trap-doors. A new lighting plant was installed, with the then latest device of colour-changing, so that "there can no longer be any possible mistake as to the lines and colours required for each separate or special incident or scene."

Some account of developments of stage lighting is given in the text of Chapter I, but it is thought that it would be well

¹ The Coliseo and Hippodrome, Buenos Aires, was built on the model of the London Hippodrome.

² *The Era*, December 30, 1899.

to give here a few additional details, mainly of auditorium illumination.

The Apollo Theatre, London, was a pioneer in the use of new limelight effects. The faces of the actors were lit from the front and from the sides simultaneously, so that shadows were avoided. Limelights were thrown on to the stage from a space between the stalls and the circle boxes at the actual level of the actors' faces, and this abolished shadows without appearing to be unnatural. As regards auditorium lighting, electricity was rapidly coming to replace gas in all theatres of the country by 1900, though many houses retained gas as a reserve in the event of failure of the electric light. The Grand, Woolwich, for example, had not only electricity, but gas and oil-lamps as well ready for any emergency, despite the fact that 1500 electric lamps were installed. At the T.R., Chatham, was a specially handsome copper-and-brass chandelier hanging from the centre of the ceiling, while the T.R., St Helens, made a special feature of lamps in sprays to illuminate the house. Indian-style electroliers adorned the Empire, Holloway, in keeping with its general Indian scheme of decoration. The Palace, Blackburn, introduced illuminated turn clocks at each side of the proscenium, which were much admired and were patented by the architect. Naval effects, in the form of brass anchor-lights, appeared at the T.R., Portsmouth. New ideas in footlight arrangement were seen at St Helens, where, by employing the principle of liquid resistance, the footlights could be raised or lowered in intensity. There were also adjustable battens with alternating red, white, and blue lights, which were used for effects of sunrise and sunset, this being a great advance at the time of its introduction.

Theatre capacities will be found listed in Tolmie's catalogue, *"The Stage" Guide* (London, 1946). Many of the playhouses of the early 1900's were surprisingly large, an outstanding example being the Tower (now the Hippodrome) at Birmingham, which was described in an advertisement at the end of 1899 as accommodating "upwards of 4000." The T.R., Hanley, was also advertised in 1900 as having accommodation for 3700 people. The Terriss, Rotherhithe, would take 3000. It would seem that some of these figures erred on the side of

extravagance, since the largest seating capacity of any theatre in London, that of the Lyceum, was only 2891.

New forms of ventilation were being introduced about the turn of the century, as at the New Theatre, Ayr (1901), where "Tobin's Tube" was installed, the exhausted air being carried off by coils and an electric fan in the roof, and at St Helens, where Stott's patent ventilator was fitted into the fluted dome.

The steel cantilever system of theatre construction was also finding favour with architects of the time. At the reconstructed T.R., Birmingham (1904), cantilevers were used to form the main strength of the three tiers. By this arrangement the old and unsightly rows of pillars which so impeded the vision in many nineteenth-century theatres were abolished, and at Birmingham the finished effect "has all the appearance of galleries resting on air." The tiers were actually kept up by six solid steel columns running up the back of the house from the pit through the circles right up to the gallery, leaving only two pillars visible in the circle.

As regards the seats in which audiences were "accommodated" in these newly arranged theatres, certain improvements were being made. In 1899, for example, Messrs A. R. Dean, Ltd, advertised that they had "invented and patented a new tip-up divided running seat, which will sooner or later be in use at all up-to-date theatres. A. R. Dean, Ltd, have invented a new patent adjustable rod, instead of pivot, which can be supplied to any of their tip-up chairs -in lieu of the ordinary pivot on which the seat works."

II. BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES TO CHAPTER I

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(ii)

Theatre buildings and the art of theatre construction are described in many works, of which, however, very few give any details of the extant playhouses of England. (On this question see Appendix I to the present work.) The historical progress of theatre-building in general is admirably illustrated in Allardyce Nicoll's *Development of the Theatre* (1927), while

the large three-volume treatise of Edwin O. Sachs, *Modern Opera Houses and Theatres* (1896-98) is concerned with Victorian theatre buildings and playhouses abroad. See also Philip Morton Shand, *Modern Theatres and Cinemas* (1930); Edward Bernard Kinsila, *Modern Theatre Construction* (1917); Arthur S. Meloy, *Theatre and Motion Picture Houses* (1916); Irving Pichel, *On Building a Theatre* (1920); also *Modern Theatres* (1925); Paul Zucker, *Theater und Lichtspielhäuser* (1926).

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(iii)

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(iv)

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(v)

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(vi)

For works dealing with stage costume vide Rupert Mason (comp.), *Rohes of Thespis: Costume Designs by Modern Artists* (1928) (contains chapters by Sir Max Beerbohm, Sir Barry Jackson, Sir Nigel Playfair, C. W. Beaumont, C. B. Cochran, etc.); Theodore Komisarjevsky, *The Costume of the Theatre* (1931); Agnes Brooks Young, *Stage Costuming* (1927); Elizabeth Berkeley Grimball and Rhea Wells, *Costuming a Play* (1925); Edith Dabney and Claude Merton Wise, *A Book of Dramatic Costume* (1930); Lee Simonson and Theodore Komisarjevsky, *Settings and Costumes of the Modern Stage* (1933).

(vii)

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(viii)

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III. GENERAL NOTES TO CHAPTER I

(1) *Edwin Sachs' "Modern Opera Houses and Theatres"*

One of the most sumptuous of all works on theatre architecture is the great folio three-volume treatise of Edwin O. Sachs, *Modern Opera Houses and Theatres* (London, 1896-98). It is concerned largely with foreign theatres, but there are a number of English examples given, and reference to this is indispensable for a study of the late-nineteenth-century playhouse. It includes copious and magnificent illustrations, together with architects' elevations, details of measurements, ground-plans, photographs of stages and auditoriums, longitudinal sections, sketches of external and internal effects, chandeliers, lobbies, staircases, act-drops, ceilings, and a list of theatre fires. As it appeared before 1900 it does not extend to the period here under review, but as an analysis of the Victorian theatre-building tradition, which persisted for so long into the twentieth century, it is of the greatest value.

The following English theatres are described or illustrated:

Volume One. London: D'Oyly Carte's Opera House, now the Palace Theatre, Cambridge Circus (R. D'Oyly Carte, T. Collcutt, and G. Holloway, 1891); Daly's (S. Chadwick, 1893); Trafalgar, now the Duke of York's, (Walter Emden, 1892); Grand, Islington (F. Matcham, 1888); Alhambra (J. Perry and F. Reed, 1883).

Provinces: Grand, Wolverhampton (C. J. Phipps, 1894); Palace, Manchester (E. Darbyshire and F. B. Smith, 1891); Empire, Bristol (O. Wylson and C. Long, 1894).

Volume Two. London: Her Majesty's (C. J. Phipps, 1897); Lyric (C. J. Phipps, 1888); Garrick (Walter Emden, 1889); Empire (T. and F. Verity, 1882); Oxford (O. Wylson and C. Long, 1893).

Provinces: Stratford-on-Avon Memorial Theatre (F. Unsworth, 1879); Grand, Leeds (G. Corson, 1876); New, Cambridge (E. Runtz, 1896).

Volume Three. This contains many ground plans and longitudinal sections, also plates and sketches of theatres at

Norwich, Peckham, Middlesbrough, Hastings, Covent Garden, and Drury Lane. This volume also has an interesting supplement dealing with the "Electrical Turntable Stage" (pp. 69-74).

(2) C.J. Phipps (1835-97)

Perhaps the most important of the Victorian theatre architects. Much of his work stands to-day untouched and can be studied in many English towns. He constructed, or altered, a large number of London playhouses, including the Vaudeville, the Strand, the Haymarket, the Savoy, the Prince of Wales, the Shaftesbury, the Lyric, and his masterpiece, Her Majesty's (1897). (Several of these have been much altered since his death.) He was also concerned with work at the Lyceum, the Comedy, the Globe, and the St James's. He built many provincial theatres, including examples at Swansea, Nottingham, Sheffield, Portsmouth, and the little Opera House at Northampton (now the Northampton Repertory Theatre). A notable work was the Grand Theatre at Wolverhampton, which is fully noticed in Sachs (*op. cit.*, vol. i, p. 44). He was also responsible for rebuilding the Theatre Royal at Edinburgh and the Theatre Royal at Glasgow, and also the Gaiety at Dublin. His style was criticized by Sachs (too severely, it would appear), but credit is given to him for his professional abilities, especially as seen in the Grand at Wolverhampton and Her Majesty's, London. Sachs stated (in 1896) that some forty theatres in Great Britain were the work of Phipps.

(3) *Gothic Theatres*

Just as Neo-Gothic monopolized Church architecture in the nineteenth century, so Baroque or a vaguely Renaissance style monopolized theatre-building. The only outstanding exception to the Baroque tradition was the old Stratford-on-Avon Memorial Theatre, built by F. Unsworth in 1879, where Gothic was applied. Here, however, the idea of a public monument mingled with the conception of a memorial theatre, and no doubt this influenced the sponsors in choosing

Gothic. Edwin Sachs declares (*op cit.*, vol. ii, p. 43) that in the Stratford building "the Gothic feeling in the treatment is unique in the annals of theatre construction." It may be noted, however, that the Grand at Leeds (G. Corson, 1876) had a Gothic elevation, as Sachs himself illustrates, while *The Era* (August 13, 1904) reproduced the Gothic frontage of the Theatre Royal at York.

(4) *Continental and American Theatres*

Anything like a full treatment of modern developments in theatre construction and decoration would be irrelevant here. For though extraordinary effects have been secured in many American and Continental playhouses, they have hardly touched the English theatre as a whole. For example, the whole question of visibility from every part of the auditorium has been carefully considered and worked out in such houses as Chanin's Majestic Theatre, New York. Again, some of the new ideas in auditorium decoration, such as the Chinese designs at the Theater am Kurfürstendamm in Berlin, have gone far beyond anything as yet seen in England. Swedish theatres, in particular, have shown wonderful progress of recent years in providing the most advanced stage machinery, and in using a device whereby the auditorium can be enlarged or diminished so that its size varies with the size of the audience. The revolving stage, adopted from Japan, has been employed abroad as a basis for innumerable new devices which perhaps tend to make the theatre too much of an exhibition temple. There is a strong temptation, when the stage equipment is specially impressive, to show off its glories merely for the sake of mechanical display. The same applies to some of the miraculous modern switchboards which apparently attempt to outvie the sun itself in producing enchanting kaleidoscopic effects. In fact, too much mechanics and too much lighting defeat the ends of the theatre, which cannot in any case rival the visual splendours of the cinema, and would do well not to try.

Occasionally, as in the Theater in dem Redoutensaal at Vienna, experiments have been made with no proscenium, employing a simple actors' dais with a permanent cycloramic

background. Max Reinhardt's Grosses Schauspielhaus in Berlin was originally a circus, and retained a central stage with the audience on all sides.

Clearly the pioneer work of Wagner and, later, of Gordon Craig and Adolph Appia has had far-reaching results in many countries. But in England only a very occasional playhouse, such as the new Stratford theatre, has held up its head against the Victorian building tradition.

IV. PROVINCIAL TOURS

AN examination of the English provincial touring system is of great interest to those who like to study the background of the modern stage. For the vast majority of our British actors begin their work on tour in the network of Lyceums, Hippodromes, and Grand Theatres scattered over the land. Moreover, it frequently happens that provincial towns see a production before it reaches London, and the 'try-out' tour is a well-recognized feature of theatrical life. Unfortunately managers sometimes attempt to unload their London failures on provincial audiences, and many a weary fiasco from the West End has reappeared in the provinces, brazenly describing itself as "straight from its London success." However, the standard of the English travelling company is, on the whole, very high, and during the present century innumerable excellent shows, including some splendid revues and 'resident pantomimes,' have been seen on the provincial stage.

The following summary is based on an examination of one of the tour lists which appear regularly in *The Stage*. A random date was selected for this purpose, about half-way through the years covered by this book, and a brief study made of the list of engagements in the provinces for the two weeks beginning May 9 and May 16, 1927. It is thus representative of provincial activities in the heart of the period under review, and may be taken as typical of touring conditions in general in the twentieth century. Fortunately the list provides details of bookings for two weeks in all the major theatres of the provinces, and it is possible to trace the movements of companies from one town to another, with many other points of interest.

The following are some of the facts which emerge from this apparently prosaic catalogue of companies and theatres.

First we may notice the long journeys often entailed between Saturday and Monday to fulfil engagements. The *Greater Love* company, for instance, travelled from Southsea to Bradford between Saturday, May 14, and Monday, May 16. The *Glad Eyes* revue came from Newcastle to Northampton, and *Top*

Hole from Glasgow to London, at the same time. Awkward cross-country journeys were frequently involved, as for instance, when the *Mercenary Mary* company travelled from Chesterfield to Ipswich, and even cross-channel excursions, for *Peg o' My Heart* went from the week of May 9 at the Chelsea Palace to that of May 16 at the Opera House, Belfast. At the same week-end *Devonshire Cream* was travelling in the opposite direction, from the Gaiety at Dublin to the Lyceum at Sheffield.

Generally, however, companies endeavour to move in easy stages, particularly when they are in the London area, so that shifts from Willesden to Penge (the *Life* revue company), or from Croydon to the Holborn Empire (*Convicts*), or from one Empire to another near by (*Sergeant Lightning* from Brixton to Hackney), are quite common. Scottish towns are taken together where possible (*Miss 1927* from Glasgow to Dundee), as well as neighbouring northern towns (*Tip Toes* from the Palace, Manchester, to the Empire, Liverpool).

The great popularity of some London successes has often led to the formation of two or more different touring companies working different circuits with the same piece. They are sometimes differentiated as "Blue Company," "Red Company," etc., as, for instance, those for *The Ghost Train* and *White Cargo*. In May 1927 there were no fewer than four separate companies on the road with *No ! No! Nanette!*, three with *Mercenary Mary*, and three with *The Ghost Train*. Another noteworthy feature is the preponderance of revues over 'companies' and 'stock.'

This list takes no account of Variety Bills (which afterwards, and during the Second World War, ousted revues almost completely), but it is obvious that light entertainment accounted for at least half of the provincial-theatre engagements at this time. Before the revival of interest in ballet (dating from the reopening of Sadler's Wells in 1931) there were no touring ballet companies such as excite so much enthusiasm now. We are reminded how recent is the popularity of this art by scanning this list, where ballet is conspicuous by its absence. Occasionally, however, a revue had choreographic pretensions, and even a choreographic background. *Cabaret Up to Date* (Grand, Wolverhampton), for example, was sponsored by the

eminent Russian ballerina Lydia Kyasht. This revue contained, in addition to a "Scene from Russian Country Life," folk songs (Gopak and Dubinouchka), a version of Weber's *Spectre de la Rose*, entitled *After the Ball*, a "Golden Glory" Spring Fantasy Ballet, a "Porcelain" episode, with music by Boccherini and a Russian Balalaika Orchestra under the direction of M. Nicholas Medvedeff. It was presented as an ordinary twice-nightly revue, leavened with more popular dance items, jazz, and Charleston. But such pioneers were ploughing a very lone and often discouraging furrow, and cannot in any way be compared with the brilliantly successful Sadler's Wells, International, and Anglo-Polish Ballet companies of the 1940's.

The entries under 'stock' in this 1927 tour list are of particular interest. Again they throw much valuable light on the condition of the stage at the time. Occasionally the visit of a 'stock' company to a provincial town had far-reaching results, for when, in 1926, the Elephant Repertory Company visited Northampton Opera House for an ordinary month's stay neither they nor anyone in the town foresaw what would happen. The original month was prolonged and renewed several times. At last, as a result of the interest directly created in Northampton by the Elephant Company's visit, a permanent Repertory Theatre was founded. This theatre has now been playing for over twenty years without a break. Thus the original visit of the Elephant Repertory in 1926 inaugurated a movement which has had nearly a quarter of a century's unbroken success. Many interesting productions have been staged there, including a Dryden Festival.¹ The theatre has been noteworthy for the high standard of its scenic design and production, achieving most extraordinary effects week by week almost since the theatre was founded.

We notice also in this tour list phenomena such as the Denville Stock Companies, which were playing simultaneously at Blackburn, St Helens, Preston, Huddersfield, Hanley, Doncaster, Ashton, Stockport, Gloucester, Rochdale, and Dewsbury. The Elephant Repertory, after paving the way for permanent repertory at Northampton, had moved on, and

¹ Dryden was born at the Northamptonshire village of Aldwinkle.

was at this time at Bristol. Companies such as the Dorothy Mullord Players were maintaining interest in repertory at outlying London houses. Occasionally a company had its own theatre, named after itself, as in the case of Leslie's Players, billed as at "Leslie's Little Theatre, Manchester,"

We have, in fact, to distinguish three kinds of repertory company. There was the permanent, firmly settled, theatre-owning group of the type of Birmingham and the Cambridge Festival Theatre in the days of the magnificent Mr Terence Gray. There was also the 'resident stock' company whose policy was to remain a season of anything from six weeks to six months at a particular theatre—for example, the Elephant Company. And, thirdly, there was the touring repertory of the type of the travelling Shakespearean or Opera Company, which moved on from week to week—for example, those of Henry Baynton, Sir Frank Benson, Edward Dunstan, D'Oyly Carte, Carl Rosa, O'Mara, and Godwin.¹ Sometimes opera companies remained a fortnight or more in the larger towns—the O'Mara Company was booked for May 9 and May 16 at the Shakespeare Theatre, Liverpool—but very frequently they moved from week to week. (The D'Oyly Carte moved from Brixton to Croydon between May 9 and 16.) This was a rule only to be broken in the larger towns. (Benson's Shakespeare Company remained a fortnight at Glasgow.)

Shakespeare was popular, judging by the number of companies then on tour. In addition to the named organizations, Benson's at Glasgow, Baynton's at Harrogate and Southport, and Dunstan's at Wigan and Bolton, there was the Shakespeare Festival Company playing at Oxford.

Besides Shakespeare and opera, we also note the popularity of other older pieces in revival, a phenomenon which was to return with surprising and redoubled force during the Second World War. For instance, *The Belle of New York* was at the

¹ Work in the smaller touring opera companies must have been hard. A study of the Godwin Opera programme on visiting the Theatre Royal, Loughborough, shows that operas were presented "once nightly on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, and twice nightly on Monday and Saturday." On twice-nightly evenings there would be two different operas, so that one could see, first house, Balfe's *Bohemian Girl* and, second house, Donizetti's *Daughter of the Regiment*, some of the artists appearing in both operas.

Prince's, Bristol; *Charley's Aunt* in two companies playing at Manchester, Liverpool, and Walsall; *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* at the Pier Theatre, Eastbourne;¹ and *The Silver King* at Aldershot and Norwich.

The small range of theatre names is noteworthy. On the whole the 'Companies' appear at the more impressively titled theatres—Royal, Grand, Lyceum, Opera House, Prince's, and King's—while revues are billed usually for Empires, Hippodromes, Palaces, and Pavilions. But not always. A serious play like *The Man with a Load of Mischief*, for instance, appeared on May 9 at the Pavilion, Weymouth, while, on the other hand, a revue, *Early to Bed*, was booked for the Opera House, Dudley. But the nomenclature of the provincial theatres is never a sure guide to the fare offered, and there must be many an Opera House in England at which nothing remotely resembling an opera has ever been staged.

¹ Pier Theatres, often built entirely of wood, are a feature of the last fifty years. A fine specimen, glittering with four silver cupolas, is the South Parade Pier Theatre at Southsea. From the list it will be seen that various Pier and Winter Garden Theatres booked full companies for their patrons.

V. APPENDIX TO CHAPTER IV

THE following is a list of the more important spectacular and musical works produced in London from 1900. It consists mainly of musical comedies, light operas, and revues, in all of which there was a strong visual element. Those productions which were outstandingly spectacular are marked thus, (S), and the nature of the main effect is indicated in brackets after the title.

1900	<i>The Messenger Boy</i> ¹ <i>Kitty Grey</i>	1904	<i>The Cingalee</i> <i>The Prince of Pilsen</i> <i>Lady Madcap</i> <i>A Maid from School</i>
1901	<i>The Toreador</i> <i>A Chinese Honeymoon</i> <i>The Emerald Isle</i> <i>The Silver Slipper</i> <i>Bluebell in Fairyland</i> <i>The Belle of New York</i> (first produced 1898) <i>The Girl from Up There</i>	1905	<i>The Blue Moon</i> <i>The Little Michus</i> <i>The Spring Chicken</i>
1902	<i>Merrie England</i> (S: Elizabethan pageantry) <i>The Girl from Kay's</i> <i>A Country Girl</i> <i>Three Little Maids</i>	1906	<i>Amasis</i> <i>The Dairymaids</i> <i>The Girl behind the Counter</i> <i>The New Aladdin</i> <i>The Little Cherub</i> <i>The Beauty of Bath</i> <i>See See</i> <i>The Merveilleuses</i> <i>The Vicar of Wakefield</i>
1903	<i>The Duchess of Dantzic</i> <i>A Princess of Kensington</i> <i>The Orchid</i> <i>My "Lady Molly</i> <i>Veronique</i> (also in 1904) <i>The Earl and the Girl</i> <i>The Cherry Girl</i> <i>The School Girl</i>	1907	<i>The Gay Gordons</i> <i>Miss Hook of Holland</i> <i>My Darling</i> <i>Tom Jones</i> <i>The Girls of Gottenburg</i> <i>The Merry Widow</i>

¹ *San Toy*, though produced in 1899, ran for 768 performances, and was a major attraction in London during 1900 and 1901.

- 1908 *Havana*
Faust (S: Steam Brocken effects; Flying Witches)
A Waltz Dream
'The King of Cadonia
My Mimosa Maid
The Belle of Brittany
- 1909 *The Arcadians*
Our Miss Gibbs
Fallen Fairies
The Mountaineers
The Dollar Princess
The Dashing Little Duke
Dear Little Denmark
- 1910 *The Balkan Princess*
The Chocolate Soldier
The Quaker Girl
The Girl in the Train
- 1911 *The Mot is Me* (S: japanese earthquake scene)
Kismet
Sumitrun (S: Black-and-white effects by Stern)
The Count of Luxembourg
Where the Rainbow Ends
Peggy
- 1912 *The Girl in the Taxi*
The Sunshine Girl
Princess Caprice
The Dancing Mistress
Gipsy Love
A Venetian Night (S: Wedding feast, with gondolas; revolving stage)
- 1913 *Typhoon* (S: Storm with shipwreck)
Oh ! Oh!! Delphine!!!
The Pearl Girl
The Girl from Utah
The Marriage Market
- 1914 *The Cinema Star*
Martiselle Tralala
- 1915 *To-night's the Night*
Tina
Florodora (first produced 1899)
Betty
- 1916 *Chu Chin Chow* (S: Chinese and Arabian pageantry—palaces, gardens, jewel caves)
My Lady Frayle
Young England
Houpla!
Theodore and Company
High Jinks
- 1917 *The Maid of the Mountains* (S: Robbers' mountain haunt; island scene)
Arlette
The Boy
- 1918 *The 'Lilac Domino*
- 1919 *Afgar* (S: Moorish courtyard and harem)
Kissing Time
Monsieur Beaucaire
Sylvia's Levers

- 1920
Irene
A Southern Maid
A Uttle Dutch Girl
The Naughty Princess
- 1921
The League of Notions (S: Lavish revue with elaborate sets of silver curtains)
Cairo
Sally
Sybil
The Rebel Maid
The Golden Moth
- 1922
Decameron Nights (S: Hanging Gardens; Venetian scene; eclipse of the sun)
Mayfair and Montmartre (S: Inca Ballet)
Phi-Phi
Lilac Time
The Cabaret Girl
The Last Waltz
The Lady of the Rose
- 1923
Hassan (S: Pageant of ancient Bagdad)
The Beauty Prize
Catherine
Madame Pompadour (S: Louis XV setting)
Katinka
- 1924
Primrose
Toni
The Street Singer
- 1925
Rose Marie (S: Rocky Mountains; Totem scene)
- Not No! Nanette!*
Katja the Dancer
The Blue Kitten
Betty in Mayfair
- 1926
Lido Lady
Sunny (S: Wedding on a liner and circus-tent scenes)
The Student Prince
Princess Charming
- 1927
White birds (S: Montmartre scene; Indian's head; Spanish flower)
The Desert Song (S: Riff Hills and Moroccan Desert scenes)
The Vagabond King
The Blue Mazurka
The Blue Train
- 1928
This Year of Grace
Blue Eyes
Show Boat (S: Mississippi scene, with a Floating River Theatre)
- 1929
The Five o'Clock Girl
Wake Up and Dream (S: Coppelia in 1910; San Francisco Gold Rush, 1849)
The New Moon
Bitter Sweet (S: Viennese cafe in 1880)
Mr Cinders
La Vie Parisienne
- 1930
Evergreen (S: Sets by Stern, with revolving-stage Fair scene)
The Three Musketeers

- | | | | |
|------|--|------|---|
| 1931 | <i>White Horse Inn</i> (S: Tyrolese village; revolving stage; mountain storms; real animals) | 1938 | <i>Me and My Girl</i> |
| | <i>Cavalcade</i> (S: Scenes of First World War) | | <i>Operette</i> |
| | <i>Waltzes from Vienna</i> (S: Fireworks Ballet and moving orchestra) | 1939 | <i>The Dancing Years</i> |
| | <i>Tantivy Towers</i> | 1943 | <i>The Lisbon Story</i> |
| 1932 | <i>Casanova</i> (S: Revolving stage) | 1944 | <i>A Night in Venice</i> (S: Venetian carnival; Commedia dell' Arte Ballet) |
| | <i>The Miracle</i> (S: Ballets, coronation, cathedral, and forest scenes) | 1945 | <i>Gay Rosalinda</i> |
| | <i>Helen!</i> (S: White Grecian bedroom by Oliver Messel) | 1946 | <i>Song of Norway</i> (S: Peer Gynt Ballet; Norwegian festival) |
| | <i>Derby Day</i> | | <i>Can-Can</i> (S: <i>Tales of Hoffmann</i> Ballet-fantasy) |
| | <i>The Dubarry</i> | | <i>The Fairy Queen</i> (S: Covent Garden opera) |
| 1934 | <i>Streamline</i> | | <i>The Sleeping Princess</i> (Spectacular fairy-tale ballet) |
| 1935 | <i>Glamorous Night</i> | | |
| 1936 | <i>Follow the Sun</i> (S: Revue with elaborate sets by Stern) | 1947 | <i>Bless the Bride</i> |
| | <i>Balalaika</i> | | <i>Annie, Get Your Gun</i> |
| | <i>Careless Capture</i> | | <i>Oklahoma!</i> |
| 1937 | <i>Home and Beauty</i> | 1949 | <i>Latin Quarter</i> (S: Revue with moving stage and illuminated curtain) |

In addition to the spectacle offered by the works in the above list there have been many gorgeous stage pictures at Covent Garden during the International Opera seasons. Especially memorable were some of the effects in the cycles of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, notably in *Das Rheingold* in the scenes under the Rhine, and in the collapse of the Hall of the Gibichungs in *Götterdämmerung*. Other splendid Covent Garden scenes

included the Egyptian Triumph in *Aida*, which was at its most lavish in the Coronation Night production of 1937.¹ There have also been elaborate scenic effects in a number of Drury Lane and Lyceum pantomimes. And beside some beautiful Shakespearean revivals, such as those at the Stratford Festival Theatre, and some at the Old Vic and at the New Theatre in London, there have been the designs of Oliver Messel, Rex Whistler, and McKnight Kauffer in the realm of ballet and poetic drama. The D'Oyly Carte Company has also restaged several of the Savoy Operas, including a striking new production of *The Mikado*, which had the quality of a Japanese print to replace the familiar black-and-gold and cherry-blossom effects of the original mounting.

¹Five recent productions were the *Turandot* (1947), with designs by Leslie Hurry, and *Boris Godunov* (1948), designed by Wakhevitch. (See *ante*, p. 121; also illustrations facing pp. 112 and 128.)

VI. LIST OF THEATRES IN THE BRITISH ISLES

I HAVE endeavoured to make the following as complete a list as possible of theatres in the British Isles at the time of writing, but absolute accuracy in such a catalogue is not easy to attain. As far as information was available, I have indicated by the letter C in brackets where a theatre has been or is being used as a cinema, either exclusively or sharing with stage performances, but, of course, such a method of indication cannot be always exact. A theatre may become temporarily a cinema or a cinema a theatre—for example, for a pantomime season or for a short visit of an opera company, as when the Carl Rosa Opera appeared in London suburban cinemas as an experiment in 1948.

Another difficulty in listing is that a theatre may have been temporarily closed through war damage, fire, etc., and in such cases—again only so far as information was available—I have put the name of the theatre in brackets. It should be noted, however, that a theatre so listed may at any time be reopened or reconstructed, and its inclusion in brackets does not at all imply that it is permanently out of use. This catalogue, in fact, is an attempt to list the actual theatre buildings of the British Isles in which the drama of the twentieth century has so far been performed, although at the time of writing some of them are no longer active homes of that drama. In addition to the theatres mentioned here there are a number of 'seasonal' pavilions and halls, mostly at holiday resorts, where, often enough, good plays are performed. Various abbreviations have been adopted. T.R. stands for Theatre Royal; O.H. for Opera House; Emp. for Empire; Pav. for Pavilion; P.O.W. for Prince of Wales's; T. throughout indicates theatre.

i. ENGLAND, WALES AND SCOTLAND

(a) LONDON

Adelphi	Ambassadors'
Aldwych	Apollo
Alexandra, Stoke Newington	Arts

Bankside Little Theatre,	New Lindsey
Baling	(Old Vic)
Bolton's Theatre, Kensington	Palace
(Brixton)	Penge Empire
Cambridge	People's Palace
Chepstow	Phoenix
Coliseum	Piccadilly
Comedy	Players, Villiers Street
Coronet (C)	Playhouse
(Court)	Prince's
Covent Garden	Prince Edward (now Casino)
Criterion	Prince of Wales's
Dominion (C)	Q
Drury Lane	(Queen's)
Duchess	Regent, Euston (C)
Duke of York's	(Royalty)
Embassy	Sadler's Wells
Empire (C)	St James's
Fortune	St Martin's
(Gaiety)	Saville
Garrick	Savoy
(Gate)	Scala
Gateway (private)	(Shaftesbury)
Globe	Stoll
Granville, Walham Green	Strand
Haymarket	Stratford T.R.
Hippodrome	(Streatham Hill)
His Majesty's	Torch
Intimate, Palmer's Green	Twentieth Century
King's, Hammersmith	Unity
(Kingsway)	Vaudeville
(Little)	Watergate
London Pavilion (C)	Westminster
Lyceum	Whitehall
Lyric	Wimbledon
Lyric, Hammersmith	Windmill
Mercury	Winter Garden
New	Wyndham's

Music Halls in the London Area

(Balham Hippodrome)	Camberwell Palace
Bedford, Camden Town	Camden Hippodrome
Brixton Empress	(B.B.C. Studio)

Chelsea Palace	New Cross Emp.
Chiswick Etnp.	Palladium
Collins's, Islington	(Poplar Hippodrome)
East Ham Palace	Queen's, Poplar
Finsbury Park Emp.	(Rotherhithe Hippodrome)
Golders Green Hippodrome	Shepherd's Bush Emp.
Grand, Clapham	(South London Palace)
Hackney Emp.	(Stratford Emp.)
Hammersmith Palace (C)	Victoria Palace
(Holborn Emp.)	Walthamstow Palace
Kilburn Emp.	Wood Green Emp.
Lewisham Hippodrome	Woolwich Emp.
Metropolitan	Woolwich, Royal Artillery T.

(b) PROVINCES

Aberdeen	Barnstaple
His Majesty's	John Gay T.
Tivoli	Barrow-in-Furness
Aberdovey	His Majesty's
Pav. (C)	Basingstoke
Aberystwyth	Grand
Little	Bath
Accrington	T.R.
Hippodrome	Palace
Aldershot	Bearwood
Hippodrome	Windsor T.
T.R.	Beccles
Amersham	T.R.
Playhouse	Bedford
Ashford	Royal County
Garrison T. (Exchange)	Bexhill
Ashton-under-Lyne	De La Warr Pav.
T.R.	T.R.
Aylesbury	Bilston
County T.	T.R.
Ayr	Birkenhead
Gaiety	(Argyle)
Bangor	Birmingham
County	T.R.
Barnsley	Alexandra
T.R.	Hippodrome

Birmingham (<i>continued</i>)	Dolphin
Aston Hippodrome	Hippodrome
Repertory T.	Grand
(P.O.W.)	Palace Pier Pav.
(Emp.)	Bristol
(Bordesley Palace)	Emp.
(Metropole or Queen's)	T.R.
(Grand; now a Casino)	Hippodrome
Bishop Auckland	Little
Eden	Broadstairs
Blackburn	Bohemia T.
Grand	Burnley
Blackpool	Victoria
Grand	Palace
O.H.	Bury
Tower	Hippodrome
Winter Gardens Pav.	Buxton
Hippodrome	O.H.
Ice Drome	Playhouse
Regal Pav.	Cambridge
Feldman's	Arts
Palace of Varieties	New (C)
Bolton	(Festival)
Hippodrome	Cardiff
Grand	P.O.W.
T.R.	New
Little	Emp.
Bournemouth	Unity
Palace Court	Little
Pav.	Carlisle
Little	Her Majesty's
Hippodrome, Boscombe	Castleford
Bradford	T.R.
Alhambra	Chatham
Princes	Royal Hippodrome
Civic Playhouse	Emp.
(Palace)	Chelmsford
Bridlington	Regent
Grand Pav.	Cheltenham
Spa T.	O.H.
Brighton	Civic Playhouse
T.R.	Chester
Imperial (C)	Royalty

Chesterfield	Dudley
Hippodrome	Hippodrome
Charley	Dundee
Plaza (C)	Palace
Clacton	Repertory T.
Town Hall (Princes)	Dunfermline
West Cliff T.	O.H.
Coatbridge	Eastbourne
T.R.	Devonshire Park T.
Colchester	Pier T.
Repertory T.	Royal Hippodrome
Colne	Eccles
Hippodrome (C)	Broadway
Colwyn Bay	Edinburgh
Repertory T.	(T.R.)
Coventry	Emp.
Hippodrome	King's
Repertory T.	Lyceum
Crewe	Palladium
New	Everyman
Croydon	Gaiety, Leith
Grand	Exeter
Davis T.	T.R.
Emp.	Falmouth
Darlington	Princess Pav.
New Hippodrome	Farnham
Repertory T.	Castle T.
Deal	Felixstowe
Globe	Pier Pav.
Derby	Ranelagh T.
Grand	Folkestone
Dewsbury	Pleasure Gardens T.
Emp.	Gateshead
Didsbury	Emp.
Capitol	Little
Doncaster	Glasgow
Grand	T.R.
Douglas	Alhambra
Derby Castle	King's
Variety T.	Royal Princess's
Palace Coliseum	Emp.
Gaiety	Park
	Rutherglen Repertory

Citizens'	Tivoli
Pav.	Hunstanton
Metropole	Town Hall T.
Empress	Hyde
Queen's	T.R. (C)
Great Yarmouth	Ilford
Little	(Hippodrome)
Greenock	Ilfracombe
King's	Alexandra Hall
Emp.	Victoria Pav.
Grimsby	Ilkley
Palace	Playhouse
Halifax	Inverness
Grand	Emp.
Palace	Ipswich
Hanley	Hippodrome
(T.R.)	Keighley
Hanwell	Hippodrome
Park T.	Kettering
Harrogate	Savoy (C)
Grand O.H.	Kidderminster
Harrow	O.H.
Coliseum	King's Lynn
Hartlepool	Pilot (C)
Emp.	Kingston-on-Thames
Harwich	Emp.
Alexandra, Dovercourt	Lancaster
Hastings	Grand
White Rock Pav.	Leeds
Haverfordwest	Grand T. and O.H.
County (C)	T.R.
Henley-on-Thames	Emp.
Playhouse	City Palace of Varieties
Hereford	Leamington
Palladium (County)	T.R. (C)
Horsham	Leek
Court Royal	Grand
Huddersfield	Leicester
T.R.	Royal O.H.
Palace	T.R.
Hull	Palace
New	Little

Leigh	Palace
• T.R.	Queen's Park Hip.
Letchworth	Hulme Hippodrome
St Francis T.	Rusholme Pav. (C)
Lewes	Gaiety (C)
Glyndebourne O.H.	Mansfield
Lichfield	Palace
Garrick T.	Margate
Lincoln	Hippodrome
T.R.	Middlesbrough
Liverpool	Emp.
Royal Court	Morecambe
Shakespeare T.	Royalty
Playhouse	Winter Garden
Emp.	Alhambra
Pav.	Tower
Llandrindod Wells	Morley
Plaza Playhouse	Pav.
Llandudno	Motherwell
Pier Pav.	Emp.
Grand	Nelson
Loughborough	Grand
T.R.	Newark
Lowestoft	Palace (C)
Hippodrome	Newbury
Sparrow's Nest T.	Plaza
South Pier Pav.	Newcastle-under-Lyme
Playhouse	T.R.
Luton	Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Grand	T.R.
Lytham	Emp.
Ashton Pav.	Palace
Macclesfield	Palace T.
Brocklehurst Memorial	People's T.
Hall	Playhouse
Maidstone	Grand, Byker
Palace (C)	New Mills
Malvern	Art T.
Festival T. (C)	Newport
Manchester	Little
O.H.	Newquay
Hippodrome	Newquay T.
	Cosy Nook T.

Newton Abbot
 Alexandra
 Northampton
 New
 Repertory T. (O.H.)
 (Emp.)
 Norwich
 T.R.
 Hippodrome
 Maddermarket
 Nottingham
 T.R.
 Emp.
 Little (Repertory)
 Hippodrome (C)
 Olympia
 Nuneaton
 Hippodrome (C)
 Oldham
 T.R.
 Emp.
 Coliseum
 Oxford
 New
 Playhouse
 Paisley
 Paisley T.
 Penrith
 Alhambra (C)
 Playhouse
 Penzance
 Pav.
 Perth
 Perth Repertory T.
 Peterborough
 Embassy
 Emp.
 Plymouth
 Pakce
 Pontardawe
 Pav. (C)
 Porthcawl
 Grand Pav.

Portsmouth
 T.R. (C)
 Emp.
 South Parade
 Pier T.
 King's, Southsea
 Preston
 Palace
 Royal Hippodrome
 Ramsgate
 Palace
 Reading
 Palace
 Redditch
 Palace (C)
 Retford
 Majestic
 Rhyl
 Pav.
 Queen's T.
 Richmond, Surrey
 Richmond T.
 Richmond, Yorks.
 T.R.
 Rochdale
 T.R.
 Rotherham
 Regent
 Regal
 Emp. (C)
 Hippodrome (C)
 Ryde
 Esplanade Pav.
 St Andrews
 Byre T.
 St Helens
 T. and O.H.
 Salford
 Royal Hippodrome
 Salisbury
 Arts T.
 Saltcoats
 Beach Pav.

Scarborough	Swindon
Grand O.H.	Civic Playhouse
'Scunthorpe	Emp. (C)
Savoy	Torquay
Shanklin	Pav.
Shanklin T.	Tunbridge Wells
Sheffield	Assembly Hall T.
Emp.	Tyldesley
Lyceum	T.R. (C)
Playhouse	Ulverston
Palace, Attercliffe	Palladium (C)
Heeley Green T.	Roxy Cinema (stages plays)
Skegness	Ventnor
Butlin's T.	Winter Gardens
Arcadia	Wakefield
Southampton	O.H.
Emp. (C)	Wallasey
Guildhall	Tivoli
Southend	Tower
WestclirT Palace	Wallsend-on-Tyne
Regal	Borough T. (C)
Pier Pav.	Warrington
Southport	Royal Court T.
Garrick	Warwick
Little	County T. (C)
Stockport	Watford
T.R.	Palace
Hippodrome	Wednesbury
Stockton-on-Tees	Hippodrome
Globe (C)	Wellingborough
Hippodrome (C)	Palace (C)
Stratford-upon-Avon	West Bromwich
Shakespeare Memorial	(T.R.)
T.	Plaza
Sunderland	Weston-super-Mare
Emp.	Knightstone T.
Palace	Winter Gardens Pav.
Sutton Coldfield	Weymouth
Highbury Little T.	Alexandra Gardens
Swansea	Whitby
Emp.	SpaT.
Grand (C)	

Whitlcy Bay	T.R. (C)
Playhouse (C)	Hippodrome
Widnes	Worcester
Alexandra (C)	T.R.
Wigan	Workington
Hippodrome	O.H.
Little	Worthing
Windsor	Connaught T.
T.R.	York
Wolverhampton	T.R.
Grand	O.H. and Emp.

2. IRELAND

Belfast	Gate
Emp.	Queen's
Grand O.K.	Capitol
Clonmel	Kilkenny
Clonmel T.	Kilkenny T.
Cork	Limerick
O.H.	Savoy (C)
Drogheda	Lyric (C)
Town Hall	Tralee
Dublin	St John's T.
Gaiety	Waterford
T.R.	T.R.
Olympia	Wexford
Abbey	T.R.

The undermentioned are members of the Little Theatre Guild of Great Britain:

Bolton, Little Theatre	Newport, Little Theatre
Bradford, Civic Playhouse	Newcastle-upon-Tyne, People's Theatre
Crescent Theatre, Birmingham	Norwich, Maddermarket Theatre
Crompton Stage Society, Playhouse, Shaw, Lancashire	Questors' Theatre, Baling
Highbury Theatre, Sutton Coldfield	Stockport Garrick Society, Hall
Garrick	
Great Hucklow Playhouse	Unnamed Society, Whitworth
Loft Theatre, Leamington	Theatre, Manchester
Leicester, Little Theatre	Wigan, Little Theatre

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