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ENGLISH VERSE DRAMA FROM 1890 TO 1935

Thesis submitted to the University of Durham  
for the degree of M.Litt.

by

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September 26, 1958.

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# I

## I N T R O D U C T I O N

As a research student for the degree of M.Litt., I went to the University of Durham to work under Professor Clifford Leech, whose unfailing inspiration and encouragement to a student in a foreign land need no emphasis. I did a year's work under his constant supervision. I had planned to spend two years under him, but circumstances beyond my control compelled me to return home at the end of the first year. Prof. Leech was good enough to guide me from across the seas. Thus this work has been done in two countries. I am conscious of my debt to the Department of English of the Durham University and am very grateful to the University of Mysore for having spared me a year to study abroad.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE CAUSES OF THE DECLINE OF POETIC DRAMA IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The passing of the high tragedian, - so cheerfully recorded by Charles Hawtrey, - meant the loss of the drama's highest organ - poetic tragedy, - and with it a shrinking of human values. That sense of the greatness of human life, which the most ranting Shakespearian actor conveyed, which the veriest barn-stormer adumbrated, which lingered like the echoes of thunder even in the tragedies of Sheridan Knowles, had vanished from our post-prandial theatre. No wonder that the Germans (whose artisan class in the very stress of Armageddon built for itself a great classic theatre) considered Shakespeare theirs, and the Englishman a 'slacker'.<sup>1</sup>

These are the words of a writer early in this century. Whatever may be the significance we attach to them, they certainly throw light on the condition of English verse drama. After the Jacobean, poetic drama gradually gave way to other forms.

There have been attempts, many of them feeble, to revive poetic drama. Writers of all genres make occasional excursions into this field. Addison felt impelled to write a play in verse, even Samuel Johnson produced Irene. The Romantics showed an irresistible attraction for this form, which became almost an obsession with them. But their very nature went against this way of writing. As they were remote from the general current of life, they could not give what was wanted on the stage. Consequently, their plays had little dramatic merit. They did not regard the drama as a point of contact offered

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<sup>1</sup> Israel Zangwill, 'Poetic Drama and the War',  
The Poetry Review, 1916, ii, pp. 30-31.

in the theatre between the writer and the community at large, but only as a suitable form to embody their passions. Unlike the Romantics on the Continent, they lived in isolation:

It is perhaps difficult to conceive of Romantic egotists such as Shelley or Byron submitting to the discipline of the theatre; yet the history of nineteenth-century drama elsewhere in Europe suggests that the Romantic approach could find satisfactory expression on the stage. To Schiller or Hugo the theatre offered a challenge which they rejoiced to accept. To the English Romantic poets it was something which they mostly preferred to ignore.<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult to agree in detail with Rowell, as so many Continental Romantic plays are not performable. Certainly, having been soaked in the Elizabethan and Jacobean style, the English Romantics were divorced from idiomatic speech, which they could have profitably used on the stage. The Romantic temperament did not realise that the play is something which exists for an audience. 'The Elizabethans, while writing drama, kept both their immediate and their universal audiences in mind'.<sup>2</sup> There is a kind of relation between art and the people, which no artist, particularly no dramatist, can afford to ignore. A drama not related to the climate of popular life becomes a devitalised product and perhaps achieves popularity only in the printed form. On the other hand while the dramatist must not be too remote from life, he should seize on the eternal truths of life. As Wilson Knight puts it:

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<sup>1</sup> George Rowell, The Victorian Theatre, 1956, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> L.A.G.Strong, 'Elizabethan Drama and Society', Talking of Shakespeare, 1954, p. 179:

"The time, the humour, the smell of these (Elizabethan) plays are the first evidence of how closely interwoven drama was with the nation's life, the life of the people".

We should not look for perfect verisimilitude to life, but rather see each play as an expanded metaphor, by means of which the original vision has been projected into forms roughly correspondent with actuality, conforming thereto with greater or less exactitude according to the demands of its nature ..... The persons, ultimately, are not human at all, but purely symbols of poetic vision.<sup>1</sup>

The letter introducing The Fall of Robespierre throws light on the medium used by the Romantics. Coleridge explains that it is his "sole aim to imitate the impassioned and highly figurative language of the French orators and to develop the characters of the chief actors on a vast stage of horrors".<sup>2</sup>

Intense emotions are well expressed in verse, which can fascinate and hold the hearer. Their expression can have aesthetic merit too; but the use of highly figurative language to the exclusion of the language of every day, removes the dramatist from the general tenor of life, and creates an 'ivory tower' for him. There should be a difference between stage-speech and the colloquial speech of the theatre-audience. But the gap between the two should not be too wide. In Murder in the Cathedral, the speech of the Knights after the murder is, no doubt, declamatory. Nevertheless, Eliot is close to the idiom of his audience, and in this respect he is nearer to the Elizabethans than Coleridge, Tennyson, Bridges or even Phillips. Eliot, discussing the poetry of Murder in the Cathedral, alludes to the failure of the Romantics in their imitation of Shakespeare's blank verse:

<sup>1</sup> G.Wilson Knight, The Wheel of Fire, 1956, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> S.T.Coleridge, Poetical Works, Oxford, 1912, ii, 495.

As for the versification, I was only aware at this stage that the essential was to avoid any echo of Shakespeare, for I was persuaded that the failure of nineteenth-century poets when they wrote for the theatre (and most of the greatest English poets had tried their hand at drama) was not in their theatrical technique, but in their dramatic language; and that this was due largely to their limitation to a strict blank verse which, after extensive use for non-dramatic poetry, had lost the flexibility which blank verse must have if it is to give the effect of conversation.<sup>1</sup>

William Archer's lively attack sums up the limitations of those sedulous imitators of Shakespeare:

Dramatic literature was at a low ebb. The ghost of Romantic drama stalked the stage, decked out in threadbare flipper and gibbering blank verse .....Whatever was least essential to Shakespeare's greatness was conscientiously imitated; his ease and flexibility of diction, his subtle characterisation, and his occasional mastery of construction were all ignored. Laboured rhetoric, whether serious or comic, was held to be the only legitimate form of dramatic utterance.<sup>2</sup>

Oddly enough, Shakespeare himself, seen through the distorting mirror of the German Romantic drama and the "Gothic" school, is in large part responsible for the divorce in nineteenth-century verse drama between stage life and actual life.

Though their study of Shakespeare doubtless influenced their approach to the theatre, Wordsworth and Coleridge turned more for inspiration to the novelty of the Gothic cult. The outline of The Borderers is manifestly inspired by Schiller, though the play itself has little of the Gothic essence in it.<sup>3</sup>

Rowell is largely correct, although the scene in which the aged Herbert is left abandoned on the heath by the Borderers, obviously

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<sup>1</sup> T.S.Eliot, Poetry and Drama, 1950, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> The Reign of Queen Victoria, 1887, ii, 561.

<sup>3</sup> G.Rowell, The Victorian Theatre, 1956, p. 33.



draws, though superficially, on certain aspects of the storm scenes in King Lear. F.R. Leavis points out that The Cenci is not only "Shakespearean in inspiration" but "full of particular echoes of Shakespeare, - echoes protracted, confused and woolly; plagiarisms, that is, of the worst kind".<sup>1</sup>

This critical judgment supports the view that verse drama tradition in the nineteenth-century was mainly imitative of Shakespeare.

The influence of Shakespeare and other Jacobean seems to be the reverse of invigorating. The attempt at the recreation of the spirit of their plays is futile, and the result is that they give no substance but shadows. Of the many instances where the dramatist is trying to recapture the spirit of the Elizabethans and the Jacobean, the outstanding one is Death's Jest Book. It looks as if Beddoes is parodying Jacobean tragedies in spirit and form. In doing this, he does not go beyond the surface of their work. The story of the duke who commits a murder, the avenger who disguises himself as a court-jester, and the victim who rises from the tomb, bears a kinship with the Jacobean plays, chiefly those of Webster and Tourneur. But Death's Jest Book failed as it lacked the strength of characterisation which distinguished its models. Gosse's remark is revealing: "Beddoes's worst weakness is his inability to record conversation".<sup>2</sup> Commenting on Swinburne's rather colourful critical remark that Beddoes's characters howl like lunatics in an asylum, Gosse says: "It is true that his characters talk preposterously.....  
..... Beddoes adapted, and abused, the Jacobean conventions, the comic interlude, the tragic fool, the absurd violence of passion".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Revaluation, 1949, p. 223.

<sup>2</sup> The Complete Works of Thomas Lovell Beddoes, ed. Edmund Gosse, 1928, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

Beddoes himself is not happy in contemplating his imitation of the early dramatists:

These reanimations are vampire~~ed~~ cold.....with the greatest reverence for all the antiquities of the drama, I still think that we had better beget than revive -- attempt to give the literature of this age an idiosyncrasy and spirit of its own and only raise a ghost to gaze on, not to live with -- just now the drama is a haunted ruin.<sup>1</sup>

The dramatists were aware of what they should but could not do.

More ominous for the progress of the drama, the hero of Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy tends to be simplified into an ideal portrait of the poet himself, especially in Byron. He becomes a personification of the poet's thought and emotional attitude, solitary, suffering, a martyr to his own ungovernable passions. The degree of objectification necessary for drama is either absent or only superficially present.

Abstract ideas have often played a large part in drama. But the important matter is one of stress. When the Romantics attempt to dramatise abstract issues, they tend to delineate characters which stand for an ideal rather than portray an individual. The tendency to present human conflict in extremes of passion, of guilt or remorse, tends to make characters types and not persons. The character of Beatrice in The Cenci is an outstanding example of this kind of portrait. Even Byron's Manfred is not free from abstraction. Remorse was a great favourite of its author's, the more so as certain pet abstract notions of his are therein expounded.<sup>2</sup> He succeeded in getting Sheridan to produce it at Drury Lane. But it is a play

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<sup>1</sup> The Works of Thomas Lovell Beddoes, ed. H.W.Donner, 1935, p.595

<sup>2</sup> Coleridge's Poetical Works, Oxford, 1912, ii, 651.

that could not be revived. The pet abstract notions of Godwin are also dramatised, but with only partial success, in The Borderers, where Marmaduke, the 'fool of feeling', is opposed to the rational Godwinian, Oswald. Similarly, in the words of Mary Shelley, "the interest in which he (Shelley) found<sup>in</sup> his dramas is often elevated above human vicissitudes into the mighty passions and throes of Gods and demigods: such fascinated the abstract imagination of Shelley".<sup>1</sup>

Some of Shakespeare's characters tend to personify abstract issues, such as jealousy or ambition, but give the impression of being individual men. This actuality in the delineation of characters makes them truly dramatic. But the Romantics lack the dramatic aptitude to create complex characters which yet present a dramatic idea. One is inclined to endorse Eliot's views on the requirements of poetic drama.

It must take genuine and substantial human emotions, such emotions as observation can confirm, typical emotions, and give them artistic form; the degree of abstraction is a question for the methods of each author.<sup>2</sup>

A striking feature of these dramas is the comparative rarity of prose, the vehicle of everyday communication. The technique of using prose and verse with a definite design (as in Shakespeare) adds to dramatic effectiveness. The use of normal conversational speech mixed with poetry to give expression to an intense situation would have been acceptable to the audience of the nineteenth century. Shakespeare's effective use of prose and verse carried his audience with him.

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<sup>1</sup> Shelley's Poetical Works, Oxford, 1929, p.267.

<sup>2</sup> 'Rhetoric' and Poetic Drama, (1919), now in Selected Essays, 1951, p.41.

The knocking at the gate in Macbeth is an example that comes to everybody's mind; but it has long seemed to me that the alternation of scenes in prose with scenes in verse in Henry IV points an ironic contrast between the world of high politics and the world of common life. The audience probably thought they were getting their accustomed chronicle play garnished with amusing scenes of low life; yet the prose scenes of both Parts I and II provide a sardonic comment upon the bustling ambitions of the chiefs of the parties in the insurrection of the Percys.<sup>1</sup>

Usually in Shakespeare, the highly placed characters use verse and the plebeian characters use prose, which breaks the monotony of blank verse and enriches the dramatic pattern.

An inherent defect in the drama of the period is over-literal stage-presentation, which leaves little or no room for the poetic dramatist to establish an environment, literal or symbolic, by imagery. It is difficult in such a prosaic setting to bring the significance of the experiences of the characters home to the audience:

One should leave the description of the poet free to call up the marlet's procreant cradle or what he will.<sup>2</sup>

In 1893, when The Tempter, a tragedy in verse by Henry Arthur Jones, was produced at the Haymarket Theatre, a ship was put bodily upon the stage in a shipwreck scene:

When, however, the ship came to be put on the actual stage it would neither work, nor sail, nor sink, and in place of thrilling the spectator with terror, it merely gave him a sensation of sea-sickness..... The whole business of the ship served only to show the futility of realism carried beyond the point at which it is subservient to other ends.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> T.S.Eliot, Poetry And Drama, 1950, p.14.

<sup>2</sup> W.B.Yeats, Plays And Controversies, 1927, p.22.

<sup>3</sup> H.A.Jones, The Tempter, 1898, Preface, p. vi.

Although the quotation serves as an attack on realism of staging, it enables us to see the point that the poetry should suggest and the staging should not prevent the free working of the imagination.

The verse dramatists of the nineteenth century had also to struggle against the character of the popular theatre, which was expected to satisfy the demand for spectacle. There was a large audience, craving for pantomime, and Victorian melodrama to a certain extent catered to this need.

Melodrama with its substitution of sensation for emotion, situation for structure and spectacle for nearly everything, had taken the place of tragedy.<sup>1</sup>

This naturally performed a double function - answered the new demand and perhaps made the audience incapable of appreciating finer work. A similar situation had been well summed up at the end of the eighteenth century in Colman's prologue to New Hay At The Old Market:

Since the preference we know  
Is for pageantry and shew,  
'Twere a pity the public to balk -  
And when people appear  
Quite unable to hear  
'Tis undoubtedly needless to talk.  
Let your Shakespeares and Jonsons go hang, go hang!  
Let your Otways and Drydens go down!  
Give us but elephants and white bulls enough,  
And we'll take in all the town.

Brave boys!<sup>2</sup>

It was also an age of actors:

The poetic play found itself wholly dependent upon the popularity of some great actor.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> U.Ellis - Fermor, The Irish Dramatic Movement, 1954, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Rowell, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Harold Child, Chapter viii, 'The Decline of Tragedy', The Cambridge History of English Literature, xiii, 1922, p. 257.

The success of a play depended on the theatre in which it was produced and the actors who performed it. The play was not the thing for the dramatist: the important thing for him was that it should be played by a famous actor. Shelley, after completing The Cenci, in a letter to a friend says:

What I want you to do is, to procure for me its presentation at Covent Garden. The principal character Beatrice is precisely fitted for Miss O'Neil, and it might even seem to have been written for her. ....and, in all respects, it is fitted only for Covent Garden. The chief male character, I confess, I should be very unwilling that anyone but Kean should play - that is impossible, and I must be contented with an inferior actor.<sup>1</sup>

This preference for actors has come down from the days of Shakespeare. The dramatist, if he knows his actors and audience, can mould his play to suit their idiosyncrasies, and to that extent his play will be enriched. But there is the danger of the dramatist making himself subservient to the actor, if his sole aim is to exploit the actor's personality.<sup>2</sup> J.T.Grein, in an appeal to Passmore Edward to endow a theatre which might make possible the recognition of drama on its intrinsic merits, voices the same feeling:

For once let your benevolence blend with your love for art; enfranchise our drama from the degradation of commercialism by endowing a theatre.....where plays shall be performed on the strength of their intrinsic merits, not on account of their possibilities for 'star-acting'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Shelley's Literary and Philosophical Criticism, ed. J.Shawcross, 1909, p. 191.

<sup>2</sup> Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Eliot, 1954, p. 33.  
"The play will become a mere stalking horse for the star, and while we may then expect a virtuoso act, it is entirely a matter of chance if we get any of the more permanent qualities of dramatic literature."

<sup>3</sup> The New World Theatre, 1924, p. 159.

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<sup>3</sup> The New World Theatre, 1924, p. 159.

The failure of the Romantics to make any lasting contribution to the theatre derives from their inability to come to grips with it.

But, in spite of their limitations, the impulse to write plays in verse was very strong. Even a novelist like George Eliot shows an interest in this branch of literature. About her Spanish Gypsy, she says: "I conceived the plot and wrote nearly the whole as a drama in 1864".<sup>1</sup> This was to her a source of happiness, and she says, "I seemed to have gained a new organ, a new medium that my nature longed for."<sup>2</sup> G.H.Lewes suggested that the subject was eminently suited for an opera.<sup>3</sup> Browning is successful when this impulse is directed away from the stage into dramatic monologue. Tennyson's plays, while they achieved some limited stage success in their day, are rarely attempted by a producer now.

The garrulousness of English poetic drama is a tradition that lingers late in the century with Tennyson's elaborate historical surveys and the 15,000 lines of Swinburne's Bothwell.<sup>4</sup>

Like the Romantics, the Victorian poets lacked the energising influence of a living theatre in which they could learn their craft and see that their productions came into their own. This want prevented them, despite their genius, from writing drama in the real sense of the term. A new attitude, however, began to make itself apparent when Yeats and Eliot wrote drama in verse:

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to John Blackwood, 21 March 1867, The George Eliot Letters, ed. by Gordon S.Haight, Oxford, 1956, iv, 354.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Francois d' Albert-Durale, (July 1868), Ibid., iv, 465.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to John Blackwood, 23 June 1868, Ibid., IV, 453

<sup>4</sup> Rowell, p. 32.



I have spent much of my time and more of my thought these last ten years on Irish organisation, and now that the Irish Literary Theatre has completed the plan I had in my head ten years ago.....I want to get back to primary ideas. I want to put the old stories into verse, and if I put them into dramatic verse, it will matter less to me henceforward who plays them than what they play, and how they play it. I hope to get our heroic age into verse.<sup>1</sup>

That was Yeats in 1901. Eliot, in 1934, wrote:

The Elizabethan drama was aimed at a public which wanted entertainment of a crude sort, but would stand a good deal of poetry; our problem should be to take a form of entertainment and subject it to the process which would leave it a form of art.<sup>2</sup>

A common endeavour to fashion poetic drama on new lines is discernible. Yeats and Eliot are different figures with different backgrounds and aims: Yeats much nearer than Eliot to live theatre and the exigencies of stage production, Yeats, for all his translation of Sophocles, much less under classical influence than Eliot. But in Yeats's reference to 'primary ideas' and Eliot's recognition of the primal vigour of Elizabethan drama, we can detect an urge to get back to the roots of indigenous drama, whether the roots are English or Irish.

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<sup>1</sup> W.B.Yeats, Samhain, Dublin, Oct. 1901, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> The Sacred Wood, 4th ed. 1934, p. 70.

## CHAPTER TWO

## DERIVATIVE PLAYS: ROBERT BRIDGES AND STEPHEN PHILLIPS

Among the verse dramatists of the eighteen nineties Bridges (1844-1930) and Phillips (1868-1915) looked backwards to draw inspiration from the Elizabethan, Greek and even Spanish writers of drama. The Victorian dramatists, Browning, Tennyson and Swinburne, had continued their efforts in the tradition of the Romantics. Their success was limited: "Their miscalculation lay in the expression of the Romantic spirit, when outside the theatre the Romantic movement was a spent force."<sup>1</sup> But the demand for poetic drama was perennial: the audience wanted a dramatist who could handle verse in the theatre more skilfully than the Victorian dramatists. In 1879 Matthew Arnold had summed up the situation:

We have our Elizabethan drama, we have a drama of the last century and of the latter part of the century preceding, a drama which may be called our drama of the town ..... But we have no modern drama ..... We have apparitions of poetical and romantic drama.... because man has always in his nature the poetical fibre. Then we have numberless imitations and adaptations from the French. All these are at bottom fantastic. We may truly say of them that "truth and sense and liberty are flown". And the reason is evident. They are pages out of a life which the ideal of the homme sensuel movern rules, transferred to a life where this ideal does not reign.<sup>2</sup>

In the following decade, there was a demand for 'apparitions of poetical and romantic drama'. Phillips, who had a knowledge of

<sup>1</sup> George Rowell, The Victorian Theatre, 1956, p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Arnold, 'The French Play in London', Nineteenth Century, August, 1879, pp. 238-9.

the theatre, felt the pulse of the audience. When Paolo and Francesca was produced he was acclaimed as a second Shakespeare. But Bridges, who did not have contact with the theatre, wrote plays that were rarely undertaken by a producer.<sup>1</sup> A comparison of his plays and Phillips's dealing with common themes is attempted in the last section of this chapter.

### Robert Bridges

Robert Bridges, though he is scarcely remembered as a dramatist, wrote a considerable number of plays. His eight plays and two 'masques' were all written between 1883 and 1904. All these except The First Part of Nero, which was regarded as 'an exercise in dramatic qualities rather than scenic',<sup>2</sup> were intended for the stage. The Humours of the Court was produced by the Oxford University Dramatic Society in 1930, the year of Bridges's death. Prometheus the Fire Giver and Demeter had only amateur productions.<sup>3</sup> An obituary notice stated that Bridges himself believed that, if once produced, his plays would hold the stage.<sup>4</sup> Posterity has so far belied Bridges's belief.

His dramatic career began in 1883 with Prometheus the Fire Giver, which he styled 'A mask in the Greek manner'. Then followed

<sup>1</sup> Edward Thompson, Robert Bridges, Oxford, 1944, p. 38: "Bridges rarely, if ever, went to the theatre, of which I never heard him speak".

<sup>2</sup> Poetical Works of Robert Bridges, 1901, iii, 262.

<sup>3</sup> Letters, p. 160: "Prometheus was acted at a boys' grammar school near Newbury." Demeter, Oxford, 1905, Notes: Written for the students of Somerville College, was produced by them on the 11th June, 1904.

<sup>4</sup> The Times, 22nd April, 1930.

his plays: The First Part of Nero (1885), The Feast of Bacchus (1889), Achilles in Scyros (1890), The Christian Captives (1890), Palicio (1890), The Humours of the Court (1890), The Second Part of the History of Nero (1894), and Demeter, a Mask (1904).

Although Bridges's plays were written at a time when there was a demand for poetic drama, they received very little critical attention, and even that was hostile. Binyon praised his Prometheus in The Dome.<sup>1</sup> But he emphatically discouraged its production.

Yvor Winters, reviewing the poems of T. Sturge Moore, said:

The dramas of Mr. Moore and Robert Bridges have never to my knowledge been taken very seriously, yet it seems to be beyond all question that Bridges' two plays on Nero are the greatest tragedy since The Cenci and (if we except that furious and appalling composition, Samson Agonistes, which, though a tragedy, is no play) are quite possibly superior to any English tragedy outside of Shakespeare, that his Christian Captives is nearly as fine, and that his Achilles in Scyros is a performance as lovely as Comus, though doubtless less profound.<sup>2</sup>

Thus in posthumous criticism an attempt has been made to revalue Bridges the dramatist, though contemporary reviews dismissed his characters as 'bookish' and his plays as wanting in the 'fury of the battle of life which is the stuff of drama'.<sup>3</sup>

Any revaluation of Bridges must take into account the motive behind his plays. Bridges the dramatist stands in the tradition of the Victorian poets who wrote blank verse dramas in the manner of

<sup>1</sup> Laurence Binyon, 'Prometheus, the Fire Giver', The Dome, ii, (1899).

<sup>2</sup> Yvor Winters, 'T. Sturge Moore', Hound and Horn, vi, 1933, p. 542.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by A. Guerard, Robert Bridges, Cambridge, 1942, p. 124.

the Elizabethans. The young Bridges knew the Victorians, at least Tennyson, on the stage. The Cup and Becket, produced in 1881, achieved great success.<sup>1</sup> Bridges's Prometheus, which came out two years later, was praised for its poetic effects. This is a very interesting period - dramatic activity was stirring: on one side, the last phase of the Victorian theatre, struggling to continue the Elizabethan and the Greek tradition, most pronounced in Bridges and Phillips, and on the other, the reanimation of realistic prose drama with translations of Ibsen. The old tradition continued in Bridges at a time when the realistic prose drama began to take root.

Bridges's aim as a dramatist showed that he differed fundamentally from those whom he tried to imitate. One of the characters in The First Part of Nero sums up his attitude to the stage:

Nay, even of drama Aristotle held  
Though a good play must act well, that 'tis perfect  
without the stage:<sup>2</sup>

His essay, 'The Influence of the Audience on Shakespeare's Drama',<sup>3</sup> where he condemns Shakespeare on the grounds of morality and of sacrificing art in order to please the 'vulgar stratum of his audience',<sup>4</sup> shows his insistence on 'dramatic qualities other than scenic'. His criticism would require of Shakespeare that emphasis

<sup>1</sup>Rowell, The Victorian Theatre, 1956, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>The First Part of Nero, 1901, p. 86.

<sup>3</sup>Collected Essays and Papers, vi, 1927.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., vi, 2

should be laid on characterisation at the expense of dramatic intensity, although he himself, disregarding the stage, would lay emphasis on poetry rather than action or characterisation. This emphasis makes his own plays dramatic poems. The limitation is due partly to his want of dramatic strength and partly to the tradition from which his dramatic work derives.

Bridges's essay on Mary Coleridge throws light on his views on poetry:

It may be difficult to say what the artistic requirements of modern poetry are or should be, but two things stand out, namely the Greek attainment and the Christian ideal; and the art which nowadays neglects either of these is imperfect; that is, it will not command our highest love, nor satisfy our best intelligence.<sup>1</sup>

Greek myth has been a source of inspiration to many: Bridges and Thomas Sturge Moore, among others, were greatly attracted to it. In his Prometheus the Fire Giver Bridges tries to achieve that union of 'Greek attainment and the Christian ideal' to which he somewhat vaguely refers. He is not, like Shelley, creating a Prometheus of the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature.<sup>2</sup> His motive is discernible in the prophecy of the Semichorus:

For God who shall rule mankind from deathless skies  
By mercy and truth shall be known,  
In love and peace shall arise.<sup>3</sup>

This specifically Christian reference exemplifies the union he speaks of.

<sup>1</sup> Collected Essays and Papers,<sup>1927,</sup> /vi, 212 (1937).

<sup>2</sup> Shelley's Poetical Works, Oxford, 1929, p. 201.

<sup>3</sup> Bridges's Poetical Works, 1914, p. 48.

Bridges very faithfully keeps to the form of the Greek play in the matter of using a chorus and a severely limited cast. Prometheus, appearing disguised as a shepherd standing before the palace of Inachus in Argos on a festival of Zeus to give 'the flash of mastering fire'<sup>1</sup> to the 'hopeful, careful, brave and wise'<sup>2</sup> Inachus, and the tragic consequences which both the giver and the receiver have to face, form the substance of the play. Prometheus explaining his purpose, Inachus' fear and the anger of Zeus are sketched in rich poetry.

Readers of the present day are likely to be attracted by the poetry of Prometheus, rather than by Bridges's handling of the myth. Clearly, Bridges is under the influence of Milton as far as style is concerned. The Miltonic influence is manifested in a general orotundity and a particular variety of poetic diction - latinistic, polysyllabic and bookish. This kind of influence is, however, less striking than are his Miltonic inversions of complex sentences. For instance, the opening lines of Prometheus have a direct Miltonic ring:

From high Olympus and the aetherial courts,  
Where mighty Zeus our angry king confirms  
The Fates' decrees and bends the will of the Gods,  
I come:<sup>3</sup>

If we look forward a few decades to 1921, we find Bridges entitling one section of his collection of 'New Verses', New Miltonic

<sup>1</sup> Bridges's Poetical Works, 1914, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., ... p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., ... p. 3.

Syllabics.<sup>1</sup> This phrase underlines Bridges's constant self-consciousness about metre, although his metrical theories (Miltonic, quantitative) were not developed until after he had long ceased writing plays. Bridges also makes use of stichomythia (which came from classical drama) to give force to a play where there is not much action. The action is confined to the palace of Inachus. The main characters, Inachus and Argeia, do not develop in the course of the action. This becomes especially evident when the characters are unable to respond to the offer made by Prometheus. Inachus speaks of 'winter-withering hope'<sup>2</sup> while Argeia ponders the 'desperate sorrow sighing'<sup>3</sup> in her husband's heart. This situation, however intense it may be, is drawn out to inordinate length.

Although the play is not without literary merit, it does not succeed as a vehicle for acting. Binyon sums up its undramatic quality in a colourful phrase, 'unripe drama'.<sup>4</sup>

Demeter, written for performance at Somerville College, Oxford, appropriately deals with the story of Persephone. The story of Persephone being carried off to Hades, the grief of her mother Demeter, and the restoration of the daughter on certain conditions, which gives a symbolic interpretation of the four seasons, has been used by many writers, among them Milton, Hawthorne, Keats and later Sturge Moore. Sturge Moore's Psyche in Hades, written in the form the Japanese Noh play, is considered later.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bridges's Poetical Works, Oxford, 1936, p. 507.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> Laurence Binyon, 'Prometheus the Fire Giver' The Dome, ii, 1899 p.205.

<sup>5</sup> Vide p. 306 infra.



Bridges casts his characters in a meditative mould. The lyrical description of the gentle-eyed Demeter and the chorus of the Oceanides contribute to the poetic charm of the play. The romantic atmosphere is conveyed through his characteristic technique:

O happy is the Spring!  
 Now birds early arouse their pretty minstreling;  
 Now down its rocky hill murmureth ev'ry rill;  
 Now all bursteth anew, wantoning in the dew  
 Their bells of bonny blue, their chalices honey'd.<sup>1</sup>

It is characteristic of Bridges's lyrical mode that celebration of the natural scene involves him in artifice: the source of such words as 'rill', 'murmureth' and 'chalices' in this context is clearly literary.

It is a common feature in Bridges's plays, that whenever a chance arises, he makes one of the characters the mouthpiece of his views. We feel the dramatist's intervention to give vent to his feelings on such subjects as wisdom, joy and other virtues. Athene and Artemis, who gather flowers for the festival of Zeus, turn their thoughts to discuss emotions, passions and other complexities of life:

All emotions,  
 Whether of Gods or man, all loves and passions,  
 Are of two kinds; they are either inform'd by wisdom,  
 To reason obedient, -- or they are uncondacted,  
 Flames of the burning life.<sup>2</sup>

An image of rich association is used.

Demeter's sorrow is expressed in a simple idiom. She tells the chorus, who consoles her:

You are not mothers, or ye would not wonder.<sup>3</sup>

She is the true symbol of motherhood. When her daughter is restored

<sup>1</sup> Poetical Works of Robert Bridges, p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

to her, Bridges seems to relate the story to the Christian doctrine of Resurrection, but he never loses sight of the usual interpretation of the Persephone myth. Persephone speaks thus:

I thought  
That man should innocently honour me  
With bloodless sacrifice and spring-tide joy.<sup>1</sup>

After describing the death of a plant, she continues:

So I the mutual symbol of my choice,  
Shall die with Winter and with Spring revive.  
How without Winter could I have my Spring?  
How come to resurrection without death?<sup>2</sup>

The chorus of ocean nymphs at first praises the beauties of Sicily and sings of the joys of Spring. But when Persephone is carried off by Hades, the chorus deplores the loss and prepares the audience to receive the grief-stricken Demeter. Finally, a year later, the chorus welcomes her and offers garlands, thus giving emphasis to the underlying meaning of the myth.

Bridges's experiments in Prometheus and Demeter are to be regarded as an expression of his interest in various forms of drama, particularly the 'mask'. But to him the 'mask' means narration of an old story in poetry, 'a work which relies principally on its poetry for its effect, and yet springs from a dramatic idea'.<sup>3</sup>

He continues his experiments in this direction in Achilles in Scyros, once again Greek-inspired. He romanticises the story of Achilles' concealment on the island of Scyros, disguised as a girl named Pyrrha, to avoid fighting at Troy, his discovery by Ulysses and his marriage to Deidamia. Bridges makes a slight departure

<sup>1</sup> Poetical Works of Robert Bridges, p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. Binyon, p. 204.

from the original story. In Apollodorus, Achilles had an affair with Deidamia, the daughter of Lycomedes, to whom a son, Pyrrhus, was born, afterwards named Neoptolemus.<sup>1</sup> But Bridges's sense of morality makes Deidamia innocent: she never doubts the sex of Pyrrhus till the arrival of Ulysses and his intervention.

Bridges has one clearly realised character in Achilles, in whom an endeavour is made to represent the conflict between love and honour, Achilles finally choosing the latter. Although the main interest is in the poetry, the characterization is vivid. Ulysses is distinctly drawn. The scene in which Ulysses overhears the conversation of Deidamia and Achilles is dramatically effective. Thetis's appearance on the stage and the rhetorical questions of the mother and son sustain the interest of the audience. Lycomedes is a spokesman of the poet's views on the quiet life and religion. Ulysses' disguise as a pedlar is of dramatic interest.

Disguise and the device of overhearing--well known techniques in Shakespeare--do not, of course, make this play of high quality. Its value lies in its poetry. The play is important in the development of Bridges's style. He shakes off the Miltonic influence.

As Bridges indicates in his notes<sup>2</sup> he copies from Calderon a passage describing the Cretan ships joining the fleet at Aulis which shows some degree of liberation from Milton:

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<sup>1</sup> The Library, Library Association, III, xiii, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Poetical Works of Robert Bridges, 1901, iii, 262.

The next day at dawn  
 I played the spy. 'Twas such a breathless morning  
 When all the sound and motion of the sea  
 Is short and sullen, like a dreaming beast:  
 Or as 'twere mixed of heavier elements  
 Than the bright water, that obeys the wind.<sup>1</sup>

Although the lines are imitative, they are not mannered and have a genuine ring. Miltonic inversions disappear and we have something nearer Bridges's own style.

Bridges's interest in writing <sup>'masks'</sup>~~'masks'~~ may be regarded as an expression of his concern to revive this old form of drama. About a decade later, The Mask, a journal of the art of the theatre, was started "to bring before an intelligent public many ancient and modern aspects of the Theatre's Art which have too long been disregarded or forgotten".<sup>2</sup>

Bridges takes plots from various sources and provides the skeleton with ornamentation or drapery. He is not original, even when the 'comic spirit' attracts him. He looks to a model, where a degree of close observation of actual experience seems to be essential.

The Feast of Bacchus, which is partly translated from Terence, possesses some features of Latin comedy--double plot, concealed identities and heavy fathers. Bridges has considerably reduced his original, Heautontimorumenos, which contains too many plots for his taste, and concentrated on the main incidents. He retains the first act, which introduces Chremes and Menedemus and their talk

<sup>1</sup> Poetical Works of Robert Bridges, 1901, p. 204.

<sup>2</sup> Enid Rose, Gordon Craig and the Theatre, 1931, p. 82.

about their children. The two nagging servants, Dromo and Syrus, of the original are replaced by Philolaches, an actor-friend of Pamphilus, and thus the cast is limited. He also tampers with the theme:

As it stands (it) would be unpresentable to a Christian audience, chiefly on account of the story of Antiphila's exposure, which must deprive Chremes of sympathy.<sup>1</sup>

This tampering, with a view to achieving a fusion of the Greek attainment with the Christian ideal, makes Bridges's play less dramatic, and the result would certainly not be thought richly comic by an audience. Brett Young's remark on Bridges's censorship of the original is revealing:

Bridges has lost something vigorous and satyric, the harvest of the violent wines of the South.<sup>2</sup>

In Bridges's hands the atmosphere of the comedy lends itself to quiet humour rather than to boisterous laughter. Menedemus, an Athenian gentleman, and Chremes, a retired Ionian sponge merchant, corresponding to the heavy fathers of the Latin comedy, are important in the exposition. But they are not properly realised. We do not feel that two human beings are engaging in this discussion about the lost daughter of the one and the absent son of the other. But Bridges's characters retain traces of the original in Menedemus' taunt to Chremes:

<sup>1</sup> Poetical Works of Robert Bridges, 1905, vi, 276.

<sup>2</sup> Brett Young, Robert Bridges, 1914, p. 172.

Have you so much spare time, then, Chremes,  
Left from your own affairs to meddle with other people's?'<sup>1</sup>

Chremes while expressing sympathy on Menedemus' loss of his son says that he has been callous as a father.

If one reflects that a broadly similar artificial narrative structure may be found in Moliere's comedy, a contrast will be clear: in Moliere the basis of the intrigue and the impossible ~~denouement~~ ~~denouncement~~ hardly seem to matter except as vehicles for a searching dissection of human folly. Such a motive is absent in Bridges' *Clinia*, the lost daughter as Clipho, and *Antiphila*, the absent son, meet and marry on the day of the feast of Bacchus. Pamphilus and Gorgo are the other pair of lovers. Through these two pairs, the dramatist tries to generate an atmosphere of romantic felicity, which is foreign to Bridges's nature. The imitative genius of Bridges does not lend itself to this kind of medium. Hopkins thought that this play was not a failure but no great success.<sup>2</sup>

Bridges's metrical experimentation in this play is of historical importance. He tries the new technique, later found in The Testament of Beauty, with 'the normal line as having twelve syllables and six stresses, with some lines varying so far from this norm as to have sixteen syllables and only four stresses'.<sup>3</sup> The six-stressed verse is inspired by Hopkins's 'Alexandrine verse sometimes expanded to 7 or 8 feet, as in *St. Winifred's Well*'.<sup>4</sup> Whatever may be the source, Bridges's intention is clear. The effect of the metre is

<sup>1</sup> Poetical Works of Robert Bridges, vi, 276.

<sup>2</sup> October 11, 1887.

<sup>2</sup> The letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Bridges, ed. C. C. Abbott, ~~October 11, 1887,~~ 1935, p. 262.

<sup>3</sup> N.C. Smith, Notes on The Testament of Beauty, 1931, xxxvi.

<sup>4</sup> Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Oxford, 1937, p. 257.

to approximate to the rhythm of the ordinary speaking voice. Of this kind of dramatic verse it may be said, as of Eliot's later plays, that it is prose to the ear and verse to the eye. Bridges frequently uses a mixture of prose and verse to achieve a variety of tone, a device which Shakespeare employs to far richer effect.

Lope de Vega's The Gardener's Dog suggested to Bridges another comedy, The Humours of the Court.<sup>1</sup> The Gardener's Dog is a comedy built around Diana, who falls in love with Theodore, her secretary, who in turn loves Marcella, one of the ladies-in-waiting. Diana discovers that Theodore is the last in the line of Count Lodovico, which results in their marriage. Bridges bases his play on Lope's Act III dealing with the restoration of Theodore to his father and his marriage with Diana. Lope's sub-title Amar por Ver Amar (love kindled by the sight of love), seems to have weighed much with Bridges, as he transforms Diana's flirtations into real love and attempts to build an artificial situation of the type we find in Shakespeare's romantic comedies.

As in the original, Diana is Bridges's central character. She becomes infatuated with Frederick, her secretary, and loves him secretly. When she is deceived by intrigues, her anger knows no bounds:

Rejected: by the man I loved, rejected:  
 Despised by him, and myself betrayed!  
 And all will know it--I could not hide it.  
 Old nature hath this need: woman must love.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Poetical Works of Bridges, 1905, v. Notes.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

She is well portrayed and always guided by the principle that love should be guarded from profanation. She is nevertheless kind-hearted, and generously pardons Tristram, servant to Frederick, 'for stealing her sonnet and shutting her in the cupboard'. Tristram is a lover of money, and reveals his master's secrets, but is rewarded at the end by his marriage to Flora.

This inordinately long comedy of 3150 lines closes with an expression of gratitude from Tristram:

Thank you, my lady.  
I never did understand anything in the 'Humours of  
this Court', and I never shall.<sup>1</sup>

Most readers will share Tristram's feeling. The play is discursive and lacking in concentration.

Bridges's comedies are imitative; his humour, if we make an effort to discover it, is anaemic. His moralistic outlook prevents him from creating full-blooded characters with the vices and virtues natural to human beings.

His concern for morality governs the treatment of Palicio, the central character in the play of that name, Palicio: A Romantic Drama in Five Acts in the Elizabethan Manner, and the conduct of the Captives in The Christian Captives, a Tragedy in A Mixed Manner.

The source of Palicio is 'a bad French story by <sup>De</sup>Stendhal, called 'Vanna and Vanini'.<sup>2</sup> The play is about Giovanni Palicio, a Sicilian brigand who leads a rebellion in a land of starvation. Manuel, the chief justiciary, is in secret sympathy with the rebels, and Hugo, the viceroy, is incapable of taking a decision for himself.

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<sup>1</sup> Poetical Works of Bridges, 1905, p. 292.

<sup>2</sup> Poetical Works of Robert Bridges, Oxford, 1902, iv, 302.



The romantic element of the play centres on the escape of Palicio, hiding in the house of the chief justiciary, winning his sister Margaret's love, and Margaret's getting the surgeon to treat Palicio's wounds with the surgeon blindfolded lest the identity of Palicio be discovered. Margaret, who is the heroine of the play, puts on a man's dress when she visits the robber chief. She is reminiscent of Rosalind in As You Like It, but lacks the richness of Shakespeare's character. Nevertheless she is responsible for the one spark of warmth in an otherwise tepid play. She visits Palicio in the habit of a priest and understands his heart. She plays a prominent part in saving the life of Hugo and his daughter by thwarting the designs of the robber chief.

Palicio stands for a cause. When the action starts he is patriotic: he braves everything for the triumph of his cause. But when he is caught between Margaret's love and his mission, he undergoes a change and prefers love. This transformation comes as a surprise to the reader, because there is no adequate preparation. Palicio had planned to storm the palace, but on seeing Margaret he swerves from his path. This sudden abandonment of purpose, coming as it does at end of Act IV, is unconvincing and constitutes a weakness in structural design.

Bridges's title-page description of the play as in the Elizabethan manner presumably relates to two main aspects of it: first the romance between Margaret and Palicio, and second the degree of unabashed contrivance in the narrative scheme. As in most romantic plays, the wrong-doers are pardoned and the play ends in the marriage of the lovers. Into the mouth of Margaret the poet puts his song of joy: this with its lyrical acceptance of, and delight in, the natural scene may be part of what Bridges calls the Elizabethan manner:

This morning mine. I saw the sun, my slave,  
Poising on his high shorn naked orb  
For my delight. He there had stayed for me,  
Had he not read in my heart's delight  
I bade him on. The birds at the dawn sang to me,  
Crying 'Is life not sweet? O is't not sweet?'  
I looked upon the sea; there was not one,  
Of all his multitudinous waves, not one,  
That with its watery drift, at raking speed  
Told not my special joy.<sup>1</sup>

Such lyrical passages raise the play to the level of poetical drama.

The Christian Captives is based on 'the same subject as Calderon's *El Principe Constante*'.<sup>2</sup> In Bridges's hands, the play becomes a plea for tolerance and love. He transforms the theme from one 'of heroic martyrdom, to a tragedy of "star-crossed lovers", since he is unable to share Calderon's passionate Catholic feeling'.<sup>3</sup>

But Bridges is to some extent attracted by this Catholic feeling, and the play displays the futility of religious war. The *Christian Captives*, who form the chorus, also take part in the play. Their cry is understood by Almeh, a strongly imagined character who stands for love:

They sing of Jesus, whom they make their God.  
I understand no more; only their praise  
Is sweeter than whatever I have heard  
In mosque or sacred temple, or the chant  
Of holy pilgrims that beguile the road.<sup>4</sup>

Like Miranda, she cannot bear to see others suffer. She pleads for the release of the captives, but the king, her father, will not yield unless he gets Ceuta, which is the dearest possession of Ferdinand, the Prince of Portugal.

<sup>1</sup> Poetical Works of Robert Bridges, Oxford, 1902, IV, p. 72.

<sup>2</sup> Poetical Works of Robert Bridges, Oxford, 1902, V, 295.

<sup>3</sup> Guerard, 146.

<sup>4</sup> Poetical Works of Robert Bridges, Oxford, 1902, V, p. 25.

Bridges develops the love-plot between Ferdinand and Almeh. Ferdinand wins the love of Almeh in spite of her father. Into Ferdinand's mouth fine poetry is put. Narrative passages in a poetic drama should be evocative. In the mature Shakespeare, the scene in its essentials is completely evoked by poetry. At times, Bridges has a measure of this ability. Ferdinand's description of his prison and Almeh's praise of the Captives' song are both written in evocative poetry.

The scene in which Ferdinand is stabbed is quite Elizabethan in manner. The King, who has decreed that Ferdinand shall die of starvation, learns of Almeh's resolve to end her life. He is torn between his affection for his daughter and his determination to own Ceuta. When he finds himself in this dilemma, he tries to win over Ferdinand, and the scene is of dramatic interest.

The famishing Ferdinand is borne on to the stage. The King, alone with Ferdinand, offers him food, calls him the pillar of his house as he has won his daughter's love, and promises her in marriage. When the prince, lured by the promise, shows an inclination to eat and live, the King, who feels that he has won him over, says:<sup>1</sup>

Ceuta is the price for my daughter.

Ferdinand cries:

'Ah, never!'

The King's anger bursts out; he calls him 'Infidel':

Apostatizing dog, lest now thy mouth  
Should find the power to gasp one broken speech  
Of triumph over me, die at my hands.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.97.

He stabs him. The situation is at once exciting and surprising. Ferdinand, placed between death and life, does not yield. He triumphs in death.

Bridges introduces the ghost of Ferdinand in the Elizabethan manner, in moonlight. The messenger's report of Ferdinand's ghost provides a fitting conclusion to the tragic incident, and deepens the horror of the audience. After the stabbing of the prince, however, the play's interest wanes. Almeh learns that her father has stabbed her lover, and that he has then 'sallied forth to assault the Christian Captives' in their camp by the sea. She realises that she has no place in the world. She goes to the harbour, where she finds Ferdinand's body, and determines to die:

Here in this bower of death  
I leave my body to this pitiless world  
Of hate: and to thy peaceful shores, O joy,  
I arise. O Ferdinand! me thou didst love,  
Thou didst kiss once ... and these they lips so cold  
I kiss once more. I have no fear: I come!<sup>1</sup>

This climax is strongly reminiscent of the last scene in Romeo and Juliet, though the resemblance is not carried through in detail. The King is killed and 'love and faith have conquered'.<sup>2</sup>

The Christian Captives has many dramatic situations: the King trying to win over Ferdinand, the cry of the Captives intended to deepen the tragic effect, and Almeh's death. The lovers grow to full stature at the end of the play, having undergone distress and danger. The verse is more dramatically conceived than in most of Bridges's verse dramas. The play

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 116-117.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

deserves more attention at the hands of critics and would even justify attempts at production.

It is easy to enumerate the grave limitations of Bridges as a dramatist: he never deals with the moral issues of everyday life; his plots are derivative and contrived; his verse is insufficiently responsive to the individualisation of characters; his poetry moves more surely in the frequent lyrical passages than in dramatic narration or conversation. He had little knowledge of the theatre or sense for drama, and his considerable merits as a lyrical and contemplative poet are not sufficient to compensate for these deficiencies. His poetic drama remains a literary curiosity, hardly read and never performed.

### Stephen Phillips.

Bridges and Phillips partake of the same tradition; but while Bridges from the practical standpoint was a total failure, Phillips achieved some partial and temporary success in both the dramatic and material worlds.

Phillips's star had a meteoric rise from 1900 to 1908, when six of his plays were produced at important theatres and brought him at one time royalties of £ 50 a week. His association with his cousin Frank Benson, the director of the well-known Shakespeare company, trained him to be an actor. It was the aim of Benson's company to encourage plays which contained plenty of rhetoric and dealt with ancient themes. Phillips acted parts which gave him scope for grandiloquence. Playing the Ghost in Hamlet and Prospero in The Tempest gave him the chance to speak blank verse 'with a certain sonorous fervour'. Lady Benson reveals that Phillips had a 'fine voice' but he 'would insist on rolling out

his lines.....making his diction unnatural and stilted. I asked him the reason for this and he replied that he put a higher value on the beauty of the words than their dramatic effect'.<sup>1</sup> This conception of acting influenced his writing of drama.

Later his contact with Beerbohm Tree at His Majesty's Theatre proved fruitful. Although Tree's aim was to make Shakespearean productions into popular theatrical fare, he encouraged young talent in the writing of plays set in elaborate scenic backgrounds and couched in flamboyant verse. Both are found in Phillips's Herod, which was produced with great success at His Majesty's in 1900. Tree also commissioned Phillips to write a new version of Faust, which he did in collaboration with Comyns Carr. This was produced in 1908. Between 1900 and 1908, Phillips's major plays were put on at important London theatres: Ulysses at His Majesty's in 1902, Paola and Francesca at St. James's in 1902, The Sin of David at the the Savoy in 1904, Nero at His Majesty's in 1906, Nero's Mother, a one-act drama, which naturally forms the concluding part of Nero, was produced at His Majesty's in 1906, and Armageddon at the New Theatre in 1915. Other short plays unacted were The King (1912), Iole (1913), The Adversary (1913) and Harold (1916).

His conception of drama was reinforced by his views on non-dramatic poetry. In poetry he asked for "some great compelling thought, some rapturous and passionate purpose".<sup>2</sup> He also believed in "poetry, high poetry as the sublimation of the senses into soul".<sup>3</sup> This statement clearly suggests Keats, and Keatsian at a distance is the indulged sensuousness of such a passage as the following from

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<sup>1</sup> Mainly Players, 1926, pp. 65-6.

<sup>2</sup> 'Wanted: A theme for Modern Verse', The Dome, vi, 1899, p.211.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by P.Thouless, Modern Poetic Drama, Oxford, 1934, p. 11.

Marpessa (with the further loose link with the Keats of Endymion, in the dramatisation, tending to the spurious, of the torments of young love):

Wounded with the beauty in the summer night  
 Young Idas tossed upon his couch, he cried  
 "Marpessa, O Marpessa!" From the lake  
 The floating smell of flowers invisible,  
 The mystic yearning of the garden net,  
 The moonless-passing night - into his brain  
 Wandered, until he rose and outward leaned  
 In the dim Summer.<sup>1</sup>

This was in 1898. His plays, which date from 1900, have certain characteristics in common with the verse drama of the period. Their verse, inheriting traces of the Elizabethan drama, is characterised by mannerism and poetic diction; and the plays by conventional characterisation. But, in spite of these defects, Phillips achieved enormous success, though posterity's critical judgement agrees that it was right that his success should have been short-lived.

Phillips, like many of his contemporaries, seeks inspiration in historical and legendary subjects, which lend themselves to magnificent scenic effects. Biblical themes -- as that of Herod -- fascinate the verse dramatists of the period. Sturge Moore, like Phillips, starts his career in the literary theatre with Mariamne,<sup>2</sup> devoted to the study of conflict in the relation between Mariamne and Herod. He covers a vaster field than the three-act play of Phillips. Incidental to the main theme are Salome's jealousy, her machinations and Mariamne's imprisonment. The play is discursive

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Phillips, Poems, 1898, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> T. Sturge Moore, Mariamne in Five Acts, 1911.

Vide Chapter seven, pp. 303-309 for other plays of Sturge Moore.

and the dramatist uses an irregular and loose blank verse medium. But Phillips, who has more experience of the theatre, concentrates on the highlights of the story. A comparative study of Sturge Moore and Phillips is unrewarding, as there is nothing in common between them except the names of the characters.

Herod is the first play that brought Phillips into the theatrical world. The story of Herod with its rich legendary associations, enabled Phillips to write a drama in which conflict becomes all-important. Herod loses the love of his wife, Mariamne, because of his complicity in the murder of her brother; circumstances conspire against her; Salome, who is jealous of her, produces evidence to make Herod believe that his wife has tried to poison him and has had an affair with a soldier of low birth. Herod is afflicted and distracted; but is prepared to forgive Mariamne. In his appeal to her, both the weaker and the stronger aspects of Phillips's use of blank verse as a dramatic medium can be seen:

O stay yet!

I forgive the love denied:  
 See - I forgive the poison. I but crawl  
 Here at your feet, and kiss your garment's hem  
 And I forgive this mutiny -- all -- all --  
 But for one kiss from you, one touch, one word.  
 O like a creature, I implore some look,  
 Some syllable, some sign, ere I go mad!<sup>1</sup>

The language and the movement of the verse are for the most part impassioned and dramatic. But there are traces of the closet drama in the way in which Herod is made to express in words such actions as crawling and kissing the garment's hem, which would not be required for a theatre audience.

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<sup>1</sup> Herod, 1901, p. 91.



Herod's last words in the speech prove prophetic, and consequently when Mariamne dies the news is not broken to him. He demands her presence:

Summon the queen,  
Or I will call not earthly vengeance down.<sup>1</sup>

He feels intensely:

I'll re-create  
My love with bone for bone and vein for vein.  
The eyes, the eyes again, the hands, the hair,  
And that which I have made, O that shall love me.<sup>2</sup>

When he sees the embalmed body of the queen, madness seizes him. He raves and throws himself on to the throne, then touches the queen on the forehead and stands suddenly rigid with 'a fixed and vacant stare' in cataleptic trance.

All attempts to bring him out of the trance fail, and he is found in that condition by the envoys from Rome, who have to announce that Caesar has conferred the Kingdom of Arabia on him. The play ends in silence and immobility. The stage directions read:

Slowly and silently the whole Court melt away, one or two coming and looking on the King, then departing. Herod is left alone by the litter, standing motionless. The curtain descends: then rises, and it is hight with a few stars. It descends, and again rises, and now it is the glimmer of dawn which falls upon Herod and Mariamne, he is still standing rigid and with a fixed stare in the cataleptic trance.<sup>3</sup>

It will be seen that there are genuinely dramatic situations in the play and the climactic close, through perhaps somewhat melodramatic, is extremely effective for performance in the theatre.

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<sup>1</sup> Herod, 1901, p. 124.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 125

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

Phillips knows the dramatic value of Shakespeare's use of prose and verse. Bathsheba, the maid to Mariamne, converses in simple prose. At times the main character is silent while others speak eloquently. It is a device which Shakespeare puts to effective use in the second scene of the first act in Hamlet. Conversational sentences in the maze of verse, like a few blades of grass pushing up through the snow, are frequent. They emerge in contrast to the flamboyant verse:

Mariamne: How bright the towered world  
 Herod: The towered world;  
 And we, we two will grasp it, we will burst  
 Out of the East into the setting sun.<sup>1</sup>

Phillips occasionally uses the language of every day, which assumes importance in such late poetic plays as those of Yeats or Eliot. Herod speaks of Mariamne 'rising like a black pine out of bending wheat'; of 'committing beauty to earth', and 'eyes that bring upon us endless thoughts' -- all suggestive and simple.

Phillips's strength lies in his picturesque and sonorous idiom, which borders on rhetoric. Rhetoric has a place in poetic drama, provided it is powerful and can contain the thought it carries. The following speech of Herod illustrates the kind of verse rhetoric which comes to the later nineteenth century, ultimately from Marlowe's 'mighty line', but through the mediation of the Romantic poets (particularly here Shelley in the dove and the eagle images and Keats in the moon's argent archery):

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<sup>1</sup> Herod, 1901, p. 44

I dreamt last night of a dome of beaten gold  
 To be counter-glory to the Sun.  
 There shall the eagle blindly dash himself,  
 There the first beam shall strike, and there the moon  
 Shall aim all night her argent archery;<sup>1</sup>

Blank verse in Phillips looks at best derivative and at worst exhausted. It has not that freshness and smooth flow which characterise the verse of those who used it for the first time. All its possibilities have been used up.

The Daily News reviewer spoke of the 'sovereign quality of the verse'.<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to agree with this remark, as Herod is not free from indulgence in lyrical passages which hinder the movement. J.T.Grein said that the enjoyment derived from the play was only intellectual:

The heart did not throb, there was not that hushing of breath, that feeling of sympathetic alertness in the audience that comes only when a great poet gives his best.<sup>3</sup>

This sums up the limitations of the play. While the majority of the audience were pleased with the production, Reginald J. Farrer parodied Herod. His efforts became burlesque:<sup>4</sup>

Is this the face that launched a thousand ships,  
 And fired the topless towers of Illium?  
 Oh, dear me, that's all wrong! I am not Kit Marlowe,  
 But Stephen Phillips, Shakespeare up to date.  
 Is this the bard that burned a thousand towns,  
 And fired the robbers out Galilee?  
 And I that Herod that has garnered in  
 Other people's wealth?<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Herod, 1901, p. 113

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., quoted at the end of the book.

<sup>3</sup> Dramatic Criticism, 1900-1901, 1902, iii, p. 47.

<sup>4</sup> Herod: Through the Opera Glass, <sup>Oxford,</sup> 1901, ~~Oxford~~

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

In spite of the burlesque, Phillips was established in the world of poetic drama. The play that gave him fame is Paolo and Francesca, which is full of Shakespearean echoes and to a certain extent Greek devices.

The opening scene recalls Hamlet in technique. As the second scene of the first act, in which the prince first appears and sits silent, helps to build up the suspense, so in Phillips's play the hero's silence arouses the interest of the audience.

Paolo and Francesca are caught in the inexorable bond of love. In spite of themselves, the hero and heroine walk into a trap. Eliot,<sup>1</sup> in discussing The Changeling, observes that Beatrice belongs to De Flores even as Francesca belongs to Paolo. But there is this difference: Beatrice belongs to De Flores through hatred and necessity; it is love nourished by disgust. But Francesca loves Paolo simply and genuinely. They are a study in impassioned, fundamental emotional pressures common to human beings at all times.

Giovanni, who is much older than Francesca, has married her as he is in need of 'calm of mind'. He is 'deaf with war' and henceforth he wants a 'quiet breathing'. He wants to impose his pattern of life on his newly acquired partner:

Tell me, Francesca; can you be content  
To live the quiet life which I propose?  
Where, though you miss the violent joys of youth,  
Yet will I cherish you more carefully  
Than might a younger lover of your years.<sup>2</sup>

Thus the play begins with Giovanni's awareness of the separation in mind between himself and his wife. His admiration for her is born of this incompatibility.

1 T.S.Eliot, Selected Essays, (Edn.3), p. 164.

2 Paolo and Francesca, 1900, p. 13.

Phillips's characters, including Angela, the blind and aged servant of the Malatesta, are instinct with life. They are intensely human. Lucrezia, who has been a sobering influence on Giovanni, the tyrant, now widowed and childless, feels her barren condition:

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.<sup>1</sup>

She feels that she could not teach little lips to move, 'until they shaped the wonder of a word'. In her blessing of Giovanni, she recalls actually his early childhood. These human touches prepare us for the crisis, in which our sympathy is deeply involved.

The action moves swiftly; the dramatist endeavours to establish the growth of passion between the lovers. Very soon Paolo and Francesca 'belong to each other'. The dramatist carries the audience with him through poetry and dramatic situations.

Lucrezia has a double purpose: apart from producing a soothing effect on Giovanni, she causes suspicions of Paolo in his mind. She becomes an Iago on a minor scale, but lacks the subtlety and machinations of Shakespeare's villain. But in her own way she gives rise to and works up Giovanni's emotions, and asks him to wait for the occasion when

.....he and she  
 Will seize upon the dark and lucky hour  
 To be together: watch you round the house,  
 And suddenly take them in each other's arms.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

But Lucrezia cannot live long with these thoughts. Unlike Iago, she undergoes a transformation. Her jealousy yields to sympathy. She tries to avert the calamity, when it is too late to save the lovers from Giovanni's rage.

Love develops between Paolo and Francesca; their meeting has some resemblance to the love scene between Lorenzo and Jessica on a moonlit night. The resemblance lies especially in the employment of fanciful imagery to suggest the romantic excess of their love.

Paolo: Did I not sing to thee in Babylon?  
 Francesca: Or did we not set sail in Carthage bay?  
 Paolo: Were thine eyes strange?  
 Francesca: Did I not know thy voice?  
 All ghostly grew the sun, unreal the air  
 Then when we kissed.  
 Paolo: And in that kiss our souls  
 Together flashed, and now they are a flame,  
 Which nothing can put out, nothing divide.<sup>1</sup>

Although the scene, as a whole, lacks the rich intensity of poetry and the solemn stillness of the moonlit night in which Shakespeare's lovers move, the love-talk is suggestive and evocative. The language of the lovers is as deep, as languorous as the moonlit atmosphere it fills, and is worthy of lovers who are united in death.

On seeing the production at St. James's Theatre on March 9, 1902, J.T. Grein wrote thus:

No memories haunted me; the fine lines rushed towards me with the suddenness of revelation; the beautiful love scene at the end of Act III enchanted me like the chords of a youthful lyre. And I did not think of Shakespeare, of all the great luminaries to whom Phillips has been compared. Phillips alone spoke to me.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 109-110.

<sup>2</sup> Dramatic Criticism 1902-1903, 1904, p. 51.

In spite of this tribute, we cannot lose sight of the fact that Phillips did have Shakespeare in mind in his introduction of the poison-buying scene in Act III. Pulci's drug shop at the wayside inn out of Rimini is suggested by the apothecary's shop in Romeo and Juliet. Romeo's description of the shop is echoed in Phillips's stage directions:

The walls and ceilings are hung with skins,  
sharks' teeth, crucibles, wax figures, crystals,  
charms, etc.....<sup>1</sup>

Romeo says:

And in his needy shop a tortoise hung,  
An alligator stuff'd, and other skins  
Of all-shaped fishes.....<sup>2</sup>

Phillips imitates; nevertheless, his imitation has a way of its own. The conversation between Pulci and his customers provides a relief from the emotional tension of the play. The hiding of Giovanni behind the arras, to overhear 'secrets of Rimini and unsuspected moorings' of his subjects, is also reminiscent of the King and Queen hiding behind the arras to overhear Hamlet, and the bedroom scene in which the arras conceals Polonius. These devices show his indebtedness to Shakespeare.

The fourth Act, which forms the crisis of the story, has a certain Pre-Raphaelite or late Keatsian charm, which enhances the enjoyment of the drama:

Remember how when first we met we stood  
Stung with immortal recollections.  
O face immured beside a fairy sea,  
That leaned down at midnight to be kissed!  
O beauty folded up in forests old!<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Paolo and Francesca, p. 65

<sup>2</sup> Romeo and Juliet, V. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Paolo and Francesca, p. 109.

The last scene is artistically defective: the off-stage murder and the frantic orders of Giovanni to fill the palace with wedding candles, as the corpses of the lovers are brought in on a bier, do not help to maintain the steady note of the tragic situation. It diminishes the tragic intensity. Giovanni's last words echo Webster:

Gio: She takes away my strength.  
I did not know the dead could have such hair.  
Hide them. They look like children fast asleep.<sup>1</sup>

These lines bear semblance to the terrific lines uttered by Ferdinand, the Duke of Calabria, on seeing the dead body of his sister:

Cover her face, mine eyes dazzle, she died young!<sup>2</sup>

The reader who reads Paolo and Francesca in his study and the audience who witness it on the stage are likely to be impressed. Both are left in a mood of pity tinged by the consoling thought that those who are not allowed to love and live are united in death.

Having dealt with the claims of conflicting love in Paolo and Francesca, Phillips deals with the inevitable punishment that follows immoral conduct in The Sin of David. He also chooses to deal with the struggle between flesh and spirit, and punishment dogs the foot-steps of those indulging in flagrant violation of the rules of chastity. Owing to difficulties of censorship, he could not use the original characters from the Bible. He interprets the Biblical theme in terms of the Civil War in England in the seventeenth century.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> Webster And Tourneur, ed. S.A.Symonds, 1948, p. 212.



The opening is very impressive. The curtain rises at the Headquarters of the Puritan Army: various military officers are standing in silence with bowed heads and folded hands awaiting the doom of the young Lieutenant Joyce for seduction. Mardyke gives expression to the puritan sentiment: Joyce is of unclean heart and shall not fight for him.

Herbert Lisle, a Commander of the Puritan Army, takes the place of David. The main theme is his falling in love with Miriam, the wife of Colonel Mardyke, who is sent to his death in the name of military service. The play suffers because the hero Lisle is not troubled by inner questionings and consequently lacks the stature of a tragic hero:

I do but send  
Him whom the peril asks, by man unblamed.  
With God how stand I? Vain to palter these.<sup>1</sup>

He yields to temptation; when Mardyke is killed, he marries the widow as in the story of David in the Bible. The child born of this union dies young. Lisle and his wife must pay for the sin of David. Miriam feels stronger than Lisle, who consoles her. He tells her that the child has been taken away so that they may start life 'afresh' in spiritual marriage:

Dear, in a deeper union we are bound  
Than by earthly touch of him, or voice  
Human, or little laughters in the sun.<sup>2</sup>

This note of morality falls flat as the characterisation is elementary and the moral fable is writ large.

<sup>1</sup> The Sin of David, 1904, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 39-40.

The scene depicting the parents' joy on seeing the child and their ~~the parents'~~ enjoyment of the baby talk provides relief in the otherwise monotonous play and deepens the tragedy when the child dies. The play is simple; there are many characters -- officers and soldiers of the Parliamentary Army, who have not much to do with the main theme. Phillips puts flamboyant verse into the mouths of his characters, but fails to create 'bold strokes' (as Dryden would say) which would add to the dramatic force of the characterisation.

The theme of Faust has excited the imagination of poets and dramatists, being a seemingly inexhaustible source of dramatic tension and allegorical significance. Phillips wrote Faust in collaboration with Comyns Carr, a writer with considerable experience of stagecraft who derived much of his dramatic material from the Arthurian legend and the story of Tristan. Like Phillips, Comyns Carr also believed in recreating the verse drama of the past.

Although Faust was claimed to be "A New Version of Goethe's Faust", it is very Marlowesque. The prologue sets the tone of the play. The scene is set on a range of mountains between Heaven and Earth. Mephistopheles makes a wager with Raphael to win the soul of Faust very soon. Faust's soul is bartered and Faust sells himself to the Devil:

To plumb the depths  
Of every earthly pleasure born of sense,  
To win from life a world of new desire,  
And quench desire in unimagined joys.....<sup>1</sup>

The use of the Good Angel and Evil Angel in Marlowe deepens the intensity of the tragedy. Their comment produces a choric effect

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<sup>1</sup> Faust, 1908, p. 18.

and shows the agony in the heart of one who sells his 'eternal jewel to the common enemy of man'. The absence of such a device in Phillips's Faust, an imitative play, makes it less dramatically taut than the original.

The conception of the main character is not very different from Marlowe's. Marlowe's Faustus, who has agreed to live in power and voluptuousness for four and twenty years, declares:

Had I as many souls as there be stars  
I'd give them all for Mephistopheles.

Phillips's Faust is sensual but he is of the earth earthy. He sees Margaret and falls in love with her. The following passage describing her beauty is insipid. These lines jar on the hearer, giving the sensation of hearing something that is removed from prose merely by artifice:

By heaven, how beautiful! In all the world  
Dwells not her equal. Fresh and sweet and pure  
As the first flowers of spring that greet the snow,  
Yet with red lips that ripen for a kiss  
Those downcast eyelids still refuse to yield  
Ah! could I win that maid! <sup>1</sup>

Contrast Marlowe's eloquent lines in the Helen scene:

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships  
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?  
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.....<sup>2</sup>

This scene has a further dimension, denied of course to Phillips, in that Faustus was committing the sin of demonolatry.

The garden scene in which Faust and Margaret take each other into confidence acquires a touch of <sup>homeliness</sup> ~~homeliness~~ as it is in prose, the prose of every day. The scene in which Faust is dragged to

<sup>1</sup> Faust, 1908, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> Marlowe, 1893, p. 223.

hell is made more impressive by the introduction of witches and cauldrons and is strongly reminiscent of Macbeth. The play closes with the decision of Raphael that the lovers shall be exonerated: Mephistopheles thus loses the great 'world wager'. This compromise ending is not in keeping with the spirit of tragedy, but the dramatist is here dependent on Goethe.

Phillips did not very much like to imitate the Elizabethans. He believed in 'a deliberate rebellion against the Elizabethan tradition'.<sup>1</sup> But the tradition stealthily seizes him. The central situation of Pietro of Siena is deliberately modelled on the suggested sacrifice of Isabella's honour to save Claudio in Measure for Measure. It also combines in small measure, some suggestions from Maurice Maeterlinck's Monna Vanna, particularly Monna Vanna's willingness to be seduced by Prinzivalle, who promises not to destroy Pisa. In Phillips, Pietro awards punishment of death to Luigi Gonza, but, bewitched by the beauty of Gemma Gonza, his sister, who springs like a sudden splendour in the dust, he releases her brother, and the play ends in Gemma becoming his wife.

The opening of the play is theatrically exciting. Like Julius Caesar, it opens with furious shouts heard from off-stage. These shouts grow louder as from an approaching multitude. This is a technique intended to arrest the attention of the audience. At first Phillips endeavours to depict in an emotional manner the theme of revenge. The audience's attention is concentrated on the destruction of the house of Gonzaga by the people: Girolamo vehemently declares:

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<sup>1</sup> P.T.Thouless, Modern Poetic Drama, Oxford, 1934, p. 24.

Let none of the Gonzaga house be spared!  
 Nor man nor woman; and the pestilence  
 That brooded o'er Siena all these years,  
 If thou wouldst rule secure, blot out the blood!<sup>1</sup>

The association of such words with the Senecan revenge tradition is obvious. This motive is also pursued by Fulvia, the sister of Pietro. The punishment of death is decreed: Luigi is to die before sunrise. It is interesting to compare Luigi's speech with that of Claudio in Measure for Measure. The comparison shows how differently dramatic poetry shapes itself in the hands of Shakespeare and Phillips, though they are handling similar situations.

Claudio, who is condemned to die, begs his sister Isabel to save his life; he is afraid of death and his words come from his heart and touch the heart of his sister.

Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;  
 To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot;  
 This sensible warm motion to become  
 A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit  
 To bathe in fiery floods or to reside  
 In thrilling regions of thick-ribbed ice;  
 To be imprisoned in the viewless winds,  
 And blown with restless violence round about  
 The pendent world; or to be worse than worst  
 Of those that lawless and incertain thoughts:  
 Imagine howling! -- 'tis too horrible!  
 The weariest and most loathed worldly life  
 That age, ache, penury and imprisonment  
 Can lay on nature is a paradise  
 To what we fear of death.<sup>2</sup>

These words at once give us a sharp appreciation of life and death. Luigi, likewise, is awaiting anxiously the arrival of Gemma, his sister, and contemplating death. He is to die at dawn:

The dawn, the dawn! Now when all wakes to life,  
 I wake to death. When all revives, I die.  
 This freshness and the coming colour make  
 The pain grow worse. Oh, but to die at dawn!

<sup>1</sup> Pietra of Siena, 1910, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Measure for Measure, iii, 1 (l. 118-132)

At midnight, yes! but not when the world stirs  
 When the Creator reassures the earth,  
 And reappears in the balm out of the East.<sup>1</sup>

He listlessly gets up, goes on describing the dawn; his thoughts wander like the thoughts of all men whom death is staring in the face; he thinks of a young wife half awake kissing the dreaming babe laid beside her, and a soldier starting to the trumpet call.

The juxtaposition of these two passages enables us to see that the one is intensely visualised and the other merely gives expression to vague feelings. Luigi's speech tells against Phillips, even more than Claudio's would expose the limitations of The Cenci.

Gemma slowly yields: Phillips manages the situation ably by the introduction of a nurse who urges Gemma to capitulate. Luigi, at first ignorant of Gemma's virtue, dishonours her, later is reconciled. The theme of revenge is lost sight of: Pietro converts his subjects. He and Gemma are married. This conversion is brought about suddenly. The play ends with the words of Pietro:

A golden morning on us all descends  
 ..... a golden morning waxes  
 Into a deeper life between us two,  
 Bringing not bloodshed nor old enmity  
 But on our houses and Siena peace.<sup>2</sup>

Who will not recall the lines at the end of Romeo and Juliet, although the situation is quite different. We discern Shakespearean echoes in lines such as:

"You, you alone cast his immortal soul!"<sup>3</sup>

and in

"Far off music melting on the soul".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pietro of Siena, 1910, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>3</sup> & <sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

Such a debt to the Elizabethans, which one grows to expect in verse drama in Phillips' time, is a fit commentary on Phillips's disclaiming the Elizabethan influence.

The history of Harold, the last of the Saxon Kings, had been used as the theme of a novel by Bulwer Lytton, and of a five-act verse drama by Tennyson. Phillips, who closely follows Tennyson, concentrates mainly in Harold's love for the fair Edith. Arthur Symonds sees 'something extraordinary in the passionate grip of action, in the splendour of dialogue and in the intensity of life' in Tennyson's figures. But in the contrivance of a situation Phillips seems to surpass Tennyson. The handling of the last scene, in which Edith searches for the body of Harold in order to die by his side (common to both plays), shows Phillips's insight into theatrical device, which Tennyson did not possess.

In Tennyson, the 'Field of the Dead Night'<sup>1</sup> is made intensely tragic. Aldwyth and Edith go in search of Harold's body. Edith seeks 'one who wedded her in secret'. Their words full of grief bring out the horror of the battlefield. Edith, who is treated as the wife of Harold by Tennyson, proves her wifeness by showing the ring:

Bear me the true witness--only for this once--  
That I have found it here again?  
.....And thou,  
Thy wife am I for ever and evermore.<sup>2</sup>

With these words on her lips, she falls and dies.

In Phillips, Edith asks William for the body of Harold in order to give it burial. She feels as Harold's beloved, and also understands the heart of his mother, Elfrida, whose 'sorrow is greater as

<sup>1</sup> Harold, Act V. Scene 2.

<sup>2</sup> The Works of Tennyson, 1901, p. 674.

she did dandle him upon her arm'. She is given permission to bury Harold. On the moonlit battlefield of Senlac, Edith and Elfrida, hooded, search and find the body. The stage directions are telling:

At last Edith throws herself on the body of Harold beneath the true Saxon standard with a cry. Two priests advance and throw the light of torches on the dead man's face. Edith raises him in her arms, moaning softly.

A priest: (bending with the torch) Lady, is it the King?  
I knew him not.

Edith: Beloved, all those scars deceive not me.

The brief scene closes:

(The moon emerging falls on Edith, who has raised Harold's head on her lap).<sup>1</sup>

The comparison between these two scenes reveals Phillips's ability to manage theatrical climax and justifies the comments of The Spectator:

The purely dramatic quality of the play is surprisingly high.<sup>2</sup>

Surprisingly enough, the play has never been produced.

The King is a strange mixture of classical form with Jacobean content. Incest is a subject common in the Jacobean drama but is here treated with an attempt at the Greek manner. If Phillips's play is compared with the very different treatments<sup>3</sup> of the incest-theme in Ford's ''Tis Pity She's a Whore' and Beaumont and Fletcher's A King and No King, it will be seen that Phillips has aimed at an approach to Greek reticence rather than the emotional complexities of the Jacobean drama.

<sup>1</sup> Harold, 1927, p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., quoted at the end.

<sup>3</sup> C. Leech, John Ford and the Drama of His Time, 1957, p. 41.



Don Carlos, the son of the King, falls in love with Christiana, a lady of the court, not knowing that she is his father's daughter. The King plans a political marriage for his son with the princess of Portugal. Carlos, who will not betray Christiana, disgusted with his deed, kills himself, and Christiana also dies. Phillips is close to Ford in his love scenes, which are filled with melancholy notes and luxuriant description.

The portrait of the King is unconvincing. When his son reveals his affair with Christiana, the King says:

Now I will humble my white hair to you,  
And tell you, I myself, young then as you,  
Was drawn into sweet folly, but the throne  
Demanded me and all this people's care.<sup>1</sup>

The lovers die and the King seeks sad consolation in blaming himself:

My sin was but a rehearsal of their sin,  
A sad enacting of this tragic scene.<sup>2</sup>

The death of the lovers is handled with restraint in a manner Phillips believed to be Greek.

Phillips continues his experiments in the imitation of Greek tragedy in Iole, a one-act play based on the Greek legend of the House of Corinth. Pelias, the renowned and aged Corinthian general, undertakes to fight for his city, as the Goddess assures him victory on the condition that he should sacrifice whatever first meets him coming out of doors on his return from the battlefield. His daughter Iole, betrothed and to be married the next day, becomes the victim. Pelias cannot bear to kill his daughter:

She is too great a price to pay for Corinth.  
Not all the reared cities of the world  
Are worth the smallest drop of blood in her.<sup>3</sup>

1. Lyrics and Dramas, 1913, p. 153.

2. Ibid., p. 177.

3. New Poems, 1908, p. 144.

(These words have a Shakespearean ring, echoing especially Macbeth). When Pelias is unable to take a decision, Iole summons courage and is prepared to die for the sake of the country. She refers to the Greek heroes and heroines in a moving speech:

Alcestis winds her arms about my waist,  
And pale Iphigenia kisses me.<sup>1</sup>

She cites Agamemnon, who sacrificed his dear ones for the sake of the motherland.

After the sacrifice of his daughter Pelias justifies his action, although it is not in conformity with his earlier feelings. Left alone in the world, he crowns himself with lonely hands. Phillips's aspiration to stir the feelings of an audience in a tragedy after the Greek model reminds us of Roy Campbell's lines:

You praise the firm restraint with which they write:  
I'm with you there, of course,  
They use the snaffle and the curb all right,  
But where's the bloody horse?

Armageddon, his last play, was about the first world war and was considered a play with a patriotic purpose when produced at the New Theatre on June 3, 1915. Phillips styles this an epic drama, beginning with a prologue and ending with an epilogue, partly in prose and partly in verse. His opening where Satan is presiding wearing a crown of ashes, is modelled on Milton's debate in Hell (Paradise Lost, Book II). Beelzebub opens the debate, and entreats Satan to give up inaction; Moloch and Belial agree to play their part. Rumour brings an unconfirmed report of an island floating upon the western wave. Attila is despatched back to Earth to 'exult in engines that can belch armies away and lay high cities flat'.

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<sup>1</sup> New Poems, 1908, p. 154.

War begins on earth; from the realm of poetry the audience is transported into the realm of prose, and the devastation caused by the Germans is treated; the fabrication of War Office reports and the ill-treatment of innocent women and children are presented. Satan plays his part in manoeuvring all these events. The Spirit of Joan of Arc is introduced to advise the French to give up revenge.

The scene of the Epilogue is laid in Hell: Attila sums up the horrors of war:

I have made desolate the Earth,  
And half the world have left a wilderness;  
Beauty have I thrown down, Rapine and Rape  
Stalk unimpeded through the ruined land.<sup>1</sup>

The play closes with the Satan's arms spread out as in a Crucifixion--a symbol of the play's message: the victor and the vanquished perish in violence, and civilization will be destroyed by inhuman methods.

The play as a war drama suffers from the breadth of its canvas. The supernatural makes a superficial impression.<sup>2</sup> The blank verse, too, has lost its flexibility, showing that the powers of the dramatist are waning.

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<sup>1</sup> Armageddon, 1915, pp. 91-92.

<sup>2</sup> Israel Zangwill, 'Poetic Drama and the War', The Poetry Review, ii (1916), pp. 31-32: "There is no aesthetic reason why a modern poet should not dramatise Armageddon as Stephen Phillips. True that by his hasty seizure of current matter the poet loses the immense co-operation of the mytho-poetic instinct which shapes and selects the story, and of time, which invests it with glamour".

He also fails in the use of the supernatural in another grim play, The Adversary. Ferdinand del Castellano, an impoverished descendant of a rich family, deserted by his wife, lives alone with his child. An attempt at the dramatisation of feeling emanating from a 'fevered and tormented mind' is made: what revolves in his mind appears as an apparition. He questions the ghost, like Hamlet, and gets no answer. To add to his misery, his child dies. He lingers on and the apparition appears again, he demands:

Here must thou turn at last, at last and reveal thee!<sup>1</sup>

The figure slowly turns, and removes his mask, disclosing the features of the speaker himself. The play is an attempt at a psychological study of a man distracted in mind.

Phillips's early works were welcomed by audiences, who wanted the revival of Shakespearean eloquence. In order to provide theatrical poetry, he built on Greek and Elizabethan models, and ignored modern realities. Consequently, his style is far removed from natural speech-idiom. He seems to assume that poetic drama is nothing more than a mere reporting, with poetry and rhetoric added as an ornament. His error is reinforced by his conception of acting, in which he stresses the simple appeal of language at the expense of dramatic function.

#### Bridges and Phillips -- a comparison.

A practical knowledge of the theatre is very rewarding to a dramatist. Shakespeare's hold as a dramatist rests largely on the fact that he knew the inner workings of the craft he pursued. Phillips's intimate association with the theatre made him popular.

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<sup>1</sup> Lyrics and Dramas, 1913, p. 129.

As an actor-playwright, he understood what could be effective on the stage, and created situations in his plays which could sustain the imagination of his audience. Eliot, in his analysis of the contemporary drama, suggests that one of the contributing causes for the failure of the modern drama is the playwright's ignorance of the stage.<sup>1</sup> How important it is to a dramatist to know stagecraft in all its aspects can be seen from Yeats's desire to become an actor.<sup>2</sup> Yeats recast The Shadowy Waters in the light of the theatrical knowledge he acquired later.

Phillips's sense of the theatre gives him a higher place in the hierarchy of drama than Bridges, who showed little interest in it. The want of interest accounts from the fact that his plays received little attention and were rarely produced. A comparative study of their plays dealing with common themes will enable us to understand their differing approaches to the theatre.

The Greek myth has always provided a framework to writers to work on, though it has not been anything like so common in English drama as Roman history. The isolated exceptions--Timon of Athens and Prometheus Unbound--prove the rule. The stories of Nero and Ulysses appealed to both Bridges and Phillips, who transformed them into verse plays, each according to his ability.

<sup>1</sup> Selected Essays, 'A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry', 1932, p.56.

<sup>2</sup> The Letters of W.B.Yeats, ed. A. Wade, 1954, p. 367: "I have an idea of going on the stage in small parts next Autumn for a few months that I may master the stage for purposes of poetical drama".

Bridges's Nero (Parts I and II) is loosely built, consisting of a string of situations, involving characters that are not in the least individualised. Bridges in Nero, in Part I particularly, is experimenting and it is not intended for the stage. But Phillips has the stage in mind: the historical theme shapes itself in his hands and emerges as a well-constructed play.

Bridges's play, no doubt, covers a wider canvas than that of Phillips. It encompasses the death of Agrippina, the conspiracy of Piso and the death of Seneca. A multiplicity of characters and themes undermine the importance of the main situation, i.e. the relation of Nero to those around him. The innumerable digressions, which are not essential to the main theme, leading up to the murder of Britannicus and the death of Agrippina, distract the concentration necessary for a play. One can see the hand of an inexperienced artist who has not mastered construction.

Bridges's Nero is philosophic, while Phillips's Nero is imaginative. Bridges never loses the opportunity of putting common truths into the mouth of his hero:

The curse of life is of our own devising,  
Both of man's ignorance and selfishness.  
He wounds his happiness against a cage  
Of his own make.<sup>1</sup>

The poetry he speaks is less evocative than that of Phillips's Nero, who lives in a dreamy world and has the awareness of an artist. His speech reveals his loftiness of mind:

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<sup>1</sup> Poetical Works of Robert Bridges, 1901, iii, p. 8.

I can dispearl the sea, a province wear  
 Upon my little finger; all the winds  
 Are busy blowing odours in mine eyes,  
 And I am wrapt in glory by the sun.<sup>1</sup>

Though the verse is flamboyant, it creates a vision in the minds of the hearers, the vision that the artist wants.

The scene in which Nero's mother bide him farewell provides a contrast between the two dramatists. The farewell in Phillips is characterised by short and epigrammatic sentences:

Agr: Are you the babe that lay upon my breast?  
 Nero: I was; but I could not lie there for ever.  
 Agr: Have I not reared you, tended you and loved you?  
 Nero: Yes, but to be your puppet and your joy.<sup>2</sup>

In Bridges, we have a long peroration from Agrippina, who is about to leave:

How much you need me, Nero, will be plain  
 When I am gone. Who has deceived you now?  
 Who works this madness in you, to conceive  
 That your distaste could be a gain to me?<sup>3</sup>

Thus she goes on: her anger is worked up, but her speech lacks the tenderness of Phillips's Agrippina. She is, therefore, less complex than Phillips's Agrippina, and at the same time we are not made aware of a simple basis in common humanity. Phillips brings out the tragic dilemma of one who undergoes suffering at the hands of her own son. Such a theme demands creative power, and ability to explore character and define tense human situations.

We see Phillips's theatrical opportunism exploiting the emotional resources of a situation in lines in which the mother recalls Nero's childhood:

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<sup>1</sup> Nero, 1906, p. 18. Both Bridges and Phillips were ignorant of the existence of the anonymous Nero, published in 1624 as 'newly written' (The Mermaid Series: Nero and other plays, 1888).

<sup>2</sup> Nero, 1906, pp. 44-45.

<sup>3</sup> Poetical Works of Robert Bridges, 1901, iii, p. 15.

My boy, my boy, look again! Look in my eyes.  
 So as a babe would you look up at me  
 After a night of tossing, half-awake,  
 Blinking against the dawn, and pull my head  
 Down to you, till I lost you in my hair.<sup>1</sup>

Nero is equally responsive:

When it was in my part to cling about her  
 I clung about her with mad memories.<sup>2</sup>

Such lines pulsate with life. When they are uttered on the stage the audience comes closer to appreciating the feeling generated by the parting, once and for all, between a son and mother.

When Nero hears the news of his mother's death he is distracted, and sees the figure of his mother, who affectionately calls him 'child'. The stage directions run:

(He cries out and falls in a swoon: she comes and looks at him..... She moves, removes the amulet from his arm, flings it into the sea, and passes out in silence.)<sup>3</sup>

In Bridges, such situations are rare. When Agrippina escapes from the danger, she makes desperate attempts to appeal to the affections of her son, but without avail. When she is murdered, guilt does not bother Bridges's Nero, who asks the lords to 'appear as usual before the people.'<sup>4</sup>

A study of these situations, which are common to the two dramatists, shows the contrast between them. Where Bridges intellectualises a situation, Phillips seizes on the emotional conflicts.

Phillips's play has elaborate echoes of Macbeth. He has the sleep-walking scene in mind, when he makes Nero turn uneasily in bed,

<sup>1</sup> Nero, 1906, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>4</sup> Poetical Works of Robert Bridges, 1905, III, p. 161.



dreaming of the procession of the dead emperors. He cries out:

There, there, I seemed to see  
As in procession the dead Emperors;  
Julius, Tiberius, Caius, Claudius,  
All bloody, and all pacing that same path.<sup>1</sup>

When his mother is determined to leave him, she utters words reminiscent of Macbeth:

Agrippina: Not the seas shall stop me now,  
Raging on all the shores of all the world.  
Witness if easily my son did reign,  
I am bloody from head to foot for the sake of him.  
And for my cub I am incarnadined.<sup>2</sup>

Phillips's banquet scene again reminds us of Shakespeare. When the poisoned Britannicus falls down, Nero is afflicted with remorse; he gets up but tells the guests with apparent composure:

I do entreat that none of you will stir  
Or rise perturbed; my brother, since his birth  
Was ever thus; the fit will pass from him.<sup>3</sup>

Here beyond question Phillips echoes Macbeth, when Macbeth leaves the banquet table.

A brief reference may be made to Nero's Mother--a one-act play by Phillips intended to be part of his Nero--as an example of his creating an effective skill in/ situation. Nero's mother, filled with sorrow, is awaiting her death. All alone on the stage, she dashes a lamp against the floor and plunges the scene in darkness:

'Tis dark and I am ready for the grave.  
(As one of the soldiers is stealing up  
behind her she stops him)  
Not in the back! In front this wound should be!  
Nero, strike here, here strike where thou wast born!<sup>4</sup>

This kind of rhetorical heightening in terms of tragic gesture is quite effectively handled.

<sup>1</sup> Nero, 1906, pp. 20-21.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 57-58.

<sup>4</sup> Lyrics and Dramas, 1913, p. 115.

Bridges's historical characters and his technique of narrating intrigues and counter-intrigues are not effective. They make hardly endurable demands on the attention of the reader. In the second part of Nero, Bridges takes care to build up the personality of Seneca, who represents honour, and is well suited to convey the poet's philosophy.

The action moves quickly. Nero's opponents are destroyed one by one. But the stage is overcrowded with figures, some of whom serve no purpose, and the interest is diffused. Its length and diffuseness make it impossible to produce. Phillips's Nero, on the other hand, had enormous success when produced at His Majesty's in 1906.

The Homeric story of Ulysses has lent itself to dramatisation by various hands. Phillips, who wrote his Ulysses twelve years after The Return of Ulysses by Bridges, remarks thus:

.....scholars in English literature had already treated this theme in some form or other... Robert Bridges in his poetical play .....The Return of Ulysses has omitted the entire tale of the hero's wanderings and confines himself, as the title denotes, to Ulysses' action which takes place after his return to Ithaca.<sup>1</sup>

Phillips has traversed a wider field and has used more incidents from the early life of Ulysses. He also alters the sequence of events. In the original, Ulysses' sojourn with Calypso comes after his visit to Hades, and Phillips reverses the order. He also transfers from sea to land the ambush laid by the suitors against Telemachus. An artist is at liberty to use the original story as he likes so long as his new treatment and the derived element are both made to serve one purpose and contribute to an overriding significance.

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\* Poetical Works of Robert Bridges, 1905, vi, 267.

<sup>1</sup> Note to Ulysses, 1902.

Phillips's effort to abridge a story of inordinate length, and make it fit for the stage, shows his theatrical skill. But this does not enhance his reputation as a playwright except in contrast to Bridges. Phillips, as usual, opens his play with an effective prologue, the scene set on the summit of Olympus, where the Gods' participation is impressive. But the brightness of the prologue is diminished when the dramatist deals with the suitors and their gluttony--a scene that requires ability of a high order. Here Phillips proves unequal to the task. These characters are flat, their speeches are declamatory, and they are hardly individualised.

Although Bridges too does not make an effort to individualise his suitors, the absence of declamation makes at least one of his suitors, Eurymachus, a live figure. But one has only to place the suitors in both these dramatists by the side of the suitors to Portia's hand to notice their ineffectiveness.

In Phillips, Ulysses' visit to Hades and his conversation with Agamemnon and the phantoms provide a wonderful opportunity to construct a supernatural world which would not strain the credence of the audience. But the effect is ludicrous when Ulysses draws his sword at the sight of the spirits of his children and Hermes offers an apologetic explanation. In spite of these drawbacks, Phillips's use of the supernatural and his endeavour to create a fairy world, where nymphs move and spin 'with golden shuttle and violet wool', is satisfactory, as it is skilfully woven into the texture of the play. To attempt this for a twentieth-century audience, better accustomed to realistic drama and everyday situation, and less accustomed and receptive to the dramatic presentation of the supernatural, is at least bold and perhaps praiseworthy.

But Bridges too can soar and respond to the opportunities of vigorous dramatic situations. The combat between Ulysses and the suitors so vividly described by Penelope's maid has clear analogies with the messenger's speeches in Greek tragedy. One is tempted to quote the second maid, who grows lyrical in reply to the anxious question of Penelope:

Is the prince still safe?

Second maid: He shieldeth himself well, and striketh surely.  
 His foes fall dead before him. Ah! now what see I?  
 Who cometh? Lo! a dazzling helm, a spear  
 Of silver or electron; sharp and swift  
 The piercings. How they fall. Ha, shields are raised  
 In vain. I am blinded, or the beggar-man  
 Hath waxed in strength. He is changed, he is young.  
 O strange!  
 He is all golden armour. These are gods,  
 That slay the woers (Runs to Pen.) O Lady, forgive me!  
 'Tis Ares' self. I saw his crisped beard;  
 I saw beneath his helm his curling locks.<sup>1</sup>

Such passages justify the statement of Yeats that Bridges has held a clear mirror to the magnificent rush of the greatest of all poetry, the end of the Odyssey.<sup>2</sup> But such moments are rare in Bridges. His attempt at recasting the chief scenes in dramatic form is episodic. Ulysses' return, his conversation with Eurymachus the swineherd, and his design to fight the suitors, are all narrated with Bridges's customary metrical virtuosity. He uses the chorus to gain coherence. But the episodic nature of the play would defeat any attempt at production. Drawing a multitude of characters and incidents into the plot demanded a dramatic capacity which Bridges did not possess.

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<sup>1</sup> Poetical Works of Robert Bridges, 1902, iv, p. 294.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Bridges, May 24th (1897), The Letters of W.B. Yeats, ed. Allan Wade, 1954, p. 281.

Phillips's knowledge of the theatre enables him to give his version of the story of Ulysses impressiveness on the stage, although it lacks 'something more'<sup>1</sup> (as Symons would say). But in Bridges the want of knowledge of the theatre leaves his play lacking in concentration, though possessing occasional lyrical charm.

Gerard Manley Hopkins's remarks on Bridges's The Return of Ulysses have a general significance with reference to the drama of this period based on classical sources:

I saw that Ulysses (The Return of Ulysses) was a fine play ... nevertheless, perhaps from my mood of mind, I could not take to it, did not like it, beyond a dry admiration. Not however to remain in a bare Doctor Felldom on the matter, I did find one fault in it which seems indeed to me to be the worst fault a thing can have, unreality..... Believe me, the Greek Gods are a totally unworkable material, the merest frigidity, which must chill and kill every living work of art they are brought into.<sup>2</sup>

One has to ponder these words: Bridges and Phillips sought inspiration in Greek mythology and wrote plays ignoring the contemporary theatrical climate. Their medium may be described as archaic. A foreign plot is dressed up in English drapery. A writer should be attracted by situations that have the richness of myth. In The Family Reunion the poet uses the same medium, but succeeds where they failed. Eliot is successful in applying the Greek myth to a modern situation. He comes to grips with the actualities of life and reduces the distance between the stage and the audience, and thus holds their attention. Bridges and Phillips never succeeded in doing this, because Greek myth in their hands was given no relevance to modern life.

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<sup>1</sup> Plays, Acting, and Music, 1903, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup> The Penguin Poets: Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. W.H. Gardner, 1953, p. 199.

## CHAPTER THREE

### DERIVATIVE PLAYS (Continued)

The last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the present century were an interesting period for drama. It was a period when the 'old drama and the new' met; the old gradually yielding place to the new.

The new, in the hands of Henry Arthur Jones and Sir Arthur Pinero, and finally with the introduction of Ibsen, gradually led to what Jones in 1883<sup>1</sup> called 'a great dramatic renaissance'.<sup>1</sup> In these dramatists (with the exception of Ibsen in his poetical plays) there was an increasing tendency towards realistic prose drama. The first change one notices in this kind of composition is in style. These writers did away with the conventional use of language, and sought to increase the sense of actuality in the theatre, by reducing the distance between the proscenium and the auditorium.

While the dramatist worked on the contemporary world, and created situations close to actual life, there was also a need to write plays which were more remote from actuality. The theatre appetite was omnivorous.

The writing of plays in verse, the use of a chorus and the occasional writing of verse plays by the prose dramatists, are an expression of the desire to relieve the theatre of its burden of naturalism. The perennial attraction of the poetic play hardly needs to be explained:

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Arthur Jones, 'The Theatre And The Mob',  
The Nineteenth Century, XIV, 1883, p. 455.

Poetry drama, however, except only for preserving the necessary credibility, neglects the outer shells of reality, and directly seeks to imitate the core. Or rather, it seeks to imitate in you the effect which would be produced if you perceived with certainty and clarity the grand emotional impulse driving all existence.<sup>1</sup>

As an example of the interest in poetic drama even of the prose dramatist, Bernard Shaw may be cited. Although he put The Admirable Bashville into blank verse, as he had no time to write prose, his prose plays have some of the features of poetic plays. His themes sometimes are extravagant; his prose is sharp and often has a poetic ring. Although Shaw is mainly a prose dramatist, one is tempted to identify him also with the trend towards poetic drama.<sup>2</sup> The writing of poetic plays continues, many dramatists adopt Elizabethan and Jacobean models, and some go in search of Greek devices. While seeking for material some hit upon the rich store of mythology. The story of Tristram lends itself to a kind of dramatisation in which many writers of this period delight.

An endeavour is made in this chapter to study some plays derived from such origins.

#### Henry Arthur Jones:

The fame of Henry Arthur Jones (1851-1929) rests on his achievements in prose drama. Having been influenced by Matthew Arnold in literary judgement, Tom Robertson in the production of plays, and the contemporary melodrama in choice of themes, Jones always felt that the subject of high authority and seriousness is the best material for drama:

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<sup>1</sup> Lascelles Abercrombie, 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama', The Poetry Review, March, 1912.

<sup>2</sup> Vide p. 112 inffa. His other works in verse drama are the fragment Cymbeline Refinished (1935), and the puppet-play Shakes Versus Shav (1949), his last play.

Whatever change may come about in religion and in society, whatever creed may be upheld or upheaved, the heart and soul of man will always remain the things of the greatest price in the universe, and these to their utmost bounds will always be the entailed inheritance and inalienable domain of the drama.<sup>1</sup>

His productions up to 1882 show the influence of melodrama and were considered by a contemporary writer, 'inferior to the first heirs of their invention'.<sup>2</sup> This hostile criticism did not deter Jones from continuing on his path. He was indefatigable:

..... it appears that between 1879 and 1912 he had written fifty plays, most of them in three or more acts. Whatever else he may be, this author is a born playwright, an irrepressible practitioner of the dramatic form.<sup>3</sup>

Archer also comments on the purpose of Jones as a dramatist, which is strengthened by his insistence on the 'heart and soul of man' as the fit material for drama:

His work has been throughout distinguished by an honorable ambition..... He threw himself resolutely into the pursuit of culture. .... He determined that his work should be a criticism of life.<sup>4</sup>

Archer in his echo of the definition of poetry of Matthew Arnold pays high tribute to Jones and his purpose as a writer. An examination of his prose plays, which are the vehicle of his ambition, is beyond the scope of this work. But a brief reference to a play written before The Tempter, September 1893, serves as a necessary prelude to a proper assessment of his one verse play.

In the pre-Tempter period, a play which defines Jones' outlook is Saints And Sinners (1884). He indicates in the preface that it was written deliberately as a reaction against the cheaper and coarser

<sup>1</sup> H.A.Jones, 'The Theatre And the Mob', The Nineteenth Century, XIV, 1883, p. 455.

<sup>2</sup> William Archer, The Old Drama And the New, 1923, p. 282.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 293.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 293.



art of melodrama and to lift drama to an artistic and philosophic level. But he tries to achieve this purpose through the very process against which he rebels. Its theme is not very different from that of a melodrama. He treats the betrayal of a poor village maiden, Letty Fletcher, by Captain Eustace Fawnshawe. George, the faithful lover of Letty, succeeds in saving her from the villain's trap, but he cannot save her from death. She dies miserably. George's purpose to marry her is in vain. There are other scenes which are characterised by a note of sentimentality -- in their depiction of Jacob Fletcher, and Letty's father, a poor dissenting minister tyrannised by Samuel Hoggard, who gets him deprived of his post.

In the relation between Letty, George and Eustace, Jones stresses the importance of sincere love. The structure is weakened by shifting the emphasis from the personal conflict to social conditions. The latter aspect of the play finds expression in The Tempter nine years later.

Prior to the critical discussion of his play, it is of interest to note Jones's views on poetic drama. In 1883 he wrote:

So far from the English people resenting literature and poetry on the stage, it would be truer to say that they rarely get a chance of encouraging them. This has partly arisen from some vagueness in the managerial mind as to what literature and poetry are, and (from) the inability of authors to blend them in an actable and tractable play. Every now and then we are treated to some five act, unactable, intractable tragedy, with phantoms for characters and spouting lifeless blank-verse lines for dialogue. It fails, and a loud cry arises that the public will not have poetry on the stage. But the truth is that what they will not have is imitation poetry. They want reality.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jones, p. 453.

It looks as though, inspired by a desire to give 'reality' clothed in live 'blank verse lines', ten years later he produced The Tempter. In the preface, he also speaks of literary men having given modern playwrights so many examples of what to avoid, the time is now ripe to give an example of what to follow. He wants the poets to devote themselves solely to the cause of drama. But Jones is equally animated by the desire himself to write a poetic play as a reaction against realism.

Jones's desire was not properly realised when the play was produced by Tree at the Haymarket Theatre in 1893. The failure is attributed to a ship bodily put on the stage to depict a shipwreck scene, and the ship's failure to function; and also to Irving's non-participation.

Its failure is due more to its construction as a poetic drama than to such handicaps. Jones looks backwards and tries to recreate the mood and atmosphere of the traditional English tragedy. The devil, the shadow of terrors, is the main character among other human characters, and controls the action as well. To that extent, the freedom of the other characters is curtailed. The devil is suggested by Goethe's Faust. In a broader sense the play resembles Faust. Mephistopheles wanted the soul of Faust. Here the devil lures Prince Leon from the path of virtue, makes him love Lady Isobel, who has taken a vow to be a nun, and give up his betrothed, Lady Avis. But the devil is not wholly successful like Mephistopheles, as a priest intervenes and blesses those who have sinned.

The opening is very much like the opening of The Tempest. Prince Leon, a French Prince of the fourteenth century, is shipwrecked in the Channel, while he is sailing to marry the God-daughter of the

English King, Lady Avis. The ship is wrecked because of the machinations of the devil. Soon the devil joins in the action, sets his evil designs in motion, unites Isobel and the Prince, and thus steals the soul of the nun. Isobel quarrels with and wounds her lover mortally; the devil demands the soul of the dying Prince as he has sinned. But Isobel repents and demands the Prince's life as her own. When the Prince is dying, she stabs herself and lies beside her lover. When they are about to die, their souls are set at peace by the intervention of Father Urban, who blesses them and prays for pardon for them.

The play lacks tragic force because of the triviality of the plot and the inadequacy of Jones's treatment of the problem of evil. As in Saints and Sinners, a feeble endeavour is made to show that religious convention is all-important in matters of love and marriage.

The poetry of The Tempter takes fire here and there, but the emphasis is clearly on decorative imagery. Even the few intensely imagined passages are rhetorical. They appeal to the ear and do not reach the heart of the audience:

Our souls

Were like two birds that should have homed apart,  
 But caught by winds, the tempest mated us,  
 And we are blown hither and thither, baffled,  
 Together across outrageous oceans,  
 And vexed, unvoyageable, running gulfs;  
 Here we have made our nest; on these wild seas  
 We rock and whirl to despairing end.<sup>1</sup>

-- a passage with echoes of Webster.

The use of the supernatural elements during this period calls forth a special but unsuccessful effort on the part of the dramatist:

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<sup>1</sup> The Tempter, 1893, p. 103.

In introducing their spirit forces, however, the dramatists have often forgotten that art, particularly that form of art which deals with the supernatural world, is successful only so far as it is suggestive. No ghost ever succeeded in raising so much of that "willing suspension of disbelief."<sup>1</sup>

Jones fails because he has not the poetic gift of Marlowe or any other dramatist who could well handle a subject related to mythology. On production the play was ill received. An old lady who witnessed the play said, "I call it perfectly outrageous".<sup>2</sup> Bernard Shaw remarked that the play was a freak and Jones committed a prodigal sin in spending a year and a half in writing it.<sup>3</sup>

Jones's characters in his prose dramas are more living than those in his single poetic drama. Nine years after The Tempter, he saw the futility of his own efforts and visualised no future for a poetic drama that did not grow from the lives of the people.

#### William Archer.

Another dramatist who looks backward, borrows plots and adapts them is William Archer (1856-1924). He is remembered in the history of twentieth-century letters because of his efforts to regenerate the theatre by introducing Ibsen to England and by writing intelligent dramatic criticism, which he published in Study and Stage and articles in The World.<sup>4</sup> His works on the theatre, Masks or Faces (1888) and Play-Making, (1912), were written with a view to reforming dramatic methods. Together with Granville-Barker, he also put up a strong plea for a national theatre.

<sup>1</sup> A.Nicoll, British Drama, 1955 (edn 4), p. 378.

<sup>2</sup> The Tempter, 1898, vii.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by R.A.Cordell, H.A.Jones And The Modern Drama, 1932, p. 103.

<sup>4</sup> Reprinted as The Theatrical World, 5 volumes, (1893-1897).

'The way to get on with Archer was to amuse him: to argue with him was dangerous'.<sup>1</sup>

This remark of Bernard Shaw is significant and indicates Archer's customary tone. He was a formidable critic and intolerant of slovenliness. His value-judgements were acute. The Old Drama And The New (1923) is a survey of the drama from the Elizabethan period up to the beginning of the twentieth century including the Irish movement. It shows deep scholarship, and his criticism of the individual dramatists is characterised by a concern for art.

His creative work is not on the level of his critical standards. His first play, written as late as 1919, was War is War; it is a poor play, when compared with his next work. The Green Goddess, based on a dream about a westernised Asiatic Rajah offering English captives as a sacrifice to propitiate the Green Goddess, is a testimony to his stagecraft, and was put on at St. James's Theatre in 1923. He died the next year. Three more plays had posthumous publication: Martha Washington, Beatriz Juana and Lidia, printed in one volume.<sup>2</sup>

Beatriz Juana and Lidia are his poetic dramas, and in these Archer looks back to the seventeenth century for inspiration. Even his plots are borrowed from earlier dramatists; Middleton's Changeling suggested Beatriz Juana, Massinger's Great Duke of Florence inspired him to write Lidia.

In a joint preface to the two plays, Archer makes certain general observations quite characteristic of the period:

Many dramatists have treated more or less modern themes in an Elizabethan manner: these two plays attempt to treat Elizabethan themes in a more or less modern manner.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bernard Shaw, preface to William Archer's Three Plays, 1927, viii.

<sup>2</sup> William Archer, Three Plays, 1927.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 93

So in his attempt at dressing Elizabethan themes in modern drapery, he takes 'one or two characters and a situation'<sup>1</sup> from the originals. He brings to bear on them 'a form of intellectual effort different from that of the Elizabethans'<sup>2</sup> He discards prose as spoken in real life and resorts to 'blank verse.....rather as a dialect than as a poetical form!' <sup>3</sup> His use of blank verse is an expression of the attempt to escape from the naturalistic style; but his statement is open to question. A poetic playwright should combine in him/<sup>self</sup>the two functions--those of a poet and a dramatist. The poetic medium must be used with a purpose. Poetry itself must be felt to have a crucial part to play in the development of the drama as a whole. Verse must be used to achieve the integration of metre and imagery in a poetic play:

A verse play is not a play done into verse, but a different kind of play: in a way more realistic than 'naturalistic drama', because instead of clothing nature in poetry, it should remove the surface of things, expose the underneath or the inside, of the natural surface appearance".<sup>4</sup>

Beatriz Juana owes little to the original, The Changeling. Beatriz, who is the central figure of the play, is conceived as a woman quick in imagination, heartless, who can 'plan a murder as deftly as a martlet'. Like her original, she is not constant in love. She uses De Flores as a means to an end, and gets rid of Don Manuel, a crude lover. She marries Don Beltram De Cabra. De Flores does not tolerate this; he makes advances to her, tells her that crime has united them. She tries to bribe him but he does not

1, 2 & 3 W.Archer, Three Plays, 1927, p. 94.

3 ~~ibid., p. 93.~~

4 T.S.Eliot, Introduction to S.L.Bethell's Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition, 1938 (ed. 2nd)

yield. She asks her husband to rid their happy path of this 'foul contamination'. When he kills De Flores, Beltram learns the treachery of the 'Malignant woman'. His heart becomes 'numb with agony' and he exposes Beatriz's crimes to corregidor and stabs himself. Beatriz, who is responsible for the death of three people, retires to a convent to heal her bruised spirit. Archer's heroine is very poorly conceived. Middleton's Beatrice is conceived in strong tragic terms. Her tragedy lies in winning De Flores:

'I'm forced to love thee now:  
'Cause thou provid'st so carefully for my honour.<sup>1</sup>

Beatriz is superficial. Archer makes no attempt to create profound studies of human beings. Even in the most intense situation Beatriz's lines lack individuality and dramatic or poetic fire.

Oh, my lover! There he stood,  
And braved me like a fool -- but like a king!  
Oh, I could kiss her footprints. Even his honour  
I love, while I despise. Men will be men,  
And headstrong. Only weaklings crouch before us.  
By the new tremor in my heart I know,  
And the sweet, subtle tingling in my veins,  
'Twas for this man that I was born a woman!<sup>2</sup>

Certain phrases and lines of the earlier dramatists are echoed:

'Casements all unbarred',<sup>3</sup> 'man of men'.<sup>4</sup>

Beltram's disgust is expressed in lines that are very Shakespearean:

Oh my love! If there were aught  
In heaven or earth, elixir, lymph or balm,  
Could wash those hands clean, I would give my life for it.<sup>5</sup>

Archer's style and choice of material indicate the impress of the Elizabethans on him.

<sup>1</sup> Middleton, Best Plays (Mermaid Series), 1894, p. 153.

<sup>2</sup> Archer, Three Plays, 1927, p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

Lidia is closer to its original, The Great Duke of Florence. Archer retains three important characters, Giovanni, his tutor Carlo and Lidia, Carlo's daughter.

Lidia is the central figure in the comedy. Giovanni, as in the original, receives tuition from Count Carlo. He falls in love with Lidia but is secretly watched. He is 'to leave the school of letters for the sterner school of life'. When Giovanni is reluctant to bear the burden of life, Lidia advises him to give up 'fever-fantasies'. The comedy is occupied with their love affair. Giovanni is ready to give up even the succession to marry Lidia: ultimately they are married and the 'comic muse' smiles on all. Comedy is realised through various episodes -- the Duke's insistence that Giovanni should marry Dafne, Giovanni's declaration of love to Lidia, and his anger and striking the Duke. These episodes are not, however, knit together in an emotional unity.

Lidia is the only full-blooded character. She is clever and vivacious, and she has traces of her original in her behaviour with Giovanni, her father and the Duke.

Archer introduces a masque in honour of Pandolfo, the Duke, and his escort, in the garden of the Villa Caromonte, in which Giovanni and Lidia participate. It is in the manner of the masque in The Tempest, arranged to entertain the betrothed lovers.

'E'en though his verses limp, his rhymes make war'<sup>1</sup> are the words of Giovanni, which may be applied to Archer's blank verse in his tragedy and comedy, where his purpose is to give stark undecorated drama, using 'measured speech' less jarring than any other form of utterance he could devise.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Archer, Three Plays, 1927, p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 100.



Archer himself makes no claim to have written a great poetic play. His plays are poor replicas of their models. In this, he is not an isolated example.

### Comyns Carr:

Mr. Irving is to be congratulated on the impulse which has led him to exclaim, ..... 'Let us get rid of that insufferably ignorant specialist, the dramatist, and try whether something fresh cannot be done by a man equipped with all culture of the age'.<sup>1</sup>

Thus wrote Bernard Shaw on seeing the production of King Arthur by Comyns Carr at the Lyceum Theatre in 1895. While paying tribute to the culture of Comyns Carr, Shaw mistrusts his power as a dramatist.

Comyns Carr established himself in the intellectual world as a critic on the Pall Mall Gazette and English editor of L'Art (1875), but made occasional excursions into the field of verse drama. Eleven years after King Arthur, he wrote Tristram and Iseult, treated in the last section of this chapter. In 1908, in collaboration with Phillips, he produced Faust. His desire to write in verse was due to the encouragement received from Irving and Phillips.

King Arthur and Tristram and Iseult are based on legendary subjects. The Arthur cycle has charmed poets and dramatists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. An ingenious dramatist or poet has always been able to exploit this mass of poetic tradition. As late as 1923, Laurence Binyon culled much material from this source for dramatic purposes. His Arthur, A Tragedy was produced at the Old Vic by Robert Atkins.

Comyns Carr and Binyon both concentrate on Lancelot's illicit love of Guinevere. In the hands of Carr, it is<sup>a</sup> neat piece in four

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<sup>1</sup> Our Theatre In the Nineties, 1954 (edn. 3), 1. 12.

acts; in Binyon it dissolves itself into a series of scenes numbering nine and occupies a wider canvas.

Carr's opening, as in the plays of Phillips, is very arresting. A prologue introduces the main characters, Arthur and Merlin. Merlin prophesies that Arthur's doom lurks in the 'gift of beauty' and thus hints at the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere. The Spirit of the Lake offers the sword Excalibur to Arthur. Elaine, who nursed the wounds of Lancelot, loves him passionately, but he never reciprocates. Lancelot is not allowed to go on the quest of the Grail, other knights feel jealous of him, and illicit love between him and Guinevere develops. 'Every hawker cries' of it. In the meantime, Elaine dies of despair. Arthur is enraged and curses Lancelot for his faithlessness, and the last act deals with the passing of Arthur, Guinevere's sorrow, and the restoration of the sword Excalibur.

Although Shaw calls Carr 'a jobber in poetry', his play has certain well-imagined situations. The scene in which Elaine opens her heart to Guinevere, telling her of her love for Lancelot and how she robbed her of her lover, is well composed:

Nay, be not angered: so it chanced to fall,  
In that same hour when thou, new crowned a Queen,  
Didst come from Cameliard as Arthur's bride,  
My love was lost.<sup>1</sup>

When Arthur learns that his faithful knight has turned a traitor by loving his Queen, he expresses anger in lines that echo Shakespearean ideas:

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<sup>1</sup> King Arthur, 1895, p. 21.

..... Yet here I stand  
 That cannot strike a blow in mine own cause.  
 Is this a curse that Heaven hath sent on Kings,  
 Who may not love nor hate like common men?<sup>1</sup>

His blank verse is regular and anticipates Phillips, his collaborator in Faust:

His image dwelt securely like a star  
 Hung high above me in a stainless sky, --  
 A lamp illumined with a fireless flame  
 That wrought no ill ---<sup>2</sup>

Rhymed couplets are used for the Chorus of the Lake Spirits, and occasionally prose is used. Carr's use of prose and verse is not motivated by any definite design, as in Shakespeare or the Jacobean. The Chant of the Grail is choric in character, as its comments bear relation to the play.

The acting by Irving and his company reached the heart of the audience. Designs by Burne-Jones and paintings by Harker and Hawes Craven produced a singularly good effect, to make the characters of the legend alive on the stage.

Laurence Binyon's Arthur<sup>3</sup> is not so spectacular or theatrically effective. In his dedication to Sir John and Lady Martin Harvey, Binyon reveals that he discussed the play with them and recast it according to their advice. One single motive -- the love of Launcelot for Guinevere -- underlies the structure; his introduction of Sir Bernard and his sons only to emphasise Elaine's love for Launcelot, Mordred's parting and Guinevere's joining the convent are episodic and lessen the concentration of the play. Illicit love is ennobled in:

<sup>1</sup> King Arthur, 1895, p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Binyon's other plays are treated in Chapters five and seven.

It is a fire that eats upon the heart,  
It is past comprehension; it exceeds  
And feeds upon excess.<sup>1</sup>

He introduces a Bishop who comes from the Holy Father on the seat of St. Peter, who asks the King to pardon Launcelot, who restores the Queen to Arthur.

Binyon gives more attention to the delineation of the character of Elaine than does Comyns Carr. Her love scenes with Launcelot are so fully treated that they tend to overshadow the main love-relationship between Launcelot and the Queen.

The verse is regular, and restrained, and Binyon's style enables him to bring the play close to the audience and their speech. He is not under the influence of the early writers:

I see  
Your spirit, and my spirit, and that one  
Who stands between us; and I see the realm,  
I dreamed to make one flawless crystal, cracked  
To fragments; and the loss, the waste.<sup>2</sup>

These lines, in which Arthur describes the dissolution of the Knights of the Round Table, suggests that Binyon was aware of the need for a change towards idiomatic speech in the world of poetic drama.

### Clemence Dane<sup>3</sup>

J.M. Robertson closes his article, 'The Evolution of English Blank Verse', in the Criterion, thus:

Perhaps the best dramatic blank verse of recent years, by Shakespearean standards, is Miss Clemence Dane's in her desperate play, headed by the Master's name; upon which beyond an adjective, I cannot trust myself to

<sup>1</sup> Arthur, A Tragedy, 1932, p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>3</sup> The pseudonym of Winifred Ashton.

speak. Rhythm and diction, after all, are but entrancing forms of ideas, feelings, visions, judgments, presentments of life, and when these belong to chaos, the result is 'beyond permission', however skilful the form.<sup>1</sup>

This criticism of Will Shakespeare, An Invention in Four Acts (1921) at first sight appears to be harsh. Clemence Dane had considerable dramatic experience: Rutherford And Son (1912), A Bill of Divorcement (1921) and Mariners (1925-26) are some of her peaks of achievement.

What may be regarded as the most adverse criticism of Will Shakespeare takes note of its construction. Clemence Dane, as the sub-title denotes, is recreating in an imaginative way the life of Shakespeare, with no dependence on records, from his days at Stratford up to the day he achieved success as a playwright in London. It is in this respect like The Barretts of Wimpole Street (1930) by Rudolf Besier; but while Besier knows his facts, Clemence Dane does not.

Will Shakespeare<sup>2</sup> begins with Will's married life; we see the mental divorce between the imaginative Will and his simple wife. Anne does not want him to leave Stratford, but he feels the call to go to London to make his fortune. Henslowe visualises the great prospect, the players love him, and Will at last reaches London. He becomes the favourite of Queen Elizabeth, the patron of art, meets Marlowe, becomes his friend but kills him under the spell of wine, because of Mary whom they both love. He repents of his hasty act and is at last crowned the player King of England.

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<sup>1</sup> The Criterion, ii, 1923-24, p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> Produced at the Shaftesbury Theatre, London, on November 17th, 1921. (Vide title page, Will Shakespeare, 1921)

It is purely a literary fantasy, a costume comedy with a literary background. The play contains implicit criticism of act-division, Marlowe's plays, Shakespeare's comedies, and the condition of the theatre in those days. The play is to be regarded as a freak of fancy in which the artist delights. The verse is vigorous, and Clemence Dane makes efforts to be very Shakespearean:

My mind's not one room stored, but many,  
 A house of windows that o'erlook far gardens,  
 The hanging gardens of more Babylons  
 Than there are bees in a linden tree in June.  
 I'm the King-prisoner in his Capital,  
 Ruling strange peoples of a world unknown,  
 Yet there come envoys from untravelled lands  
 That fill my corridors with miracles  
 As it were tribute, secretly, by night;  
 And I wake in the dawn like Solomon,  
 To stare at peacocks, apes and ivory,  
 And a closed door.<sup>1</sup>

While these words are a tribute to the myriad-mindedness of Will, they also embody ideas, feelings not unworthy of the master-mind to whom they are attributed.

Clemence Dane attempts an imaginative recreation of Shakespeare's early life, but in some episodes (for instance, the scene where Shakespeare kills Marlowe) her imagination runs wild. Will Shakespeare is clumsy in construction. The scene in which the shadowy figures of players converse with Shakespeare is tedious and irrelevant, and the introduction of the Fates strains the credence of the modern audience. A genius second only to Shakespeare would be needed to translate the Fates and the shadowy figures into a world that scorns the supernatural.

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<sup>1</sup> Will Shakespeare, 1927 (new Ed.) pp. 61-62.

### Charles Williams.

But Charles Williams, who started his dramatic career with a play on Shakespeare<sup>1</sup> wrote a different kind of play altogether. His aim is to 'provide a momentarily credible framework for representative scenes and speeches from the plays'<sup>2</sup> of Shakespeare. He was popular in the world of the theatre as a writer of dramas for private occasions.

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<sup>1</sup> A Myth of Shakespeare, 1928.

<sup>2</sup> Note. Ibid.,

The following is a list of Charles Williams's plays:

Three Plays (1931). In a note he indicates that all the three plays, The Witch, The Chaste Woman and The Rite of the Passion were commissioned and thus written with performance in view. They are inferior to the series of religious dramas which came after 1936. Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury (1936). Seed of Adam and Other Plays (1948) is a collection of three plays - Seed of Adam, a Nativity Play, The Death of Good Fortune, a Christmas Play, and The House By the Stable, a Christmas Play. Grab And Grace, a sequel to The House By the Stable.

He was also attracted by criticism. His critical essays on the poets of his generation are included in Poetry at Present, Oxford, 1930, and he has an introductory essay to The Duchess of Malfi (1945). Martin Brown writes in his introduction to Four Modern Verse Plays, (Penguin Books) 1957, (p. 12) that Williams's was a spirit of fire and that to hear him read Paradise Lost, in his excruciating cockney accent, was to experience the glory of that sublime creation.

All his plays do not come into this survey. His career as a poetic dramatist falls into two divisions - before 1931 and after 1936. The early plays, including A Myth of Shakespeare, suggest that the dramatist in Williams is coming too close to imitation.<sup>1</sup> In those after 1936, which are his major plays, he uses a poetic medium which follows fairly closely normal speech-rhythms.<sup>2</sup> He was aware of the changes brought about by T.S.Eliot and others in the medium of poetic drama.

A Myth of Shakespeare 'contains no thesis of Shakespeare's life, character or genius except that he was a born poet and working dramatist'.<sup>3</sup> The play was written for a Shakespeare festival at the suggestion of A.C.Ward. It is divided into two parts -- the first part contains five scenes -- The Road from Stratford to London, London, outside and inside the Theatre, Marlowe's Lodging at Deptford, The Theatre and the Court. The settings for the second part are Shakespeare's Lodgings, A Room at the Mermaid, The Theatre, On the Road to Stratford, and The Garden at New Place.

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<sup>1</sup> He is a pseudo-Shakespeare, as the following passage from The Witch shows:

To-morrow? No,  
This is to-morrow; only in your eyes  
The future sits - if I should part from you  
I should go out of the universe; God made  
Nothing but you, and outside you and Him  
There is eternal nothingness and void.

(Cf. Three Plays, 1931, p. 24)

<sup>2</sup> A passage from The Death of Good Fortune included in Seed of Adam, and Other Plays, 1948, p. 41:

How shall I be able to tell you what I know?  
I found myself riding through the heavens; below,  
On earth, wise men are riding to a Birth,  
To a lonely, difficult, universal gospel  
Of nature, its nature and all things' nature.

<sup>3</sup> Note to A Myth of Shakespeare.



The prologue tells the reader:

This is the fabulous dreaming; take it so. The play provides a framework for inserting certain scenes from the Plays of Shakespeare, and the author also gives freedom to readers and producers to introduce scenes of their own choice. In the first act, while Shakespeare and Prince are discussing the actors, the scene from A Midsummer Night's Dream, in which Bottom and his companions rehearse Pyramus and Thisbe, is introduced.

He maintains dramatic interest by making Shakespeare converse with Marlowe, Southampton, Ben Jonson and Queen Elizabeth. He attributes to Shakespeare an amusingly hard-headed attitude to his work:

I want money, Kit;  
Yes, and I'm going to have it. This is the way:  
To polish plays as well as any man,  
And have a tag in verse as well as it need,  
And a play of one's own to hand if there's a chance.  
You'll see me own a bit of the theatre yet.<sup>1</sup>

Kit and Will converse freely and watch the rehearsal of Tamburlaine.

The play is in regular blank verse; as a whole, it is a deliberate pastiche, as can be seen where Williams's lines are juxtaposed with the scenes from Shakespeare. Shakespeare is talking to Southampton:

Alas, my Lord, I would not boast my trade;  
I am but parcel poet; most of me  
Drawn out in plans and lists of properties,  
The honest foreman of a working gang  
Of honest actors. But if you should ask  
What thing it is that keeps a woman sweet  
And a man tender, I would make a guess.

Mary Fitton intervenes and asks:

What is it then? What book has taught you that?

Shakespeare replies in the words of Berowne (Love's Labour's Lost Act. IV, Sc. 3).

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

O where is any author in the world  
 Teaches such beauty as a woman's eye?  
 Learning is but an adjunct to oneself  
 And where we are our learning likewise is:  
 Then when ourselves we see in ladies' eyes,  
 Do we not likewise see our learning there?

Here and there, criticisms of Shakespeare's plays are to be found. When Burbage thinks very highly of Claudio's speech, 'Ay, but to die, and go we know not where', Jonson speaks contemptuously of the sentiments expressed and tells Will that his young heroes are the loathliest crew.

The very division of the play into two parts shows its episodic nature. But it serves the purpose of the author, 'to mythically represent barely possible incidents in Shakespeare's life, passages read to or by his friends, or performances in the theatre'.<sup>1</sup>

A Myth of Shakespeare bears a relation to the pageant-play written for a special occasion. It is of interest to note that T.S. Eliot's first attempt was in this direction. The Rock (1934) is a pageant-play, written for a special occasion, of which he says in the Prefatory Note, 'I cannot consider myself the author of the "play", but only of the words which are printed here'.<sup>2</sup>

### John Davidson.

The Times memoir of April 19, 1909, while drawing attention to the work of John Davidson (1857-1909) and his 'untempered materialism' and 'a kind of mad Nietzscheism', says that in his early work were charm, individuality and power. Davidson could not leave behind a system of philosophy, although he desired very much to do so. In a moment of acute depression, he made an end of himself. He desired that no-one should write his biography.

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<sup>1</sup> Note to the play.

<sup>2</sup> The Rock, 1934.

His idea was to revive the Victorian drama, but he looked at the Victorians through the eyes of an Elizabethan. Yet he regarded Ibsen as the most impressive writer of his time. Explaining his method in writing drama, he says, "I take men and women as I know them.....and make them more apparent and more engaging to an audience, I place them in an imaginary environment and in the colour and vestments of another time."<sup>1</sup>

To him romance means the essence of reality. With the purpose of demonstrating this he composed a number of plays. He came into fame with the publication of Fleet Street Eclogues (1893). His plays which precede 1893 show him in a serene mood, giving free rein to his imagination. An Unhistorical Pastoral (1877), A Romantic Farce (1878), Bruce, A Chronicle Play (1886), Scaramouch in Naxos (1888) and Smith, A Tragic Farce (1888) were printed in one volume.<sup>2</sup> These plays were written while he lived in Scotland. In 1889 he left for London, where he spent the rest of his life. Godfrida (1898) Self's The Man (1899) and The Knights of Maypole (1903) were published in separate volumes. These early plays differ in content from those he wrote after 1905. His style does not differ, but in the later plays he shows himself at war with the world around him. He sets out deliberately to preach to the world through The Theatrocrat (1905) and the Mammon trilogy, of which he completed only two plays, The Triumph of Mammon and Mammon and His Message (1907). He is doctrinaire in these plays, and they are treated in the next chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> John Davidson, Godfrida, 1898, pp. 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> Plays by John Davidson, 1894.

Davidson also wrote lyrics for the Yellow Book; he did a poetical version of Francois Coppee's Pour la Couronne in English called For the Crown, produced at the Lyceum in 1896,<sup>1</sup> and a version of Victor Hugo's Ruy Blas for Lewis Waller in 1901, produced at the Imperial Theatre, Westminster in 1904.<sup>2</sup> Both were ill-received by the London audience. Although his adaptations were produced, he could not secure performance for his own plays.

His earliest plays, An Unhistorical Pastoral and A Romantic Farce both Shakespearean in style, fall into one group. The return to life of those thought to be dead and the restoration of lost children are treated here. But though The Winter's Tale offers such situations Davidson's themes seem to belong rather to the world of Victorian melodrama. He is unlike Oscar Wilde, who, in The Importance of Being Earnest, makes fun of these situations. He fits them into the general current of his drama.

An Unhistorical Pastoral has all the trappings of a romantic comedy. Alardo, separated from his son by shipwreck, and thought to be dead, returns to his kingdom and watches his son's activities in disguise. Conrad, who is in a similar situation, keeps company with him. Rupert, son of Alardo, is to marry Eulalie, a shepherdess, while Cinthio, Conrad's son, wants to marry Faustine, a nobleman's daughter. They meet on a May Day, and the two fathers reveal themselves to their sons. Eulalie is discovered to be a nobleman's daughter, and the couple are married.

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Shaw, Our Theatre in the Nineties, 1954 (edn. 2), ii, p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> Max Beerbohm, Around Theatres, 1953, pp. 308-10.

It looks as if Davidson is weaving the fairy world of A Midsummer Night's Dream into the texture of the play. Oberon, Puck and Titania participate in this world/<sup>of</sup>make-belief. In his use of rustics and nobles and his mixture of prose and verse, he echoes Shakespeare.

A Romantic Farce is in the same vein. It treats of long separated lovers, Mary and Edmund, Herminia and Antinous, Bellon and the Clown: these pairs of lovers are in disguise. They meet and marry after long separation. The play is fantastic; we know nothing about the characters in the first two acts, in which they appear in fancy costumes, and we discover all of them in Act III.

The blank verse of these plays is stilted and the language is all that of a book, and the hand of the dramatist is still immature. They are vagaries of his imagination.

Scaramouch in Naxos shows Davidson more mature in content and style. He uses characters -- both human and divine -- to criticise the sordid world. His play is what he calls a pantomime:

True pantomime is a good-natured nightmare. Our sense of humour is titillated and strummed, and kicked and oiled, and fustigated and stroked, and exalted and bedevilled, and, on the whole, severely handled by this self-same harmless incubus; and our intellectuals are scoffed at. The audience, in fact, is, intellectually, a Pantaloon, on whom the Harlequin pantomime has no mercy.<sup>1</sup>

A year later, Arthur Symons also expresses the same view on pantomime and poetic drama:

It is an error to believe that pantomime is merely a way of doing without words, that it is merely the equivalent of words. Pantomime is thinking overheard  
..... Becoming aristocratic, getting sheer through

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<sup>1</sup> Prologue to Scaramouch in Naxos.

the accidents of life without staying by the way in the manner of the realistic drama, it adds the beauty of words to the beauty of primary emotions, and is the poetic drama.<sup>1</sup>

Davidson calls Scaramouch a childhood of new poetic comedy. It is "a good-natured nightmare" to those immersed in sordid materialism. Scaramouch, who represents this sordid outlook on life, goes to Naxos in order to get Bacchus and Ariadne to the real world so that he may make money in an entertainment. Instead he brings Silenus, who pretends to be Bacchus, until at last the real Bacchus appears and turns him into an ape. Scaramouch's mercenary purpose is frustrated.

Davidson uses prose and verse in order to emphasise his point. His prose is vigorous:

Silenus: And is money still the cure for all the ills of life? Is it still the talisman, eh! --- my brand-new demigod? And the great and glorious institution of rich and poor, good spick-and-span divinity--is the world not tired of that gift of the gods yet?<sup>2</sup>

A number of mythological figures are introduced, thus maintaining the variety of the pantomime. At times his verse seems to have come from the younger romantics:

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<sup>1</sup> 'Ballet, Pantomime and Poetic Drama', The Dome, 1898, 1, 67-68. A.B.Walkley quotes the following definition of a pantomime, which is near to Symons's, in Still More Prejudices, 1925, pp. 220-221: 'Pantomime ..... is the earliest form of drama. (in it) words were not spoken, but simply acted. In a later stage of development drama began to make use of speech, but still remained true to the original form of pantomime.'

by John Davidson,  
<sup>2</sup> Plays, 1894, p. 275.

O Sweet West Wind  
 Stay here and tell me secrets for a while!  
 Whence do you come and whither are you bound?  
 What music are you singing to yourself,  
 Sometimes with muffled syllables that fall,  
 And break their meaning on the hearts they touch?<sup>1</sup>

Such <sup>passages</sup> ~~passes~~ in the play possess lyrical beauty and are strongly reminiscent of the Ode To the West Wind.

In Bruce he makes an attempt to dramatise the events under Edward I leading to the battle of Bannockburn and resulting in victory for Bruce. He is attempting a chronicle play, after the manner of Shakespeare.

Although Bruce is not fully realised, he is something more than a mere mouthpiece of rhetoric. Davidson invests Bruce with human qualities. He follows the device of Henry V in making Bruce overhear <sup>the</sup> conversation of the war-weary soldiers on the battlefield. He cheers them up and intensifies their determination to break the power of the 'Great Plantagenet'. He is kind to them and allows them to indulge in little pleasures.

The whole of Act III is devoted to William Wallace, who is in prison under the English King. This is not in keeping with the structure of the play as a whole.

In the last act, the audience learns about the battle through the conversation of a young friar, a woman and a cripple. The effect of the words is indeed powerful:

Look here! look here, I say! who's this behind?  
 His horse sinks down -- the brute is dead, I think,  
 His clothes are torn; his face with dust and sweat  
 Encrusted, baked and backed.<sup>2</sup>

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by John Davidson  
<sup>1</sup> Plays, 1894, p. 263.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

The character of Bruce is important; he is a defiant figure, whose aim is to establish freedom for his land and victory for his people. The defiance is pronounced in Davidson's later characters in The Theatrocrat and the Mammon plays, written after 1889.

Smith, Godfrida, The Knights of Maypole and Self's the Man are plays based on deeper thought, and the characters show his knowledge of life.

Siward in Godfrida, to whom love alone is worthy, braves all dangers to win his object of love; Gabriel Ash and his love of Agnes in The Knights of Maypole are cast in a defiant mould, and the Urban of Self's The Man feels that 'one against the world will always win'. The characters are full of ideas. They are strongly Ibsenite. Most of them, like Dr. Stockmann of An Enemy of the People, are defiant, yet they fail to impress because Davidson has not the grip of Ibsen over his characters. Smith shows Davidson trying to come to grips with the hard facts of life. Smith and Hallows, the latter not being fully developed, fail because they cannot resist the corroding effects of life. Smith destroys himself and the girl he loves, because he is not allowed to marry her. Hallows, a defrocked clerk and teacher, in despair of poetical success, kills himself. These two characters are full of ideas. Their unlimited ambition is matched against their limited ability, and thus they fail. This play, written at the end of Davidson's Scottish period before he came to London, is a good prelude to his other plays of ideas embodied in defiant figures.

Godfrida was suggested by the story of Torfrida, who exercised the magical art to win Hereward's love, in Charles Kingsley's Hereward The Wake. The incident of the tournament and the ribbon in Godfrida is taken from this novel.



The main theme is the love of Godfrida for Siward, the Constable of Provence. Ermengarde, the Duchess of Provence, who also loves Siward, attempts to thwart their love. Isembart, the Chancellor of Provence, loves Godfrida; he admonishes her for preferring 'a sort of slave, a despicable huckster of the blood'. Godfrida is arrested; but still she affirms her love for Siward:

Madam, although you were to bury me  
 Deep in a dungeon or an unknown grave,  
 Our happy love would not be desolate;  
 For on my mouth is Siward's kiss.....<sup>1</sup>

Siward, undaunted, braves all dangers; the schemes of Isembart and Ermengarde are easily defeated, and the lovers go through life 'sweetly and violently'.

The main characters are animated by the idea of love; the incidents are borrowed but the characters are original.

The Knights of Maypole is a comedy, whose scene is set in the reign of Charles II, and the poet returns to the early mood of the romances. Gabriel, who was shipwrecked and has stayed away for the ten years, returns home to his love, Agnes Grey, and sees the treachery of Anthony, who wants to deprive him of his estate; his love, Agnes, is coveted by the King. Gabriel declares:

After ten years of undivided love,  
 Wherein your image, married<sup>to</sup> my soul,  
 Endeared to me long travail and despair,  
 And made mere life desirable in times  
 Of harshest fortune, malice waked a storm  
 That shook the full-eared harvest of my joy  
 And home-returning pride.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Godfrida, 1898, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

His love for Agnes develops in woodland scenes, and dancing round the Maypole enhances the romantic rural atmosphere. Gabriel becomes the Lord of Maypole, judges other lovers and wins his love ultimately. He generously pardons Anthony because he is 'too happy to make others grieve'. Gabriel is powerfully drawn: he stands for the sanctity of first love. The language of the lovers is homely, and the play is alternately in prose and verse, which contributes to the realisation of the romantic atmosphere.

Self's The Man has a misleading title. It treats of rivalry between Urban and Lucian for the throne of Lombardy. Urban is elected and he becomes the mouthpiece of the poet's wishes. He is a dreamer, he cares for artistic things but is also egoistical. When he is chosen King, he renounces his mistress Saturnia and marries Osmunda. Davidson's purpose <sup>is</sup> to show that a dreamer and an egoist cannot rule long and that he should not have given up Saturnia through fear of public opinion. To him,

To be king is greater than to love!<sup>1</sup>

He is full of self-love; he tells Saturnia:

I love myself  
Too well to overthrow the edifice  
And fair proportion of my youth; and you  
Too well to change the soul that opened heaven  
For me, and made me man, into the stale  
And fashionable mistress of a king.  
Power is my chosen bride!<sup>2</sup>

As he does not fit into the general scheme of things, he is banished and his daughter becomes the queen. Till the end of Act IV the play is without dramatic complications.

<sup>1</sup> Self's The Man, 1901, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

Twenty years elapse. His daughter, Queen Sibyl, wants to erect a statue in his honour. When she makes a fine speech eulogising her father's services, he appears as an old man, rushes to the spot and gives a disparaging account of himself:

Discrowned and hopeless, like a star unsphered  
He sank beneath the nadir to the abyss.<sup>1</sup>

The people do not tolerate the old man; he is beaten. But only his discarded love, Saturnia, recognises him and consoles him. He sums up his fall thus:

I should have married her I love, because  
I love as lovers and as women love;  
No pastime, but my life. Then had my strength  
Been matched with loyal fate on equal terms;  
But having done dishonour to myself  
In the great passion which the world endures,  
A bridge without a keystone, all my hopes  
Crumble to dust and vanish in the gulf.....<sup>2</sup>

Lucian is less powerfully drawn than Urban. Osmunda makes a profound impression on the audience; she loves Lucian at first but it is fated that she should marry Urban, who has been chosen king. She submits herself willingly to fate.

This play, despite its structural weakness, is written in a vigorous style and makes a passage to Davidson's later plays of greater concentration treated in the next chapter.

Nevertheless, his plays are derivative; his thoughts are commonplace and not enriched by vividness of language or imagery. In him there is an attempt to revive the old forms of drama--Romance, Farce and Pantomime.

#### Gordon Bottomley.

I think of him who from an Italian seed  
Was born an Englishman, him who renewed  
By moody English ways, and English tension,

---

<sup>1</sup> Self's The Man, 1901, pp. 216-217.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

For English unillumined hearts like mine,  
 The lost Italian vision, the passionate  
 Vitality of art more rich than life,  
 More real than the day's reality.<sup>1</sup>

In terse lines, Gordon Bottomley (1874-1948) pays homage to the poet Rossetti, whose work The Blessed Damozel influenced his poetry and drama. The Blessed Damozel with its romantic richness of language kindled poetic fervour in Bottomley. He was also inspired by the work of the mythological painters Shannon and Ricketts, closely associated with the stage and literature. Both on occasion painted scenes for his plays. Bottomley is distinguished for his devotion to verse speaking.

These influences enabled Bottomley to form his views on poetry and drama:

In my conception the arts are the language of this immortal state; they may be collectively called poetry, which is unerring utterance, without wastage or redundancy or flaw.<sup>2</sup>

Like many of his time, he devoted himself to the cause of poetic drama and the speaking of verse. He said:

The poetic drama is, indeed, not so much a representation of a theme as a meditation upon it or a distillation from it; its business far less the stimulation of life than the evocation and isolation for our delight of the elements of beauty and spiritual illumination in the perhaps terrible and always serious theme chosen.<sup>3</sup>

Thus Bottomley is close to Yeats in his conception of poetic drama. Like Yeats, he deviates from the path of reproducing external forms of life and dramatises eternal issues. Both cherished the

<sup>1</sup> Gordon Bottomley, Poems and Plays, ed. by C.C. Abbott, 1953,

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

p. 167  
~~xxxxxxx~~

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

design to construct drama as a reaction against realism and actuality. The Noh form lent itself to this purpose.<sup>1</sup>

Bottomley divides his plays into two divisions -- plays for the Theatre Outworn<sup>2</sup> and plays for <sup>a</sup>Theatre Unborn.<sup>3</sup> Plays for a Theatre Outworn include The Crier By Night (1900), produced by the Portmanteau Theatre, a touring organisation in the United States; Midsummer Eve (1901), performed by the Arts League of Service in 1930; Laodice and Danae (1906), at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, 1930; Riding to Lithend (1907), at the Cambridge Festival Theatre, 1928; King Lear's Wife (1913), also at the Cambridge Festival Theatre; Britain's Daughter (1917), at the Old Vic, 1922; Gruach (1918), also at the Old Vic, 1922.

The plays for a Theatre Unborn are the plays included in Scenes and Plays (1929), Lyric Plays (1932), Choric Plays (1939), The Acts of St. Peter (1933). These plays, with the exception of the last, treated under the heading of Religious/<sup>Verse</sup>Drama, will be dealt with under the heading of The influence of the Noh plays on verse drama. His Deirdire, a prose play, came out in 1944; Kate Kennedy, a comedy in three acts, in 1945; and his last play, Crookback's Crown: A tragi-comedy<sup>4</sup> is of Shakespearean inspiration.

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<sup>1</sup> Allardyce Noyl, World Drama, From Aeschylus to the Present Day, 1954, (edn. 3) p. 657)

"After he had been stirred to write his Four Plays for Dancers, Yeats urged his friends to pursue this style further, with the ultimate result that both Bottomley and Lawrence Binyon began..... to experiment in the writing of Japanese-inspired plays for John Masefield's Garden Theatre."

<sup>2</sup> & <sup>3</sup> Gordon Bottomley, A Stage for Poetry, 1948, p. vii.

<sup>4</sup> Durham University Journal, December, 1946 and March, 1947.

Bottomley's considerable dramatic output is a testimony to his passion for the revival of poetic drama. Although a great admirer of Jacobean drama, he wanted to make a new start:

The Jacobeans had established that drama of patterned unrealistic speech on the basis of a realistic plot which serve a prose drama equally well. I fell in with this, and was only conscious of innovation in adopting Maeterlinck's early experiments with a one-act form for poetic writing of grave and even tragic import.<sup>1</sup>

After 1918, this interest in the Jacobeans waned and he looked to the Noh and classical models in his plays for a Theatre Unborn.

The Crier By Night is an example of his treating a theme of tragic import in one act and is written in the traditional English blank verse.

It uses a story of the Viking Age. Thorgerd, a Norsewoman, represents cruelty and takes delight in illtreating Blandid, an Irish bondmaid, as she is loved by Thorgerd's husband Hialti. Blandid, who is considered an 'aged soul', strange among them, bears her misery meekly:

'Tis the eternal suffering of love.<sup>2</sup>

She responds to the Crier's cry, when he asks her to follow him. She consents to go if Hialti joins her. Hialti is carried away by the Crier, who returns for Blandid. But she is frightened and seeks protection at the hands of Thorgerd, her torturer, who does not care to succour her. And thus Blandid helplessly follows the Crier in the darkness.

<sup>1</sup> Gordon Bottomley, A Stage for Poetry, 1948, pp. 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> King Lear's Wife And Other Plays, 1925 (edn. 3), p. 58.



phrases show that Bottomley is feeling his way through the maze of poetic drama.<sup>1</sup>

In Midsummer Eve, an attempt is made to dramatise the 'atmosphere of June'. It is full of lyrical description and has again an artificiality of style.

A group of young kitchen and dairy girls describe the English Summer and they reflect on its beauty. Their reflection leads them to ponder higher things -- life and death. Wishing to see the

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<sup>1</sup> An unsigned review attributed to A.B.Walkley in the Times Literary Supplement, December 5, 1902, of The Crier By Night said that Bottomley was too much influenced by 'Yeats and his foolish friends' and quoted the following stage direction:

In the cottage the sound of a heavily unconsciously falling body is heard; after that nothing happens any more.

When the playhouse lights waken again, the curtain is found to have descended silently, unknown to the audience.

The reviewer commented:

The point is not that these directions are impracticable in themselves, but they are couched in a language which declares an attitude of completely stupid insolence towards the playhouse and its audience.

Yeats in a letter to Lady Gregory, December 9, 1902, says,

"Walkley's comment on Bottomley's vague little play amused me very much."

Vide The Letters of W.B.Yeats, ed. by Allan Wade, 1954, p. 388.



shadows of their future husbands, they go out into the night. Suddenly they encounter the 'fetch' of Nan, one of their companions, and consider it an ill omen portending their death, and the play ends in her death, which disturbs the lyrical atmosphere which has been built up.

In this play, Bottomley is concerned with the theme of meditation on life and death, but very inadequately. The characters are not strong enough to realise the brooding meditative atmosphere. Artificial phrases recur: 'dew-drenched'; 'dew-dull'; It is a common characteristic of his early plays.

Bottomley's idea of constructing a play based on material 'grave and even of tragic import' clearly manifests itself in The Riding to Lithend, where he retells a story from the Icelandic Sagas. At this stage, like many other writers of poetic drama, he is attracted by Terence Grey's cycle of heroic plays on Cuchulain. This attraction is largely due to Bottomley's association with Yeats, who did a series of plays based on the various aspects of this legend for the Irish National Theatre.

This play illustrates Bottomley's genuine craftsmanship in writing a poetic play. The tale of the ancient Woe of Gunnar and 'Hallgerd's ruinous great hair', which she refuses to give to Gunnar at a critical time, is a well-knit piece. It catches the spirit of the Saga. Through Rannbeig, the hero's mother, we learn all about the hero Gunnar and his wife Hallgerd, who takes a great delight in the sight of a battle. Her bloodthirsty soul is reflected in her speech:

	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?<sup>1</sup>

Gunnar likes her; but she cherishes her vengeance against him for an earlier blow he has given her. This comes into full expression when she refuses to give him a lock of hair to repair his bow; he is in a perilous state, fighting against his enemies:

Hallgerd, my harp that had but one long string,  
But one low song, but one brief wingy flight,  
Is voiceless, for my bowstring is cut off.  
Sever two locks of hair for my sake now,  
Spoil those bright coils of power, give me your hair.<sup>2</sup>

She is unmoved. She is the embodiment of vengeance:

Then now I call to your mind that bygone blow  
You gave my face; and never a whit do I care  
If you hold out a long time or a short.<sup>3</sup>

Gunnar takes it calmly and heroically:

Let be ---

She goes her heart's way, and I go to earth.<sup>4</sup>

Rannveig, the mother of Gunnar, is angry; she wants to kill Hallgerd, but Hallgerd runs away, and Rannveig helplessly curses her.

The grim play closes with the mother's display of affection for her dead son. There is no comfort in her breast; she raises his weapon, wipes it, and a deep hum follows:

No; it remembers him,  
And other men shall fall by it through Gunnar:  
The bill, the bill is singing.....The bill sings!<sup>5</sup>

These incidents contribute to the atmosphere of a Saga.

The play is important from the point of view of technique.

Early in the play, Bottomley introduces three beggar-women in need

<sup>1</sup> Poems and Plays, ed. C.C.Abbott, 1953, p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 124

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

of shelter and food: while Gunnar offers them protection, Hallgerd drives them away. This incident shows her heartlessness.

Bottomley records that a Japanese boy, watching the play at Cambridge, at the entry of the beggar-women said, "Why do you ask me about our Noh? Much of it is like this".<sup>1</sup> He makes their entrance highly formal and the lines of their verse longer than normal blank verse lines and with swifter rhythms; they sing in chorus:

Black clouds fall and leave us up in the moon-depths  
Where wind flaps our hair and cloaks like fin-webs,  
Ay, and our sleeves that toss with our arms and the cadence  
Of quavering crying among the threatening echoes.<sup>2</sup>

They speak together, and this heightens the effect on those from whom they beg.

Thus Bottomley is evolving the new technique manifested in plays for a Theatre Unborn.

The plays of Shakespearean origin show Bottomley's strength in conceiving characters more roundly than in the earlier plays. King Lear's Wife, first printed in Georgian Poetry (1913-1915), and Gruach, in two scenes, won him encomiums from his friends.<sup>3</sup> In these plays, Bottomley has taken a peep into the lives of two of Shakespeare's tragic characters before their tragedy begins.

<sup>1</sup> A Stage for Poetry, 1948, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>3</sup> In a letter of end of July 1920, Paul Nash on the publication of King Lear's Wife and Other Plays, says "The work is a noble volume -- it must be one of the richest of our day in real poetic thought and drama. I am full proud of it". (cf. Poet And Painter, Oxford, 1955, p. 119).

King Lear's Wife<sup>1</sup> received immediate recognition in the theatrical world. Bottomley has reconstructed imaginatively the early life of King Lear and his relationship with his wife, Hygd. His study is an attempt to portray a stage in the family relationships of King Lear, preceding and to some extent explaining the situation treated by Shakespeare. Lear's unchaste relationship with Gormflaith, the waiting woman, while the Queen is on a sick-bed, provides the dramatist with an opportunity for character-study. The verse is austere and has lost its early luxuriance.

Lear has neglected Queen Hygd; there is no love between them. Hygd is suffering from 'inward pains' which the physician is unable to diagnose. Contrast is carefully introduced. While she is on the sick-bed, Lear and Gormflaith love each other. Lear, blinded by lust, is ignorant of the faithlessness of the maid; in his madness, he even offers her the crown. With the crown on her head, she tells Lear:

Let anger keep your eyes steady and bright  
To be my guiding mirror: do not move.  
You have received two queens within your eyes.<sup>2</sup>

Hygd on her deathbed is disturbed by their laughter and she sees the crowned Gormflaith. She rises to watch her husband 'wooing once again'. She recalls her happy moments with Lear:

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Jackson produced the play at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in September 1915. Kathleen Drinkwater played the Queen, and Bottomley was quite pleased with the production. Next year John Drinkwater produced it at His Majesty's Theatre with Viola Tree as Goneril and Lady Tree as the Queen....Paul Nash, in a letter of 1st January 1917, shows his dissatisfaction with this production.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon Bottomley, Poems and Plays, ed. C.C. Abbott, 1953, p.149.

Does he remember love-ways used with me?  
 Shall I never know? Is it too near?  
 I'll watch him at his wooing once again;  
 Though I peer up at him across my grave-sill.<sup>1</sup>

Each question flashes its poignant answer. She falls down unconscious, regains consciousness and cries in jealous despair:

Why do you wear my crown? Why do you wear  
 My crown I say? Why do you wear my crown?  
 I am falling, falling! Lift me: hold me up.<sup>2</sup>

At last she collapses.

Goneril is a virtuous, heroic woman who feels that she is cast for a higher purpose in life. After her mother's death, she taunts Gormflaith and kills her. She reveals her faithlessness to the amorous Lear. While Lear feels remorse, she crowns the dead Queen:

Mother and Queen, to you this holiest circlet  
 Returns, by you renews its purpose and pride;  
 Though it is sullied with a menial warmth,  
 Your august coldness shall rehallow it,  
 And when the young lewd blood that lent it heat  
 Is also cooler we can well forget.<sup>3</sup>

In Bottomley, Cordelia, who appears as a child, is loved by Lear, while the Queen hates her. The character of the Queen is not developed; there appears therefore no reason why she should be made to hate her child. The speeches of an elder woman and a young man produce choric comment.

At the end of the play, we are left in a tragic mood, similar to that which envelopes the Lear of King Lear.

Bottomley, influenced by Yeats and the highly formalised Noh technique, sheds his luxuriant style, and instead uses verse which is bare, austere and yet musical.

<sup>1</sup> Gordon Bottomley, Poems and Plays, ed. C.C.Abbott, 1953, p.150.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 152

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

In Gruach, he enlarges his conception of the one-act design and accommodates a large range of material in two scenes. He also uses characters who deliver choric comment more frequently.

While recreating the character of the young Lady Gruach, the bride who later becomes Lady Macbeth, he concentrates on the qualities which convert her into an ambitious murderess.

Gruach is a vigorous character; she despises the man whom she is to marry, and instinctively falls in love with an Envoy, who reveals himself to be Macbeth.

We are introduced to the main characters when the play begins. Morag, the Lady of Fortingall, is preparing for the wedding feast of Gruach and Conan, Thane of Fortingall. He knows Gruach well. She is a woman of 'unreasonable moods'; he wants to leave her alone on the last free maiden night. The audience know all about her before she makes her entrance. She appears to be very human: she wants to mend all her faults before being wedded tomorrow. She enumerates her likes and dislikes. Thus the exposition sets the play on the move.

The Envoy of King Duncan, on his way to Inverness bearing a message, seeks shelter at Fortingall. With his arrival, the dramatist concentrates on the two main characters. The Envoy knows about Gruach. The love scene between them is marked by restraint. She loves him from the moment she sees him:

I knew there was a quality in this knight.<sup>1</sup>

The Envoy knows her heart:

She came to me with her eyes as if she made  
Decision, and her nearness of approach

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 188.

Was more immediate than tenderness;  
 She came as close to me with her intention  
 As an unexpected and convincing thought.<sup>1</sup>

Their love is like deep calling to deep. Very soon they are entranced with each other. In a scene which could be very effective on the stage, Gruach writes letters to all her relatives about her intention not to 'mother the blood' of Fortingall, and leaves the castle with the Envoy.

Conan's comment is significant:

She is not fit  
 To be a wife: she follows her own will  
 I had liefer wed the bridge-end blacksmith's daughter:  
 She fills her clothes as well as my lady cousin,  
 And her lips bring thoughts of dew on rosy plums.  
 I am not afraid to touch her. If I touch Gruach  
 I feel her body go hard beneath my hand,  
 And danger crouching there: if she does nothing,  
 She makes me feel outside her.<sup>2</sup>

These words suggest the domineering qualities of Lady Macbeth, who contributed so much to Macbeth's tragedy.

Although Bottomley works in a Shakesperean framework, he liberates himself from limitations of theme and style. He gains dramatic effect by using a restrained form of unrhymed decasyllabic verse.

Significantly enough, Bottomley's last work is also of Shakespearian inspiration, Crookback's Crown: A <sup>t</sup>Tragic-<sup>c</sup>Comedy.<sup>3</sup> It is a play about Richard III and his Crown at the battle of Bosworth. This tragic-comedy, with a prologue and an epilogue, while not as impressive as the other two plays, is an interesting

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>3</sup> Durham University Journal, December, 1946, and March, 1947.

example of Bottomley's imaginative recreation of historical fact. It contains a passage which echoes a Shakespearian sentiment:

Yet a Crown  
Is foredained to hinder a man from sleep,  
Give him a restless night.<sup>1</sup>

The plays on Shakespearian themes are clothes in a bare kind of poetry with few ornaments. They show a firmer grasp of character than the plays on Scottish and mythological themes.

### Israel Zangwill.

Another dramatist in whom the imitative style continues, is Israel Zangwill<sup>(1864-1926)</sup>. His is a small talent, but not completely without consequence in the field of poetic drama. Bonamy Dobree in his Introduction To English Literature, Volume IV, sums up his work in one sentence:

These (novels and plays) are quite competent, but they do not probe very deep into humanity.<sup>2</sup>

He only takes note of Zangwill's work on the life of the London Jews. Zangwill's venture into the theatrical world was fraught with a number of difficulties, and according to Joseph Leftwich he was ruined and killed in the venture.<sup>3</sup> No doubt he was like a plant from an exotic climate striving to flourish in one quite unsuited to him. His background and education enabled him to achieve something in the fields of drama and the novel. He dramatised novels and stories. Our concern is with his major poetic play, The War God (1911). It is a tragedy in five acts, produced at His Majesty's on November 8, 1911 by Beerbohm Tree.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Durham University Journal, New Series, viii (1947), 56.

<sup>2</sup> Introduction to English Literature, 1938, IV, 303.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Leftwich, Israel Zangwill, 1957, p. 241.

<sup>4</sup> Title page, The War God, 1911.



The contemporary reviews of the play are by no means unanimous in their verdicts.<sup>1</sup>

The War God has two parallel strains of thought -- the theme of war and peace, and the conflict in the soul of the individual who dreams of making his descendants the permanent rulers of Gothia. But as the play develops the former strain is forgotten and the latter becomes all-important. Thus it becomes a tragedy of character. Count Torgrin, the Chancellor of Gothia, who 'carves his will in quiv'ring flesh'<sup>2</sup> and dreams of making his family the hereditary rulers of Gorith, is the main character. But contrary to his expectations, his son Osric dies and he sees the error in his judgment:

They told me he had died an hour ago,  
But when I raised the lid and saw the face  
I felt he had been dead a million years,  
Such infinite silence lay between us.<sup>3</sup>

The play closes with his deposition from office.

Zangwill indirectly argues that human beings, however great they may be, cannot play at Providence and life is too big and tangled for our meddling.

<sup>1</sup> (i) The Observer said that it was a dull didactic drama.

(ii) The Nation called it "a powerful play, by far the most important event of the dramatic season of 1911".

(iii) John Masefield thought that it was much the biggest thing done for many years.

(iv) William Archer called it a very fine piece of symbolic drama.

(These opinions are quoted from Leftwich, p. 265.)

<sup>2</sup> The War God, 1911, p. 111.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 160.

The thought is trite: the importance of the play lies in its verse. Zangwill's remarks in a note to the book on the use of verse and prose in drama are interesting. He quotes Archer:

All the great scenes of the play are, and ought to be, and cannot help being, rhetorical; why should the author deny himself the swing and resonance of verse?<sup>1</sup>

Archer in his eagerness to defend Zangwill is angry with people who use two mediums -- verse and prose -- in one play:

In spite of Elizabethan precedent, there is nothing more irritating on the modern stage than the drama which is couched in two mediums.<sup>2</sup>

Zangwill subscribes to this view.

He argues that the verse passages acquire an air of self-consciousness. He is partly correct. Archer is a representative of the unnaturalist attitude. But verse is used with a definite design. The use of prose and verse enriches the variety of the play.

Archer admires Zangwill's verse: he characterises it as a 'smooth, easy, flowing blank verse, without contortions'.<sup>3</sup> Much of Zangwill's verse lacks vigour, but he puts ordinary talk cleverly into the iambic movement.

Why not? My son's a Socialist!  
Dear little doves that play at being hawks.  
It is the riot of their springtide blood,  
The riot meant for mating, which I still  
By pairing them, so in their happy cooings,  
Nest-buildings and soft gurglings o'er their brood,  
They learn to leave the world's affairs to God.<sup>4</sup>

Norna's speech on a more elevated theme is however somewhat beyond his reach:

<sup>1</sup> Note to The War God, vii.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., viii.

<sup>3</sup> Leftwich, p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> The War God, p. 35.

Ah God! the pictures  
 Corpses and carcasses, that in my brain  
 Are ever mingling in a blood-red mist  
 Whence hollow groans resound and horses' screams  
 That sting my soul to blow the world to pieces!<sup>1</sup>

Frithiof's exposition of: 'The God of War as a man of business-  
 with vested interests' reminds us of Eliot's lines in Difficulties  
of a Statesman or Triumphal March which came nineteen years after  
The War God.

Frithiof: So much sunk capital, such countless callings,  
 The Army, Navy, Medicine and the Church -  
 To bless and bury, - Music, Engineering,  
 Red-tape Departments, Commissariates,  
 Stores, Transports, Ammunition, Coaling-Stations,  
 Fortifications, Cannon-founders, Shipyards,  
 Arsenals, Ranges, Drill-halls, Floating Docks,  
 War-loan Promoters, Military Tailors,  
 Camp-followers, Canteens, War Correspondents,  
 Horse-breeders, Armourers, Torpedo-builders  
 -----  
 Beelzebub and all his hosts, who, whether  
 In Water, Earth, or Air, among them pocket  
 When Trade is brisk a million pounds a week!<sup>2</sup>

Zangwill's efforts to be very close to the spoken idiom are  
 praiseworthy. He believed that,

The reverence for blank verse as for a medium debased by  
 anything but the finest poetry is the mere superstition  
 of the semi-literate.<sup>3</sup>

But his own verse is not the best recommendation for this  
 theory. A critic in the Poetry Review justly commented:

Nothing can alter the fact that The War God was con-  
 ceived as prose and executed as prose: the attempt  
 to transpose it into poetry is entirely abortive.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The War God, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> Note to The War God, ix.

<sup>4</sup> Harold Monro, 'Dramatic Poetry And Poetic Drama', The Poetry  
Review, March 1912, iii, 131.

The imitative style has a charm of its own in Phillips; in Bridges it is tempered with classicism. Henry Arthur Jones fails to realise his personages from history and legend by specifically poetic means. Archer is anaemic, while Carr's rhymed and blank verse for his legendary subjects, for all its apparent variety, is enervating. In Davidson there is an attempt to water down Elizabethan blank verse so as to make it close to the contemporary idiom. Zangwill chops up his sentences and inverts a certain number of words to achieve a poetic play. Bottomley is more complicated than these dramatists. The changes in the style are always relative to various influences he was subjected to.

These attempts to look backwards and use different styles in poetry to amplify drama, however imperfect they may be, indicate the desire of the dramatist to set himself against realistic drama. The poetic playwrights, aware of the changes outside their domain, adopt themes and use forms inherited and sometimes revitalised. In the words of Jack Lindsay:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Lindsay, as one of the Editors of The London Aphrodite, a bi-monthly. Only six numbers were issued. He and his colleague P.R. Stephenson regarded themselves as highly progressive. In their Editorial Manifesto, they said:

We stand for a point of view which equally outrages the modernist and the reactionary.

Vide The London Aphrodite, August 1928, i., p. 2.

Lindsay's plays, Helen Comes of Age, a lyric drama in two acts; Ragnu, a Tragedy; and Busy D'Amboise, a Tragedy, are written in blank verse and are an interesting example of his desire to introduce purification in verse drama. The plays are contained in one volume, Helen Comes of Age, 1927.

A purification is first essential; but that having been achieved we must face the very difficult problem of harmonising the newly discovered emotional directness with on the one side the mass of modern colloquialisms and on the other side the gorgeous extension of colour-imagery begun by Beddoes and carried through the gaudy rhetoric of Francis Thompson into the explosive nervousities of Edith Sitwell.<sup>1</sup>

Lindsay's statement seems involved to us, and his selection of names has an arbitrary look; but the gist of what he says is symptomatic of the desire to progress in poetic drama through radical experiment.

### ii. Burlesque:

While attempts are made to establish poetry in the theatre and to write serious dramas excluding realism and actuality, occasionally a dramatist or a critic parodies the attempt and ridicules blank verse drama.

An outstanding example of this kind is Bernard Shaw's The Admirable Bashville or Constancy Unrewarded (1903) based on his novel Cashel Byron's Profession. He dramatised the novel in order to escape the threatened copyright difficulty, and he found it easier to do so in blank verse than in prose.

Blank verse is so childishly easy and expeditious (hence, by the way, Shakespeare's copious output) that by adopting it I was enabled to do within the week what would have cost me a month in prose.<sup>2</sup>

These observations of Shaw (1856-1951) need to be amplified. As a result of increasing naturalism, changes were brought about in the use of theatrical language. As early as 1874, Ibsen was aware of this change in the medium:

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by A. Nicoll, British Drama, 1955 (edn. 4), p. 474.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Shaw, Cashel Byron's Profession, 1912, p. 387.

The illusion I wished to produce was that of reality. I wished to leave on the reader's mind the impression that what he had read had actually happened. By employing verse I should have counteracted my own intention ..... The many everyday, significant characters whom I have intentionally introduced would have become indistinct and mixed up with each other had I made them all speak in rhythmic measure. We no longer live in the days of Shakespeare.....The style ought to conform to the degree of ideality imparted to the whole presentment.....My desire was to depict human beings and therefore I would not make them speak the language of the gods".<sup>1</sup>

There are, however, certain situations which a dramatist would do well to clothe in verse, if they are to appeal to the heart of the audience. As Eliot puts it:

The human soul, in intense emotion, strives to express itself in verse. It is not for me, but for the neurologists, to discover why this is so, and why and how feeling and rhythm are related. The tendency at any rate, ~~if~~ of prose drama is to emphasise the ephemeral and superficial; if we want to get at the permanent and universal we tend to express ourselves in verse.<sup>2</sup>

The reader of the best prose drama, of, for instance Ibsen or Synge, would hesitate to agree with Eliot's view of the 'tendency' of prose drama to the ephemeral and superficial: Ibsen's moral commitment is serious enough, and Synge's roots in idiomatic discourse deep enough, to reverse such a tendency. But it is easy to concede that, generally speaking, poetry will become obligatory as a medium in proportion to the intensity of a writer's emotion and the ~~profundity~~ of his insight into human behaviour.

Although Shaw speaks slightly of blank verse, the treatment of some of his plays, such as Back to Methuselah and Saint Joan, and

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Edmund Gosse, quoted in Archer's introduction to Emperor and Galilean, 1921, xiv.

<sup>2</sup> Selected Essays, 1953, (4th ed.) p. 46.

their characters, truly belong to the domain of poetic drama. His very desire to 'poetaste' The Admirable Bashville in the rigmarole style indicates his inclination to this form. He warns his critics:

Lest the Webster worshippers should declare that there is not a single correct line in all my three acts, I have stolen or paraphrased a few from Marlowe and Shakespeare.....so that if any man does quote me derisively, he shall do so in peril of inadvertently lighting on a purple patch from Hamlet or Faustus.<sup>1</sup>

About its production, he writes to Granville-Barker:

It is not a burlesque. It should be announced simply as Bernard Shaw's celebrated drama in blank verse.<sup>2</sup>

He quotes a number of instructions to be printed in the theatre-programme: one of them is that the audience is begged to disperse quietly at the conclusion of the piece. The play was a tremendous success when produced by the Stage Society on 7th June 1903 at the Imperial Theatre.

Despite his denial, the desire to burlesque is evident. It opens with the love of Lydia and Cashel, who meet and decide upon marriage. Shaw makes the business of prize-fighting subsidiary to the love theme and, as in the novel, does not idealise Cashel Byron the prize-fighter. There are many situations which reveal Shaw's intention to make fun.

Cashel, who has chosen prize-fighting as his calling, describes other callings of the world; he wants the painters to turn stock-brokers and poets to stoop over merchants' desks and pen prose records of the gains of greed.

Shaw is deliberately prosaic in describing the most intense situation in the play: Cashel has received a blow on his nose in

<sup>1</sup> Cashel Byron's Profession, 1912, pp. 290-291.

<sup>2</sup> 23rd April 1903, The Shaw-Barker Letters, 1956, |  
ed. C.B.Purdom, p. 12.

sport from Bashville, Lydia is surprised at the 'welling life-stream'. Her sentiments produce an amusing effect:

How well he speaks!  
 There is a silver trumpet in his lips  
 That stirs me to my finger ends. His nose  
 Drops lovely colour: it is perfect blood.  
 I would that it were mingled with mine own! <sup>1</sup>

Shakespeare is constantly in his mind; Lucian speaks of the English face concealing a brain whose powers are proved in the plays of immortal Shakespeare. He parodies his lines when Cashel consoles Bashville, who has to renounce his lovely lady's service:

'Tis Fate's decree,  
 For know, rash youth, that in this star-crost world  
 Fate drives us all to find our chiefest good  
 In what we can, and not in what we would.<sup>2</sup>

When Adelaide and Lord Worthington embrace each other, Cashel in an aside says:

The world is a chessboard  
 And we the merest pawns in the fist of Fate.<sup>3</sup>

He makes fun of Marlowe's famous lines; when Lydia throws herself into his arms, Cashel says:

This is the face that burnt a thousand boats,  
 And ravished Cashel Byron from the ring.<sup>4</sup>

Shaw's attempt at burlesque is carried further by Max Beerbohm in his 'Savonarola' Brown (1917). He succeeded Shaw as dramatic

<sup>1</sup> Cashel Byron's Profession, 1912, p. 313.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 330.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 331.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 331.



critic of the Saturday Review. Shaw, speaking of a younger generation knocking at the door, said, "as I open it, there steps spritely in the incomparable Max".<sup>1</sup> Some of Beerbohm's best criticism is collected in Around Theatres (1953). His plays, more famous than the one under discussion, are A Social Success (1913), and The Happy Hippocrite (1924).

His introduction to 'Savonarola' Brown tells how Brown, one of his school-fellows, inspired by the music of the name 'Savonarola', determined to write a tragedy in blank verse. His characters having come to life in four acts, Beerbohm insisted that the catastrophe must be led up to, step by step, and that the end of the hero must be logical and natural. To this he replies:

I don't see that ..... In actual life it isn't so.  
What is there to prevent a motor-omnibus from knocking me over and killing me at this moment?<sup>2</sup>

He is prophetic; he is killed instantaneously by a motor-omnibus, and it is left to Beerbohm as his literary executor to complete the play. Beerbohm introduces a scenario at the end and invites someone to finish it for him, promising a free pass for the second night.

In this delightful introduction, Beerbohm ridicules blank verse drama and speaks harshly of those writers of poetic drama who do not combine the functions of dramatist and poet:

Unfortunately I have been discharg'd  
For my betrayal of Lucrezia,  
So that I have to speak like other men -,  
Decasyllabically, and with sense.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Oxford Companion To The Theatre, 1951, (2nd edn) ed. P. Hartnoll, p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> Max Beerbohm: Introduction to 'Savonarola' Brown, Seven Men and Two Others, 1954.

<sup>3</sup> Max Beerbohm, Seven Men and Two Others, 1954, p. 180.

are the words of the Fool of Lucrezia in 'Savonarola' Brown, which indicates the author's intention to ridicule a plot which has no shape, where characters behave quite haphazard.

(1890- )  
Two Gentlemen of Soho (1927) by A.P. Herbert is another burlesque. In his own words, the play is 'a shameless attempt to uplift a modern theme by clothing it in Shakespearean language'.<sup>1</sup> The title is derived from The Two Gentlemen of Verona. It is popular among amateur actors. The play thrives on the discrepancy between the trivial, absurd plot on the one hand, and on the other the heavily metrical and sententious Marlovian blank verse:

Oh, that in England might be born a Man,  
 (with outstretched hands to audience)  
 Sprung from the loins of English liberty,  
 To rise and sweep, twice daily, like old Thames  
 In a strong tide against petty tyrannies,  
 And though at evening he be beaten back,  
 Flood in at morning to clear the channel again  
 Of busy women, and suck out to sea  
 Bans, prohibitions, inferences,  
 Movements, societies, Government departments,  
 Such as curtail, diminish, and cut down  
 The antique privilege of true-born Englishmen  
 To take their pleasure in what way they please,  
 When, how, which, where, whatever, and with whom!  
 (To the door L. and asks the closed door the question.  
     Chord. Seqr. 'Tipperary')  
 Was it for this I joined the infantry  
 And took up arms against a continent,  
 To have my eating and my drinking times  
 Fixed by old maids and governed by policemen?<sup>2</sup>

But it is clear this discrepancy, while largely comic in its effect, contains in itself a measure of seriousness.

The Admirable Bashville is the only <sup>major</sup> work of Shaw in verse; the peak of his achievement is in prose drama. Max Beerbohm is a critic and story writer, and this is almost the only occasion he strayed

<sup>1</sup> Seven Famous One-Act Plays, ed. John Ferguson, 1953 (edn.3), p. 180.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 56-57.

into verse. Likewise, A.P. Herbert devoted himself principally to the novel and the semi-serious political pamphlet. These verse burlesques are in each case a by-way from the main current of their literary activity.

### Greek influence.

Greek influence on English literature is persistent; in the drama, it manifests itself particular<sup>ly</sup> in form. The writing of trilogies by the dramatists who entered the Greek dramatic festival competitions was common. They had to write a tetralogy, consisting of three tragedies (a trilogy) and a satyr play. Each trilogy would deal with a dramatic story extending over a considerable period of time. The unity of the play was maintained by the use of a chorus. The Greek audience, who were acquainted with the myths, were carried with the dramatist. The tetralogy by its very nature gave vast scope for the dramatist to exercise his powers of imagination.

The most eminent modern attempt to write a trilogy, is by Eugene O'Neill in Mourning Becomes Electra.<sup>1</sup> Eliot, for all the strength of the classical influence on him, has not been so ambitious.

Twenty four years before Murder in the Cathedral, however, Maurice Hewlett<sup>(1861-1923)</sup> made an attempt in The Agonists.<sup>2</sup>

While Eliot and O'Neill are successful in their experiments, Hewlett fails. Unlike them he uses the myth without adjusting it to the contemporary situation. He is archaic. Yeats's Deirdre (1907) should have been his model. Deirdre<sup>3</sup> maintains the Greek dramatic

<sup>1</sup> Eugene O'Neill, Mourning Becomes Electra, a Trilogy, (3rd ed.,) 1937.

<sup>2</sup> The Agonists, A Trilogy of God And Man, 1911.

<sup>3</sup> For<sup>a</sup> fuller treatment of Deirdre, see Chapter Nine, pp.

structure, but there is relatively little literary archaism.

O'Neill uses the trilogy form to dramatise events after the close of the American Civil War, and very subtly the characters involved in the Greek dramatic structure are revealed to us in prose, and therefore it is outside the scope of this discussion.

Maurice Hewlett's reputation is limited in the field of drama: he earned fame as the author of a novel, The Forest Lovers, A Romance (1898). In The Agonists he deals with the fate of Minos' family. The division of the story into three parts breaks the continuity and lessens the dramatic intensity. The theme of the fate of Minos, King of Crete, and his family becomes unworkable in his hands.

In the first part, Minos, King of Crete, he deals with the failure of Minos, the son of Zeus, through his lack of power, one of the qualities he attributes to Zeus. The play begins with the death of the Queen Pasiphae, the wife of Minos; her death was the result of a monstrous crime committed by her. She had also given birth to a monster, the Minotaur. Minos, who had deceived Poseidon by not sacrificing the white bull, had gone to his father to seek counsel about the monster delivered by his wife. He returns remorseful:

I did a violence to God,  
To Poseidon, when swoln with heat  
Of renown. I waghered against him  
Power for power, and knowledge  
For knowledge: man against God.<sup>1</sup>

The chorus comments on this action, and prays for him, and the first part closes with his prayer at Mount Ida, while the country suffers from the cruelty inflicted by the monster, the Minotaur.

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<sup>1</sup> The Agonists, 1911, p. 4.

Ariadne in Naxos, the second part, deals with Theseus who, having killed the Minotaur, wins the hand of Ariadne, the daughter of Minos. On his homeward voyage he stays at Naxos, an island of magic. Dionysus breathes upon Theseus, who trembles and is defeated. The chorus consoles Ariadne. Dionysus loves her, but her heart is with Theseus; he tries to woo her by force; when she does not yield, he vanishes from the scene. Disgusted with life, she swiftly goes to her grave. The chorus <sup>philosophises</sup> ~~philosophises~~ on the sorrow of man.

The last part of the trilogy is The Death of Hippolytus. It treats of the King Minos, who is old and exiled, seeking refuge in Sicily, and Phaedra, Minos' daughter, driving Hippolytus, son of Theseus, into exile.

One can see from the foregoing summary the soundness of Hopkins' advice to Bridges that the Greek Gods are totally unworkable material because, as he says, they are:

The merest frigidity which must chill and kill every living work of art they are brought into.<sup>1</sup>

Hewlett's aim is to present a tragic story of the failure of God to implant Himself in man, and of man to receive into his nature the divine substance; and the inference ..... that the divine qualities can only mate with the human faculty in the ideal presented to mankind in the incarnation of God to the Christians!<sup>2</sup> This was perhaps too ambitious and is certainly not achieved in this rather loosely constructed trilogy.

In his introduction, Hewlett stresses two principles which are apparently contradictory: first, that he has been guided by the

<sup>1</sup> Vide p. 64 supra.

<sup>2</sup> Introduction to The Agonists.

analogy between dramatic poetry and music, with particular reference to Wagnerian opera, in its attempts to 'induce a specific kind of emotion in the hearer'. Second that his verse should be spoken with the maximum possible degree of prose-stress.

If we turn to the play itself, with all its metrical virtuosity, what is striking is the distance from colloquial speech rather than any approximation to it:

Ah, but that wine was sweet  
 Supt at the bridal! Sweet was the chant  
 Of them by wreathed Hermes fast by the door!  
 Frolic the feast was, burning the bride,  
 Hiding her shame to be so desired!  
 But here is sterner joy--in spilt blood,  
 In clash of men, shock of horses,  
 In shouting, clamour, pressing of spears!<sup>1</sup>

Here and elsewhere in the play it seems clear that Hewlett is attempting to revive the vigorous stressing and alliterative pattern of Old and Middle English poetry. But the effect here again is towards artifice and away from naturalness.

### Rudolf Besier.

Although Rudolf Besier (1878-1942) has not attempted a trilogy, his characters and situations in The Virgin Goddess,<sup>2</sup> derived from the Greek influence, are more impressive than Hewlett's in The Agonists. Besier's The Barretts of Wimpole Street (1930) brought him fame, and Bernard Shaw's defence of him against the injured family is a cause celebre of literary history. The Virgin Goddess, however, is an early composition; it was produced in 1906 at the Adelphi Theatre and was quite a success.

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<sup>1</sup> ~~Introduction to~~ The Agonists, pp.106-107.

<sup>2</sup> The Virgin Goddess, 1907.

Manager Otho Stuart, and actor Oscar Asche, two old Bensonians, optimistically hoped to turn the Adelphi Theatre, hitherto the recognised home of melodrama, into a temple of verse drama.<sup>1</sup>

With this end in view, they produced Besier's play. In theme and form, it is essentially Greek, with no act divisions.

Hephæstion, a votary of the Virgin Goddess, kills his brother Cresphontes and loves Cresphontes's wife Althea; he incurs the displeasure of the Goddess, and the play closes with the lovers becoming the victims of the Goddess's wrath. The action takes place in the marble courtyard before the temple of Artemis.

The theme of revenge is emphasised. Hephæstion hates his brother Cresphontes 'from the womb' of his mother, and the brothers grow up in hate. When Cresphontes is killed by his brother, their mother wants to take revenge but waits till the Goddess intervenes. The cycle of revenge is complete when Hephæstion and Althea become victims of the Goddess's wrath.

The chorus chants dirges and forecasts woe and death. It sings of 'unrelenting fate' and the powerlessness of man before the inevitable.

Hephæstion is treated as a victim of circumstances beyond his control. The virgin priestess of Artemis pities him:

I hate thee not:  
Rather I pity thee as the sport of fate  
And Queen Althea, whose beauty lured thee on.<sup>2</sup>

The movement is swift, and the play is full of references to the Greek heroes.

<sup>1</sup> A.E.Wilson, Edwardian Theatre, 1951, p. 157.

<sup>2</sup> The Virgin Goddess, p. 61.

The contemporary critics rightly saw that in The Virgin Goddess there is no 'true grip of tragedy'.<sup>1</sup> But the play's occasional lyrical passages pleased those who wanted to convert the Adelphi into 'a temple of verse drama'. This hope did not endure long. The verse is impressive but there is abundant evidence of straining after literary effect:

Touch me not! Thy touch is death!  
 Between our souls a crimson current seethes,  
 That, nathless, neither you nor I may ford,  
 And o'er our heads avenging Fate rolls up  
 Black thunderclouds!<sup>2</sup>

There are Miltonic phrases like 'supernal power', some poaching from Shelley, in 'pestilence-striker, famine-wasted' and in the rhetorical heightening and the archaism 'nathless'.

This goes against his disclaimer in the prefatory note that it 'should be judged as an acting play, not as a literary tour de force'.<sup>3</sup>

These two overt imitators of the Greek suffer from merely being archaic. Their work has little contemporary relevance.

### iii. Plays on the Legend of Tristram:

Alas! young dramatists never tempt us with new versions of Hamlet's or Othello's story, yet Athenian audiences were asked to applaud ever afresh Medeas or Antigones. Milton did not carry out his intention of writing a Macbeth. Even had he not surpassed Shakespeare's he must have thrown light on the essential characteristics of that masterpiece, and might have eased the tyranny which forces us to suppose that all Shakespeare's faults were such as it is easy to correct while his excellences must for ever be gaped on.<sup>4</sup>

But the legend of Tristram has tempted many poets and dramatists; its attraction is irresistible. Matthew Arnold, Swinburne,

<sup>1</sup> Wilson, p. 158.

<sup>2</sup> The Virgin Goddess, p. 61.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. vii.

<sup>4</sup> T. Sturge Moore, 'Tristram And Isolt', The Criterion, 1922, i. 34.



Tennyson, Michael Field and Binyon, attracted by the richness of the legend, have treated it poetically. The verse playwrights under discussion--Comyns Carr, Arthur Symons, Thomas Hardy and Masefield--were also charmed by the spell of a magic philtre, which made the lovers love each other in spite of themselves. The legend is capable of taking different shapes in different hands. It has a situation which stirs deep feelings in the human breast. Besides, the treatment of sexual love or passion is full of dramatic possibilities; it was a favourite theme of the Elizabethans and Jacobean. Thus the Tristram story, which has sexual passion as its paramount note, is in tune with the search for old themes which we have seen to be characteristic of modern verse dramatists.

The story varies from one to another. Comyns Carrs keeps close to Malory and makes it a moving melodrama; Hardy alters the original story considerably so as to concentrate on the love element; Arthur Symons's version makes the love story a vehicle for his symbolism; Masefield introduces new characters and an element of rustic humour.

Comyns Carr had already treated the tale of Launcelot and Guinevere in King Arthur.<sup>1</sup> His Tristram And Iseult was produced at the Adelphi Theatre in 1906.

Carr, who draws from Arthurian legend and Wagner's opera, invests the plot with as much reality as possible. His lovers instinctively fall in love with each other. He keeps close to Malory except that Tristram is killed before Iseult marries King Mark.

Each act has a descriptive title--The Poisoned Spear, The Hands That Heal, The Love Draught, and The Wound Incurable.

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<sup>1</sup> Vide p. 76 supra.

Tristram is an ambassador of peace: he tells Mark, who is jealous of his fame:

Let me go forth  
As thy ambassador to win this maid,  
So shall I die as I had hoped to live  
In serving thee, and so in this last act  
Bring peace once more 'twixt Gormon's throne and thine.<sup>1</sup>

The action moves swiftly: his wound is healed; he wins the heart of Iseult by the charm of his harp; Iseult loves him, ignorant that he is her brother's slayer; she saves his life, when her mother wants to kill him; Tristram wins the support of the King and brings Iseult as the bride of Mark. But Iseult does not love Mark. The vision of Iseult of the White Hands warns Iseult:

Whom thou hast healed  
Though all unknowing, thou shalt wound again;  
Whom thou hast wounded I alone may cure.<sup>2</sup>

She deeply ponders these words. She is already in love with Tristram. She even pardons Tristram for having murdered her brother, as Tristram was only an instrument of King Mark. Tristram is loyal but by mistake drinks the love draught and is seized by its magic power.

King Mark discovers the lovers through the help of Ogrin. At first he hesitates to kill Tristram:

And thou shalt not die!  
That were too swift a vengeance. Nay, not thou,  
Most valorous knight! If aught should ail thee now,  
Were it no graver than a bloodless scratch,  
I'd pray that sorceress, there, to heal the wound--  
So, thou should'st love for ever! And for ever,  
With endless shame, still feed my endless hate.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tristram and Iseult, 1906, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

But, in a melodramatic manner, he forgets his resolve and thrusts his sword into the back of Tristram, and the prophecy of the Vision of Iseult of the White Hands is fulfilled.

The drama has certain well-drawn situations. The apprehension of the lovers, when seen by Ogrin the dwarf, the agent of Mark, is well portrayed. Tristram's speech on love, just before he dies, has some poetic quality.

It was ill received by the contemporary critics.<sup>1</sup>

Carr uses prose and verse: as an 'encyclopaedic gentleman'<sup>2</sup> he knows the value of 'Dumb Show', which he uses as a measure of economy.

#### Arthur Symons's Tristram And Iseult:

There are three kinds of critics of importance. The critic of the first order is a man of feeling, ..... in whom the exquisiteness of taste is carried to the point of genius and transformed into the power of creation: the critic of the second order is either a philosopher with an extraordinary force of intellect who takes some province of the kingdom or art by violence, or a man of great learning with an uncommon versatility of mind who invents some new idea of criticism: the critic of the third order is an admirable rhetorician with a flare for re-stating the sentiments and ideals of more original writers.<sup>3</sup>

Thus begins a reviewer of Studies In Seven Arts by Arthur Symons (1865- ) and indicates that Symons belongs to the first and third order. For our purpose, Symons the poetic dramatist belongs to the

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<sup>1</sup> (i) A.E.Wilson, Edwardian Theatre, 1951, p. 160:  
It was moving melodrama but the poetic fire and fervour were missing in this theme.

(ii) J.T.Grein described the play as something 'to kindle imagination, to occupy the intellect, to flatter our sense of the beautiful.' (cf. quoted by Wilson, p. 110).

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Shaw: Our Theatre in the Nineties, 1954, (2nd ed.), I, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Academy, 1906, pp. 629-630.

third order, with his gift for borrowing sentiments and giving them new expression. The tendency to discourse at length on love in Tristram and Iseult illustrates this point.

Though he had published a book of poems, Silhouettes, in 1892, Symons first made a considerable mark in the world of letters as the author of The Symbolist Movement in Literature (1899), dealing with his system<sup>of</sup> aesthetics, and Plays, Acting and Music (1903) a collection of critical essays on dramatists, the stage and music. His conception of symbolism is influenced by the study of Baudelaire, Maurice Maeterlinck and D'Annunzio. As the editor of The Savoy from 1896 he was the main force of the symbolist movement.

His contribution to poetic drama commences in 1916 with the publication of The Harvesters, A Cornish Tragedy in Three Acts in Verse, which for our purpose comes under the <sup>chapter</sup> ~~section~~ 'Realistic' Verse Drama. The Death of Agrippina and Cleopatra in Judea--one act plays--show his interest in poetic drama. Symons the symbolist is reflected in Tristram and Iseult (1917).

The romantic tale, which does not undergo any change, becomes a receptacle for his ideas. His characters are puppets, means to achieve this end. Like Comyns Carr, he also constructs a four-act play.

The idea of vengeance is predominant in the first act. Iseult and her mother talk of vengeance for the blood of Morolt. Tristram, who was responsible for his death, has come with his blood upon him. Iseult and Tristram drink wine to wash away Morolt's blood. Under the spell of the love-potion, they describe their imaginative experiences. The emotion of love is not carnal, it is treated on a spiritual plane. Symons's words reveal the soul of things.

Tristram: What is <sup>it</sup> that has bound me with these chains  
That burn like shining fire about my soul?

Iseult: What is it that has set me free? I feel  
As if a boundless joy had given me wings:  
I am as universal as the sun.  
Look, Tristram, there is nothing here but light:  
Light in the sky, light in the hollow sea,  
The encircling and caressing light of the air!  
Light eats into my flesh and drinks me up,  
I am a cup for the immense thirst of light;  
I cannot see you, Tristram, for the light.<sup>1</sup>

The lovers universalise their feelings and Tristram sees his love 'wrapped about with light', and her eyes burning with brightness like flames. This image is symbolic of their doom. To Iseult, love is bitter after the blinding sweetness of that moment. Thus the audience is prepared for the crisis, when Iseult, having become the victim of Mark's anger, says:

Love is a sword, a sword that severs friends.  
Love is a fire that burns all these things.<sup>2</sup>

Significantly enough the sea forms the background of the lovers' death. It is on a voyage to Cornwall that they drink the love-potion. Tristram dies as he is deceived by the white sail of Iseult's ship. The sea-image is intensely conceived; the lovers are united with the vastness of nature. The play's imagery conjures up rich associations.

After completing The Dynasts, Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) turned his attention to reviving old forms in drama. The mumming play interested him most. The traditional mumming play dealing with St. George and a Turkish Knight had made an impression <sup>on</sup> him in his childhood. In December, 1920, he witnessed a performance of his

<sup>1</sup> ~~Academy, 1906, xxx, 50.~~ Tristram and Iseult, 1917, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

own play, The Play of St. George, by the mummers at Max Gate, in which Hardy keeps close to the traditional story of St. George and the Turkish Knight. He is also conscious of the allegory -- the death and resurrection of the year-god.

A more impressive production is The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall, which lingered long in his mind. He began it in 1916 and resumed and finished it in 1923. It is a 'new version of the Tristram story, arranged as a play for mummers in one act, requiring no theatre or scenery'. Hardy, who takes considerable liberties with the traditional material, describes his intention thus:

My temerity in putting together into the space of an hour events that in the traditional stories covered a long time will doubtless be criticised, if it is noticed. But there are so many versions of the famous romance that I felt free to adapt it to my purpose in any way--as in fact the Greek dramatists did in their plays.<sup>1</sup>

Of his characters, he says:

I have tried to avoid turning the rude personages of, say, the fifth century into respectable Victorians, as was done by Tennyson, Swinburne, Arnold, etc. On the other hand it would have been impossible to present them as they really were with their barbaric manners and surroundings.<sup>2</sup>

The play was produced in November, 1923 by the Hardy Players at the Corn Exchange, Dorchester. F.E.Hardy remarks that the amateurs did not feel equal to the task of enacting a poetic drama, but the performance pleased the author.

Hardy, with a view to fitting the Tristram legend into a classical pattern, retains the unities and simplifies the action by altering the story considerably. With the help of the chanters, who correspond to the Greek chorus, he achieves unity; their speech is in rhyming couplets.

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<sup>1</sup> & <sup>2</sup> F.E.Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, 1892-1921, 1930, pp. 235-236.

The play is close to the Greek pattern. The action begins very near the climax, it has a prologue and an epilogue by Merlin, a phantasmal figure standing away from the other characters. The prologue introduces the play and the chanters, men and women who narrate the incidents leading to the arrival of Tristram with Iseult:

Tristram a captive of King Mark,  
Racked was the Queen with qualm and cark,  
Till reached her hand a written line,  
That quickened her to deft design.<sup>1</sup>

Queen Iseult's heart is given to Tristram, who is already married to Iseult of the White Hands but really loves Queen Iseult. He arrives disguised as a harper and tells the tale of his marriage:

Arrested by your name - so kin to hers.<sup>2</sup>

His song is in lines that rhyme alternately:

Let's meet again to-night, my fair,  
Let's meet unseen of all;  
The day-god labours to his lair,  
And then the even fall!<sup>3</sup>

Iseult of the White Hands is discarded; she asks Tristram to love her; her declaration of love is not far from artifice:

Forgive me, do forgive me, my Lord, my husband!  
I love, I have loved you so imperishably;  
Not with fleet flame.....<sup>4</sup>

But Tristram continues to love the Queen; they are surprised by King Mark; Tristram offers his explanation for sinning unwillingly, under the charm of the 'love-compelling vial'. King Mark stabs him, while the Queen kills her murderer husband, who possessed her against her nature. This stabbing is not in the manner of the Greek drama. The Queen leaves the stage, however, to commit suicide.

<sup>1</sup> The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall, 1923, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> ibid., p. 47.

Merlin, in the Epilogue, speaks of Hardy's intentions:

Thus from the past, the throes and themes  
Whereof I spoke - now dead as dreams -  
Have been re-shaped and drawn.<sup>1</sup>

Hardy has nothing new to offer other than an indication of his interest in an old form of drama. The play is out of keeping with the regular stage; it is meant for a drawing-room audience. Thus the distance between the audience and the actors is reduced.

B. Ifor Evans sums up the limitations of the play:

Hardy, in reducing the legend, has made it a meaner thing; nor does his model of a mummer's play..... allow any adequate development of character or conflict.<sup>2</sup>

John Masefield (1878-) attempted to dramatise the tale in Tristan and Isolt, which has a freshness and charm lacking in other plays on the theme. It was written in 1927, in the middle period of his dramatic career. His work in drama is considerable and reveals various influences. Masefield always set himself a high standard in drama:

I sometimes feel all the thoroughly good artists, like Durer, Shakespeare, Michael Angelo, Dante, all of them, sit in judgment on the lesser artists when they die.<sup>3</sup>

His plays show diverse influences--the classical, the Elizabethan, the Japanese, the realistic and the poetic. He has a number of plays with a ritual background, here treated under the heading of 'Religious Verse Drama'. His plays after the Noh style are treated under 'The Influence of <sup>the</sup> Noh plays on verse drama'.

Some plays which may be considered peaks of his achievement both in prose and verse are The Tragedy of Nan, produced by the Pioneers at the New Royal Theatre, 1908, The Tragedy of Pompey,

<sup>1</sup> The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall, 1923, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> English Poetry in the Later Nineteenth Century, 1933, p. 193.

<sup>3</sup> A character in Masefield's Multitude and Solitude, 1909, p. 63.



1910, Philip the King, produced at the Covent Garden Theatre, 1914, The Faithful, Birmingham Repertory, 1915, Good Friday, 1917, The Trial of Jesus, privately performed at the Music Room, Boar's Hill, Oxford, 1925, The Play of St. George, 1948, a play devised for performance upon a stage having approaches from each side of the front and back. In addition he has written plays for children. In 1922, he translated Racine's Berenice and Esther.

Tristan and Isolt may be said to continue the experiment of Hardy, in that it is also written for a stage without scenery, hung with backcloth, for a theatre with a fore-stage or apron and a main-stage on a somewhat higher level. It was produced at the Century Theatre, Bayswater, in 1927. The costumes of the players were of bright and vivid colours.

There is here a tendency to present characters stripped of emotional richness. They are no longer the characters of the legendary world; their attitude to life is simple and uncomplicated. These experiments are a pointer to Masefield's interest in the Noh drama.

Unlike the writer of Tristram plays treated so far, Masefield works in a bigger framework, and introduces a comic interlude involving some pig-keepers. This comic element mingled with the legendary element produces a kind of play nearer to actuality than those we have seen so far.

Destiny introduces the play:

I show Tristan, the prince, the glory beginning,  
 And Isolt, the maid, in her beauty: I show these two  
 Passing from peace into bitter burning and sinning  
 From a love that was lighted of old I display them anew,  
 And deaths that were due.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tristan and Isolt, 1927, p. 1.

Tristan releases King Marc from the clutches of Kolbein, a pirate, who asks him to proceed to his domain in Ireland to escort Isolt, his daughter, to King Marc. He sails away and brings Isolt. The love story is far different from that in Malory. The lovers feel a new life when they see each other. Their love-talk is brief but impassioned:

Tristan: O golden beauty, I love you so that I die.  
If you cannot speak some solace, I am but dead.

Isolt: I cannot speak a solace, being so swayed;  
But you are my one thought, you are my life, my love;  
I care not what may happen so I have you.<sup>1</sup>

It is characterised by a simple dignity appropriate to the inexperienced young people.

Tristan does not attend the wedding, but King Marc looks upon him as his saviour, and is courteous to him.

Marc: You fled my wedding, and then you have wished me no luck.

Tristan is indeed discourteous:

I fled your wedding, indeed, being no courtier.  
As for my wishes, I wish more than I can say.<sup>2</sup>

The play has two comic incidents. Isolt and Tristan persuade Brangwen to impersonate Isolt and present the love-potion to the King in bed. When Arthur and Bedwyr set a trap to catch Tristan he outwits them by taking the place of a swineherd to enable him to carry a message to Isolt. While he guards the pig-sties Arthur and Bedwyr come in disguise to plot against him; but they are defeated and plastered with dirt. It is a comedy of lively vigour in contrast to the gloom of the love story.

<sup>1</sup> Tristan And Isolt, 1927, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

The lovers escape to the woods; Isolt feels remorse and returns to the King, and then again joins Tristan. In her last speech she ponders the beauty of the world and then says:

I am following, Tristan;  
 Wait for your cruel killer, a little hour,  
 You shall be my death as I have been yours, beloved.  
 We who have flooded like the Severn, will ebb  
 To the great sea together like tides going out.<sup>1</sup>

The play is wanting in emotional sincerity, but blazes a new trail in retelling the old story.

As we close this chapter on plays of heterogeneous origin, we find new forms emerging out of the old. The Elizabethan and Greek influences which make themselves felt early in the century continue and are to be harmoniously combined in Murder In the Cathedral.

The Tristram legend lends itself to the revival of old forms of drama such as the mummer's play and also plays without stage or scenery, or what may be described as drawing-room plays. These are characteristic of the period in that one frequently finds two elements which are at first irreconcilable, and which individual dramatists manage to reconcile with very different degrees of success: the first, the dependence on traditional themes and archaic or obsolescent dramatic forms, and the second, a degree of contemporaneity in the plot and of sophistication in the stage presentation.

<sup>1</sup> Tristan And Isolt, 1927, p. 127.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DOCTRINAIRE PLAYS

#### Davidson and Hardy

Davidson's The Theatrocrat, The Triumph of Mammon, Mammon and His Message, and Hardy's The Dynasts.

#### Davidson (1857-1909).

I would not care to invite an audience to witness a play which I could not invite my readers to peruse.<sup>1</sup>

These words of Davidson, who had little knowledge of the actual theatre,<sup>2</sup> are tinged with a note of disappointment. He aspired, like all dramatists, to see his plays on the stage. But, while his adaptations from the French were produced, his creative work could not go beyond rehearsing and making arrangements with the producers.

The stage was the only medium for him, but he felt that Shakespeare had exhausted the possibilities of the dramatic presentation of the old world-order in his magnificent poetic dramas.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Davidson, Godfrida, 1898, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> P.Thouless, Modern Poetic Drama, 1934, p. 96:

"In his early years in London he showed no interest in the actual theatre and he says ..... that during ~~the~~ five years in London he only visited the theatre once".

<sup>3</sup> The Triumph of Mammon, 197, p. 165:

....."as the English stage still lives and moves and has its being in the Christian economy, fable and morality, there is no occasion to write great plays for it; impossible to supersede Shakespeare in his own world."

Consequently his later plays, with which our concern is in this chapter, are conceived with the imaginative background of his new world-order, and are designed to propagate his message through poetic drama to as wide an audience as possible. He was fully aware of the non-recognition of his work and attributed it to the mercenary outlook of the world, an attitude which he had already attacked in Scaramouch in Naxos, published in 1888. This was reiterated nine years later:

This age is too commercial, too entirely in the grip of economics: it is too immoderate in its pleasure in every kind of moral suggestion, every kind of temporary interest and ephemeral issue, to care for poetical drama, too abject in its haunt of dulcet romanticism, mystic piety and dwarfing comicality; and although the most tragic circumstance in the history of the world is at our doors -- the failure of Christendom, namely -- the mind, the imagination of our time is not yet healthy enough, not yet strong enough, not serious enough..... not passionate enough, not great enough for tragedy.<sup>1</sup>

The reference to 'the failure of Christendom' and 'the tragic circumstance' in history and the concern of the poetic dramatists for these issues are characteristic of the period. In the preface to The Dynasts, Hardy (1840-1928) showed deep concern with the changes at the beginning of the century. Explaining the purpose of the Phantasmal Intelligences, he says:

The wide prevalence of the Monistic theory of the universe forbade, in the twentieth century, the importation of Divine personages from any antique Mythology as ready-made sources or channels of Causation, even in verse, and excluded the celestial machinery of, say, Paradise Lost, as peremptorily as that of the Iliad, or the Eddas.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Triumph of Mammon, 1907, pp. 152-153.

<sup>2</sup> The Dynasts, 1926, pp. viii-ix.

Thus these verse dramatists, whether their plays were intended for production or not, made drama the vehicle of their view of the world.

Davidson, unrecognised as a playwright and a prey to constant poverty, pours out his satire of the world around him through his characters. The Theatrocrat (1905) and the two Mammon plays, The Triumph of Mammon and Mammon and his Message (1907), show his dissatisfaction with the existing world-order. The characters are invested with long speeches and discourses on the new cosmogony; the characters have none of the complexity which is necessary for dramatic interest. Thus the plays are unsuited to the stage. Moreover, it seems unlikely that modern taste or theatre censorship would ever accept the castration scene in one of the Mammon plays. Like The Dynasts, these plays are incompatible with stage production, but they lack the variety and historical richness of Hardy's epic drama.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Dynasts was meant for 'mental performance'. Granville-Barker reduced it to one third and adapted it for the stage at the Kingsway Theatre, November 25, 1914. In spite of the elaborate arrangements, the public response was small: "There is no connecting story to link the various campaigns together"--The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News, 19 December, 1914. Barker's attempts were discouraged. But the action of The Dynasts in two worlds, with the Phantasmal Intelligences, might justify further attempts in this direction. Like Tolstoy's War and Peace, it might be made into a good film.

In 1943, Muriel Pratt's adaptation of The Dynasts was broadcast in the Home Service of the B.B.C; 1st Part, October 18, 1943; 2nd Part, October 20, 1943; 3rd Part, October 22, 1943.

In any case, Davidson and Hardy are far from the living theatre. Their works are best studied as literary dramas propounding the authors' views on the age. In contrast to Hardy in The Dynasts, Davidson expresses his message explicitly and with concentration.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, a number of important trends or schools of thought profoundly influenced many young writers. Carlyle's anti-philistinism attracted the writers of the younger generation. Tennyson's In Memoriam was regarded as summing up the various changes in the intellectual realm:

Though he (Tennyson) wrote In Memoriam before the days of Davidson (he) had fully realised and keenly felt the conflict, pain and waste in Nature.<sup>1</sup>

Although this complex of ideas is present in Tennyson, it does not become as general or as profound a disturbance as we might expect. It is either mitigated by the fundamental Victorian confidence or canalised into 'poetic' poetry just as in Davidson and Hardy. The Darwinian theory of evolution, which shook religious faith, and the industrial revolution, which brought about changes in the economic sphere, could not but stir the minds of the intellectuals.<sup>2</sup>

Davidson seems to reproduce the essence of the discontent seen in the second generation of the Romantics. Even as, in different intellectual circumstances, Shelly<sup>e</sup> in Prometheus Unbound was in

<sup>1</sup> A.C. Bradley, A Miscellany, Oxford, 1929, pp. 10-11.

<sup>2</sup> F.R. Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry, 1943, p. 3:

'For a sensitive adult in the nineteenth century could not fail to be preoccupied with the changed intellectual background and to find his main interest inseparable from the modern world.'

rebellion against society, and Byron in Childe Harold wanted to create a modern Titan, Davidson in his Mammon plays is out to destroy the existing order of society, "to change the mood of the world".<sup>1</sup> His Testaments and Tragedies are an expression of his discontent with the values of the society of which he was part.

Nietzsche, who imagined a new type of human being, the Superman, fired Davidson's imagination.<sup>2</sup> His plays are inspired by Nietzschean ethics, and in his Ballads and Songs the influence is even clearer:

So let us think we are the tortured nerves  
Of beings in travail with a higher type.<sup>3</sup>

Nietzsche was the dominant influence; while others also made an impression on him:

The two potentates of English literature in the nineteenth century, Carlyle and Wordsworth, had the same ambition -- to furnish imagination with a new abiding-place: the Carlyledom, which the first would have substituted for Christendom, he called Hero-Worship; Wordsworthdom is a Nature-worship.<sup>4</sup>

Like many intellectuals of the period, Davidson is tossed about and is unable to make up his mind. It is difficult to assess the influence of any writer on Davidson. His work does not expound a complete system of philosophy. But certain waves of thought are generated. Repudiating Christ and the world around him, he believes in individualism:

<sup>1</sup> The Theatrocrat, 1905, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Wyndham Lewis, The Art of Being Ruled, 1926, p. 125: Nietzsche.....repudiated the world of positivist knowledge which is essentially a world of disillusion and pessimism, and substituted for it a world of affirmation (his Yea) and of action.

<sup>3</sup> Ballads and Songs, 1894, p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> The Theatrocrat, 1905, pp. 13-14.



Be your own star, for strength is from within,  
And one against the world will always win.<sup>1</sup>

These lines, which preface Self's The Man, point towards his purpose explicitly declared in the prologue to The Triumph of Mammon:

I begin definitely in my Testaments and Tragedies to  
destroy this unfit world and make it again on my own  
image.<sup>2</sup>

The tragedies are full of ideas in defiance of Christ and society.

Eliot<sup>3</sup> draws a distinction between the voice of the poet addressing the audience and the voice of the poet when he attempts to create a dramatic character speaking in verse. In a major dramatist a character may or may not share his own voice. Ability to detach oneself from one's creations and look at them from outside with detachment requires skill. In a marginal dramatist this skill is likely to be deficient. In Davidson, we are conscious of the voice of the dramatist speaking through each character embodying his views.

The Theatrocrat has a sub-title, 'A Tragic Play of Church and Stage' and is dedicated 'to The Generation Knocking At the Door'. He calls upon the generation to 'declare your hardest thought, your proudest dream'.<sup>4</sup> His elaborate introduction to the play shows his restless spirit waging a war against the Church and the Stage. The play contains implicit criticism of the contemporary stage. The Times<sup>5</sup> obituary, which described the play as an extraordinary affair,

<sup>1</sup> Self's The Man, 1901, title-page.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>3</sup> The Three Voices of Poetry, 1955.

<sup>4</sup> The Theatrocrat, 1905, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> The Times, April 19, 1909.

in which an irreligious bishop, drunken actors, ~~American~~ <sup>American</sup> music hall managers and erring women participate, draws attention to his declamatory violence and savage power.

Davidson introduces two sets of characters in order to establish his idea -- the tragedy of Stage and Church. Sir Tristram, an actor-manager of the Grosvenor Theatre, who ruins himself by staging Troilus and Cressida, is persuaded by Lady Sumner to put it on again with Warwick Groom, an able actor but a drunkard who was once her paramour. The second dimension is given to the play by the introduction of the Bishop of St. James, who is involved in the plot when the staging of Troilus fails, and pours forth his contempt of Christianity. The tragedy ends with the death of Tristram, his wife, Warwick Groom, and the Bishop. The Bishop dies visualising his new universe:

I see  
A greater breed of men, a nobler world,  
An independent power in the Universe,  
The Universe itself become aware.<sup>1</sup>

The feeling generated on reading the play is one of horror tinged with disgust. The playwright fails in his purpose -- to create a 'great conception of the universe'<sup>2</sup> and to 'furnish imagination with a new abode'.<sup>3</sup>

The characters are ~~planted~~ <sup>created</sup> with a view to delivering their creator's message. The opening of The Theatrocrat is strongly reminiscent of an Ibsen play.<sup>4</sup> A long conversation between Sir Tristram and his wife puts the audience in possession of the facts. We are told about Groom, his acting ability and his love for Lady

<sup>1</sup> The Theatrocrat, pp. 195-196.

<sup>2</sup> & <sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> In Hedda Gabler, for example, the scene between Tesman and Berta prepares us for the arrival of Hedda.

Sumner and her insistence on getting him to play in Troilus and Cressida. Tristram is helpless, his heart is laid bare before us:

She forces Warwick on me  
To play the part of Troilus. Suddenly  
The nebulous past contracts to this: my wife  
Was Warwick's mistress before she married me;  
And I could kill them both. What must I do?<sup>1</sup>

There is an undercurrent of pain symbolised by Tristram, who is unable to take a decision. He yields to her request unwillingly. With the introduction of Warwick Groom, the tragedy of the stage is set on foot. The character of Groom is not drawn in the round. He appears to be a dramatic mechanism intended to aggravate the misery of Sir Tristram and to condemn the dramatic world, whom he represents. He is irresponsible and under the spell of drink he talks 'fantasies'. But he shares Davidson's criticism of the stage:

When plays were damned  
By Churchmen, and the player a citizen  
Of rascaldom on sufferance living only,  
Great was the stage, a lover of all life,  
The friend of sinners and the home of sin,  
A city of refuge for humanity  
Escaping from religion and the curses  
Of the law; for Church and stage are deadly foes,  
They can be strong only in enmity;<sup>2</sup>

Thus he goes on; accusing the Church, and hating the stage made the prostitute of crafty godliness. He fails as an actor, as he is not sober. Consequently <sup>the play</sup> ~~the play~~ is a failure. This is a commentary on the affairs of the contemporary stage.

Lady Tristram intends to commit suicide. The play takes a new turn at this point with the introduction of the Bishop.

<sup>1</sup> The Theatrocrat, p. 194.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 111-112.

Henceforward he is a dominating figure, and the action resolves itself into a dialogue embodying the Bishop's irreligious views.

He is anti-Christian:

I never preach  
The Man of Sorrows now...I grasp my theme:  
Give me your eye and ear, your heart and brain.  
Jesus of Nazareth -- no, the Son of Man;  
Because this Jesus is a sloppy word,  
Mainly a sponge to wipe the tiresome tears  
Of foolish people.<sup>1</sup>

To him Christianity is 'the foe of life'. He speaks the voice of Davidson:

At the journey's end I see  
A new world purged of God and purged of Sin,  
Where men are healthy, women beautiful,  
All men, all women, beautiful and strong.<sup>2</sup>

But the Bishop's message, delivered from the stage to the further prejudice of the performance, does not bear any fruit, and the audience assault him. Sir Tristram in his misery makes love to Europa, an actress, which shows another aspect of the rottenness of the stage. Warwick Groom's old love for Lady Sumner revives, but she commits suicide. Warwick wounds Tristram mortally in a quarrel, and the play closes with the death of the main characters.

Sir Tristram on his death-bed forgets his misery and sets forth his vision of the universe:

We will fill the abyss left in the universe  
By cancelling God with the universe itself.<sup>3</sup>

As already said the play leaves us in a mood of horror and disgust. There is no attempt at character development. Sir Tristram's liaison with Europa, Groom's murder of him, and Lady

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 138-139.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 195.

Sumner's suicide are ill-contrived episodes which do not connect effectively with the central theme.

Davidson hurls himself in passionate fury against the world, producing, however, as a result, not 'a drama of Church and Stage' but a rhetorical polemic containing here and there a few impressive rhapsodical visions.<sup>1</sup>

The Theatrocrat shows that Ibsen has invaded the realm of poetic drama. Davidson has given up old forms, has taken to the drama of ideas in blank verse, which to him is 'omnigeneous-rhetorical, colloquial, lyrical, declamatory as the mood requires'.<sup>2</sup>

'The parade of savage power' assumes definite expression in The Triumph of Mammon and Mammon and his Message: in these he takes upon himself the task of converting the world to his creed. The dramatic form is contrived for the purpose of argument. The various characters stand for different shades of opinion in the author's mind. The blank verse is more vigorous than the blank verse of the Testaments. Towards the end of his career he is charmed by this medium:

We have blank verse: age cannot wither it,  
nor custom stale its infinite variety.<sup>3</sup>

The scene of action of both the plays is an imaginary land called Thule, and the characters are unlike ordinary men and women. Davidson puts into practice his dramatic principle that drama must not be the mere reproduction of life:

All dramatic art must be as unlike life as possible:  
it must be as unlike life as a tree is unlike the root  
from which it springs. Dramatic art, tragic or comic,  
is the transmutation of life by imagination.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> H. Fineman, John Davidson, Philadelphia, 1916, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> The Theatrocrat, p. 165.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 165-166.

In The Triumph of Mammon, the conflict is represented in King Christian and his elder son Mammon, who on the day appointed for his wedding refuses to marry, renounces Christianity, and goes away to study the world. The King arranges that the bride, Guendolen, shall marry his second son Magnus, on whom the succession devolves. Mammon returns and is threatened with castration unless he repents. In order to escape Mammon pretends to repent but, as soon as he is released, kills his father and later his brother, and establishes himself as king. He proclaims his creed and triumphs.

The plot is simple, the mood of the play and the mental climate of the characters are well established in the opening scene. The forces in conflict are well represented. King Christian, who stands for Christianity, sincerely wishes that his son should repent and join the fold:

My withered body burns to clasp my son --  
 A parching fire the salt green wood of youth  
 With vapour moist and bitter suffocates.  
 Spirits in travail labour forth to God;  
 Repentant sons should seek their fathers out.<sup>1</sup>

He never expected that his son would live up to his name, when he named him Mammon. But Mammon delights in his name:

I shall make this name renowned  
 For things unprecedented through the earth.<sup>2</sup>

Father and son argue; the duologue develops and culminates in the castration scene, which could be very impressive on the stage. King Christian's fatherly feelings and Mammon's determination not to yield are well portrayed. Mammon is tied before the 'Crucifix -- a thought of power' and his father threatens to castrate him,

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

Christian .. .. Do you believe  
That Christ was crucified to save your soul?

Mammon: Tremblingly I believe.

Christian: That shaft of power  
Transpired the pride that thought to ~~undertake~~ under-  
The overthrow of Christendom? take

Mammon: No shaft -  
No single shaft:- the overthrow of me:  
My chief desire forbidden - no crown, no love;  
And pouring through my veins a cataract  
Memorial -- admonition, music, prayer  
From infancy to adolescence; plus  
The pitch-and-toss of unforeseen events  
That play me like a feather in the air.

Christian: That humbles you? You feel yourself undone?

Mammon: I have no feeling: I repent.<sup>1</sup>

Although Davidson's hero hates Christianity, he is bewitched by Christ and bewildered by the 'blessedness of Christendom'. This cannot be reconciled with his convictions and the emergence of his new world.

Another character delineated to illustrate the new doctrine of Mammon is Guendolen. She grows in stature, her views change as the play develops. At first she believes in the divine spark:

I am a visitant from further off  
Than any planet, system, sun or star:  
I came from God as you and all men do.<sup>2</sup>

To her love is more than 'mere sexual union'. She had hoped to give birth to the 'Son of Man'. Her hope is shattered, when Mammon interferes in rage and kills Magnus on the night of their wedding. Mammon preaches his new message to her, but she hopes to be a virgin mother. Mammon is opposed to it:

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

Nothing is bestial, nothing mean or base;  
 For all is universe, an infinite  
 Ethereal way and being of myriad-minded  
 Matter: substance and soul, all matter, wanton  
 As lightning, chaste as light, diverse as sin.<sup>1</sup>

At this supreme moment of his teaching, the stage is flooded with light. This device is to heighten the effect of his doctrine and to reflect the inward illumination of the newly converted Guendolen. Having crowned himself King of Thule, Mammon quells a rebellion and wants his doctrines to prevail. He meets the representatives of the people. He tells the Mayor:

Gods

Are at a discount: .....  
 ..... A machine-made God?  
 A fattened God -- pâté de foie gras  
 For over-nice religious epicures!  
 An end of divination!  
 ..... what the world needs  
 Is change: it's tired -- as tired as you and I  
 Of all the past. But he who speaks to you  
 Is change incarnate, operant and crowned,.....<sup>2</sup>

He declares himself to be the 'greatest man of all ages', who 'shall adjust the world's polarity to mine'.<sup>3</sup> In his coronation speech, he invites his people to join him to refashion the world:

Men

Belov'd, women adored, my people, come,  
 Devise with me a world worth living in --  
 Not for our children and our children's children,  
 But for our own renown, our own delight!  
 All lofty minds, all pride, all arrogance,  
 All passion, all excess, all craft, all power,  
 All measureless imagination, come!  
 I am your King; come, make the world with me.<sup>4</sup>

The world he makes is not for all and for ever. Images of excess culminating in 'measureless imagination' are symbolic of Mammon's ambition. It is also a world of transitoriness, which ends in his love of Guendolen.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 144-145.



He mobilises the army of Thule and begins his anti-crusade. At this point starts Mammon and his Message, the second part of the intended trilogy, God and Mammon.

Mammon has grown titanic, 'ready to carve the world in my own image'. Guendolen feels a new life in her. She now shares Mammon's views; her thought-system, though a little confused, gives us this message:

We can be neither Christian nor Antichristian,  
Theist not ~~an~~ atheist, nor any ~~name~~ name,  
Mohammedan or Buddhist: we are earth  
And air, carbon and phosphorus and sulphur,  
The lightning, and ether-like the stars.  
We are the whole great universe itself  
Become intelligent and capable.  
The universe in love! <sup>1</sup>

Mammon meets the various sections of his society. He tells a group of harlots that they have no souls, withdraws their licenses and forbids their trade. He rids the new society of beggars and wants the army to have 'wholesome ~~faces~~ always'. The press is put down, and he overcomes all opposition. But his message does not go deep. Even Anselm, his close associate, does not believe it. Mammon is left alone praising his new universe. He does not derive strength from it, and at times behaves frantically as if on the edge of a volcano.

The play is structurally weak. The one dominant character, fighting against various forces and raving about his doctrines, is not firmly <sup>established</sup> ~~planted~~ in the play. A dramatist of greater ability would have created a worthy opponent and thus introduced conflicting forces, necessary in a play like this. We are left in a mood of bewilderment at the end of Mammon and his Message. If the last part had come out, perhaps we should have had a reasonable ethical system.

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<sup>1</sup> Mammon and his Message, 1907, pp. 8-9.

Davidson's Epilogue sums up Mammon's views:

I devour, digest, and assimilate the universe;  
make for myself in my Testaments and Tragedies  
a new form and substance of Imagination; and by  
poetic power certify the semi-certitudes of science.<sup>1</sup>

Davidson fails to disturb his readers at the end of his tragedies, but convinces them of his courage and faith. As a contributor, to The Yellow Book he must have known of the ideas of Nietzsche, current in the intellectual circles he frequented, but he denied that he was influenced by them. His tragedies show that he is very much of a materialist. He works out a conception of sin as courage, heaven and hell as 'memories of the process of evolution struggling into consciousness, and God as ether, from which man came and to which he will return'.<sup>2</sup>

Davidson's titanic energy at last gave way to consciousness of failure. His last poem, written a year before he committed suicide, may be read as a confession of Mammon's failure to achieve his ideal.

I felt the world a-spinning on its nave;  
I felt it sheering blindly round the sun;  
I felt the time had come to find a grave:  
I knew it in my heart my days were done.  
I took my staff in hand, I took the road,  
And wandered out to seek my last abode.  
Hearts of gold and hearts of lead  
Sing it yet in sun and rain,  
'Heel and toe from dawn to dusk  
Round the world and home again'.<sup>3</sup>

The verse of the Tragedies, although close to the spoken idiom, is unvaried, and thus underlines the monotony of the characterisation. Even at its most rhetorical it has truly poetic force:

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>2</sup> H. Jackson, The Eighteen Nineties, 1933, p. 190.

<sup>3</sup> The Testaments of John Davidson, 1908, p. 145.

This evolution,  
The errantry of nature, is known, is caught:  
Soon tamed, apprenticed, disciplined and drilled,  
'Twill be our most obedient minister.<sup>1</sup>

or as in Mammon And His Message:

I worship not,  
All worship I destroy, I make men great.  
Call it self-worship -- to be understood  
A little; but discourse can never reach  
My message, every over-burdened word  
Being so bent with meaning long imposed.<sup>2</sup>

With all their limitations as drama, the Mammon plays cannot be lightly passed over. They show the influence of Ibsen, they are soaked in ideas. But though Ibsen may have given an impetus to this drama of ideas, there is nothing in Davidson's statement to compare with the realism and rationalism of Ibsen. In fact, the comparison makes us all the more aware of a residual romanticism in Davidson's attempt to compensate for his lack of certainty by dogmatic assertiveness.

He adopted an attitude similar to Hardy's -- though in Hardy it was genuine -- of stoic romanticism, anticipating some elements in modern French existentialism, which is thoroughly theatrical. The Romantic movement surviving in the theatre is inherently given to attitudinising.

Thomas Hardy's The Dynasts:

..... what this poem (The Dynasts) achieves is..... a metaphysical idea held in some consistent and noble shaping. And this idea is one that underlies most of the intellectual life of our time; though the shaping is altogether the poet's own. Hardy in The Dynasts attains to something that the age of Tennyson and Browning quite failed to effect.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 81. The Triumph of Mammon, 1907, p. 113.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>3</sup> L.Abercrombie, Thomas Hardy, 1912, p. 188.

With these words Abercrombie sums up the philosophy of Hardy expounded in the Homeric sweep of The Dynasts. A great work of art represents the age in which it is produced and also expresses the belief of the poet. Tennyson's In Memoriam was considered to sum up the spirit of its age.<sup>1</sup> In our time, The Waste Land is regarded as a poem reflecting the characteristic attitude of the age. F.R. Leavis, commenting on the style of The Waste Land, says:

(It is) an effort to focus an inclusive human consciousness. The effort, ..... is characteristic of the age.<sup>2</sup>

That there are important differences in the relationship of these three poems to their respective periods is obvious: what they have in common is that in each we see a poet reacting imaginatively to problems which deeply concerned his contemporaries.

Hardy, who shares the intellectual background of Davidson, likewise felt that 'all was not all right with the world' and imaginatively began to represent in novels and in The Dynasts a society characterised by deep gloom. His discontent, his view that the universe is ruled by a power which is indifferent to human concerns, and the reference in Tess of the D'Urbervilles to "The President of the Immortals" show his awareness of the feelings of his time. As he was a man of greater intellectual power than Davidson, his hostility to Christianity and to the existing values of society manifests itself in a subtler way in his work.

The Napoleonic wars, which he may have heard of as a child,

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<sup>1</sup> Vide p. 138 supra.

<sup>2</sup> New Bearings in English Poetry, 1950 (2nd edn), p. 95.

provide Hardy with the material for The Trumpet Major and The Dynasts.<sup>1</sup>

Hardy's fame rests mainly on his novels; but he was greatly interested in the theatre and the history of drama<sup>2</sup>. His genius is essentially dramatic. He wrote in his diary on February 23, 1893:

We tale-tellers are all Ancient Mariners, and none of us is warranted in stopping Wedding Guests .... unless he has something more unusual to relate than the ordinary experience of every average man and woman. The whole secret of fiction and the drama -- in its constructional part -- lies in the adjustment of things unusual to things eternal and universal.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Published in 3 parts, 1903, 1906 and 1908.

B. Ifor Evans, English Poetry in the Later Nineteenth Century, 1933, p. 178: "As a child he was delicate, but so ~~interested~~ <sup>interested</sup> in books that even as a village schoolboy he discovered Dryden and Johnson and enjoyed them. Also he unearthed an old periodical which portrayed the Napoleonic Wars."

<sup>2</sup> Marguerite Roberts, Tess In The Theatre, Toronto, 1950; p.xv; "Although, as Mrs.Hardy reminded me, most people do not think of Hardy as a dramatist, his private papers reveal the fact that there were times when he was interested in writing drama not only to be read but also for the stage."

<sup>3</sup> F.E.Hardy, The Life of Thomas Hardy, 1928, II, p. 7.

(i) Tess was dramatised in 1894-5.

(ii) The Three Wayfarers, A Pastoral Play in one act (dramatised from The Three Strangers) was produced at Terry's Theatre, June 3-9, 1893. It was well received. cf. J.T.Grein, 'Stage Society, The Three Wayfarers'; Dramatic Criticism, 1900-1901, 1922, p. 54.

(iii) The Queen of Cornwall, a Mummer's Play, has also been produced, Vide F.E.Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, 1892-1921, 1930, pp. 235-236.

In 1892 William Archer accused the novelists of having caused 'the divorce of literature from the stage'.<sup>1</sup> Shortly afterwards the Pall Mall Budget took up the charge and asked the novelists to clear themselves of the accusation.<sup>2</sup> Hardy's answers reveal his deep interest in drama. This was in 1892, and eleven years later

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<sup>1</sup> William Archer, 'The Stage Literature', Fortnightly Review, February, 1892, p. 232.

<sup>2</sup> The Pall Mall Budget, <sup>September</sup> ~~Sept~~ 1, 1892, asks the writers of fiction to answer the following questions as they may think fit:

- '(1) Whether you regard the present divorce of fiction from the drama as beneficial or inimical to the best interests of literature and the stage;
- '(2) Whether you, yourself, have at any time had, or now have, any desire to exercise your gifts in the production of plays as well as of novels; and if not,
- '(3) Why you consider the novel the better or more convenient means for bringing your ideas before the public whom you address'.

Hardy's answers were published in the same issue, <sup>September</sup> ~~Sept~~ 1, 1892:

- '(1) Inimical to the best interest of the stage: No injury to literature.
- '(2) Have occasionally had a desire to produce a play, and have, in fact, written the skeletons of several. Have no such desire in any special sense now.
- '(3) Because, in general, the novel affords scope for getting nearer to the heart and meaning of things than does a play; in particular, the play as nowadays conditioned, when parts have to be moulded to actors, not actors to parts; when managers will not risk a truly original play; when scenes have to be arranged in a constrained and arbitrary fashion to suit the exigencies of scene-building, although spectators are absolutely indifferent to order and succession, provided they can have set before them a developing thread of interest. The reason for this arbitrary arrangement would seem to be that the presentation of human passions is subordinated to the presentation of mountains, cities, clothes, furniture, plate, jewels, and other real and sham-real appurtenances, to the neglect of the principle that the material stage should be a conventional or figurative arena in which accessories are kept down to the plane of mere suggestion of place and time, so as not to interfere with the high-relief of the action and the emotions.'

he found a new medium for himself in The Dynasts.

Attempts have been made to prove that Hardy's ethical system is derived from Nietzsche<sup>1</sup> and Schopenhauer.<sup>2</sup> Hardy himself is not clear about any system of philosophy implied in The Dynasts:

I have handicapped myself by expressing, both in the drama and previous verse, philosophies and feelings not well established.<sup>3</sup>

In a reply to an article on The Dynasts in The Fortnightly, he says:

I have repeatedly stated .....that the views ..... are seeming provisional impressions only used for artistic purposes.<sup>4</sup>

He considered them raw material to work upon -- only a compound heap of impressions like those of a bewildered child at a conjuring show.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> He was aware of the inadequacy of the Nietzschean system:

'It is a question whether Nietzsche's philosophy is sufficiently coherent to be of great ultimate value, and whether those views of his which seem so novel and striking appear thus only because they have been rejected for so many centuries as inadmissible under human rule.' Vide F.E.Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, 1930, p.160.

<sup>2</sup> (i) Edmund Gosse, in a letter to Hedgcock, denies that Hardy had any interest in Schopenhauer. (vide F.E.Hardy, The Life of Thomas Hardy, 1928, II, pp. 104, 175, 219).

(ii) Ernest Brenneche, Thomas Hardy's Universe, 1924, p. 14:

'It is perfectly believable that the broad outlines of his philosophy ..... were developed in complete independence of Schopenhauer.'

<sup>3</sup> F.E.Hardy, op. cit., II, p. 104.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 219.

While no doctrine is explicitly put forward, or coherently worked out, in The Dynasts, social and philosophical criticism is implied. Hardy's poetic experience of life patterns the web of The Dynasts. He gives us the generalised form of what the thinking world had gradually come to adopt as a criticism of modern life, or even of all life.

His mind worked objectively in novels and concerned itself with the serious issues of life, and in The Dynasts he deals with the 'meditative world'<sup>1</sup> in 'poesy and dream',<sup>2</sup> where even the 'fond unbelieving Spirits

.....cannot swerve the pulsion of Byss  
Which thinking on, yet weighing not its thought,  
Unchecks its clock-like laws.<sup>3</sup>

Many earlier studies have pointed out the link between War And Peace and The Dynasts. Although Rutland<sup>4</sup> affirms that Hardy was

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<sup>1</sup> The Dynasts, 1926, Preface, p. XI.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Fore Scene, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> W.R.Rutland, Thomas Hardy, Oxford, 1938, p. 272.



not aware of War And Peace, there is certain evidence<sup>1</sup> to show that he was not ignorant of Tolstoy and his thought. On Florence Hardy's evidence, Hardy knew Tolstoy and his work<sup>2</sup> and recent scholarship has carefully explored the relationship between The Dynasts and War and Peace.<sup>3</sup> The conception of history and war underlined in The Dynasts does not differ greatly from that of Tolstoy, who, like Hardy, strongly disapproved of a dictator indulging in naked brutality. The broad agreement in the conception of the characters shows that War And Peace influenced Hardy's characters at least as far as the chief protagonists are concerned.

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<sup>1</sup> G.Phelps, The Russian Novel in English, 1956, p. 141:

'Tolstoy's views on war and the part played by the "heroes" were not altogether unfamiliar; his conception of obscure instinctive forces working among the masses of mankind was part of a whole reorientation in historical studies, in which many others including Carlyle (and in the novel, of course, Stendhal) had played a part. It is incidentally worth noticing that Thomas Hardy was interested in this aspect of Tolstoy's thought; in 1893 he attended a lecture on Tolstoy given by Kropotkin and in 1904 (June 28th) he wrote to The Times to express his general agreement with Tolstoy's "masterly general indictment of war as a modern principle", an agreement which perhaps finds expression in The Dynasts'.

<sup>2</sup> F.E.Hardy, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Emma Clifford, 'War And Peace And The Dynasts', Modern Philology, August, 1956, LIV, 1, p. 53.

In War And Peace Tolstoy was anxious to reduce the stature of the first Napoleon to that of a common man: for his great march through history he was dependent, according to Tolstoy, on the casual chances of fortune. But in compensation Tolstoy's fictional characters exercise their will and, in a humanly imperfect fashion, put their impress on events.<sup>1</sup>

This is clearly Hardy's intention when he makes his human characters powerless. Even Napoleon feels that he has been subdued by the elements and that the apparently unconquerable has been conquered by forces beyond man's control.

The Dynasts, as Abercrombie points out, combines psychology with the use of the chronicle play in its methods. Hardy is looking backward to the poetic dramatists of the preceding age. But although imitative, he evolves a new technique. He widens his canvas and consequently chooses a medium which enables his readers to realise the panorama of the chronicle without losing its essentials. He claims 'a tolerable fidelity to the facts.'<sup>2</sup> He continues: 'Whenever any evidence of the words really spoken or written by the characters in their various situations was attainable, as close a paraphrase has been aimed at as was compatible with the form chosen'.<sup>3</sup> He is aware of the limitations of his form:

It may hardly be necessary to inform readers that in devising the Chronicle-piece no attempt has been made to create that completely organic structure of action, and closely webbed development of character and motive, which are demanded in a drama strictly self-contained.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Clifford Leech, 'Art and <sup>the</sup> Concept of Will', The Durham University Journal, December 1955, xlviii, i, p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> Preface, p. viii.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. ~~xxx~~ ~~xxx~~

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. ix.

Many poetic dramatists of this period are imitators, some are jobbers of verse and others of form; their domain is small and their form is a poor replica of the Elizabethan, Jacobean or Greek. But Hardy, who mingles supernatural spectators of the terrestrial with human agents, makes wonderful use of chorus, soliloquy, dumb-show, the alternation of prose and verse, and stage directions in prose. These various devices are necessitated by the epical sweep of the drama. He is not limited by the conventions of the realistic setting, he soars above them freely and imaginatively. It is with the help of the chorus of Spirits of the supernatural world that the great drama of The Dynasts is distanced from us spatially; it is against this cosmic background that even human agents of destiny look small. The conflict is historical in origin, but it acquires a universal significance, and becomes an eternal conflict between good and evil. Thus the actors on terra firma are lifted to a philosophic plane.

#### The Phantasmal Intelligences

In his novels written before The Dynasts, Hardy has shown his interest in commentary approximating to the choric comment in a Greek drama. The author frequently comments on certain aspects of a situation or character. But there, although it helps the reader to understand a situation and appreciate a character, it is disturbing. In many instances, the device appears clumsy and provokes the reader, as it interferes with the development of action; it is not woven into the emotional texture of the novel. In The Dynasts the Spirits of the Overworld are meant to perform the same function. But the use is different; they transcend the analytic method of the realistic novel and become agents in the cosmic drama. They are therefore emotionally satisfying in the structure of the play.

Before commenting on their action, one may briefly note Hardy's indebtedness to earlier works, in which supernatural agency is used to realise action. One obvious debt is to Shelley's Prometheus Unbound:

It was in his studies of Greek drama that Hardy became familiar with the use of the chorus. The whole spirit machinery of The Dynasts was clearly suggested by that of Prometheus Unbound, with its Spirits of the Hours, of Earth, of Ocean, of the Moon, its Echoes, and its Fairies .... The Shade of the Earth in The Dynasts bears a close resemblance to Earth in Prometheus; and Hardy's continual use of semi-chorus has been clearly modelled upon Shelley's practice.<sup>1</sup>

But 'influence-spotters'<sup>2</sup> have always been busy and are at times irritating. The sources are of little importance to us, as the author himself has said the last word:

These Phantasmal Intelligences are divided into groups of which one only, that of the Pities, approximates to 'the universal sympathy of human nature -- the spectator idealised' of the Greek chorus ..... Another group approximates to the passionless Insight of the Ages. The remainder are ethically chosen auxiliaries whose signification may be readily discerned.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rutland, op. cit., pp. 288-289.

<sup>2</sup> (1) Barker Fairley, 'Notes on the Form of The Dynasts', P.M.L.A. 1919, XXXIV, p. 402:

'It shares and in a sense combines three great literary traditions -- the epic tradition of Shakespeare's English history plays; the metaphysical tradition of the philosophical dramas of Aeschylus, Goethe and Shelley.... The Shakespearean tradition relates itself more nearly to the human scenes, the metaphysical tradition to the supernatural scenes.'

(2) Hoxie N. Fairchild, 'The Immediate Sources of The Dynasts', P.M.L.A., 1952, LXVII, 43-64. He is of the opinion that Buchanan's The Drama of Kings, 1871, exerted a strong influence on The Dynasts.

<sup>3</sup> Preface, p. IX.

The Phantasmal Intelligences are also called 'supernatural spectators of the terrestrial action, certain impersonated abstractors or Intelligences called Spirits'.<sup>1</sup> They broadly fall into two divisions -- The Spirits of the Pities, with those akin to ~~them~~ <sup>it,</sup> Ironic and Sinister; and the Spirits of <sup>the</sup> Years approximating to the 'Passionless Insight of the Ages'.<sup>2</sup> Their functions are diverse; they are comparable to the function of the choric characters in Greek and Elizabethan dramas. In Shakespeare, individual characters replace the chorus. The Fool in King Lear, Enobarbus in Anthony and Cleopatra, Horatio in Hamlet and Thersites in Troilus and Cressida perform the function of the Greek chorus: they are essential to the tragic expression. The Spirits of the Overworld closely resemble the characters on the Athenian stage and form an integral part of the working of The Dynasts. Their function is in two worlds -- this world and the overworld. They are the unifying agents: Hardy's series of historical 'ordinates' (to use a term in geometry<sup>3</sup>) are cast into three parts of one hundred and thirty scenes which are held together by these Intelligences of the Overworld.<sup>4</sup>

It is significant that the action is set in motion by the discussion of the Spirits of the Overworld in a Fore Scene which puts a pattern on the events that ensue. Their discussion of the universe characterises them. The Spirit of the Years defines the

1 & 2 Ibid., p/ viii.

3 Ibid., ix.

4 L.Abercrombie quotes Cervantes as the first to have used the Phantoms of the Imagination in Numantia (vide Thomas Hardy, 1927, p. 150).

The Phantoms of the Imagination referred to are War, Infirmity, Hunger: they all appear in Numantia, Act IV, Sc. ii. They are allegorical personages, fighting for the ruins of Numantia. (vide Poems by Cervantes, ed. G.W.J.Gyll, 1870, p. 194).

## Immanent Will and Its designs:

It works unconsciously, as heretofore,  
 Eternal artistries in Circumstance,  
 Whose patterns, wrought by rapt aesthetic rote,  
 Seem in themselves its single listless aim,  
 And not their consequence.<sup>1</sup>

Hardy's human characters are pitted against this immense background.

The Spirit of the Pities lives up to its name; it stands for sympathy and the secret desire of man to escape from the clutches of relentless fate. It expresses sympathy for the sufferers, while the Spirits Ironic and Sinister revolt against the fate of the human race. They make disturbing comments on the human agents. Such a contrast gives vividness to the drama.

Hardy maintains an artistic balance. The poetry of the Spirit of the Pities is of a higher order than that used by the Spirit Ironic or Sinister. They express tragic emotion in a suitable medium.

The Fore Scene is expository: the attitude of the Spirits towards the protagonist is made explicit. They watch the human characters from a vantage point. The Spirit of the Years says:

You'll mark the twisting of this Bonaparte  
 As he with other figures foots his reel,  
 Until he twitch him into his lonely grave.<sup>2</sup>

While the Spirit of the Years dismisses the characters in the lower world as 'frail ones'<sup>3</sup> the Spirit of the Pities expresses its disapproval of this irresponsible disposition:

We would establish those of kindlier build,  
 In fair Compassions skilled,  
 Men of deep art in life-development;

<sup>1</sup> The Dynasts, 1926, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

Watchers and warders of thy varied lands,  
 Men surfeited of laying heavy hands  
 Upon the innocent,  
 The mild, the fragile, the obscure content  
 Among the myriads of thy family.  
 Those, too, who love the true, the excellent,  
 And make their daily moves a melody.<sup>1</sup>

The Fore Scene with masterly brevity through different Spirits evokes different attitudes and prepares us for the drama in Europe, 'disclosed as a prone and emaciated figure'.<sup>2</sup>

The Spirits descend to the Earth. The Spirit Sinister makes a telling comment:

Ay; begin small, and so lead up to the greater.  
 It is a sound dramatic principle.<sup>3</sup>

This comment is in response to the Spirit of the Years who has called attention to 'England's humblest heart'. Thus at once three Spirits participate in the action. They mingle with the Wessex people, who are talking of 'Corsican mischief'.<sup>4</sup> The Spirits of the Pities talks of the monarch George not caring for Napoleon, while the Sinister Spirit takes delight in describing the 'European broil' and the guns that 'riddle human flesh'. These two Spirits are contrasted wherever occasion arises. After having depicted the attitude of the ordinary people towards the impending disaster they go to watch:

How the High Influence sways the English realm  
 And has the jacks lip out their reasonings there.<sup>5</sup>

When the Spirits of the Pities <sup>watches</sup> ~~watch~~ the 'pale debaters' in the House of Commons, all the Spirits become participants in this drama. In the disguise of ordinary strangers, they watch the debate. Sheridan closes his attack on the Prime Ministers, who

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.15.

Has brought the millions to the verge of ruin  
 By pledging them to Continental quarrels  
 Of which we see no end!<sup>1</sup>

of the Pities                      its  
 The Spirits/comments, ~~their~~ comments suggest that the characters are  
 powerless:

It irks me that they thus should Yea and Nay  
 As though a power lay in their oraclings,<sup>2</sup>  
 Spirits  
 They/watch and pronounce their judgement and interfere with the  
 action, each according to its nature. At times they are very human.  
 The Spirit of Rumour, in the form of a personage of fashion, enters  
 the apartment of a gentleman and converses with him. This reduces  
 the distance between the Overworld and this world. Rumour announces  
 the news of Napoleon's coronation. It mingles with the crowd and  
 disappears. The news is received by the English as 'a precious  
 pinch of salt on raw skin'. Hardy maintains the unity of the epic  
 by means of these ethereal characters. Their comments carry the  
 audience along.

The Spirits of the Pities watching Napoleon planting on his  
 brow the Lombard Crown, whispers in his ear:

Lieutenant Bonaparte,  
 Would it not seemlier be to shut thy heart  
 To these unhealthy splendours?<sup>3</sup>

But the Spirit Sinister wants to plunge him into war:

.....War makes rattling good history; but peace is  
 poor reading. So I back Bonaparte for the reason  
 that he will give pleasure to posterity.<sup>4</sup>

The Spirit of the Years assumes the shape of a white sea-bird and  
 influences Villeneuve to take an important decision.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 41.



Their comments enable us to make up our minds about the great Emperor Napoleon, they sum up the multitudinous events of this vast epic and at times point out the impending disaster of a man who destroys himself by his own excess; thus their comment intensifies the situation. When Maria Louisa reflects on her marriage with Napoleon, a small enamel portrait of Marie Antoinette slips down on its face. The Spirit of the Years at once comments:

What mischief's this? The Will must have its way.

The Spirit Sinister: Perhaps Earth shivered at the lady's say?

Shade of the Earth: I own thereto. When France and Austria

My wed  
My echoes are men's groans, my dewes are red;  
So I have reason for a passing dread!<sup>1</sup>

They refer to the inviolable law of nature and also at the same time disapprove of it. Thus the audience is forewarned and is well prepared to respond to the situation. These dispersed comments are necessary for the total sense of the play. At times they get emotionally involved in the action. Thus the Spirit Ironic disapproves of Napoleon's love for Maria Louisa.

First 'twas a finished coquette,  
And now it's a raw ingenue, --  
Blonde instead of brunette,  
An old wife doffed for a new.<sup>2</sup>

The Spirits are also used to telescope events; their description corresponds to the impression by means of a dumb show. Thus the wedding procession of Napoleon and Maria Louisa is recorded by the Recording Angel in reply to a question by the Spirit of the Pities.

First there walks  
The Emperor's brother Louis, Holland's King;  
Then Jérôme of Westphalia with his spouse;  
The mother-queen and Julie Queen of Spain,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 272.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 281.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 287.

These lines are impressionistic and enable the reader to visualise the procession. They aid the mental performance. This is indeed cleverly achieved. Similarly the Spirit of the Pities says that Napoleon looks content; the Years ~~reply~~ replies:

Yet see it pass, as by a conjuror's wand.<sup>1</sup>

The stage directions that follow supplement with the comments:

Thereupon Napoleon's face blackens as if the shadow of a winter night had fallen upon it. Resentful and threatening, he stops the procession and looks up and down the benches.<sup>2</sup>

The Spirit Sinister attributes this event to the 'artistry of the Immanent Will'.<sup>3</sup> The human actions are reduced to insignificance by Hardy's theoretical determinism.

The Phantasmal Intelligences amplify the action of The Dynasts and it is in dramatic fitness that they assemble again in the Overworld. The whole pageant is presided over by the Spirit of the Years, which sums up their function:

Thus doth the Great Foresightless mechanize  
In blank entrancement now as evermore  
Its ceaseless artistries in Circumstance  
Of curious stuff and braid, as just forthshown.<sup>4</sup>

Significantly enough, The Dynasts closes with the singing of 'Consciousness the Will informing, till It fashion all things Fair'. The varied commentary of the Spirits underlines the dominant idea of The Dynasts -- the power of the Immanent Will and the helplessness of the subjects of destiny. Their chronic comment, interpretation, interference are all necessary for the evocation of the action in the imagination of the reader. They successfully impose a pattern on the action of The Dynasts.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 287.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 287.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 287

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 521.

The Choric Scenes in The Dynasts.(Scenes in prose and verse to produce a choric effect.)

Apart from the Chorus of Phantasmal Intelligences, Hardy uses a number of other devices, Elizabethan in origin, to give unity to the mass of material he condenses. There are many scenes in prose which produce a choric effect. The characters use chorus-like words which throw light on the main episodes relating to the more important characters. Hardy's handling of this device is according to the Shakespearean fashion. He chooses humble characters and puts into their mouths words which illumine the situation. For example, the Passengers at the Ridge in Wessex sum up their attitude to the 'Corsican mischief'. They fear destruction:

We have alarms enough, God knows!<sup>1</sup>

The third Passenger in a way epitomises the qualities of Bonaparte, about whom the audience have learnt a great deal:

War is his name, and aggression is with him!<sup>2</sup>

In a simpering woman's cry:

Oh that I hadn't married a fiery sojer, to make me  
bring fatherless children in the world, all through  
his dreadful calling!<sup>3</sup>

one hears the unhappiness of the family life of a soldier.

The lowly placed characters comment on those highly placed. The Boy in the Crowd near the Guildhall accuses Pitt of pushing England to the brink of war. In his innocent way, he says:

Mr.Pitt made the war, and the war made us want  
sailors; ..... Uncle John was carried on board  
a man-of-war to fight under Nelson; and nobody  
minded Uncle John's parrot and it talked itself  
to death. So Mr.Pitt killed Uncle John's parrot;  
see it, Sir?<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.53

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.101.

The comment produces laughter but it embodies a grim truth.

The conversation in a verse scene between the Spirit Ironic and a Woman at night in a street in Paris sums up the victories of Napoleon and, incidentally, the woman's pity for England who has lost Nelson.

She's lost her Nelson now,  
 (A worthy man: he loved a woman well!)  
 George drools and babbles in a darkened room;  
 Her heaven-born Minister declines apace;  
 All smooths the Emperor's sway.<sup>1</sup>

Hardy has a method of concentrating on the main theme, without losing sight of the details. The four ladies in Berlin discuss the destruction of Prussia and the agony that the Queen is undergoing. She has gone somewhere:

To what sanctuary?  
 From earthquake shocks there is no sheltering cell!  
 -- Is this what men call conquest? Must it close  
 As historied conquests do, or be annulled  
 By modern reason and the urbaner sense? —  
 Such issue none would venture to predict,  
 Yet folly 'twere to nourish foreshaped fears  
 And suffer in conjecture and in deed.<sup>2</sup>—

An ordinary woman thus gives utterance to stern moral truths.

A number of incidents relating to the main characters are narrated by minor characters, and by such means unity is achieved. An Englishwoman and a Viennese citizen in a cafe in Vienna discuss Maria Louisa, who was convinced of the truth of the augury that Bonaparte 'was starved to die'<sup>3</sup> that year. This prophecy, unknown to her, relates to her future husband. In the very next scene, we see Maria Louisa telling her lady-in-waiting that he is doomed to die this year at Cologne in an inn called 'The Red Crab'. These incidents, however insignificant they look, contribute to the

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 226.

realisation of the central theme. The reader's expectation is awakened when he sees Napoleon discussing with Madame Metternich the possibility of marrying Maria Louisa. This device is deliberate in a play meant for 'mental performance'.

A whole range of military operations and political scenes in various countries are brought before the reader's eye by such techniques. The prose scenes interspersed here and there not only provide choric comment but also help to avoid monotony.

Hardy's prose used in the stage directions is full of the evocative precision of poetry. The stage directions perform a very important function in the play. They embody historical facts and description intended to make visible the panoramic vastness of the scene. They meet the needs of an action which covers a wide and varied field, and also aid the orchestration of the epic. But Hardy's method might degenerate in the hands of lesser artists, unable to reveal the characters through dialogue and dependent on extraneous factors. It is possible that Hardy is trying to cater for readers of prose and poetry; he is in line with contemporary practice.<sup>1</sup> Hardy, having developed his mastery of both prose and poetry, contrives an ideal combination of them in The Dynasts:

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<sup>1</sup> A.Nicoll, British Drama, 1955 (edn.4) p. 443:

'After a few years of hesitancy in the publishing of plays, the newer writers sought for a double public. Without ignoring the theatre, as the poets of the past had done, they made an appeal also to many readers of novels and poetry. Their stage directions and their prefaces alike were penned for this purpose, and as a consequence the drama as a whole became ever more and more a part of literature'.

In point of literary form, the scheme of contrasted Choruses and other conventions of this external feature was shaped with a single view to the modern expression of a modern outlook, and in frank divergence from classical and other dramatic precedent which rules the ancient voicings of ancient themes.<sup>1</sup>

### Dumb Show

The prose dumb shows in The Dynasts serve different purposes at different times. They are mostly used for sheer economy in action, as in Shakespeare,<sup>2</sup> to minimise dialogue, or for impressionistic purposes, as in Webster's The Duchess of Malfi;<sup>3</sup> Webster seems to be the nearest precedent for Hardy. In Hardy, the dumb shows also form connecting links between various fully dramatised actions.

<sup>1</sup> Preface, IX.

<sup>2</sup> J. Dover Wilson, What Happens In Hamlet, Cambridge, 1935, p.147.

<sup>3</sup> "It (the Dumb Show) was merely employed either (i) to foreshadow the contents of a play (or an act) by means of a symbolical or historical tableau, as when for example, to quote Creizenach, "in the Spanish Tragedy the fearful termination of the wedding feast is prefigured in Dumb Show, in which torch-bearers enter followed by a black-robed Hymen who blows out their torches"; or (ii) to save the dramatist the trouble of composing dialogue for the part of the action by representing it in pantomime, which was often then 'explained by some one acting as intermediary between performers and audience, the person usually being designated as chorus", but sometimes as presenter."

<sup>3</sup> 'The Ceremony of the Cardinal's installation at the Shrine of Our Lady of Loretto'.

Webster and Tourneur, 1948, p. 189.

The dumb shows paint the kaleidoscopic scenes depicting historical facts and enable the author to explain events more clearly to the reader. The dumb show enacting the 'Camp and Harbour of Boulogne', shows Napoleon thus:

With his head forward and his hands behind him the Emperor surveys these animated proceedings in detail, but more frequently turns his face towards the telegraph on the cliff to the south-west erected to signal when Villeneuve and the combined squadrons shall be visible on the west horizon.<sup>1</sup>

It aids the action of the play:

From the terrace Bonaparte surveys and dictates operations against the entrenched heights of the Michaelsberg that rise in the middle distance on the right above the city. Through the gauze of descending waters the French soldiery can be discerned climbing to the attack under Ney.<sup>2</sup>

The dumb show on the island of Lobau, enacted soon after Napoleon's arrangements for his marriage with Maria Louisa lays Napoleon's heart before us. It reflects the torture in his heart:

From bridge to bridge and back again a gloomy-eyed figure stalks, as it has stalked the whole night long, with the restlessness of a wild animal. Plastered with mud and dribbling with rain-water, it bears no resemblance to anything dignified or official. The figure is that of Napoleon, urging his multitudes over.<sup>3</sup>

A dumb show exhibits in an impressionistic manner his reactions to the declaration of the Allies, which he has just read:

His flesh quivers, and he turns with a start, as if fancying that some one may be about to stab him in the back.<sup>4</sup>

Dumb shows such as these prepare the reader to appreciate the spiritual values of the epic-drama,<sup>5</sup> and Barker Fairley sees an affinity

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.234.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.454.

<sup>5</sup> Ifor Evans, op. cit., p. 190.

in the style between the dumb shows of The Dynasts and the prose comments in The Return of the Native.<sup>1</sup>

The dumb shows supplement the function of the figures of the Overworld, and make

The Dynasts one of the great dramas for the exercise and delight of the mind, which can range over vaster fields and more transcendent heights than those on wireless or screen.<sup>2</sup>

### Cosmic Determinism and Tragedy

The Dynasts, though a great dramatic poem or epic drama, could not strictly be called a great play because the relation of details to outline, which is peculiar to epic, demands a tempo that destroys the concentration peculiar to drama.<sup>3</sup>

Thus Professor Ellis Fermor sees the failure of the mass drama, which loses concentration in its epic spaciousness. It is the purpose of the author to create a multiplicity of scenes and events and touch

<sup>1</sup> P.M.L.A., 1919, p. 4, pp. 404-405.

'The Dumb Show coming after Leipzig, enacting the ~~conveying~~ <sup>converging</sup> movement of the allied armies, gliding on "as if by gravitation, in fluid figures, dictated by the conformation of the country, like water from a burst reservoir; mostly snake-shaped but occasionally with batrachian and saurian outlines": he compares this with the figure of Eustacia on the barrow at night: "It rose from the semi-globular mound like a spike from a helmet", resembling a sort of last man among ~~man, among~~ <sup>man among</sup> the Celts who built the barrow, "musing for a moment before dropping into external night with the rest of his race..... The figure perceptibly gave up its fixity, shifted a step or two, and turned round. As if alarmed, it descended on the right side of the barrow, with the glide of a water-drop down a bud, and then vanished".

<sup>2</sup> F. E. Hardy, Thomas Hardy, 1954, p. 280.

<sup>3</sup> U. Ellis-Fermor, The Frontiers of Drama, 1945, p. 12.



life at various levels. A pageant of life -- a pageant in which some are small and some are great -- passes before our mind's eye. No character, however important, compels our admiration. The human characters watched over by the phantasmal Intelligences of the Overworld, are made deliberately to shrink into Lilliputians. They become pathetic and powerless when viewed against the background of relentless fate. The author's intentions are explicit:

The spectacle here presented in the likeness of a drama is concerned with the great Historical Calamity, or Clash of Peoples.....<sup>1</sup>

A fringe of the same vast tragedy had already been dealt with in The Trumpet Major; the human side of life had received greater attention in the novels. Hardy is concerned with the world as a mechanism, dramatised by the 'Monistic theory', a work of the 'Immanent Will', weaving 'its designs'. The Napoleonic Wars provide him with a myth upon which to project life imaginatively to dramatise eternal issues and to interpret the laws that govern the universe. Although the drama is not meant for a living theatre, the poetic interpretation of these issues gives it permanent value.

Out of the multitude of characters, Napoleon and his actions form the connecting link in the events grouped about Trafalgar, the Peninsular Campaign, Moscow, Leipzig and Waterloo. Hardy dislikes Napoleon, as did Tolstoy, and depicts him as a clever intriguer in contrast to other characters -- Pitt, Nelson and Wellington and other less important figures in the campaigns. It is established in the mind of the reader that this great Emperor is treated with ridicule by the Spirits in the Overworld. Nevertheless he is a titanic figure striding across the map of Europe. He is a great

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<sup>1</sup> Preface, ~~px~~ vii.

designer who wants to show that his despotism is not devoid of charity and that he commands the respect of the Church. When he sits on the throne the Archbishop conducts the coronation service and blesses him; The Spirit of the Pities, however, sees through the game:

Thus are the self-styled servants of the Highest  
 Constrained by earthly duress to embrace  
 Mighty imperiousness as it were choice,  
 And hand the Italian sceptre unto one  
 Who, with a saturnine, sour-humoured grin,  
 Professed at first to flout antiquity,  
 Scorn limp conventions, smile at mouldy things,  
 And level dynasts down to journeymen!<sup>1</sup>

His character is revealed; he is no longer a lover of democracy, his soul,

Now labours to achieve  
 The thing it overthrew.<sup>2</sup>

From the beginning he is conceived as one to be conquered only by the unconquerable. When he places the crown of Lombardy on his head, he is aware of a higher power:

'Tis God has given it to me. So be it.<sup>3</sup>

He has the foibles of an ordinary human being; his sentiments are very human. His words addressed to Mack, the conquered Austrian officer, show awareness of his limitations:

War, General, ever has its ups and downs,  
 And you must take the better and the worse  
 As impish chance or destiny ordains.<sup>4</sup>

A slight attempt is made to contrast Napoleon and Pitt, who are both powerfully drawn. They are conspicuous by their actions and distinguished by their speech: Napoleon is possessed of a calm,

<sup>1</sup> The Dynasts, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

serene outlook, while Pitt is worried and tortured when he hears the rumours of the defeat of Austria. He has read the news in a Dutch paper; his reaction is a commentary on a personality less powerful than that of Napoleon:

By God, my Lord, these statements must be false!  
These foreign prints are trustless as Cheap Jack  
Dumfounding yokels at a country fair.<sup>1</sup>

On the field of Austerlitz, gigantic as Napoleon is, he feels that he is only a creature of luck in the cosmic drama. He attributes the death of Nelson to his luck. The characters are in the grip of the Will. On the field of Eylau<sup>u</sup>, the snows are incarnadined, and 'everywhere one sees frozen limbs and blood iced hard.'<sup>2</sup> As if to relieve this scene, which smells of the macabre, Hardy introduces the Queen of Prussia, whose interview with Napoleon shows the latter's cunning and diplomacy. His polite refusal to return Magdeburg and yield to the tears of a woman show his political capacity. In words reminiscent of Kent in Lear, he puts the blame on the stars:

My star, my star is what's to blame -- not I.  
It is unswervable!<sup>3</sup>

His analysis of his action shows a sharp contrast to what he has just said.

My God, it was touch-and-go that time, Talleyrand!  
She was within an ace of getting over me. As she stepped into the carriage she said in her pretty way, "O I have been cruelly deceived by you!" And when she sank down inside, not knowing I heard, she burst into sobs fit to move a statue. The Devil take me if I hadn't a good mind to stop the horses, jump in, give her a good kissing, and agree to all she wanted.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 179. Cf. It is the stars, the stars above us...  
(King Lear, Act IV, Sc. 3)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

This scene, alternately between verse and prose, is Shakespearean in manner and is designed to bring out the closeness of the dramatic character to actuality.

Along with the scenes of brutality, scenes, too, evocative of 'men's passions, virtues, visions, crimes', 'the mutative unmotived' are also portrayed. The scene in which Napoleon parts from Josephine shows his cold ruthlessness. His determination to 'null the sterile marriage' acquires the sanctity of a public cause and hence of something out of his control:

We are but thistle-globes on Heaven's high gales,  
And whither blown, or when, or how, or why,  
Can choose us not at all! .....<sup>1</sup>

He is cold, ruthless, unmoved and emotionally distanced from one with whom he has lived so long. The heart of the woman who has to sever all connection with her husband is laid bare:

O my husband long,  
Will you not purge your soul to value best  
That high heredity from brain to brain  
Which supersedes mere sequences of blood,  
That often vary more from sire to son,  
Than between furthest strangers! .....<sup>2</sup>

Her sorrow is unavailing; her reason is unheeded; this is set against the Dictator's rational decision to waive private joy for policy.

Napoleon's hard-heartedness in dealing with his wife is matched with his ruthless behaviour in war. But, when private joy is concerned, Napoleon's human traits come into play. This is emphasised in the revelation of his anxiety when Maria Louisa is delivering a child. His feelings are as natural as any father's. He praises Heaven as his wife has laid down a 'dynastic line for him'. He

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 203-204.

has also concern for his wife's health:

..... I would sooner father no more sons  
Than have so fair a fruit-tree undergo  
Another wrenching of such magnitude.<sup>1</sup>

Napoleon conquers; the havoc caused by two battles, Leipzig and Waterloo, of unprecedented magnitude, is described in relentless detail. The common people undergo untold miseries; mass-massacres have occurred. Napoleon's ambition is insatiable:

With Moscow taken, Russia prone and crushed:  
To attain the Ganges is simplicity.<sup>2</sup>

But he is not always the ruthless, self-willed conquerer. At times he feels that he is the instrument of higher forces:

History makes use of me to weave her web  
To her long while aforetime-figured mesh  
And contemplated character: no more.<sup>3</sup>

But soon history records his failure in Moscow. The Spirit of the Years denounces 'His halting hand, and his unlighted eye'.<sup>4</sup> He has plunged many into misery:

The pale pathetic peoples still plod on  
Through hoodwinkings to light.<sup>5</sup>

After the battle of Waterloo, Hardy makes an attempt to study Napoleon's inner mind. His thoughts and emotions generated as a result of helplessness in face of the inevitable are revealed. Tragic inevitability is given poetic expression: an idea frequently used in the portrayal of tragic figures. Napoleon falls into 'a drowsy stupefaction' and 'nods a momentary sleep' in the midst of battle. He is startled:

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 295.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 329, cf. Marlowe's Tamburlaine, whose soul can 'comprehend The wondrous architecture of the world' (Christopher Marlowe, ed. H. Ellis, 1893, p. 34).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 330.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 414.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 504.

A horrible dream has gripped me---horrible!  
 I saw before me Lannes--just as he looked  
 That day at Aspern: mutilated, bleeding!  
 "What---blood again?" he said to me. "Still blood?"<sup>1</sup>

He is ashamed to answer Lannes, a soldier who has died fighting.

Napoleon once attained greatness, now is helpless:

Life's curse begins, I see,  
 With helplessness!.....<sup>2</sup>

As if to rub the wound deeper, the Spirits indict him and despise him. There is a direct encounter between him and the Phantasmal Intelligences. When he falls 'into a fitful sleep', the Spirit of the Years says:

Thus, to this last,  
 The Will in thee has moved thee, Bonaparte,  
 As we say now.

Napoleon drowsily replies:

I have ever known  
 That such a Will I passively obeyed!<sup>3</sup>

Thus he justifies his action; he feels that the 'Genius who out-shapes my destinies did all the rest!'<sup>4</sup>

It has been argued<sup>5</sup> that the great tragic forces are not

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 501.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 504.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 519.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 363.

<sup>5</sup> (1) J.E.Harrison, 'Hardy's Tragic Synthesis', The Durham University Journal, December 1950, xii, 1. p. 21:

"The mythology of cause and origin expounded in The Dynasts is, to my mind, ..... incompatible with tragedy. The proposals of man in face of so omnipotent and so irresponsible a disposer, become pathetic and slightly ridiculous."

(ii) Israel Zangwill, 'Poetic Drama And the War', The Poetry Review, 11 (1916), p. 33: 'In the Mass Drama--another modern potentiality exploited by Hauptmann in The Weavers and less purely by Hardy in The Dynasts, that gigantic canvas more populated than Tintoretto's Paradise -- no one individual summarises the suffering. Hauptmann's hero is the crowd, and so is Hardy's, despite that Napoleon occupies the foreground. Yet it is always through the individual soul that the great tragic forces are seen passing, refracted according to the nature of each.'

generated through an individual soul, despite the fact that Napoleon is the main actor in the drama. But Hardy makes an effort to give poetic expression to tragic intensity in such scenes as Napoleon's dealings with Josephine and his frequent references to the inevitable. The hero figure struggles against the inevitable and his struggle is worthy of a tragic character. When the central character is vanquished, his behaviour is not unworthy of a tragic character facing his doom strictly according to the accepted Aristotelian definition:

O hideous hour,  
Why am I stung by spectral questionings?  
Did not my clouded soul incline to match  
Those of the corpses yonder, thou should'st rue  
Thy saying, Fiend, whoever thou may'st be!.....<sup>1</sup>

The Dynasts is full of a variety of human scenes planned with a view to projecting poignant situations. The characters in these scenes are very much of flesh and blood; they often possess the noble attributes of the human heart. The dying Nelson's request to Hardy shows the heart of a man feeling for his near and dear ones:

But ah, my heart  
Knows not your calm philosophy! -- There's one --  
Come nearer to me, Hardy.-- One of all,  
As you well guess, pervades my memory now;  
She, and my daughter -- I speak freely to you.<sup>2</sup>

The scene in which the Prince of Wales reports on the 'lengthy strife' and Sheridan's asides in the Assembly rooms are dramatic. Historical facts are narrated in the London club. Above all the King of Rome's reluctance to leave Paris is intensely human; by his continuous murmur of his intention not to leave the palace he evokes sympathy.

<sup>1</sup> The Dynasts, p. 519.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., ~~pp. 97-98~~ p. 97.

I like being here best,  
And I don't want to go I know not where!<sup>1</sup>

These scenes show that the characters involved are like most human beings facing real issues and are not subject to Hardy's determinism.

'If they stood alone they would have the appearance of a pre-Elizabethan chronicle play'.<sup>2</sup>

Hardy, in spite of his gigantic canvas, aims at a realistic and believable development of character and situation. His epic drama is concerned with the serious problems of life. The message of The Dynasts, if we seek for it, lies organised in the work itself.

#### S T Y L E.

The style of The Dynasts is derived from many sources:

Influence-spotters don't have a very happy time with him. We know he read Virgil young, admired Crabbe, Shelley, Keats, Scott and, of his contemporaries, Barnes, Swinburne, Meredith and Browning. But it is extremely difficult to detect any stylistic influence these writers had upon him.<sup>3</sup>

These observations on Hardy's lyrical poetry hold good in respect of The Dynasts.

The use of historical material in poetic drama makes certain demands on the dramatist. The very treatment of men and events on such a vast canvas is bound to produce uneven artistic results. A year before he undertook the writing of The Dynasts Hardy talked of a dichotomy between emotion and expression:

Its (poetry's) component fractions may be either, say:  
Emotion three-quarters, plus Expression one-quarter,  
Or Emotion one-quarter, plus Expression three-quarters.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 403.

<sup>2</sup> Ifor Evans, op. cit., p. 189.

<sup>3</sup> C. Day Lewis, The Lyrical Poetry of Thomas Hardy, 1951, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> F. E. Hardy, op. cit., p. 92.



These different formulae suit him.

His blank verse is derived from the Elizabethans. Marlowesque triple endings are liberally scattered through the play:

Distant voice in the wind:

The hostile hatchings of Napoleon's brain  
Against our Empire, long have harassed us,  
And mangled all our mild amenities.<sup>1</sup>

Voice of Napoleon:

"Soldiers, your sections I myself shall lead;  
But ease your minds who would expostulate  
Against my undue rashness.<sup>2</sup> .....

The verse plods when he versifies the debate in 'The Old House of Commons':

Not one on this side but appreciates  
Those mental gems and airy pleasantries  
Flashed by the honourable gentleman,  
Who shines in them by birthright.<sup>3</sup>

Sometimes prosaic instructions are put into verse:

"My telegraphs will have made known to you  
My object and desire to be but this,  
That you forbid Villeneuve to lose an hour  
In getting fit and putting forth to sea, ...<sup>4</sup>

The most effective scene in The Dynasts is that depicting the effects of war preparations on the creatures of nature. The whole animal kingdom is shaken. Significantly enough the Chorus of the Years sings it:

The eyelids of eve fall together at last,  
And the forms so foreign to field and tree  
Lie down as though native, and slumber fast!<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Dynasts, 1926, p. 328.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 19

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 483.

It is all aerial music:

Yea, the coneys are scared by the thud of hoofs,  
And their white scuts flash at their vanishing heels,  
And swallows abandon the hamlet-roofs.<sup>1</sup>

These words make a deep impression on the reader: the lines are evocative.

Trodden and bruised to a miry tomb  
Are ears that have greened but will never be gold,  
And flowers in the bud that will never bloom.<sup>2</sup>

He alternates prose and verse, an Elizabethan device to distinguish between the characters. Sometimes at the end of a prose scene, a blank verse speech is used to explore an intense situation. The passage where the officer reports in verse to Maria Louisa the advance of the French to the town of Eversberg produces a great dramatic effect, coming as it does at the end of a homely conversation between Maria Louisa and her Lady-in-waiting.<sup>3</sup> His speech contains references to 'heaps of dead', 'wounded being consumed' and 'frizzled flesh' - all evocative images with strong associations to emphasise the horror of war. Napoleon's inhuman behaviour in this refusal to drink coffee served by the Empress Josephine on the eve of divorcing her, a scene of deep emotion, is conveyed in simple verse.

Napoleon's last soliloquy is a triumph of characterisation; in great poetry he utters his epitaph:

Great men are meteors that consume themselves  
To light the earth. This is my burnt out hour.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 483.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 483.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 232

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 520.

The speeches of the Phantasmal Intelligences are all in verse, unlike those of the human characters, which are sometimes in prose.

Hardy has affinities with many poets. He may be regarded as continuing the work of the Victorian dramatists. Nevertheless he has evolved a style of his own, 'literary, colloquial, prosaic, poetical, pedantic and rustic'.<sup>1</sup>

Davidson and Hardy disturb our calm of mind; they are deeply engaged in the problems of their time, and meditate upon them. While their meditations are profoundly disquieting, the forms embodying them are unrewarding: that is to say, the dramatic forms are not suited for production and do not really solve the problem of a contemporary verse drama.

Davidson's major plays, although in the fashion of Ibsen portraying ideas, remain far from the living stage because of defects in the form. A single character assumes importance out of all proportion; situations are created deliberately with a view to delivering a message; and the blank verse medium is somewhat lacking in freedom and variety of movement.

William Archer, in an article on "The Stage and Literature"<sup>2</sup> summing up Ibsen's ability to combine theatrical technique with literary beauty, deals at length with the ideal combination of these qualities in drama. He juxtaposes two passages from Henry Arthur Jones and A.W. Pinero. The passage from Jones is taken from his preface to Saints and Sinners:

I am concerned to establish the general rule that the intellectual and art values of any drama, its permanent influence and renown, are in exact proportion to its

<sup>1</sup> E.A. Horsman, 'The Language of The Dynasts', Durham University Journal, December 1948, XLI, i, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Fortnightly Review, 1892, p. 120.

literary qualities. Shakespeare and Sheridan are popular playwrights today strictly on account of the enduring literary qualities of their work. They have admirable stagecraft as well, but this alone would not have rescued them from oblivion.

He quotes Pinero in an interview with the Pictorial World, October 31st, 1891:

It may shock you to hear it, but I am convinced that Sheridan and Shakespeare live on the stage, not by reason of literature, in the accepted sense of polished prose-writing or poetry, but on account of their character-development and dramatic condition.

He comments on these differing judgements and arrives at a conclusion:

My argument is not that the areas of the literary drama and of the successful stage drama are, or ought to be, co-extensive, but merely that they neither are nor ought to be mutually exclusive.<sup>1</sup>

Thus his plea for a combination of literary and theatrical qualities in order that a play may be successful both on the stage and in the study (made a generation earlier than The Dynasts and Davidson's later plays) is a commentary on the dramas of this period. It is not merely that we never see a production of the closet-dramas: There are many plays written for the theatre which we may never have an opportunity of seeing actually on the stage. Writers such as Davidson and Hardy, in trying to escape from the limitations of theatrical presentation, lose those qualities of directness of treatment and of language and tautness of construction which, to a very large extent, derive from the dramatist's facing up to those limitations.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### S P E C T A C U L A R P L A Y S .

#### Flecker and Binyon

In the first decade of the twentieth century, a new activity on the part of poetic dramatists became manifest. They made an effort to keep poetic drama alive. They were keenly aware of its narrowness of appeal and tried to cultivate simple fluency and melody. But later spectacle was introduced, spectacle combined with music. In many instances, this spectacle was exotic.

In this chapter, we are concerned with three spectacular plays - Flecker's Hassan and Don Juan and Binyon's Ayuli. The spectacular element is abundant in the elaborate scenery of Hassan, it is clear in the frequent changes of scenes of Don Juan and evident in the gorgeous eastern setting of Ayuli.

The East has a strong appeal to the English creative mind. The gorgeous East, the splendour of the Eastern tales and their mythical fairy world have long enriched English writing. There has been a steady interest in the tales of the East since the adaptation of the Arabian Nights tales in English in 1704 by Antoine Galland. Richard F. Burton was charmed by these delightful stories, which seemed to him "the most fantastic flights of fancy, the wildest improbabilities, the most impossible impossibilities"<sup>1</sup>; and he undertook a free translation and produced ten volumes. Abridgements and selections of these ever-bewitching tales followed in abundance.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard F. Burton, Introduction to The Arabian Nights' Entertainments, Banares, India, 1885.

This interest in the Eastern tale was rekindled with greater vigour in the early part of this century. Testimony to this interest is the production of Chu Chin Chow, a musical extravaganza, at His Majesty's Theatre in 1916. Its success is legendary:

No play in the history of His Majesty's Theatre had ever played to such figures, an average of £ 2,500 a week for twenty weeks.....Chu Chin Chow was produced on 31st August 1916, and ran until the 22nd July 1921, nearly five years -- longer than the Great War -- 2,235 performances.<sup>1</sup>

During the war period, the musical tale came, perhaps, as a boon to help audiences to drown their miseries. It became an institution; its popularity lay more in its music and spectacular elements than in the text:

It is, in fact, everything by turns and nothing long -- a kaleidoscopic series of scenes, now romantic, now realistic, now Futurist or Vorticist, but always beautiful, with action passing from the sentimental to the droll and from the droll to the grim, and yet with the unity of a familiar tale, the old Arabian Nights' tale of the Forty Thieves. It is continuously musical..... always rhythmical and rather sugary, but of the very sort to please the taste of the l'homme sensuel moyen..... It seems to aim at reproducing even the very smell of the east.<sup>2</sup>

Its music is still popular.<sup>3</sup> The characters were created with a view to providing spectacular effects, and the costumes were designed to enrich this effect. Chu Chin Chow with its spectacular splendour created a favourable climate for Hassan.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Oscar Asche, His Life by Himself, 1929, p. 162.

<sup>2</sup> The Times, September 2, 1916.

<sup>3</sup> A selection from Chu Chin Chow was played by the Reginald King Orchestra over the B.B.C. on Sunday, the 4th August, 1957.

<sup>4</sup> There are many spectacular plays in the period under review which are not worth referring to since their literary value is so slight. They are of interest only as social documents of the theatre.

With James Elroy Flecker (1884-1915) we are, however, on different ground. His Hassan occupies a special place among the twentieth-century spectacular verse plays. Almost for the first time we have a spectacle with a text which is worth examining.

It is rather difficult to trace Flecker's mental make-up from the inadequate biographical material we have about him. Geraldine Hodgson's biography,<sup>1</sup> based on the letters and material provided by Flecker's mother, does not give an adequate picture of his life. He spent the best part of his productive life abroad, and letters to his various friends are a valuable source of information on his dramatic career, if on the strength of two plays one can use that term.

Flecker had a varied career. He entered the consular service, but he was a man of shifting moods and changeable emotions and he discovered too late that he would have preferred teaching. His interests were diverse: education, poetry, drama and criticism attracted him. He summed up his early life in the preface to The Grecians, A Dialogue on Education (1910):<sup>2</sup>

In a technical matter such as education only the experienced seem to me to have a right to speak. For this reason only, I think it worth while mentioning that I was educated in one public school, and have lived most part of my life in another; that I passed four years at Oxford and two at Cambridge, and that it has been my duty as a civil servant to learn some eight or nine modern languages. Literature I have practised and art I have studied....

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<sup>1</sup> The Life of James Elroy Flecker, Oxford, 1925.

More information can be gathered from:

- (1) The letters of J.E.Flecker, ed. Helle Flecker, 1926.
- (2) Some Letters from Abroad of James Elroy Flecker with a Few Reminiscences by Helle Flecker, 1930.

<sup>2</sup> Now included in Collected Prose, 1922.

Flecker's formative years at Oxford were not especially brilliant. Frank Savery, his chief correspondent, who 'taught, encouraged' Flecker, thought that 'when he went up to Oxford, he was extraordinarily under-developed even for an English public school boy'.<sup>1</sup> His life-long friend, T.M.A.Cooper, gives his impression of Flecker at Oxford:

In these Oxford years..... Roy was.....in a good deal of distress. There was the future to think of. He would have liked to make a splash and win fame, I think, but there was anyway the problem of making a living to be solved. Perhaps he could have done something in journalism. He was not indolent, but he felt no call to any of the recognised pursuits in which rewards of industry are given. It is thus I must explain his Oxford career. He had no absorbing interest in questions of scholarship, ancient history, philosophical or otherwise, he could not devote sympathetic study to these things.<sup>2</sup>

At any rate Oxford must have left its academic impress on him. His critical work shows that he was judicious and scholarly. He was deeply interested in the literature of the 'nineties. He soaked himself in the aesthetic doctrines of Walter Pater and John Davidson. He regarded Davidson as one of the three most interesting moderns -- Ibsen and Nietzsche being the other two. He liked Davidson's advocacy of the great virtues of strength and self-realisation as antidotes to idealism,<sup>3</sup> by which he meant conventional moralising.

As an undergraduate he was very keen on Voltaire and on Grant Allen's Evolution of the Idea of God. He was strongly attracted to the Parnassians, as he found the Parnassian theory the only doctrine capable of giving sustenance to English poetry. In the preface to The Golden Journey to Samarkand (1913) he advocates this doctrine:

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by J.C.Squire, introduction to Some Letters from Abroad, 1930, vi.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Geraldine Hodgson, The Life of James Elroy Flecker, 1925, p. 101.

<sup>3</sup> Collected Prose, p. 189.



To have preached a Parnassian doctrine in the age of Pope would have been superfluous: to have attempted to restrain therewith the impetuous torrent of Elizabethan or Victorian production would have been impossible. But at the present moment there can be no doubt that English poetry stands in need of some such saving doctrine to redeem it from the formlessness and the didactic tendencies which are now in fashion.<sup>1</sup>

J.C.Squire suggests that Flecker's reference to 'formlessness' may be intended for the poetry of major poets such as Yeats and Bridges. This suggestion may be erroneous. The poetry of Bridges and Yeats is not formless. They are anxious to introduce new forms and their experiments cannot be mistaken for formlessness.

The suggestion<sup>2</sup> that he found this theory a way of escape from the 'gross and irrelevant egoism' of Victor Hugo implies that it came as a safety-valve for his restless soul; he had a genuine admiration for the Parnassians. In a letter to Frank Savery he says:

You see how badly I want you. First of all for yourself. Secondly to talk about all good things of the world..... most especially Henri de Regnier, Samain, and Parel Fort, and the great French poets of the last forty years, for whom.....I am conceiving an astonishing admiration.<sup>3</sup>

This interest in the Parnassians helped to recreate the gorgeous East in poetry; it helped Flecker to tell:

Tales, marvellous tales  
Of ships and stars and isles where good men rest,  
Where never more the rose of sunset pales,  
And the winds and shadows fall towards the West.

These early poems written under the influence of the Parnassians are characterised by imagery of strong visual association; they are difficult and highly coloured:

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<sup>1</sup> Introduction to The Collected Poems of James Elroy Flecker, 1916, xxii.

<sup>2</sup> P.Thouless, Modern Poetic Drama, Oxford, 1934, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> June 21, 1913, The Letters of James Elroy Flecker, 1926, p. 38.

The sun who flashes through the head  
 And paints the shadows green and red --  
 The sun shall eat thy fleshless dead,  
 O caravan, O caravan!<sup>1</sup>

Flecker thought very highly of the poems he claimed had been written under the Parnassian influence. The Golden Journey to Samarkand, which supplies the refrain of the last Act of Hassan, is one of these.<sup>2</sup> The Parnassian influence is underlined in Hassan's love of beauty, and also in the story of his rise and fall, linked with the tragic sub-plot dealing with Rafi and Pervaneh. Flecker invented a kind of Arabian Nights' plot, where the series of tragic events do not mature into tragedy in the full sense.

Although the East to Flecker was a sort of spiritual home, he had two contradictory opinions about it.

The East is a bit of a refuge from those interminable old Greeks and judging from my latest efforts I shall go down to fame (if I go) as a sort of Near East Kipling. Modern Greece and modern Greek folk are very good things too -- a very strange alliance between East and West.<sup>3</sup>

This was on January 10, 1912.

I loathe the East and the Easterns and spent all my time there dreaming of Oxford.<sup>4</sup>

This was in July, 1913.

The young men leap, and toss their golden hair,  
 Run round the land or sail across the seas;  
 But one was stricken with a sore disease --  
 The lean and swarthy poet of despair.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Collected Poems of James Elroy Flecker, 1916, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Flecker was strongly influenced by the poetry of Theophile Gautier (1811-72), one of the Young Romantics who started the Parnassian school. He advocated and practised the carefully chiseled poem, detachment from subjective emotions as well as from contemporary events, and the cultivation of 'colour'. Vide The Letters of James Elroy Flecker, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> & <sup>4</sup> Savery, pp. 32-33.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted from Humbert Wolfe, Portraits by Inference, 1934, 1934, p. 20

These lines of Flecker on himself written at a time when he felt that Oxford was unsympathetic to him indicate that he was in a dejected mood. Out of this mood of despair, born of his unstable temperament, he has written of himself and the deadly disease he was suffering from, like Keats. Although he died young, his verse is of considerable volume. The Golden Journey to Samarkand (1913) contains some of his best work.<sup>1</sup>

His prose, which has all the brilliance of his verse, includes: 'Critical Studies' on John Davidson and on Housman's Poetry; 'The Grecian', a dialogue on the educational system; and 'Tales and Sketches', reflections on men and institutions he had come into contact with. All these are found in the Collected Prose (1922). The King Alsander, his only novel, written during his youth, came out in 1914 after he had cheerfully given up hope of ever getting it published.<sup>2</sup>

But Flecker is chiefly remembered because of his play, Hassan (1914). Hassan and Don Juan were published posthumously. About 1910, he turned his attention towards the theatre. Some of the poems published in The Golden Journey to Samarkand hint at ideas and sympathies which appear in Hassan. As he says: 'The Golden Journey to Samarkand; ~~the~~ Epilogue is the last scene of Hassan - rather I wrote Hassan to lead up to the Epilogue'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'His last volume is by far his best, and it was obvious that he was, rather slowly, gaining a command of technique which might have brought him to the achievement of a kind of poetry unusual in English, and equal perhaps to the best of his French models'. Vide Harold Monro, 'James Elroy Flecker', The Egoist, March, 1915, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Savery, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

Hassan

The London audience, who a couple of years before was still enjoying the scenic splendour of Chu Chin Chow, welcomed the production of Hassan at His Majesty's with great enthusiasm in 1923. The Stage<sup>1</sup> devoted nearly three columns to discussing the first production, and The Times<sup>2</sup> music critic wrote at length on 'The music of Hassan', praising it for the atmosphere of the East.

It had taken Basil Dean ten years to get it presented on the English stage. In a producer's note to the programme, he explained the difficulties he had had to encounter in its stage presentation. He had to recreate the spirit in which Flecker had conceived it:

Hassan.....is supremely stageable and written with a certain consistency and polish which Tristan Bernard or one of those clever Frenchmen might not be ashamed of. An oriental play must be a spectacle, of course.<sup>3</sup>

As the whole play, as Flecker wrote it, could not be put on the stage, Basil Dean had to adapt it without destroying the play's character and quality. The audience at His Majesty's had been accustomed to see spectacular productions in some of Phillips's plays. But the atmosphere of Hassan was something which they had not so far experienced.

It is not simply the lively extravaganza some have supposed: it is no Kismet, still less a Chu Chin Chow.<sup>4</sup>

But, as Flecker himself says,

It's utterly oriental externally, but I hope the flash of the little European blood I possess gleams through its seraglio atmosphere from time to time.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Stage, September 27, 1923.

<sup>2</sup> The Times, September 29, 1923.

<sup>3</sup> Savery, p. 51.

<sup>4</sup> G. Wilson Knight, 'The Road to Samarkand', The Wind and Rain, Winter, 1944, p. 93.

<sup>5</sup> Savery, p. 42.

The Baghdad setting and the richness of colour associated with the characters and the orotund phrases which claim sanction in mere music had to be realised. The producer's job was not easy in preparing the 'poetic prose play'<sup>1</sup> for the stage. As in the German production, he had to cut the original scene showing Hassan and Ishak trying to obtain admission to the cell of the imprisoned Rafi at the opening of Act Four. Another important alteration was made: both the Calif and Ishak were shown as present at the interview in which the ecstatic urgings of Pervaneh overcome the King of the Beggars' natural desire for life and lead both him and her to rise superior to their physical fear and choose a day of love in preference to a life of separation. The Ghost scene was considerably tampered with. As far as the dead author was concerned, the Ghost scene was very important:

The part of the play that thrills me most is the ghosts.....I love my ghosts.<sup>2</sup>

Even those who have not had the chance of seeing Hassan on the stage are impressed with this scene. The ghosts of Rafi and Pervaneh commune with the ghost of the Artist of the Fountain and discuss the joys of life, and at last become "Cold.....cold..... cold". Coming after the horrors of the Procession of Protracted Death, this scene makes us accept the view that the choice of the lovers was wrong.

But the production had other things to compensate for this:

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<sup>1</sup> The Stage, September 27, 1923.

<sup>2</sup> Savery, p. 50.

The mournful cortege, the entrance into Hassan's pavilion, wherein his beautiful carpets were 'defiled' by the unspeakable Masrur, the red light gleaming over the forms of the torturer and his victims, and the final reeling forth of the dazed and fainting Hassan, had their effect intensified by the dirge-like March and by the greenish light casting pale shadows upon the faces and figures of all participating therein.<sup>1</sup>

The play was received with great enthusiasm, Henry Ainley as Hassan reciting by way of prologue some verses from The Golden Journey to Samarkand from behind an illuminated tableau, and the music by Delius, although not written as a piece d'occasion for this production,<sup>2</sup> helped to realise the gorgeous atmosphere.<sup>3</sup>

If one reads the review in The Stage, one notices that the critic has given most of his attention to the production. He has very little comment on the content of the play:

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<sup>1</sup> The Stage, September 27, 1923.

<sup>2</sup> The Times, September 29, 1923.

<sup>3</sup> Basil Dean tells us that he produced Hassan recently for the National Theatre organisation of South Africa without much scenic elaboration. It was quite simple, on a partly curtained stage. He also suggests that it can be kept alive without incurring much expenditure, in the fashion of the old Persian and Indo-Persian series produced in the Festival of Britain, 1951 (cf. Basil Dean's introduction to Hassan, an Acting Edition, 1951, xxi-xxii). Nevertheless, Dean's production of the play in this simple style at the Cambridge Theatre, London, in 1951, was a failure.

Indeed, the production is 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. Again there was a stirring sound-dance accompanying the grandiloquent soldiers' chorus that led up to the ceremonial entrance preceding the Divan scene, in which the Caliph, as devilishly cruel as Mr. Archer's Raja, condemns Rafi and Parvaneh to unaccountable agonies.....unless they yield to his will.<sup>1</sup>

Even The Times's reviewer concentrated on the production. In spite of this interest in the spectacular, the play has some claim to attention on the score of its form. On this subject we are confronted by two critical judgements, diametrically opposed to each other:

The ridiculous buffoonery of Hassan, the unmitigated savagery of Haroun, the idealistic rapture of the poet Ishak, and the love-passion of the two forlorn figures whose tortured screams are heard in the last act make the poem a mere patchwork of heterogeneous elements without harmony and without form.<sup>2</sup>

So says Allardyce Nicoll. But there is a different opinion:

Flecker's Hassan appears at first a strange and colourful bird of the tropics among the thrushes and blackbirds of twentieth-century English drama. Its rich colours have been compared to the feathers of a parrot..... The world of Hassan is gorgeous. Indeed, the whole play is remarkable for its richness.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Stage, September 27, 1923.

<sup>2</sup> British Drama, (4th ed.), 1955, p. 402.

<sup>3</sup> G.W.Knight, Christ and Nietzsche, 1949, p. 93.

A close examination of the play and Flecker's letters which contain his views on the play shows that its value lies between these two judgements.

Its main action concerns the rise and fall of Hassan, in love with Yasmin, an ignoble woman who finally gives herself to a 'most disgusting negro'. This plot is indirectly linked to the tragic love story of Rafi and Pervaneh, which forms a sub-plot. They are lovers ultimately condemned to death by the malicious Caliph. The play, which has a plot reminiscent of the world of the Arabian Nights, ends with an epilogue in:

A moonlight scene, a sudden burst into poetry.<sup>1</sup>

What, however, are we to make of the tragic sub-plot? It is very important, and it was Flecker's intention to use it to generate tragic feeling. He said:

If it does not give the public shivers down the back when it is acted.....I'll never write again.<sup>2</sup>

This phrase 'shivers down the back' appropriately conveys the spirit of the play. It is not meant to be a serious tragedy. The tragic scenes are subordinate to the main mood of the play, which is a frank appeal to the English audience's fascination for the fake picturesqueness of the Orient. The tragedy, therefore, is only half serious.

After the Procession of Protracted Death and the Ghost scene, Hassan returns a wiser man into the uncorrupted desert, away from the refinements of the world of civilised savagery. He regrets its glitter, leaves the 'garden of art' and walks 'through the silence', along the Golden Road to Samarkand. We are left in a mood of

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> Savery, p. 44.



pessimism, pondering the transitoriness of the riches that litter the oriental world. It is a play in which the comic attitude is brought up against a series of tragic events and thus finally collapses. In any case the style, with its oriental metaphors used to bring out the richness and sumptuousness of Baghdad, gets in the way of the expression of true tragic significance.

Although two stories are not really welded together, the play does not leave the impression of formlessness. The Ghost scene lowers the emotional tension, and prepares the audience for Hassan's final renunciation of the corrupt city. Flecker believed in the importance of the Ghost scene as providing a bridge for the emotions of the audience from the horrors of the hideous Procession of ~~the~~ Protracted Death to the pure air of the moonlight scene.<sup>1</sup> Flecker's intentions were assisted by his producer, who assures us that the play as it is on the stage does not leave the impression of a 'broken back'.<sup>2</sup>

Hassan, the central figure in the play, is taken from 'a farcical play in the Turkish language relating to the adventures of one Hassan, a simple and credulous man, whose friends amused themselves by playing practical jokes upon him with the aid of a Hebrew magician'. The magician struck Flecker's fancy, and he sketched a short farce in which Zachariah the Jew and his philtres were the centre of interest.<sup>3</sup> One of the characters in Mardrus's French translation of the Arabian Nights suggested Yasmin to him.

Hassan and Yasmin come before us in the exposition of the play. Hassan, 'a man of taste' who has 'chest narrow and belly thundrous',

<sup>1</sup> Savery, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> Dean, xxiii.

<sup>3</sup> J.C.Squire in his introduction to Hassan, 1923, p. viii.

is of a contemplative strain. He has something of the poet in him; he speaks the language of a lover when he describes Yasmin to Selim:

I could see her eyes beneath her veil, and they were like the twin fountains in the Caliph's garden; and her lips beneath her veil were like roses hidden in moss, and her waist was flexible as a palm tree swaying in the wind, and her hips were large and heavy and round, like water melons in the season of water melons.<sup>1</sup>

The rose-image recurs a number of times in the play. Hassan the sensualist feels that a perfumed rose will win her heart.

I will perfume my roses (may they melt sweetly in her lips) with the perfume of roses, so that she shall say 'a rose'! and smell before she tastes.<sup>2</sup>

When Hassan is taken away from the world of trade into the glittering world of the Caliph, Yasmin, who had scorned him, drops a rose at his feet, the flower that signifies Yasmin's respect for Hassan's present position. But Hassan, who has grown inwardly by this time, reflects on life:

Last night I baked sugar, and she flung me water:  
this morning I bake gold and she flings me a rose.  
Empty, empty, I tell you, Friend, all the blue sky.<sup>3</sup>

His desire for Yasmin brings him up sharply against his own limitations. In his soliloquy in the kitchen preparing sweets for her, he feels his humble birth intensely:

O, cruel destiny, thou hast made me a common man with a common trade. My friends are fellows from the market, and all my worthless family is dead. Had I been rich, ah me! how deep had been my delight in matters of the soul, in poetry and music and pictures, and companions who do not jeer and grin, and above all, in the colours or rich carpets and expensive silks.<sup>4</sup>

Very soon he is deceived by his young friend Selim, who steals the affections of Yasmin from him. He becomes bitter:

<sup>1</sup> Hassan, 1936, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Hassan, 1936, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

If I could but reach your necks with a knife,  
children of Sheitan!<sup>1</sup>

He is scorned by Yasmin, who pours a jug of water over him. His  
lust gives place to vengeance:

I will have you both whipped through the city and impaled  
in the market-place, and your bodies flung to rot on a  
dung-heap.<sup>2</sup>

Hassan is a sensitive soul, not an unimaginative person of the  
trading class from which he comes. His sensitive soul becomes more  
sensitive as the action advances. This appears when he is forced  
to see the scalding terror of the torture scene. He assumes  
a silence  
silence,/that implies deep horror. The world in which Hassan lives  
is corrupt, the glitter is ominous. It is a world where the streets  
are strewn with corpses,<sup>3</sup> people die of poison, and still more of  
hunger.

Hassan's emotions are well dramatised. He is bewildered in  
the house of Rafi:

What has become of me this night! Just now I was in  
Hell, with all the fountains raining fire and blood.<sup>4</sup>

'Fire and blood' anticipate the cruelty in which the lovers are to  
be involved.

In the third act, Hassan is fully developed. He cares for  
poetry, is responsive to beauty, he has become the ideal of the  
heart of the Caliph. His answer to the question of the Caliph: -  
'When did you learn poetry?' -- is significant:

In that great school, the Market of Baghdad. For thee,  
Master of the World, poetry is a princely diversion: but  
for us it was a deliverance from Hell. Allah made poetry  
a cheap thing to buy and a simple thing to understand.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

He comes to detest Yasmin, now a symbol of impurity; he has utter contempt for her. He does not want her to live any longer.

Prepare then to die, for it is not right for the sake of mankind that you should walk any more upon the roads of earth.<sup>1</sup>

But his disgust for her is so deep that he does not want to kill her, when there is a chance to do so.<sup>2</sup>

Hassan and Ishak stand for the good in a world of base values; they are poets deeply troubled by the corruption in the world around them. Hassan's plea for mercy on behalf of the doomed lovers is made in vain. He is banished as unfit to be the friend of the Caliph. He tells the Caliph:

'Look at Hassan', men will say, 'he has had his day of greatness: look at that greasy person: he has been clothed in gold:.....Let us draw moral lessons from him on the mutability of human affairs!'<sup>3</sup>

Hassan assumes the robe of a pilgrim; the robe denotes renunciation of the glitter of the world. He takes the Golden Road to Samarkand, he has developed and discovered himself.

Yasmin stands for the corrupt values in Hassan's world. She is the type of woman who worships fame, wealth and youth. She leaves Selim because he proves a coward and a fool; she seeks Hassan when he is rich. Ultimately she falls a prey to a disgusting negro. Her change of mind and lustful nature support the central theme of sensual passion. In the torture scene she glories in the bloodshed:

Yasmin: How you smell of blood!

Masrur: And you of roses.....

Yasmin: I laughed to see them writhe--I laughed, I laughed, as I watched behind the curtain.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> 'Hassan originally was going to try and whip Yasmin, not to kill her. But I decided that would be too sadistic, and not serious enough, so I altered it'. Savery, p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> Hassan, p. 161.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

This is a very powerful scene,<sup>1</sup> where the woman's blood-lust gives the dramatist an opportunity to exploit cruelty to theatrical effect.

The overlord of this corrupt world is the Caliph, a typical figure of the Arabian Nights. He loves luxury and simplicity, he loves 'single-heartedness in men as I love simplicity in my palace'.<sup>2</sup> He delights in the agony of men, and tortures lovers. He is grateful for the kind act of Hassan and provides him with shelter; but he plays the artist with the lives of men. Ishak's description of the Caliph is colourful:

Have you not seen the designer of carpets, O Hassan of Baghdad, put here the blue and here the gold, here the orange and here the green? So I have seen the Caliph take the life of some helpless man - who was contented in his little house and garden, enjoying the blue of happy days -- and colour his life with the purple of power, and streak it with the crimson of lust: then whelm it all in the gloom-greys of abasement, touched with the glaring reds of pain, and edge the whole with the black border of annihilation.<sup>3</sup>

The theme of the sub-plot is repulsive and even painful. Squire draws attention to the judgement of the critics who find the sub-plot unbearable on the stage.<sup>4</sup> But the critics of The Stage and The Times do not appear to have felt this. One who has not had the advantage of seeing a stage production feels that the condemnation of the critics quoted by Squire is excessive.

The note of cruelty is introduced with the entry of Rafi and Pervaneh into the otherwise joyous atmosphere of comedy. Pervaneh does not show fear:

<sup>1</sup> Flecker to Savery, Savery, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> Hassan, p. 111.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 110-111. G.Wilson Knight compares the Caliph to Bosola in Webster (cf. The Wind and Rain, Winter 1944, p. 96) Bosola is not an artist playing with the lives of men; he is merely a creature of circumstance who accepts the dictates of circumstance. Bosola feels remorse when the deed is done. But the Caliph does not show remorse when the lovers are condemned.

<sup>4</sup> Squire, vi.

'I will die, but I will not be defiled: rescue me alive or dead, soon or late, and avenge me on this Caliph, may the ravens eat his entrails!'<sup>1</sup>

The theme of horror and cruelty reaches its climax in the Procession of Protracted Death. In the prison scene the lovers' language conjures up images of blood and horror: Rafi speaks of drowning Baghdad in blood to kiss Pervaneh's lips again. Pervaneh, under the stress of circumstances, acquires strength and speaks like a philosopher:

We have heard the trumpets of Reality that drown the vain din of the thing that seems. We have walked with the Friend of Friends in the Garden of the Stars, and He is pitiable to poor lovers who are pierced by the arrows of this ghostly world.<sup>2</sup>

But we feel that this speech of Pervaneh is artificial and unreal. Even her creator felt so.<sup>3</sup>

In this scene, the lovers show different attitudes. Rafi longs to live; he is full of love for the green earth, while Pervaneh is prepared to die. Their whispers to each other make a heartrending scene. They are unable to understand the final mystery of life.

The scene of the Procession of Protracted Death with all the instruments of torture, the lovers half-naked pulling a cart that bears their coffin, transports the audience from an intensely romantic to a sadistic atmosphere. Flecker's depiction of theatrical cruelty is lavish enough to produce the intended effect - an exotic 'Oriental play with a spectacle'.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hassan, p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.124.

<sup>3</sup> Savery, p. 50: Pervaneh is philosophising - I tried to make it ecstatic but it's as preachy as Bernard Shaw.

<sup>4</sup> Savery, p. 51.

A strange kind of atmosphere full of surprises couched in a poetic medium links the play with Oscar Wilde's Salome.<sup>1</sup> Salome, translated from the French by Lord Alfred Douglas, has the same kind of melting language creating an atmosphere of combined Oriental romance and cruelty. But in Flecker the alternation of colloquial and jewelled language keeps the temperature at the comic level, whereas in Wilde the sustained eloquence is meant to be tragic. Flecker takes care to use images and phrases to bring out the richness of Baghdad in the days of Haroun. The style is artificial; he is fond of alliteration; Ishak speaks of the Chief of Police thus:

Thou beastly blood-drinking brute and bloated belly,  
take off thy stable-reeking hands<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Herod: Even to half of my kingdom. Thou wilt be passing fair as a queen, Salome, if it please thee to ask for the half of my kingdom. Will she not be fair as a queen? Ah! it is cold here! There is an icy wind, and I hear.....wherefore do I hear in the air this beating of wings? Ah! one might fancy a bird, a huge black bird that hovers over the terrace.....

I am choking. Pour water on my hands. Give me snow to eat. Loosen my mantle. The flowers are like fire. They have bruised my forehead.....

How red these petals are! They are like stains of blood on the cloth..... It were better to say that stains of blood are lovely as rose petals.

(cf. 'Salome', The Works of Oscar Wilde, 1948, p. 55).

<sup>2</sup> Hassan, p. 65.

Selim speaks of 'dervish in his dirt'.<sup>1</sup> Colourful phrases such as 'serene splendour', 'purple power', 'delectable tavern of death' are scattered all over the play. The diction is luscious, and its extravagant words dress up the romantic incidents. The setting of the scene in Baghdad, with the Ghost scene, the Moving Wall and the Street of Felicity, helps the author to distance it from the world around him and realise an atmosphere of strangeness and exoticism.

Flecker's richness of utterance helped to give Hassan its high degree of sumptuousness. The voluptuous description of Eastern splendour can still excite admiration even in cold print.

While Flecker provides his readers synthetic Eastern perfumes in Hassan, he has nothing comparable to offer in Don Juan, which is set in quite familiar surroundings. Nevertheless it is regarded as a spectacular play. It opens in a storm at sea, with the characters illuminated only for a moment by a flash of lightning. The many changes of scene add to the spectacular effect.

This play, written earlier than Hassan, is potentially superior to the later play though technically very inferior to it. It is Flecker's first dramatic experiment, which he very much longed to revise.<sup>2</sup> He set his ideal very high and Don Juan was to be his magnus opus:

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<sup>1</sup> Hassan, p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> In a letter from Montan-Sur-Sierre, to Frank Savery, dated, March 18, 1914, he says:

As I feel a bit alive again, I've begun seriously revising Don Juan. You will find me in the thick of it at Locarno. The last act wants rewriting absolutely. But I am quite surprised at the excellence of some passages--almost disappointed indeed to find that after three years I can't better them at all.

Savery, p. 76. We have Helle Flecker's evidence that he did not realise this ambition to revise it. (Preface to Don Juan, 1925, p. xi.)



Don Juan should rival in aim Faust ..... of course, my conception will be modern. I shall portray Don Juan utterly disappointed in his grande passion seeking refuge from sickly decadent despair first in the world and in the passion for humanity and justice, then questioning religion, then ordinary morality, until he finally becomes an utter sadist, which is the miracle to make him doubt reason itself.<sup>1</sup>

Flecker does not depend on any of the famous stories for his source material.<sup>2</sup>

The theme of Don Juan,<sup>3</sup> with its erotic associations, is dramatised in an unusual manner against the background of modern English life.

<sup>1</sup> Savery, p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> I wrote Don Juan knowing nothing whatever about him!

Never having read so much as Moliere.....(Savery, p. 8).

Other writers in English who have treated the theme are Byron, Bernard Shaw, T. Sturge Moore and Ronald Duncan.

Byron's poem on the theme of Don Juan is based on many sources, chief among them Casti's satiric epic, Il Poema tartarico (C.M. Fress, Lord Byron a Satirist, 1912).

Although Flecker's style and method resemble Bernard Shaw's one does not see any resemblance to Shaw's character of the same name in Man And Superman (1901-3). Shaw read Flecker's Don Juan (Savery P. 18) and wrote to him his impression on the 6th March 1911. His foreword to the popular edition of Man And Superman is dated 22nd March 1911, but there is no reference to Flecker's Don Juan.

T. Sturge Moore's play He Will Not Come: A Drama to be overheard from Behind a Curtain, is on the theme of Don Juan.

Ronald Duncan has written a verse play called Don Juan, 1953.

<sup>3</sup> Don Juan, 1925.

The play's realism lies in its atmosphere and characters. It is set in contemporary Britain: some scenes in Gloucester, others off the coast of Wales, and some others on the Thames Embankment. We hear the 'hoot of the motor horn' and read about 'jolly old Trafalgar Square'. The characters also belong to a more familiar world than that of Hassan. Apart from Don Juan, who has mythical associations, we have Robert Evans, a socialist leader, Lord Framlingham, the Conservative Prime Minister, a Captain, a Chauffeur, and Tisbea, a fisher girl. Except the last, these have a familiar ring about them.

Thus Flecker in his conception of character and atmosphere is aware of the increasing realism of the drama of his time. But his attempt to produce a poetic play with a realistic background does not come off. The result of his effort is just a medley or, as Shaw puts it, it is fantastic.<sup>1</sup> Flecker accused the old writers of tales in verse<sup>2</sup> of 'formlessness'<sup>3</sup> and wrote a play 'not utterly remote from the modern life and turmoil'.<sup>4</sup>

But Flecker himself stands condemned by his own critical judgment. It is difficult to comprehend the theme of Don Juan. There is poetry in it. Current political ideas are bandied about. There is some spectacle, especially in the shipwreck scene and the crowd scene. A statue miraculously comes to life. It is, in short, a hotch-potch. There is no unified theme and the characters show no development in the course of the play. The play shows

<sup>1</sup> Savery, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> & <sup>3</sup> J.C.Squire, Introduction to Collected Poems of James Elroy Flecker, 1916, xxii.

<sup>4</sup> J.E.Flecker, Preface to The Golden Journey to Samarkand, 1913, ix.

Flecker's youthful enthusiasm for Shaw. His very desire to have it read by Shaw suggests how strongly he was attracted by Shavianism, but the play turns out to be only pseudo-Shavian.

We see Don Juan at first shipwrecked and unconscious, comforted by Tisbea, who falls in love with him. Like the traditional Don Juan, he is incapable of love of any kind. When his father, Don Pedro, asks him to give up the great naked gypsy girl, he parts from her. The parting brings tears to the eyes of Tisbea, an unsophisticated girl, whose soul Don Juan has destroyed. In her agony she cries out:

Start off your motor, set your money jingling,  
Ride with the rich and prostitute the poor,  
Live what you call life, die of the rot!  
I'll never look you in the face again.....<sup>1</sup>

From the world of fishermen, he comes into the sophisticated world. His love adventures continue; he seduces Isabel, one of the daughters of Lord Framlingham, the Conservative Prime Minister. Out of his hatred of war he shoots Lord Framlingham dead, and incidentally kills Isabel's ugly sister. The statue of Lord Framlingham comes to life to punish him, and in the act of shooting the statue he kills Isabel. Finally the statue punishes him with death because:

You followed Reason and cared for no one but yourself.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly before his death he meets Tisbea again. He is conscience-stricken and blurts out:

I was a brute to you: I will make it all up again...  
Your soul shall come back to you: your dreams shall  
return: we will praise the God of the highroads yet  
once more.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Don Juan, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 159. This scene was considered a stroke of genius by Bernard Shaw (Savery, p. 22)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

There is another level of interest in the play -- its traffick-  
ing with current ideas of war, socialism and capitalism. But  
nothing definitely emerges from the discussion of these ideas. The  
author seems merely to throw out his views on some of these topics.  
It is difficult to make anything out of Don Juan's arguments with  
Robert Evans, the socialist leader of the crowd of people, who have  
struck work demanding higher wages. Don Juan meets the leader and  
convinces him of the futility of the strike. Shaw's remark that  
the scene between these two is not knowledgeable will be endorsed  
by the reader as well.<sup>1</sup> The introduction of the mother pursuing  
the disobedient child seeking refuge with the mob serves the purpose  
of bringing out the contrast between Robert Evans, who asks the  
mother not to hit the child, and Don Juan, a man of reason, who  
encourages the mother to smack the child for disobedience.

The most important political idea, which is thoroughly Shavian,  
is Don Juan's hatred of war. Lord Framlingham, who has something  
in him of Andrew Undershaft in Major Barbara, believes in violence  
and war, and believes that war is an inevitable consequence of past  
history. He tells Don Juan:

Entreat the forces of history, Juan; ask time why the  
world turns round. Can you arrest events, or tamper  
with the preordained?<sup>2</sup>

Don Juan gets rid of him by shooting him, and then he wonders why  
he has done it:

Damn my ideals. What have I done? I cannot realise  
it, yet I do not regret it. It is as if I too were  
the slave of those historic forces: as if I too were  
but a leaf eddying through time.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated 6, March, 1911, from Shaw to Flecker, vide  
Preface to Don Juan, 1925, ix.

<sup>2</sup> Don Juan, p. 90.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

Flecker's play, like the plays of Davidson, shows that political ideas could hardly be kept out even in the poetical drama. The play is a strange mixture of romantic yearnings and ill-digested Shavianism. His references to reason and sentiment naturally make us think of Shaw. Shaw cared for sentiment, seeing it as an inevitable element of humanity, but did not believe in it. He believed implicitly in reason, but Flecker's Don Juan fails because he follows reason. Flecker is a dilettante of emotions and ideas, with no fixed point. His prose is imitative of Shaw, with an attempt at Wildean wit, his similes are vivid and clear but his metaphors are often stilted:

Don Juan: We of the younger generation have too often to regret our lost spiritual life and that happy couch among moon-lilies off which our forefathers pulled us so abruptly.<sup>1</sup>

Tisbea speaks of evening as a shepherdess.<sup>2</sup>

The leading characters use rhymed verse when it is needed to emphasise the most important arguments.

The play is formless and it is not surprising that it has never been produced on the professional stage.<sup>3</sup>

Hassan and Don Juan are two different kinds of play. In Hassan Flecker came as near as he ever did to his 'single intention of creating beauty' -- the purpose he made clear in the preface to The Golden Road to Samarkand. It is a substantial achievement. ~~It is a substantial achievement.~~ Flecker intended to revise Don Juan, but, as he never did so, it remains an inferior work, distinguished by a few fine passages such as the dialogue between Tisbea and Don Juan in the last Act.

<sup>1</sup> Don Juan, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>3</sup> (i) The Oxford Companion to the Theatre, ed. Hartnoll, 1951, p. 266.

(ii) Shaw said that it was fit for amateur production (Preface to Don Juan, ix). It was acted by the students of King's College, London, in 1930.

Both plays give promise of better things to come, and all one can say of Flecker is that in his dramas he is one of the inheritors of unfulfilled renown.

Laurence Binyon's *Ayuli*:

A play published a year after the staging of *Hassan*, with a similar oriental and spectacular setting but of infinitely less poetic value and dramatic calibre, is *Ayuli*.

Laurence Binyon (1869-1943), of whom more is said in Chapter VII, lived between two worlds, one dead and the other yet to be born. His work shows traces of the disappearing tradition of Phillips, as for instance in *Attila* (1907) and *Arthur* (1931).<sup>1</sup> But he was in addition inspired by the style of the Japanese Noh drama and wrote plays for Masefield's Garden Theatre. He worked with Masefield in the Oxford festivals of spoken poetry, the aim of which was to train actors in speaking poetry:

..... ensure that all the voice could do should be done to draw for poetry notes vibrating from the depths of the reader's being, and working to a choral fullness.<sup>2</sup>

Binyon's interest in the East was many-sided.<sup>3</sup> He introduced

<sup>1</sup> vide p. 78 supra.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Sencourt, 'Laurence Binyon', The Fortnightly Review, CLIII, New Series, p. 338.

<sup>3</sup> The following publications illustrate this: Songs of Love and Death: ed. by Manmohan Ghosh, Professor in the Presidency College, Calcutta, with an introduction by Laurence Binyon, 1926.

(ii) My Pilgrimage to Ajanta and Bagh by Mukul Chandra De, with an introduction by L. Binyon, 1925.

(iii) Chinese Noh and Buddhism - from the Proceedings of the British Academy, 1936.

(iv) The Art of Asia: Reprinted from the Transactions of the Japan Society, London, 1915.

Indian authors to the West and wrote books on Buddhism and Chinese art. A distinct contribution in this sphere is his adaptation of Kalidasa's Sakuntala for performance in English by Sybil Thorndike.

In its setting and its main characters Ayuli recalls Hassan. The King and Ayuli are lovers reminiscent of Rafi and Pervaneh. The lovers in Hassan are condemned to death at the will of the Caliph. Ayuli loves the King, who gives up his kingdom for her sake, and she is murdered by the angry mob. Her spirit, which may be compared to the ghost of Pervaneh, appears and communicates with the heart-broken King. However, the scene between the lovers has little of the poignancy of the lovers' scene in Hassan. Binyon is not an orientalist of such distinction that he can create a poetic medium genuine enough to hold the Eastern myth. Unlike Flecker, he had no intimate contact with the milieu of his plays. Ayuli lacks Hassan's colour, although the poetry at times through its images recalls the work of greater poets.

When we first read the play, what remains most persistently in our minds is Binyon's ardent wish to propagate the idea that beauty should be the ruling principle of life. This is realised through the lovers. The King lives for Ayuli, who is the symbol of beauty.

Binyon introduces Shirarman to ease the dramatic situation. It is through his conversation with the Old Man that we learn that the lovers have met. It is through him that Ayuli has come to the King. Ayuli has bewitched not only the King but the whole world.<sup>1</sup> The atmosphere is full of romantic suggestion: bands of musicians play soft music, the lovers meet in a barge. The King's love is not sensual and his passion for Ayuli is a means of release:

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<sup>1</sup> Ayuli, 1924, p. 2.

King:

Ayuli, life,  
 Earth, sky, the stars, dream, truth, hopes, terror, all  
 Are you, are you: divinely perfumed Mays  
 Since the world was, all in a single flower.  
 Ayuli, you have given me the whole world  
 In the youth that I had lost. Before you came  
 I was a secret from myself. Men called me  
 Circumspect, prudent, sage; and the praise pleased,  
 How foolishly! I read old books, and talked them,  
 A philosophic animal, and thought  
 That I was happy.<sup>1</sup>

But he found happiness only in Ayuli:

When I was raw with twenty shallow years  
 But in the full meridian of my blood  
 You came to change me like a glorious flame  
 Kindling not flax and straw, burnt in a breath,  
 But the staunch iron of a manhood, molten  
 Deep in my soul, Ayuli, in my soul.<sup>2</sup>

He has forgotten his duties as a king, and spends all the state money on her, until his subjects rebel; he debates the claims of love and those of kingship and makes up his mind to renounce the kingdom for the sake of Ayuli:

My path is chosen,  
 And I will have none with me that is against me  
 In his heart's thoughts, none that is not impregnate  
 With my own faith, dyed to the heart in it,  
 And he scorns to alter. If defeat must be,  
 Let it be of my body, not my soul!<sup>3</sup>

Ayuli, like Pervaneh, talks about life. She is given to preaching and is vainglorious:

Oh, I want  
 The glory of life, to see the world enkindled,  
 To have my name a song in happy mouths,  
 To hear my praises swimming in the air - 4

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 19.



The theme of beauty is emphasised in her speeches; her reply to Shirarman, who says that we fear the shining eyes that bring kingdoms to the dust, echoes the beauty theme:

Oh, is it that! I am the vampire then  
 That sucks the Kingdom's blood! An evil thing  
 Nested in its heart, a breathing pestilence,  
 Tainting the reasonable brains of men!  
 Because I go where my own nature calls,  
 Because I have a heart and live in it,  
 Because I am loved with love that counts no cost,  
 And I love with my blood, my thoughts, my fears,  
 All shame; am nothing else, and cannot be,  
 But what I am, - 1

Thus Ayuli stands for beauty that is sufficient in itself; and she preaches about love. Having lived the life of love, she goes to meet the rebellion with the last of her lover's kisses. Like Cleopatra, she adorns herself in all her finery.

Time has his hour  
 And I have mine. Give me the mirror. Tell me:  
 Is any alteration in my cheek  
 Or dimness in my eyes? Or have I dreamed  
 That the Gods made me fair?<sup>2</sup>

She feels that beauty will conquer the rebellious spirits. But she becomes a martyr to the cause of love. Like the lovers in Hassan, who are sacrificed for the pleasure of the Caliph, Ayuli's death can be considered a sacrifice.

Her reappearance in the drama of the King, who lies broken-hearted, recalls the Ghost of Pervaneh in Hassan. But its function in Ayuli is different. The King's vision of her does not have the effect of lowering our emotions; it is too sudden. The vision of Ayuli assures the broken-hearted King of her unflinching faith.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 38-39.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

The play ends abruptly, and the King does not seem to get full satisfaction from the assurance of Ayuli when she appears in his dream.

The principle of beauty is also exemplified by Oran, the Court Poet, in a speech of evocative images:

A hush falls on the heart when Beauty's self appears.  
The soul takes wings of light when Beauty's voice is heard.  
It is like joy of home-coming that stings to sudden tears,  
And youth's lost thoughts recaptured in a secret word.<sup>1</sup>

We are made to feel the stress laid on beauty in the King's love of poetry, painting and music. We are aware of Binyon's effort to exalt beauty in a world of sordid values.

The scene of the play is laid in a kingdom of eastern Asia. The first Act is in the palace garden, with bushes in bloom; the second and third Acts are in the gorgeous hall of the Summer Palace; and the Epilogue, at night in a ruined palace, contains a spectacular ghost scene. Despite the elaborate background, the main idea, of the intellectual yearning for beauty, is simple and obvious.

The play was published in the British Drama League Library, but it has never been performed.<sup>2</sup>

Flecker|in Hassan reached a stage beyond ordinary dramatists; its attraction is irresistible. We may be dissatisfied with the surface-effect of Hassan, but still we derive something from its spectacle and lyric value. Binyon's total work in drama does not give us the same kind of experience. He clings to a romanticised past but his attempt to draw upon it is not satisfactory.

<sup>1</sup> Ayuli, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> T.C.Kemp, The Oxford Companion to the Theatre, ed. . .

In Flecker and Binyon the exotic spectacle is intended to aid the appeal of poetic drama. Both dramatists employ poetic means and their verse embellishes the action. There is a tendency to colour speech just for its sensuous appeal. Allusions thereby become poetic elements superadded to drama.

These writers of spectacular plays in verse at this time were generally craftsmen of mediocre ability. The spectacle they introduce is their biggest attraction. They employ poetic means, their verse is liberally larded over the action. Their poetic drama is called into being for reasons of prestige, and never gets beyond the surface qualities of genuine poetic drama.

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## CHAPTER SIX

### 'REALISTIC' VERSE DRAMA

'.....deeds, and language, such as men do use;  
And persons, such as Comedy would choose  
When she would shew an image of the times,  
And sport with human follies, not with crimes.<sup>1</sup>

With these lines Ben Johnson strikes the keynote of realistic drama.

About 1860, a number of dramatists, with T.W. Robertson as pioneer, became in the popular estimation the heralds of the realistic school in drama. Their intention was to write plays which approximate to contemporary life in theme and style.<sup>2</sup> This "movement", if it can be called a movement, which led to the discarding of the 'apparitions of poetic and romantic drama'<sup>3</sup> and to the establishment of drama representing contemporary people and affairs, had unbroken success for about forty years. The taste for spectacular and sensational effects, the pathetic emotions and

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<sup>1</sup> Ben Johnson's Prologue to Every Man In His Humour, Five Plays, The World's Classics, 1953, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> H.A. Jones, Renascence of the English Drama, 1894, p. 171: "Our great need is, ..... for a school of plays of serious intention, plays that implicitly assert the value and dignity of human life, that it has great passions and great aims, and is full of meaning and importance."

This is taken from an address delivered in 1884, and later reprinted in the volume referred to above.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Arnold, 'The French Plays in London', The Nineteenth Century, 1879, VI, 239.

violent actions of melodrama, had to be counteracted in order 'to elevate the drama'<sup>1</sup> and make it a live art. The aim of these writers is best expressed in the words of H.A.Jones, who (much more definitely than any of them) endeavoured to put into practice what he preached:

A strong play is not the play that goes into fits of horror and antics of sensation, and rushes through a whirlwind of terrifying and bewildering incidents, defying common sense to restrain it; the strong play is the one that bears to the end, patiently and easily and unobtrusively, its great burden of thought and motive and character and passion.<sup>2</sup>

Critics like Matthew Arnold had expressed the same sentiments earlier. Arnold had expressed himself against 'the state of false constraint.....to which the puritanism of the middle class has brought our stage'.<sup>3</sup>

There had been changes in the audience. The return of a polite and aristocratic audience, who had abandoned the theatre in suspicion 'as a residue of a worldliness and a culture against which their elders had fought',<sup>4</sup> brought changes in the theatrical climate.

Robertson, Jones and A.W.Pinero differed in their technique from the romantic dramatists. They wrote plays the essence of which was a simple plot and brilliant dialogue couched in everyday language, with characterization marked by realism. This kind of realistic drama, which rejected poetry in order to relate the language of the characters to the spoken language of the time, was

<sup>1</sup> H.A.Jones, Literature and Modern Drama, 1907, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> H.A.Jones, 'The Theatre and the Mob', The Nineteenth Century, 1883, XIV, 446.

<sup>3</sup> Arnold, op. cit., p. 240.

<sup>4</sup> Camillo Pellizzi, English Drama, 1936, p. 28.

also a reaction against poetic drama. The characters were created with a view to using language which had the 'freedom and bustle of healthy life',<sup>1</sup> and they were stripped of all heroics. They had not the uncomfortable air of being 'cased in armour and walking on stilts down Piccadilly or Broadway'.<sup>2</sup>

These characters no longer belonged to the world of the contemporary 'sensational' play; they were intimate and sympathetic. A contemporary opinion of the performance of Caste helps us to make up our minds about the purpose of these dramatists in general and Robertson in particular:

The scene-painter, the carpenter and the costumer no longer usurp the place of the author and actor. With the aid of only two simple scenes -- a boudoir in Mayfair and a humble lodging in Lambeth -- Mr. Robertson had succeeded in concentrating an accumulation of incident and satire more interesting and more poignant than might be found in all the sensational dramas of the last half century. The whole secret of success is - truth.<sup>3</sup>

This movement was characterised as a 'renaissance'<sup>4</sup> by William Archer, inaugurated by the 'cup-and-saucer drama' of Robertson. The pioneer, like pioneers of most intellectual movements, was unable to free himself completely from the tradition of which he formed part. He desired to purify drama of the sensational and the spectacular, and to create realistic, contemporary and domestic scenes. Caste, which was heralded as a new drama, is not completely free from the romantic sentimentality against which he rebelled. The return of the hero to achieve the denouement in Caste is unrealistic and is the result of a deliberate effort to accede to the popular demand for a happy ending.

<sup>1</sup> & <sup>2</sup> Arnold, op. cit., p. 116.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in the Introduction to the Principal Dramatic Works of T.W. Robertson with Memoir by his Son, 1889, I.

<sup>4</sup> The Old Drama and the New, 1923, p. 33.

The titles of his plays imply social significance -- Society, Progress, Birth, War -- and their brevity suggests the simplicity achieved by the dramatist in his portrayal of events and characters.

The efforts of Robertson to evolve a strain of English drama with native roots were continued by H.A.Jones and A.W.Pinero. Both of these had an apprenticeship in the traditional forms of Victorian drama, before they fell in line with the new movement. Jones's early experiments, particularly in The Silver King, are melodramatic. Pinero's comedy The Hobby Horse has echoes of Robertson's Society, and The Second Mrs.Tanqueray established him as a dramatist with a purpose. Their achievements was considerable:

There were two currents which flowed parallel, and the drama gained from both. The one, which was more clearly to stamp social life at the end of the century, giving it the ironical description "The Naughty Nineties", was illustrated first in some of the subjects satirised in Gilbert's operettas, and then in the witty extravagances and moral paradoxes of Wilde; the other, following the path laboriously laid by Robertson, was enriched, almost a decade later, by the first work of Jones, Pinero and other minor writers, who were formed before his influence made itself felt, although they also came to be affected by this force, which dominated all drama at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

The movement gained force with the introduction of the social and non-political dramas of Ibsen's middle period. Realism was in some instances carried to the point of absurdity in the production of plays.<sup>2</sup> Yet the increase of realism produced a kind of nostalgic desire for the verse drama. (It is interesting to recall that even the originator of the 'cup-and-saucer drama' had written a burlesque on the theme of Robinson Crusoe<sup>3</sup> in blank verse early in

<sup>1</sup> Pellizzi, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> H.A.Jones's Preface to The Tempter, 1898, vi, ~~xxxcccxxxxxx~~

~~xxx~~ Chapxxxxxxx

<sup>3</sup> Robinson Crusoe, 1883.

his dramatic career. It is a delightful one-act piece with a chorus and characters so diverse as Emperors, Mutineers, Caribs and a parrot.) The earliest expression of the new reaction towards verse drama were Wilde's Duchess of Padua and Salome and H.A.Jones's only verse play, The Tempter.

The taste of the theatre audience at this time was heterogeneous. It included many diverse kinds of experience. Some dramatists, in an attempt to revive the poetic drama for the theatre, write plays with realistic themes and plots. They incorporate certain realistic features and certain features that normally belong to the category of poetic plays. The content is realistic and the language is poetic. They occupy a kind of middle position between realistic plays in prose and poetic plays.

Wilfred Wilson Gibson, (1878- ), Lascelles Abercrombie (1881-1938) and John Drinkwater (1882-1937) are to be placed in this group. They tend, to a certain extent, to introduce a new note in verse drama by using a new dialect and new social material. They use the realistic setting of the prose drama while their style is 'poetic'. This chapter endeavours to study their plays from this standpoint. In their dramas we shall meet unsophisticated characters of the country, set and studied against the background of nature. This tendency is pronounced in Gibson. His Krindlesyke is flavoured with words of a Northern dialect. This kind of attempt to versify local words demonstrates the reaction against the rich and flamboyant verse of Phillips or the glitter of Hasan. Like other writers among the Georgian poets, they wanted to partake of the 'corporate flavour'<sup>1</sup> of the movement:

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<sup>1</sup> J.Middleton Murry, 'The Present Condition of English Poetry', Aspects of Literature, 1920, p. 140.



Shall we go walks along the hills of Heaven,  
 Rucksack on back and aureole in pocket,  
 And stay in Paradisal pubs, and drink  
 Immortal toasts in old ambrosia,  
 Fly wings in nectar on the glassy sea,  
 And build the fire with twigs of amaranth?<sup>1</sup>

These lines illustrate the spirit behind the plays of the period also. The dramatists endeavour to bring poetry close to life by 'grasping relievedly' at 'common and sordid things'.<sup>2</sup>

The lonely road no longer I roam;  
 We met, and were one in the heart's desire:  
 Together we came through the wintry gloom  
 To the little old house by Greenway home  
 And crossed the threshold and kindled the fire.<sup>3</sup>

These lines admirably sum up the varied career of Gibson before 1912 when he came in contact with the considerable force and influence of Rupert Brooke and the Georgian movement. He spent the formative years of his life in Northumberland, and his poetic genius was nurtured on that congenial atmosphere. In the urban area of Hexham, his birthplace, he met the people who flit through his dramatic scenes in Daily Bread.

After some non-dramatic verse, collected in Akra the Slave (1904), he turned to other forms. The Stonefolds (1907) is his first dramatic experiment in blank verse. Between then and Daily Bread (1910), a volume of dramatic scenes, he published poems which have his characteristic country atmosphere. His dramatic experiments continued in the form of the monologue in 'Fires' (1912), published in Georgian Poetry (1911-12). In 'Fires', he abandons blank verse in favour of rhyme, and Thoroughfares (1914) is a volume

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<sup>1</sup> E.M., Memoir prefixed to The Collected Poems of Rupert Brooke, 1918, LXXX.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., LXVII.

<sup>3</sup> Wilfred Gibson, Collected Poems (1905-1925), xxiii.

of lyrics, but in 'Borderlands' (1914) he uses the dialogue form. 'Friends' (1916), written on the occasion of the death of Rupert Brooke, gives him an occasion to reflect on himself and his other poet-friends. In 1922 he returns to dramatic poetry in Krindlesyke, and continues with this medium till 1924, when Kestrel Edge and Other Plays are published. In 1928 comes his comedy Between Fairs, in prose.

Gibson's work is dismissed in one phrase in a history of modern literature by Edwin Muir: 'A poet of ordinary occurrences'.<sup>1</sup> One feels that he deserves a more complimentary reference. Gibson feeds on life, transmutes incidents and gives them an individual mood. His peculiar mind - the dramatic type of the poetic mind - senses the angles and corners of life and dramatises them. His purpose in dramatic poetry is very near to the purpose of Wordsworth as set forth in his Preface to the Lyrical Ballads:

The principal object.....in these poems was to make the incidents of common life interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of nature.....low and rustic life was generally chosen because in that situation the essential passions of the heart find a better soil, in which they can attain their maturity.<sup>2</sup>

Gibson's verse plays are best examined if one reads them as dramatic dialogues rather than as plays meant for presentation. They contain a number of portraits which are vivid in characterisation and speech. Like Browning's characters in his monologues, Gibson's characters too are caught in a moment of intensity. Their vividness springs from the moment of crisis in which they are presented.

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<sup>1</sup> Edwin Muir, Introduction to English Literature, ed. Bonamy Dobree, The Present Age, 1939, p. 200.

<sup>2</sup> Wordsworth's Preface to 'Lyrical Ballads (1800), Wordsworth, 1955, p. 228.

In some plays nothing ever happens; in other plays the characters develop and change. In all but one of his plays he does not resolve the conflict which is presented at the beginning. The only exception to this is On The Threshold.

The Stonefolds and On The Threshold, published in 1907, contain six scenes each dealing with a phase of life. The dramatist is preoccupied with the suffering in life. The characters pass through a crisis and reveal themselves completely and with the sharpest possible definition. The tragic temper is at once revealed in the first play, The Stonefolds. Nicholas and Rachel, having lived their full life, are aware of old age. Their burden is aggravated by their witnessing the death of their grandchild and of a lamb:

This world  
Is rough and bitter to the newly born  
But far more bitter to the nearly dead.<sup>1</sup>

Their willingness to embrace death is born of misery, but death does not respond to their request. So the drudgery of life continues:

Nicholas: What hour is that?

Rachel: 'Tis one:  
The night is over.

Nicholas: Yet another day!<sup>2</sup>

In 'The Bridal', the old man who was hated by his wife commits suicide in a fit of anger. His bedridden widow warns her son, who inherits his father's character, that he should not marry. But unknown to her he is already married, and the bride, who overhears the mother's warning, is willing to accept her fate:

I loved thee, husband; yet, I knew thee not  
Until thy mother spoke. I know thee now;  
And I am not afraid.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Stonefolds, 1907, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

'The Scar' illustrates the noble principle that love is the only basis of permanent happiness in life. Abel and Margaret realise this after having gone through life:

Yea, passion parted us. Yet, surely, love  
Brings us again together.<sup>1</sup>

'Winter Dawn', 'The Ferry' and 'On The Threshold' are published in one volume, On The Threshold. Here, although the method of representing typical people in moments of crisis continues, the action is violent and at times melodramatic. 'Winter Dawn' gives a lurid picture of the son returning snow-blind to the anxiously awaiting mother and wife. At first Elizabeth, his wife, shrinks from him, but later she takes him into her care. The melodramatic element is strong in the mother's violent cry, which has a touch of artificiality.

'The Ferry' narrates the tragic tale of a woman drowning in a river. The intensity of the tale is all the greater as we learn of the event through John, her husband:

Her eyes

Were on me, and I rowed her home, though death  
Clutched at the boat, and sought to drag us down;  
For I was young and strong. That May we wed;  
And by the next spring-floods the boy was born,  
And she lay dead--and I, so young and strong!  
My strength that brought her through the roaring tide  
Could not hold back the silent-ebbing life.<sup>2</sup>

The dramatist's merit lies in clothing a tragic situation in a medium which, while close to life, is also genuine poetry.

On The Threshold shows a marked development in Gibson. It shows his ability to achieve a dramatic resolution of conflicts in life. The title-play, On The Threshold, is, indeed, significantly

<sup>1</sup> The Stonefolds, 1907, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> On The Threshold, 1907, p. 14.

named. Philip and Alice, who have just married, have moved into the former abode of William Hall and his wife, Ellen, who had lived for sixty years hating each other. This house has an ominous significance. The Halls did not even love their daughter, who had been abandoned by her husband. The house represents the loss of all human values. Philip and Alice discuss the house. They have a premonition that the history of the Halls will be repeated through them. But the young lovers' fears are set at rest by the appearance of Ellen Hall. She tells Alice that their life was filled with hatred, but Alice should love her husband, as love brings knowledge. This gives a new meaning to the life of the newly-married couple and dispels their morbid anxiety.

Alice: .....I have heard a voice from out the past;  
 And mine eyes look down all the happy years  
 That thou and I must travel, side by side.<sup>1</sup>

The lovers grow through the play. Alice is more practical than Philip; it is Alice who learns the happy meaning of life from Ellen and changes her outlook in accordance with the old woman's advice: when Philip returns from his work, he discovers happiness in his wife's eyes. Although the change in their attitude to life is insufficiently motivated, this piece reveals beauty of execution.

In these scenes, the dramatist has presumably felt that the safest way to bring realism into verse drama is to abandon stock types and to substitute for them human types. He has the homeliness of peat and heather. The living-rooms of shepherds in Stonefold, Bleakridge and Cragshields are the scenes of these plays. The joys and sorrows common to men in the lower strata of life are

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<sup>1</sup> On The Threshold, 1907, p. 33.

dramatised. A limitation is imposed on his verse by the quality of the subject matter and characters. But the verse is clear and precise. He energises the ethos of the shepherd folk with a certain original talent. We listen to the voice of feeling in Elizabeth in 'Winter Dawn' and to the voice of beauty in Ellen in On The Threshold, who reveals the secret of ~~the~~ life to Alice.

The volume entitled Daily Bread (1910), published three years after The Stonefolds, contains seventeen dramatic scenes. The prelude gives us a peep into the working of the dramatist's mind:

So I, first waking from oblivion, heard,  
 With heart that kindled to the call of song,  
 The voice of young life fluting like a bird,  
 And echoed that wild piping; till ere long  
 Lured onward by that happy singing-flight,  
 I caught the stormy summons of the sea  
 Through whose unresting conflict, day and night,  
 Aye sings the dauntless human harmony.<sup>1</sup>

A stanza of six lines is printed at the end of the book:

My life moving to one measure --  
 Daily bread, daily bread --  
 Bread of life and bread of labour,  
 Bread of bitterness and sorrow,  
 Hand-to-mouth, and no to-morrow.  
 Death for housemate, death for neighbour.<sup>2</sup>

Between the prelude and the epilogue is sandwiched the poet's experience of a different section of society from that dealt with in The Stonefolds. Having studied one phase of humanity, the poet sets man against a different background. The poetic experience universalises human suffering in these two milieux.

The grim temper of the poet persists; he sees nothing cheerful to relieve the gloom of life among the poor. We hear the voice of suffering when Grizel dies in childbirth in 'The House of Candles'.

<sup>1</sup> Daily Bread, 1923, Title-page.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

In 'On The Road' Reuben and Jessie marry in haste and beget a bairn whom they cannot look after. Chill penury stares them in the face. But with heroic endeavour they go through life. 'The Betrothed' reveals to Frances, whose son is drowned, the meaninglessness of life.

Life, without him, would be a living death;  
And I would rather lie cold in my grave,  
If I must die.<sup>1</sup>

'The Firstborn' tells the sorry tale of a father who has a premonition of the death of his firstborn while he is away:

David: Nay:  
I did not learn it, life  
From mortal lips.  
Before we reached the quay,  
My heart already feared;  
And when I saw no face among the throng  
To welcome, .....

I knew the boy was dead.<sup>2</sup>

'The Furnace' is a good example of a verse play with an industrial setting. The scene is a room in a tenement. Joseph, a stoker, lies unconscious, and his wife/<sup>Eleanor</sup>~~Eleanor~~ and two children and Bessie, a neighbour, surround his bed. Through Bessie and Eleanor, we learn about the cause of his unconsciousness:

They say his shovel  
Had tumbled in the furnace; and the heat  
Had crumpled it like paper -- almost melted:  
And by himself -- he'd only fallen short --  
His head and breast and hands .....

<sup>3</sup>

Bessie puts courage into the heart of Eleanor, who determines to work for the sake of the children. Joseph mutters to himself; his experience comes to the surface; it is narrated in short lines:

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 66.





She dies suddenly, and the play closes with the neighbours' comments on the newly-born child:

He's snuggled to her breast  
And sleeping too. A fine big boy he is.<sup>1</sup>

In all these short plays pain is caused by accidents, natural and otherwise, on railway and on sea. It hits mothers, wives, husbands and children. The faithfulness of a wife who is prepared to live miserably, the endurance of a woman who suffers silently from a deadly disease in 'The Operation', are all set in realistic backgrounds. Gibson chooses painful or critical incidents as the subject of all these tragic playlets. The characters are unsophisticated: they reveal their real selves in dialogue which is close to the spoken idiom.

What strikes us most is Gibson's presentation of the events relating to illness, accidents or hatred in the lives of common men. The reader identifies himself with the sufferer and the interest never wanes. Gibson has evolved a verse which suits his purpose; it is directly moulded by the nature of the material with which the poet is working. It has no rhyme, no regular measure, but is characteristic of the language of the people.

Krindlesyke (1922) is divided into two parts, and the second part is further divided into three sections. The first, according to the note of the author, was written in 1910, that is, the period of Daily Bread, and then revised and published in 1922, along with the second part. In his note Gibson also says that the work is not conceived with a view to stage-production.<sup>2</sup>

Gibson is ambitious in his conception of character. His canvas is very wide and represents three generations of characters, all

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> Krindlesyke, 1922, vii.

linked together in a solitary shepherd's cottage in the Northumbrian fells. To the poet the cottage represents eternity:

It bears the brunt of time, withstands anew  
Wild fires of tempest and league-scouring snows,  
Dour and unshaken by any mortal doom,  
Timeless, unstirred by any mortal dream.<sup>1</sup>

The first generation is represented by the old and decrepit Ezra Barasford and his wife Eliza. Through them we learn of their six sons, all of whom have abandoned them except Jim, the last, who has had an affair with Judith, but is married to Phoebe. When Judith bears a child, Phoebe in anger leaves home, taking Judith and her child. One generation ends here. In the first section of the second part of the play, Jim robs his old parents of their money and deserts them. The old Barasfords die, and Peter, one of the sons who has disappeared twelve years before, appears with Belle Haggard, his gypsy wife, with the intention of robbing his parents. But there is nothing to steal. His father had died, and Belle Haggard, the gypsy, who is superstitious, persuades Peter to stay on till their son Michael grows up to take possession of Krindlesyke. Henceforward Belle Haggard is an important character. After nine years, Section two begins. Michael is in possession of his grandfather's house. He falls in love with Judith's daughter Ruth. Belle Haggard returns to her gypsy life, and Judith takes her place. This is the second generation.

The third generation is represented in Section three after six years. Judith is installed as grandmother. Jim appears and browbeats her to let him stay. Belle Haggard returns and drives him out, but in revenge he kills her. Michael's children, Ralph and Nicholas, continue the pattern.

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\* <sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. ix.

If one tried to adapt the piece for the stage, one would have to concentrated on Krindlesyke and Gibson's women, through whom the unity is maintained. The women emerge as distinct figures, they grow and develop as the play advances from generation to generation. The men are without a sense of purpose. It is the women who form the connecting links in the chain.

In the first generation we meet Ezra, who, though growing duller day after day, has learnt a lot from Eliza his wife. He is reduced to unimportance:

Now, I'm no better than an old bell-wether,  
A broken-winded, hirpling tatty jack  
That can do nothing but baa and baa and baa.<sup>1</sup>

He has no control over his sons and loses them one by one. The surviving sons bring disaster to the family. Peter is a tramp and returns after twelve years only to rob his parents of their riches. We can see the contrast between him and his wife Belle Haggard in their attitudes to the family. When Belle wants to stay behind to look after the house, he refuses:

You'll not catch me: I cannot,  
With those in the other room I never could bear.<sup>2</sup>

Eliza had spent her whole life in Krindlesyke and looked after the home. She had suffered with her husband and the sons who had gone astray. Belle Haggard is the most impressive of them all. A gypsy, she gives up her wandering life only to continue the line of the Barasfords. Belle and Judith are not in the direct line. They come in casually and become the pillars of this house. Belle looks after the house and readily makes room for the legitimate heir. When she sees that the peace of Krindlesyke is disturbed by Jim, she does not hesitate to drive him out.

<sup>1</sup> Krindlesyke, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

Krindlesyke is not in dialect; it is flavoured with a sprinkling of local words; but these are, for the most part, words "expressive of emotion", says Gibson in his note. These words add vigour to the blank verse. Eliza mixes these words in abundance:

Ay: but Krindlesyke would be  
A muckheap-lie-on, with that cloffy slut  
For mistress.<sup>1</sup>

The characters gain realism by their use of the language of everyday life. We are convinced as we read that this is indeed the speech of the shepherd family living within

Four blank stone walls, an eaveless, bleak stone roof.<sup>2</sup>

Krindlesyke represents a growing period in the poet's mind and an interest in an aspect of English life not hitherto seen in the theatre.

Kestrel Edge and Other Plays (1924) is the last volume of Gibson's experiments in drama. It is a collection of five plays -- two short tragedies, "Lovers' Leap" and 'Kestrel Edge'; and three comedies, 'Red Rowan', 'Blackadder', and 'Winter's Stob', all called 'Gongrels.'

In "Lovers' Leap", Gibson's notion of tragedy assumes definite shape. He seizes upon the most important impulse, sexual passion, on which to build his tragedy. The play is remarkable for the interplay of action and character. In Ernest Reynolds's opinion, it is naively melodramatic,<sup>3</sup> for Gibson is full of violence and deaths. But it is not all melodramatic. The reader who makes his way through the five scenes of the tragedy will find something more rewarding.

<sup>1</sup> Krindlesyke, P. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., prelude.

<sup>3</sup> Reynolds's Modern English Drama, 1949, p. 83.

The central note of the play is well summed up by Rachel, the mother of Angus, who is the chief character:

Angus lies,  
Dashed to destruction by the fire of life  
That blazed within him, only to destroy him.<sup>1</sup>

Angus, the master of the 'Wind Whistle', hires Esther and Adah, two sisters, to work on the farm. He falls in love with the younger sister Adah and also desires to flirt with Esther, who in order to save her sister from this ignominious situation, agrees to meet him on the crag-top. She contrives to push him over the edge of Lovers' Leap, and escapes the law by throwing herself after him. Adah, Lucy, Angus's wife, Rachel his mother, and Alex his brother are left in bewilderment on the crag-top.

Gibson's early dramatic scenes were only bright and striking pictures of experience or the fanciful vision of the poet. The characters were undeveloped. But in Lovers' Leap the characters are more lifelike. Angus is studied in relation to many characters. The dialogue reveals personality, recalls early history and also foretells the impending tragedy. Angus stands for lust; he is a hard task-master. His wife is timid and fretful; she is afraid of her husband's name being made a scandal.

My husband's name's in all the neighbours' mouths  
Coupled with thou, bold-eyed loose-petticoat.<sup>2</sup>

His mother is helpless and a 'patient looker on'.<sup>3</sup> His brother Alex shares his qualities on a minor scale. The hired servants are not meek; they defy the master and do not give in easily. Angus has lost all sense of honour and is prepared to be denigrated:

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<sup>1</sup> Kestrel Edge and Other Plays, p. 3

<sup>1</sup> ~~Reynolds, xxxxxx, xxxxxx, xxxxxx~~

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Kestrel Edge and Other Plays, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

Shame's only for poor windlestraws  
 In trousers,--secret lechers. I've never been  
 A hole-in-the-corner lover; I've some pride,  
 I take my own road; and I'll step it out,  
 Shameless, to hell, if that be where it lead to.<sup>1</sup>

Action develops, the dialogue propels the action until the chief character meets his terrible doom. One does not feel 'calm of mind all passion spent' but a sense of pity for Esther, compelled to lose her life in her effort to save the chastity of her sister.

In the 'Gangrels' Gibson returns to his technique of sketching a bright picture of life, but with a greater number of characters than before. In 'Red Rowan', he concentrates on two women, Red Rowan a deposed queen, and Blackadder, a young fortune-teller. The scene is a horse-coper's camp near Yetholin. Both the queen and the young woman want to have mastery over people: the young woman tells the queen:

Your reign is done:

You've queened it long enough: I'm mistress now:  
 And don't you dare to turn your tongue on me --  
 Nay, nor your eyes: You cannot play the witch  
 On me: my eye's a match for any eye.<sup>2</sup>

Thus by force of will she acquires mastery over the three horse-copers, Weagle, Slim and Harbell.

This play leads on to 'Blackadder', named after the second woman of 'Red Rowan'. Blackadder, although ruler of the horse-copers' camp, comes under the spell of Jack Benson, a disabled soldier, and marries him, but can never settle down to a domestic life.

"Winter's Stob" tells the tale of William Winter, a murderer hanged for robbery. Nebby Peter narrates the story of the murder

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

to Curly Dodd, a young driver, who he hopes will draw a moral from it. But he fails in his purpose. Nebby puts commonplace truths in unpoetic words:

.....the world's

A lodging-house that takes all sorts of lodgers;<sup>1</sup>

His helplessness to correct Curly Dodd is expressed in words flavoured with colloquialism:

It's not a splinter from a gibbet  
Will cure his ache, but the gallows' rope itself.  
Yet I can't argue with every loony that's set  
On running his head in a noose: and anyway,  
With jobs that scarce, it isn't fair to the hangman;  
He's got his brats to keep in bread and butter.<sup>2</sup>

These dramatic scenes gives us a few humorous characters -- the tramp, the soldier and Peter -- but we are not impressed by their humour.

In the last play in this volume, 'Kestrel Edge', Gibson turns to tragic writing and treats of the theme of elemental/vengeance. The material of the play is derived from the violent customs of primitive life. The play relates to a father's murder by an old lover of his wife and his son's revenge on the murderer. Gibson makes a successful tragedy of a story of primitive feelings. The scene of the tragedy is the parlour of Kestrel Edge, the farm house of a big sheep-farm on the Border. When the play starts, Augath has already been murdered by Robert, who has told Naomi, the wife, that he had killed her husband in fair fight:

Naomi: He only told me, when he found I knew  
It was no accident .....

They fought for me: he heard your father's gun  
And took his own, and went right up to him  
Where he was rabbiting; and challenged him  
And then they fought like men. Your father fell.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

Actually it was not so. Gideon, one of the sons, knew that Robert used foul play to kill him.

Gideon: Mother, he lied to you. He lay in wait,  
And murdered father -- shot him through the hedge.<sup>1</sup>

Gideon is full of the spirit of revenge; he is a religious preacher who feels that he is the instrument of God to take revenge:

I couldn't rest  
With father murdered. Don't you hear his blood  
Crying for vengeance?<sup>2</sup>

He shoots Robert. But he breaks down and cries out for help. Reuben's sense of blood-brotherhood is very strong. He takes the punishment on himself and saves Gideon. The talk, clothed in smooth and vigorous verse, reveals the character of the play. Naomi unburdens her heart:

Though, in my heart,  
I was all Robert's, when he came, I lived  
For the first time; and life became the thing  
I'd dreamt it, as a girl -- a thrilling hazard,  
A flame that scorched and stabbed me, and stung my blood  
To madness: and ..... I must tell the truth --  
And even when your father died -- Oh, you  
Will never understand! -- 'twas a story --  
Two men who fought to win a woman's love,  
And I the woman!<sup>3</sup>

After having drawn pictures of common life in his early plays, which do not have much dramatic quality, Gibson takes up a wider canvas and violent action in Krindlesyke and Kestrel Edge and Other Plays. The plays as a whole do not stir in us 'pity' or 'fear'. But they succeed in giving us a sense of the reality of the characters in the situations in which they find themselves. He has realised the significance of Synge's statement made in 1907, the year of Gibson's first dramatic experiment:

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 145.



All art is collaboration; ..... in the happy ages of literature striking and beautiful phrases were as ready to the story-teller's or the playwright's hand as the rich cloaks and dresses of his time.<sup>1</sup>

Gibson's diction is full of striking and beautiful phrases which have the smell of the shepherd's hearth. Although he is identified with the Georgian movement, his verse in the plays shows a different note, which was first struck in the poems of A.E.Housman, particularly A Shropshire Lad, published in 1895.

At the time Gibson was versifying the reality of 'primitive' ways of life and unheroic characters, the dramatists of the Manchester School<sup>2</sup> were doing the same kind of thing in prose. Gibson's achievement in poetry and drama cannot be better summarised than by Abercrombie:

(He) .....has made not only colliers and fishermen, but shopkeepers and clerks, unquestionable inhabitants of the poetic world.<sup>3</sup>

Lascelles Abercrombie.

In the world of letters, Abercrombie's fame rests on his contribution to criticism. Like most professors of literature, he had a great concern for standards. His critical outlook is inspired by his desire to define art and poetry, as seen in An Essay towards a Theory of Art (1922). As early as 1914 he was brooding on the poet's use of language. In Poetry and Contemporary Speech he had pleaded for poetry to be based on the spoken word:

1 J.M.Synge, Preface to The Playboy of The Western World, 1907.

2 Stanley Houston's Hindle Wakes (1912) and Harold Brighouse's Hobson's Choice (1916) deal with the life of the provinces in a realistic spirit.

3 Oliver Elton, 'Lascelles Abercrombie, 1881-1938' from the Proceedings of the British Academy, vol. xxv, 1939, p. 13.

Poetry is not made out of printed words, but of spoken words; it is no abstract existence of words that the poet has to feel, but their actual changeful life in speech.<sup>1</sup>

The Idea of Great Poetry (1925) is a sequel to An Essay towards a Theory of Art. Thomas Hardy, a Critical Study gives us a first-hand impression of the novelist, whom he knew and admired. His critical works continued to appear from time to time. In 1932 came The Principles of Literary Criticism. He also made excursions into philosophy.

When he was in his middle twenties he published his first volume of poems, The Interlude and Other Poems (1908), followed by Emblems of Love (1912). New Numbers (1914), published privately, also included contributions from Rupert Brooke, John Drinkwater and Wilfred Gibson. Here each poet in his own way deals with the fortunes of 'simple and homely people'.<sup>2</sup> The comment of the editors of The London Aphrodite on the poetry of this period is informative:

Poetry, after the failure of Keats and Byron to complete their expressions, wandered off into the Spasmodics who hoarsened into Browning, and the Mellifluous who trilled into Tennyson: the Pre-Raphaelites a half-way house.

The new birth began with Francis Thompson: a recrudescence of Beddoes' magic splendour, thinned out into human content, but alembicated in form abstractly Dionysian. At the same time the human cry returned with A.E.Housman, very limited in emotion, but technically purified.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Poetry and Contemporary speech', The English Association, 27th February, 1914, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

Out of these two strains came the Georgians. From Thompson came Drinkwater, an intellectual enfeebling; Flecker, who gulped down an indigestible mass of colour which he tried in vain to discipline with Parnassian theory, though his instinct was right; Lascelles Abercrombie, by far the most vital, who made a desperate effort to force Thompson's best -- a husky precision -- into the action of the human universal.<sup>1</sup>

His dramatic output is small, though most of his plays were put on the stage. Deborah (1912) was the earliest of his plays and was never acted. Then came 'The Adder', produced by Basil Dean at the Liverpool Repertory Theatre in 1913 and by John Drinkwater at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre the same year. 'The End of the World' was produced by Muriel Pratt at Bristol in 1914 and by Drinkwater in 1915. 'The Staircase' was produced by Jackson Wilcox at the Playhouse, Liverpool, in 1920; 'The Deserter' at the Leeds Arts Theatre (192-?).<sup>2</sup> These plays were issued in one volume, Four Short Plays, in 1922. Phoenix: a Tragic-Comedy in Three Parts, his last play, was produced at St. Martin's Theatre in 1923. All the plays are written to be performed, but their success, according to the author, was of a very modest order.<sup>3</sup> Phoenix was attacked by J.C.Squire<sup>4</sup> on the grounds of morality.

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<sup>1</sup> The London Aphrodite, ed. by Jack Lindsay and P.R.Stephenson, 1928, p. 15. Contrast with this enthusiastic encomium the comment of Mr. John Wain: a 'minimal versifier of the day' (vide The Times Literary Supplement, September 13, 1957).

<sup>2</sup> Elton, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Preface to The Poems of Lascelles Abercrombie, 1930.

<sup>4</sup> Lindsay and Stephenson, op. cit., p. 15.

The revaluation of Abercrombie as a dramatist may be taken up under two headings: the nature of the theme and his treatment of the dramatic medium. His early work shows that he was greatly read in the old dramatists: the Elizabethans and Jacobean. This explains the theme he handles in 'The Adder', 'The Staircase' and 'The Deserter'. They are very much concerned with sexual relationships within or outside matrimony. This interest in all probability is derived from The Changeling, where Middleton is impelled by sexual tension to dramatise the fundamental passion common to human beings at all times. In his own realistic way, Middleton moves within the framework of Elizabethan morality. This seems to appeal to Abercrombie.

Like his contemporaries he wants to be in contact with the Zeitgeist, and thus uses 'a language of people talking, of speech full of the rapid shadows and gleams, the expressive irregularities, and careless experiments of conversation'.<sup>1</sup> He echoes Synge, who had already caught for us the spontaneous poetry of simple folk in The Playboy of the Western World. But, unlike Synge, Abercrombie uses a verse pattern.

He knew the theatre well, as he had been a reader of plays for the Liverpool Playhouse, and had also produced puppet plays. In a paper<sup>2</sup> read before the English Association of Manchester, he had strongly condemned the craze for prose drama and had defined 'the function of poetry in the drama':

The preference for prose plays over poetic plays is.....  
a preference for ordinary appearance over spiritual  
reality: it is, in fact, a form of materialism.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Elton, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> See The Poetry Review, No.III, March, 1912.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

Abercrombie with the weight of his scholarship and the support of the academic world laid a sure foundation for the new trend in drama.

'The Adder' is the first of the four short plays characteristic of the mood of Abercrombie. It is characteristic in the sense that he is dealing with excessive sexuality. The play is significantly titled. The adder represents the sin in a 'smouldering heart',<sup>1</sup> but ultimately the reptile intervenes to save the innocence of the daughter of sin. The scene is laid in woods 'crumbling like a beast' in autumn. The entire action takes place in darkness, and the characters are set against a sombre and terrifying background. The very essence of the play's moral subject is the dramatisation of a conflict.

Through the grim conversation of the two charcoal burners, Seth and Newby, the audience learns of Seth's joy in delighting 'all my lust'.<sup>2</sup> He reveals his personality through his talk; he is at once repelled and fascinated by his own excessive lust. In his heart is concealed the adder symbolising his sin. He talks of 'weeping sores', 'forgiving one's sin', 'the villainous hubbub of my life', and hates the daughter of his sin. The conflict comes into greater prominence when his daughter, who has been brought up in seclusion by his sister, arrives on the scene. He is obsessed with his dishonourable conduct:

God has annointed with my wrong your head;  
 And it is mine, this jagged blasphemy  
 Scribbled along your back: my sins that weigh  
 Your body flat, my malice in your eyes;  
 That flickering tongue has spoken in my heart!<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Four Short Plays, 1922, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

Thus the tension of the play is kept up till the arrival of the Squire, who shares Seth's qualities. He strikes a match and studies the girl's face. She is attracted by the Squire and says to him:

.....Tell me about sin!  
For I will get to know.<sup>1</sup>

But he gives no answer. The symbol of innocence is removed from the world of corruption: the girl dies and the play ends.

Although the characters are of the familiar world, sometimes we lose our hold upon them. The speech in which the girl comments on her aunt's talk about sin is too literary:

Scarlet!  
That was a wonderful thing for me to wear!  
And all at once I seemed to be wearing life  
Like a beggarly cheap cloak: and some know how  
To clout their drab stuff with a gaudypatch!  
Scarlet!<sup>2</sup>

But in short speeches he gets closer to the spoken idiom and uses familiar images. Thus Newby's description of the Squire is full of imagery familiar to the characters of the play:

It made me think  
Of a hound I saw, that was inwardly scarred  
With swallowed poison and wrenched hard, -- that brow  
With lines like two big weals running straight up  
Pucker'd on either side; -- how comes a man  
So signed? Deuce! I should think his forehead aches!<sup>3</sup>  
~~Act 2, p. 13~~

'The Staircase' deals with a stark situation with a bare kind of background. The situation - the eternal triangle -- is that of a woman with a baby on her hands who seeks refuge with her old lover from a hungry tramp who is pursuing her. The characters are rustic and the situation is commonplace, but the way of handling them is fresh.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

The play begins in a small room in an empty cottage. A young joiner alone in a room is working on a staircase, singing to himself:

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.....<sup>1</sup>

He has a gibe at the 'book-read folks' who will not care for his song.

The woman is introduced with the baby in her arms, and through their dialogue we learn the story. While the hungry tramp pursues the woman, three men are thus introduced:

(Three men come in 1, 2 & 3)

1. My, there he is!
2.                   The man!
3.                   The very man!

I markt him well, nosing the taproom whiff  
 Beside the door, and fearing to go in.<sup>2</sup>

The tramp is taken away and the woman is left with her old lover, the joiner.

The verse and the technique are fresh; the dialogue reveals the characters, and the verse is not the verse of feeling, but the verse of fact:

Woman: This is a wonder! And so she's your fancy,  
~~She's your fancy~~  
 The girl so friendly to your loneliness!  
 I'll hurt myself with laughing! This is the girl  
 Who slipt away from whispering in the firelight  
 To run with pretty laughter up your stairs?<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 49

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 76

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 57

Revealing the past in retrospect, leaving the characters unnamed, setting everything against a bare background of everyday life, show Abercrombie's endeavour to change technique.

'The Deserter' is the last of the three plays dealing with tension in married life. A kind of pathological sexual feeling is the dominant note of the play. The dramatist realises his theme by his use of a nerve-racking method. The play opens with a number of unnamed men and women assembled in front of Peter's cottage discussing his death. Their talk is full of macabre suggestion:

1st woman: I'll dream to-night of lobbing Peter's head  
Up the staircase to him on the landing!<sup>1</sup>

Peter was a drunkard, poisoned by his wife. But the widow, who loves a soldier, is pursued by Luther who asks her to marry him. He is harmless and gentle:

Your mind's in my grasp  
As if I held a dandelion-clock  
Before me in my fingers;<sup>2</sup>

She sends for the soldier to protect her, and he puts love above duty; he deserts his comrades going to the war and comes to her rescue. When he discovers that Martha has poisoned her husband, he hates her and wants to go back/<sup>to</sup>the battlefield:

I know  
What I shall have there; it's clear black or white,  
The offer there: you live or else you're killed,  
But here- well, I can say this for the war:  
It does get you away from living at home.<sup>3</sup>

He rejects her love and leaves her behind in the world of corruption. Martha is left to herself in a mood of remorse, accepting a symbolic dandelion-clock from Luther.

The longer speeches settle into fairly regular rhythms:

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 90

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.101

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.117



That's your affair.  
 Much better love me. The thing is, you're fast  
 You're mine. But sure, though I shan't trouble you:  
 Nor need to trouble myself. You can stay here  
 And act the widow handsomely awhile.<sup>1</sup>

Such speeches show that Abercrombie cannot free himself from the influence of Elizabethan verse.

In the dialogue he uses everyday language, as in the following cynical speech of Luther:

Well, they are dead; and come to think of it,  
 Where is your husband? And dead as my wives are,  
 They didn't drink themselves dead: they went off  
 In sound respectable diseases both;  
 The doctor guaranteed them.<sup>2</sup>

'The Adder', 'The Staircase' and 'The Deserter' belong to one phase of the dramatist's career. He concentrated on individual characters and their relation to sexual life. There is no illumination about the characters. Our reading of these plays calls forth a narrowly defined response.

'The End of the World' has been acted more than once. Abercrombie creates a tragi-comedy in two acts out of a realistic situation in the lives of simple people given to superstition. He studies a cross-section of society at a critical juncture. When the men and women of the village are told that a comet will destroy the world and that they are on the brink of disaster their passions find release. The audience sees the real selves of these characters. One of them, who has an adulterous wife, rejoices at the 'end of the world' and feels it is the Last Judgement of God on his wife and her lover. But this intense situation becomes a comedy when the frightened lover wants to restore the wife, and the comet seen in the horizon is only a blaze of fire.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

The play has a new coherence not seen in Abercrombie's early plays. What interests us most is Abercrombie's comic handling of everyday life in verse. Abercrombie's treatment of his merry plot in verse is characterised by Bottomley as the 'application of patterned speech applied to a realistic plot'.<sup>1</sup> By 'patterned speech' he refers to the metrical pattern.

The play starts quietly and gathers momentum as it proceeds. Huff the farmer, Sollars the wainwright, Merrick the smith, Vine the publican, and a stranger, while sipping their beer in a public-house kitchen, meditate on the 'end of the world'. They are frightened. But Huff is distinguished from the crowd. His wife is lost to him, but still he retains his spirits:

It needs a tough brain, ay, a brain like mine,  
To po~~ve~~ on ugly sin and not go mad.<sup>2</sup>

Their fears are strengthened by Dowser's announcement that a comet is seen. Vine asks him whether the comet will butt its head against him:

Ay, or with that wild, monstrous tail of his  
Smash down upon the air, and make it bounce  
Like water under the flukes of a harpooned whale,  
And thrash it to a poisonous fire; and we,  
And all the life of the world, drowned in blazing!<sup>3</sup>

Merrick and Sollars do not want that to happen. They grow obsessed with this idea of 'the end of the world' staring them in the face. The fear spreads like wildfire and a crowd of men and women assemble and shout confusedly. They love the green earth. Huff rejoices:

<sup>1</sup> G. Bottomley, A Stage for Poetry: My Purpose with My Plays, privately printed, Kendal, 1948, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> ~~Ibid., p. 129.~~ Four Short Plays, 1922, p. 129.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

Ay, now begins the just man's reward;  
 And hatred of the evil thing  
 Now is to be satisfied.<sup>1</sup>

He will stand and laugh at the cataclysm. Very soon he becomes a ridiculous figure. The comet is no longer there, and when his wife desires to return he rejects her. He feels that life has no meaning for him:

My good life!

And what good has my goodness been to me?  
 You show me that! Somebody show me that!  
 A caterpillar munching a cabbage-heart,  
 Always drudging further and further from  
 The sounds and lights of the world, never abroad  
 Nor flying free in warmth and air sweet-smelling.<sup>2</sup>

His rejection of his wife and the purposelessness of his life stand in opposition to the comic effect.

Abercrombie's academic temper prevents him from creating a comic play of the Aristophanic order. However, in this play, Drinkwater sees a vitality that with discipline would have made a major dramatist.<sup>3</sup>

Phoenix is a 'tragi-comedy' in three acts in which Abercrombie returns to the theme of his short plays -- sexual relationships. The framework of the play is provided by the story told by the old Knight Phoenix to Achilles in the Ninth Book of the Iliad. The scene is laid in Greece, in the times before the Trojan War, but the theme is of eternal interest.

The story runs thus:

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 146

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 159

<sup>3</sup> J. Drinkwater, Discovery, Being the Second Book of an Autobiography, 1897-1913, 1932, p. 218.

..... I left Hellas, the home of fair women, fleeing from strife against my father Amyntor, son of Ormenos: for he was sore angered with me by reason of his lovely-haired concubine, whom he ever cherished, and wronged his wife my mother. So she besought me continually by my knees to go in first unto the concubine, that the old man might be hateful to her. I harkened to her and did the deed; but my sire was aware thereof forthwith and cursed me mightily, and called the dire Erinyes to look that never should my dear son sprung of my body sit upon my knees.<sup>1</sup>

Abercrombie follows the story up to a point. His Phoenix is innocent and unaware of what he is doing; like Homer's Phoenix, he does not think of slaying his father but leaves his parents forever.

The interest of the play centres on Rhodope and Phoenix. Rhodope is entirely a creation of Abercrombie. She is the parakritis, the light-hearted promiscuous woman. Her lustful nature makes the king hate her. She is bored with his speeches:

Odious old man; nothing but gloat and talk!<sup>2</sup>

Much of the comedy of the play is realised through her. She has already flirted with a soldier and is looking for a third lover: she deceives Phoenix in hiding the fact that she is his father's concubine. Very soon she is bored with Phoenix's rhapsodies and readily gives herself to a soldier.

Like Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, the play successfully unfolds three discoveries, all involving Phoenix. He is deceived by his mother and by Rhodope, and he dishonours his father. An endeavour is made to deal with the conflict between the father and the son in the scene where the father discovers his son's affair with his concubine. Amyntor thus expresses his feelings:

<sup>1</sup> The Iliad of Homer, translated by A.Lang, W.Leaf and E.Myers, 1883, pp.174-175.

<sup>2</sup> Phoenix, 1923, p. 50.

I'll give you anything you please for her:  
 Phoenix, I must have her! You do not know  
 What it has been to find her loveliness  
 After all these wearisome blank years.  
 I went with her to heaven. I became  
 Spirit that was the god of its own life.  
 This idiot world gleamed about my mind,  
 As if it was the golden flame I made  
 Quivering round me with my burning passion.<sup>1</sup>

The image of the 'golden flame' shows the depth of his feelings. But he becomes a pathetic figure when he discovers that his 'golden flame' has left him. He turns to his old queen to soothe him.

Tragic feelings are realised through Phoenix; when he learns from his mother the ghastly truth, he exclaims:

..... over head and ears  
 Soused I have been in abomination.  
 Surely there is a stench upon me like  
 Flesh the plague is rotting alive.<sup>2</sup>

The light-heartedness of the concubine combines ill with the intense feeling of the queen and her son. Phoenix leaving his parents, Rhodope's running away to be sold in the next ship, the queen's bitter feelings, and the king's anger finding a release in whipping Rhodope's lover--all leave the impression on the audience that the play has slipped a disc.

The action moves rapidly, and the poetry does at times successfully portray the emotional tension in a character under stress.

Phoenix addresses his mother:

You twined and plaited me  
 In with your malice as easily as straw;  
 But now I see what you have done with me.  
 I know to what detestable places of life,  
 Speaking like an angel, you can persuade me.  
 You taught me that, and I will pay you for it  
 The only way I can: I will leave you.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

But Abercrombie's handling of the theme was criticised:

This (Phoenix) was loudly attacked by the moral lions like J.C.Squire, and Abercrombie timidly withdrew into silence, exposing what one feels to be the chief deterrent to a far higher achievement; a cautiousness both in poetic and critical statement at the wrong places.<sup>1</sup>

Deborah, one of his earliest plays, was never acted. Perhaps Abercrombie himself did not intend it for the stage, as the action takes place at three widely separate times, while only one character forms the link.

Here he mixes legend and history. The biblical characters - Deborah, Saul, David - which have rich legendary associations, are planted in the climate of historical actuality, in order to provide a realistic and heartrending situation. The biblical characters have no mythical aura about them. They perform no heroics; they are reduced to mere simple human beings. Deborah, who is the connecting link in the chain of events, is a simple woman with a great heart.

The first act, which introduces the simple plague-stricken fisher-folk, exhibits Abercrombie's dramatic powers. By reading the stage directions, we are at once reminded of the description of the Great Plague in Greece in Thucydides.<sup>2</sup>

Abercrombie has identified himself with the sufferers; they are set against the background of grey water and sky which represent their helplessness in face of the deadly disease.

There is no help for us; we are left alone,  
Left in the power of this flying thing  
That hates our lives.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jack Lindsay, 'The Modern Consciousness', The London Aphrodite, 1929, 1, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> See J.B.Bury, History of Greece, p. 407.

<sup>3</sup> Deborah, 1923, p. 109.

This agonising cry for help is often repeated in verse which in a peculiar way combines highly imaginative language and common expression:

We've no help at all;  
 We are left alone, jail'd by river and marsh,  
 The malady can have all its will with us.  
 You don't know your plight: but I within me  
 Can see the thing, a ghost as grey as rain,  
 Flecks of shadowy air wrapping his shape,  
 Tall as the winds standing up over us,  
 Smiling and idly bandying with his feet  
 This way and that the writhing bodies like  
 A man turns rats that have taken the bane he laid.<sup>1</sup>

Deborah's lover is dying, Saul's son Barnaby is about to breathe his last and a woman is about to collapse. They are awaiting the only doctor.

Deborah's heart is heavy; she feels it useless being in love; it is like a 'poor girl's game of being a queen'. When the Doctor arrives there is a quarrel. Saul takes him to his tent to treat his son. Others are crying for help. Deborah asks Saul to release the Doctor soon; in her distress she puts up a magnificent plea for all lovers:

Saul, there's something sacred about lovers,  
 God will not easily forget the fault  
 Of one who parts those who are fast troth-plighted.<sup>2</sup>

But David her lover dies; Deborah in a rage goes to kill Saul, who has already died of plague. His son Barnaby lives. The first act ends with Deborah's bitter lament.

The second act starts in a quieter atmosphere. It is devoted to the narration of events which have already taken place. Deborah has saved Saul's son Barnaby from the rage of the people, and he has now grown up. He is in love with Miriam, David's younger sister.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

Deborah has found a new life, a way out of sorrow. But soon complications are introduced. Barnaby deserts Miriam:

Miriam: Deborah! He has left me, Deborah!

Deborah: And David loved her so, she but a bairn! -  
Saul and Barnaby! David and his sister.

Miriam: Deborah! -- I am with child.<sup>1</sup>

There is very little action and the act drags.

In the third act, Miriam has given birth to a dead son, and Barnaby returns after bitter experiences to live with them. Miriam does not want him. There is a wild storm and the cry of the Gabriel Hounds. Miriam, who has not recovered from childbirth, is in a delirious state; she fears that the dogs have come to take away the soul of her dead son.

Miriam hates Barnaby. She suddenly bursts open the door and runs away, followed by Deborah. They never come back. The play closes with the 'shrill' of the wind and the baying of the Gabriel Hounds - a somewhat melodramatic and unconvincing end.

The play reminds the reader of Synge's The Riders to the Sea, where the spontaneous eloquence of simple folk, springing out of emotion, is close to poetry.

Abercrombie's mastery in drama is confined to the one-act play. His characters are simple; his plays are constructed out of primitive, rugged emotions, which are the driving forces of common natures. Drama for Abercrombie consists in a tension of wills, and his admiration for Hardy is reflected in his creation of deeply reflective characters who are subjected to unbearable vicissitudes of fortune. He combines dramatic intensity with considerable poetic

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 51.



skill. His experiment in making poetry out of the speech of ordinary life, despite its academic stamp, may be considered successful.

### JOHN DRINKWATER

We have the challenge of the mighty line -  
God grant us grace to give the countersign.<sup>1</sup>

Thus wrote John Drinkwater in lines spoken by Sir Barry Jackson on the occasion of the opening of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 1913. He has many affinities with Abercrombie, who dedicated his Phoenix to him. Like Gibson and Abercrombie, he rebels against the 'pantomime-tinsel type of poetic play'.<sup>2</sup> He also recognises that poetic drama has fallen on evil days, and tries to reform dramatic poetry and train the actors to utter poetic lines on the stage. While Abercrombie in the academic world tried to gain support for poetic drama, Drinkwater in the theatrical world endeavoured to do the same.

He goes about his task in the same way as Abercrombie and Gibson; like them he is most successful when he writes one-act plays in verse. But his material differs. Abercrombie and Drinkwater, in trying to devise a form of poetry in the theatre, in spite of very different subjects, show a certain similarity of approach and to some extent of technique. Drinkwater's verse drama flourishes in an imaginative, legendary and historical climate. His dramas, like the plays of Yeats, are an expression of his preoccupations; they are expressed in dramatic form, the medium of which is sometimes prose and sometimes verse. Among the three dramatists we

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<sup>1</sup> Lines for the Opening of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre,  
spoken by Barry V. Jackson, privately printed, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> Reynolds, op. cit., p. 84.

have considered in this chapter, he is the most popular. Gibson was not acted, and Abercrombie never became popular in the way Drinkwater was. His one-act play X=0: A Night of the Trojan War still holds the stage. This is due to his intimate contact with the theatre, which disciplined his craft. Having been an actor and later manager and producer in the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, he influenced the theatrical thought of the day considerably.

Although the work of Drinkwater and Abercrombie in poetic drama appears as a challenge to the stultifying realism of the debating drama, they exerted their influence in different directions. Abercrombie, as we have already seen, deprecated the rage for plays in prose and pointed out that poetry has a quality of its own. But Drinkwater wrote as a practical man of the theatre. In 1917 he wrote:

For nearly two hundred years in England the poets very rightly refused to work for a theatre that has sacrificed the drama to the actor instead of so training its actors that they could honorably give the poet the supreme joy of seeing his work nobly and tenderly interpreted. The poets, in their chosen exile, have suffered; for dramatic imagination, deprived of its gathering to the theatre, cannot, even with a Cenci or an Atalanta for harvest, be wholly prosperous.<sup>1</sup>

He spent his early dramatic career from 1911 to 1917 at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, where he wrote his poetic plays. He expressed the same feelings in 1924: he pleaded for a proper study of theatrical history and for the training of actors.<sup>2</sup> The Gentle Art of Theatre-going (1929) has the authority of a playwright and producer behind it.

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<sup>1</sup> Note, Pawns: Three Poetic Plays. 1917, v.

<sup>2</sup> Drinkwater's Introduction to Frank Vernon's The Twentieth-Century Theatre, 1924.

His poetic plays are Cophtua (1911), Rebellion (1914), The Storm (1915), The God of Quiet (1916), and X=0: A Night of the Trojan War (1917). They were performed at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in the years noted against their titles. About the same time he wrote a number of 'Masques'<sup>1</sup> for performance by a large number - between two hundred and three hundred - of Messrs Cadbury's workpeople at Bournville.<sup>2</sup> These are based on popular legends such as the Pied Piper and Robin Hood, written in prose interspersed with verse choruses in order to gain a more impressive effect in the open air. They are: An English Medley (1911), The Pied Piper (1912), The Only Legend (1913), and Robin Hood and the Pedlar (1914). Plays and 'Masques' are included in Collected Plays, Volume I.

The second volume contains the peaks of his achievement in prose drama. These chronicle plays brought him more fame than his one-act plays in verse. The transition from verse drama to prose drama does not indicate that he has given up the challenge to realistic drama. But his long experience in the theatre in various capacities suggested to him that he should write a series of historical-anecdotal plays combining his lyrical mood with realism in a style which would throw a halo round characters of historical significance. He defends his departure from poetic to prose plays:

In the days when verse was the natural speech of the theatre, its beauty, like the beauty of all fine style, reached the audience without any insistence upon itself. The guiding principle of the speech of the plays later than X = 0 has been, so far as I could manage it, to make it beautiful without letting anybody know it.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John Drinkwater, The Collected Plays, 1925, viii.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., ~~ix~~ vii.

<sup>3</sup> ~~The Collected Plays, xxxv, xxxviii, xxxix, xl.~~ Ibid., ix.

Thus he abandons verse and uses prose richer than the prose used in realistic drama.

The atmosphere after the war was propitious for a play in which the peaceful and humanitarian aims of Abraham Lincoln were emphasised. As Drinkwater says, he conceived his plays about historical figures with a view to providing a release for the imagination of the public on the subject of leadership. In Lincoln, Cromwell and Lee he dramatised the various aspects of leadership.

The series begins with Abraham Lincoln (1918), which had a great success both in England and America. In New York, Drinkwater himself appeared as a chronicler. It ran for a year at the Lyric, Hammersmith. Then follow Mary Stuart (1921), revised in 1922; Oliver Cromwell (1921); Little Johnny (1921); and Robert E. Lee (1923).

His other plays, which are often revived, are Puss in Boots (1911), a play for children produced by the Pilgrim Players,<sup>1</sup> London; Laying the Devil (1923) and Bird in Hand (1927); a political parable, John Bull Calling (1928); A Man's House (1934). He returned to verse in a play primarily intended for radio, Midsummer Eve (1932).

His prose plays, mostly of historical-anecdotal type, are interspersed with poetry. In Abraham Lincoln the chroniclers use verse, and in Robert E. Lee music is provided. This shows how much he believed that the stage will regain its full vigour only if it rediscovers poetry as its natural form of expression.

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<sup>1</sup> Barry V. Jackson's Pilgrim Players later gave rise to the Birmingham Repertory Theatre.

When Drinkwater began to write plays in verse, he was warned by Galsworthy that the shadow of Shakespeare lay over the path of those who attempted verse drama.<sup>1</sup> This warning did not chill his enthusiasm, although he bore it in mind. As already indicated, the plays are to be considered an imaginative expression of his preoccupations. His thoughts are embodied in plays that are taut in construction and economical in dialogue.

His first play, Cophetua,<sup>2</sup> has the framework of a legend. A king refuses to marry in response to the wishes of his courtiers and mother until he meets a beggar-maid, the image of his love. The idea that love knows no social distinctions is dramatised in a form which approaches the Greek model.

The play begins very near the climax; five wise men and the mother are used as choric characters. The arguments are woven

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<sup>1</sup> Preface to the Collected Plays, ~~pp~~ vi-vii.

<sup>2</sup> This was produced by the Pilgrim Players, November 18, 1911 (cf. cover page, Cophetua, 1911).

into the texture of the speeches, whose lines have three or four beats<sup>1</sup> with alternate rhymes:

Second wise man: He has gone. He is fiery proud.

Third wise man: He is king. It is well, it is well.

Fourth wise man: There is fear in my heart, and a cloud.

King's mother: There is building a story to tell:—

First wise man: He leaves the clear ways that are worn.

Fifth wise man: 'Tis the purpose of God -- we must bend.

Captain: Not in vain shall he mock us and scorn.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Abercrombie has written at length about the metre of this play:

'I am specially interested in your metre, and I think you have successfully managed to write a completely dramatic thing in lyrical measure, which is a deuced hard thing to do, in itself and by reason of the complete loss of the old elaborately metred dramatic tradition -- a loss due to our Mr. Marlowe. In fact a play like Cophetua has hardly appeared since Tudor days, and in treatment and dramatic theory seems to me to hang on to the interludes more than on to anythings else, as well as in metre. And I am sure this is as it should be: I mean that the dramatic nature of the old interludes is just the nature we want on the stage nowadays--a simple, forthright, frankly symbolic and lyrical nature, perfectly capable of dispensing with "action", and yet remaining dramatic.' (Discovery, pp.221-222)

Drinkwater was aware of this desire of Yeats, Masefield (in The Tragedy of Nan) and other dramatists who were reestablishing the medium on the stage, vide Drinkwater's Introduction to The Plays of St. John Hankin, 1923, I, pp. 13-14.

<sup>2</sup> Collected Plays, 1925, I, p. 14.

The wise men talk of the gloom in the palace and the will of God, which gives the events in the play a sense of inevitability reminiscent of the Greek drama.

The king in response to the call of love chooses a beggar maid as his mate:

My blood is kingly? It shall take  
A strain of vagrant wind and sun,  
I born a king, henceforth will make  
The people and the sceptre one.<sup>1</sup>

Rebellion is the only three-act play in verse. The author himself was not satisfied with it, and he seems to have been labouring under the warning of Galsworthy that the shadow of Shakespeare chases those who venture in the field of poetic drama. This makes Drinkwater self-conscious as a writer of blank verse.

It is a play written with a view to giving expression to lyrical thoughts and imaginative ideas on the stage. The central theme is the sharp contrast between the points of view of lovers of beauty and intellect on the one side and of the non-intellectual on the other. This is mixed up with a rebellion of the people against the king, who is made to stand for the spirit of philistinism. A poet is inveigled into the camp of the people to lead the rebellion. The Queen, Shubia, sees a kindred spirit in the poet and loves him. She dies on hearing a false report of his death. The rebellion is successful, but the poet can only mourn the death of his love. Around this tragic sequence Drinkwater weaves speculative situations. Shubia's hatred of the king is expressed:

I mated with you for rapture of the blood.  
I hazarded in your veins, some carelessness  
That was to make life venturous, uncribbed  
Of scheming overmuch.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Collected Plays, 1925, pp. 18-19.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

The king, who stands for animal pleasure, speaks in undistinguished verse: he frequently speaks of blood and fortune - which stand for material happiness. He tells Shubia:

You reckon up the process of a king  
 In a scornful word, the sinewy enterprise  
 Of a state set in peril of evil hands,  
 You name the humour of a pedlar brain.<sup>1</sup>

Narros, the poet, hates the revolutionary war -- a view of the dramatist himself which assumes a definite shape in a play written after the war of 1914.

The most beautiful situation is the scene in which Narros and Shubia meet and swear to love each other. In sentences which have the flavour of conversation, they reveal their hearts. Shubia comments thus on the song of the poet:

Shubia: That's bravely made.

Narros: I thought you were asleep.  
 I made it now for you.

Shubia: I love your songs;  
 They are so of your fibre.

Narros: Praised of you,  
 They are good songs.

Shubia: That is not flattery,  
 For beauty has its laurels to bestow,  
 And I am beautiful, -- am I not a beauty, Narros?<sup>2</sup>

They love each other. In that world dominated by material values, they emerge pure symbols of beauty. When the Queen, deceived by her maid, hears the rumour of his death, she dies, as she has no place in the world.

The poet Narros stands for liberty as opposed to the tyranny

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 69.



of the king, joining the rebels to fight for 'large liberty'.<sup>1</sup>

The play has some dramatic moments, as when Shubia watches the battle from afar, and when the King rejoices that he has got the leader of the rebellion in his grip. But the King does not grow through the play at all, and the rebellion leads nowhere. It is difficult to avoid a feeling of dissatisfaction with the play.

The blank verse is not free from rhetoric, although Drinkwater tried to strip it off in the revised version. His characters exist on the page only, and speak in a language taken from books. This is not in keeping with his claims to write in the spirit of A. E. Housman.<sup>2</sup>

Cophetua and Rebellion were both written for production at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre before the first World War. They belong to the early dramatic period and show signs of immaturity in the conception of the characters and in the verse. Nevertheless they show signs of the beneficial influence of Yeats's advice, which he quotes in his autobiography: 'Labour the emotions and simplify the expression', and 'character has become a fetish of the modern drama.'<sup>3</sup> In the later plays the obscurity of his verse is somewhat moderated.

The volume entitled Pawns contains: The Storm, The God of Quiet and X = 0, A Night of the Trojan War:

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 31. This play shares something of the ideas of Yeats's The King's Threshold, which deals with the offices of the king and the poet and the preeminence of the latter. Drinkwater points vaguely towards that theme.

<sup>2</sup> An Obituary, The Times, March 27, 1937.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Discovery, being the second book of an Autobiography (1897-1913), 1932, p. 175.

These plays had the great good fortune of being shaped in a theatre in which, of a hundred plays produced in four years, not five would fail to satisfy a jury composed, let us say, of Shakespeare and Congreve and Synge, not, of course, as to their greatness, but at least as to their artistic integrity.<sup>1</sup>

The Storm, The God of Quiet and X = 0 were subject to the scrutiny of an audience with a certain theatrical sense. The Birmingham Repertory had created a certain consciousness to which Drinkwater submitted. These plays were written when he was in close contact with the theatre, or, as he puts it, 'under the actual discipline of stage production.'<sup>2</sup>

The Storm is the one verse play of Drinkwater's which deals with the common people. The atmosphere of a mountain cottage at once links the play with his rural Midlands. He makes an attempt to depict the fury of blind nature. This is realised through two characters speaking in blank verse. The play is strongly reminiscent of Synge's Riders To The Sea, where unpretentious heroism opposes Sea and Tempest, which hang like Fate over men's lives. But here there is no sense of opposition; rather a meek submission to the inevitable.

A battle is waged in the heart of Alice between fear and hope for her husband who is out in the snowstorm. Sarah, an old woman, is a symbol of wild nature, who insists that her husband is dead, while Joan, Alice's younger sister, tries to reassure her. This conflict is worked up till the arrival of an old man who brings in the dead body of Alice's husband.

<sup>1</sup> Note to Pawns, 1917, vi.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.,

There is comparatively little action; but one is struck by the tautness of the construction. When the curtain rises, at once the breath of the audience is hushed:

Alice. It isn't fair of God. Eyes are no good,  
Nor lanterns, in a blackness like to that.  
How can they find him out? It isn't fair.

Sarah. God is for prayers. You'll anger Him speaking so.<sup>1</sup>

The situation portrays the quintessence of the mind under stress; Alice recalls her happy days with her husband and incidentally discusses the part of a husband in married life:

Do you know at all what a man becomes to a woman?  
..... If a man should take  
A patch of the barren hill and dig with his hands  
And down and down till he came to marble and gold,  
And labouring then for a dozen years or twenty  
Should build a palace finer than Solomon's hall  
Till strangers with money to travel came to praise it,  
And, when he had dug and hewn and spent his years  
To make it a wonder, should go, and be remembered  
No more than an onion-pedlar in the street  
By the gaping travellers, yet he might be glad  
If his heart was big as a woman's, for the thing he'd made,  
The strong and lovely thing, knowing it risen  
Out of his thought into the talk of the world.  
That's how it is.<sup>2</sup>

An eloquent stranger is also introduced to emphasise the fearsomeness of nature. Alice's heart is broken when she sees the dead body of her husband. The audience is gripped by the tension of the scene, and the speeches despite the length of some of the similes are helped by the concentration of imagery.

In The God of Quiet Drinkwater uses rhymed verse, 'an experimental medium of construction',<sup>3</sup> to dramatise a conflict between one who desires war and one who abhors it. He introduces a mystic element in the God of Quiet, who resembles the Buddha. This God of

<sup>1</sup> Pawns, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 11-12.

<sup>3</sup> Note to Pawns, ~~1917~~ vi.

Quiet is stabbed by the second King, who desires glory and conquest.  
The God falls crying out:

Not one of you in all the world to know me.<sup>1</sup>

The plot is slight -- merely the depiction of conflict in a society comprising beggars, citizens, soldiers and the Kings.

Drinkwater's use of verse interests us. He uses rhyme when the emotion of a speech heightens:

Young Beggar: The slings have hit  
That city hard. Well let them fight  
And finish. Broken walls are gates  
Not warded well, and men in fight  
Pay toll to beggars.<sup>2</sup>

The dramatist's leanings are with those who hate war. His play is a plea for non-violence and makes a natural transition to his anti-war play, X = 0.

X = 0, a Night of the Trojan War is a play of lasting relevance. Since its first production its hold on the stage has been unbroken. It is Drinkwater's crowning achievement in poetic drama.

Its main title is mathematical,<sup>3</sup> indicating the deeper significance of the play. If X represents the Greek soldiers, 0 represents the Trojans: the Greeks and the Trojans on the plains of Troy are possessed by identical fears and hopes. The title also means that nothing good or 'positive' comes of war. Their motives and aspirations are dramatised in two scenes of nearly equal length. The play also hints at the eternal truth that hatred begets hatred and love begets love. The last silent scene in its irony is a moving condemnation of the horrors of war.

<sup>1</sup> Pawns, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> T. Brunton Peattie was dissatisfied with the title; vide

X = 0, The Central Library Magazine, October, 1917, Vol. XXIII, No. 4, p. 473.

The four soldiers -- Pronax and Salvius, the Greeks, and Ilus and Capys, the Trojans -- are distinct characters. Each character has a special task in the action. Through the dialogues their personalities are revealed to us.

At first we learn all about the Greeks. Pronax and Salvius are poets. Salvius is reading the poems of his brother poet while Pronax, filled with high ideals, looks up at the starlit sky and tells about himself. He is homesick:

This hour  
My father's coppices are full of song,  
While sleep is on the comfortable house -  
Unless a dear one wakes to think of me  
And count my chances when the Trojan death  
Goes on its nightly errand.<sup>1</sup>

He reflects on the horrors of the war, which started nearly ten years ago. In ten years of endurance they have outgrown their original purpose:

You, Pronax, I, and our antagonists  
And friends alike are all but as dead men.<sup>2</sup>

Their minds are brooding on 'lovely things of home'.

Pronax sallies forth on his nightly duty, which he hates from the bottom of his heart, of killing Trojan soldiers.

The second scene introduces the Trojans. Capys and Ilus are keeping watch. Capys is a sculptor and Ilus a musician, the counterpart of Pronax the poet, who also dislikes fighting. He hates to go into the Greek tents to snatch an enemy life.

They're beautiful, those tents, under the stars,  
It is my night to like a shadow among them,  
And snatching a Greek life come like a shadow again.<sup>3</sup>

Ilus and Capys are also filled with noble aims:

<sup>1</sup> Pawns, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

It would be grand  
 If Troy would use us as we might be used,  
 To build and sing and make her market-places  
 Honest, and show her people that all evil  
 Is the lethargic mind.<sup>1</sup>

Their words supplement the talk of the Greek soldiers. Essentially they represent life in its totality. Art and poetry go together. Ilus, like Pronax leaving Salvius behind, leaves Capys and climbs over the parapet and is lowered into the plain. Capys' soliloquy reveals his heart:

Or Greek or Trojan, all is one  
 When snow falls on our summertime,  
 And when the happy noonday rhyme  
 Because of death is left undone.<sup>2</sup>

Then Pronax climbs the Troy wall and kills Capys.

In the third scene we return to the Greek tents. The action takes place in silence. Salvius is turning the pages of his book. Then, from the shadow in front of the tent, Ilus in his bearskin is seen stealthily approaching. He reaches the tent opening without a sound: in the same unbroken silence his dagger is in the Greek's heart. Ilus catches the dead man as he falls, and lets his body sink on to one of the couches inside the tent. The sentinel passes. Ilus, breathless, waits till the steps have gone, and then, stealthily as he came, disappears.<sup>3</sup>

Pronax returns, washes his bloodstained hands and looks at his friend:

What, sleeping, and still dressed?  
 That's careless, friend, and the torch <sup>a</sup>light still.....  
Salvius.....

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>3</sup> ~~xxxxxxx~~, p. 64.

Salvius, I say...gods! .. What, friend .. Salvius, Salvius ..  
 Dead .. It is done .. It is done .. there is judgment made ..  
 Beauty is broken .. and there on the Trojan wall  
 One too shall come .. one too shall come.....<sup>1</sup>

The last brief scene shows:

The Trojan wall. The body of Capys lies in the starlight and silence. After a few moments the signal comes from Ilus below. There is a pause. The signal is repeated. There is a pause.<sup>2</sup>

The curtain falls.

The play is marked by economy of dialogue. The blank verse, with a very free and broken rhythm, is used to echo the atmosphere of the ancient epic. Drinkwater's 'message' is implicit. Written in the most tragic year of the Great War, the play held a mirror to the minds of those who were disgusted with war.

A critic<sup>3</sup> disagreed with Drinkwater's use of the expression 'nosing along the Trojan wall'.<sup>4</sup> There is nothing undignified about the use of the phrase 'nosing': <sup>i</sup> In fact it adds colour to the style of Drinkwater, who wanted to reform poetic drama. G.L.Burton records with pleasure the smooth flow of those lines as read by the poet himself.<sup>5</sup>

Drinkwater's efforts in poetic drama are inspired by a desire to bring poetry and drama together. But except in X = 0 we remember the poetry and not the drama. The peak of his achievement is in prose drama. He turned to prose because modern audiences preferred it, <sup>and</sup> he wanted to give them something of the satisfaction that verse gave to the Elizabethans.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>3</sup> Peattie, op. cit., p. 478.

<sup>4</sup> Pawns, p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> G.E.Burton, 'John Drinkwater', The Central Library Magazine, October 1938, p. 296.

The last dramatist to be considered in this chapter is Arthur Symons.<sup>1</sup>

Symons's The Harvesters is thoroughly Gibsonian in its anti-nomianism. Here is dramatised a father's hatred for his daughter deserted by her lover when she is with child. In this three-act drama, he contrasts the beauty of Cornwall and the primitive character of its people, bound by their dogmatic nonconformist faith.

Mary, who has been deceived by her lover, is left with child. Her pious, narrow-minded father is afraid of scandal and refuses to speak to her. In her anger she kills her lover:

I gave myself for love.  
And I rejoice because I have known love.  
It was for love, because I have known love,  
I killed my lover, and because I was  
A woman, and the mother of his child:  
There also I have nothing to repent.<sup>2</sup>

She questions the conventions which have treated her so cruelly.

Shall I not say  
Father was wrong, father has done me wrong?  
Has he not sold my happiness and his  
For heavy empty syllables that weigh  
False in the balance?<sup>3</sup>

The play's conclusion is simple. A very human situation is clothed in verse close to the spoken idiom. Symons like his contemporaries is inspired with the desire to bring about some changes in the medium of the drama.

Apart from Symons the dramatists treated in this chapter show nothing less than a determined enthusiasm for the revival of drama in verse. They discovered, like their contemporaries in Ireland,

<sup>1</sup> vide  
~~Supra~~ Chapter III, ~~px~~

<sup>2</sup> The Harvesters, 1916, pp. 80-81.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 80.



a refreshing liveliness in the depiction of simple people, and have sometimes given vivid pictures of them. In their dramatic mode they attempted to write in the tragic climate of an earlier drama and at the same time to use as their medium a language resembling that of a newer age.

Gibson is the least practical of them. In a letter to Drinkwater he says:

I am intensely interested in the new movement and I feel confident that poetic drama is the ~~part~~ of the future -- only I feel that whatever gift I have is more suited to make its appeal from the intimate pages of a book than from the boards of a theatre.<sup>1</sup>

Abercrombie as an academic man could not easily harmonise his language and his characters; his language is sophisticated while his characters are not. Besides, he did not want to become a dilettante and laboured hard to naturalise his stage. Symons's output in this genre is confined to one play, which has never been produced. Drinkwater is a much more finished craftsman than these others. Circumstances favoured him: his continued association with the Birmingham Repertory Theatre enabled him to make a much more solid contribution to verse drama than the others with whom he has been associated in this chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> Discovery, ~~1935~~ p. 214.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE INFLUENCE OF THE NOH PLAYS ON VERSE DRAMA

The existing dramatic tradition is that in which Bernard Shaw, Granville Barker and William Archer triumphed over a decayed 'poetic' tradition diversely represented by Irving, Gordon Craig and the Celtic Twilight. The intellectual content has been gradually swallowed up by an increasing sentimentalism, but the form remains both for the playwright and the actor. 'Naturalness' in the sense of a photographic realism, insensibility to the qualities of the spoken word, the reduction of the visual to insignificance -- these are the aspects of the form by which the drama was reduced to the service of a purpose foreign to it.<sup>1</sup>

This statement, made in 1934, is nevertheless applicable to the drama of the first decade of the century, when the dramatists made efforts to revive poetic drama. They were deeply concerned about the disappearance of verse drama from the stage and were in search of subjects and dramatic media which would be welcomed by audiences tired of the realistic drama. At a time when dramatists were sated with 'photographic realism'<sup>2</sup> and in search of a symbolic mode, the Noh plays of Japan drew their attention. In Yeats's words, they wanted to penetrate into the 'deep of the mind' with the help of 'noble imagination',<sup>3</sup> and the Noh plays seemed to show the way to achieve this aim.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Desmond Hawkins, 'The Poet in the Theatre', The Criterion, October, 1934, XIV, No.LIV, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> W.B.Yeats's Preface to Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's Axel, 1924.

<sup>3</sup> W.B.Yeats's Introduction to Certain Noble Plays of Japan, Dundrum, 1916, vi.

This contact with the East at the beginning of the present century operated on various levels. The most important impact on the writers of this century was made by Japanese drama, which brought new trends into English drama. In 1900 a Japanese company visited the Coronet Theatre at Notting Hill and acquainted English audiences with their highly formalised art.<sup>1</sup> In the next year Osman Edward provided those interested in Japanese plays with essays on the background.<sup>2</sup> The literary world became better acquainted with these plays through Ezra Pound's translations of Noh plays. Noh or Accomplishment: A Story of the Classical Stage of Japan came out in 1916. By 1918, the form of the Noh play had become familiar. These plays were being discussed in literary circles:

to

The aim of the Noh play is to express a desire or yearning, not for beauty, but for the beauty we dream; therefore the work of the play depends, not upon the truth or humanity, but upon the total effect, which is poetry.<sup>3</sup>

The validity of these remarks can be tested by applying them to a representative Noh play, 'Nishikigi', a play in two parts by Motokiyo. It is a poetic drama in which gesture and verse unite to produce a single clarified impression. It is a play about the ghost of a girl carrying the cloth she went on weaving out of grass, when she should have opened the chamber door to her lover. We see the lovers in the form of ghosts regretting their unconsummated love:

Tangled, we are tangled. Whose fault was it, dear?  
Tangled up as the grass patterns are tangled in this coarse  
cloth ...      ...      ...<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> E.Reynolds, Modern English Drama, 1950, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> Osman Edward, Japanese Plays and Playfellows, 1901.

<sup>3</sup> Yone Noguchi, 'The Japanese Noh Play', The Egoist, V, No.7, p. 99.

<sup>4</sup> 'Nishikigi', The Translations of Ezra Pound, 1953, p. 286.

The metaphor of woven grass is repeated a number of times: the lovers are like an unfinished cloth. In the second part the priest prays, and they are united.

The Noh plays of Japan have a very ancient history going back possibly as far as the twelfth century. In their fully developed and stereotyped form they were played upon a small square stage of polished wood projecting into the auditorium and bearing conventional decorations and fixed places for the musicians and the chorus. The first actor, called Shite, wears a mask, and all the players have elaborate costumes. There are always two main actors, and the number of the chorus is always ten and of the musicians four. The plays pursue a stereotyped course divided into two main parts. The story is told first in dialogue and then in dance.

There are six different kinds of Noh plays, in addition to comic interludes, customarily played between two successive Noh plays. The first type tells stories of the origin of Gods, the second tells stories of ancient wars, the third stories concerning magical garments, such as 'Nishikigi' mentioned above, the fourth stories of spirit-possession, the fifth stories of melodramatic adventures, and the sixth suitable stories for the conclusion of a programme.

In brief, music, dance, the mask, and the use of myths and legends which were alive in the folk imagination, provided a model for Yeats and his followers. The Japanese method of symbolic representation came as a boon to Yeats, who thought that English drama had exhausted all the possibilities of realism. Indeed, Yeats, who had written plays before he discovered this medium, adopted it eagerly.

.....I go to Asia for a stage-convention, for more formal faces, for a chorus that has no part in the action..... A mask will enable me to substitute for the face of some common-place player, .....the fine invention of a sculptor, and to bring the audience close enough to the play to hear every inflection of the voice.<sup>1</sup>

The medium was effective in dramatising ancient myth -- in Yeats's case the Cuchulain cycle. He wrote the Four Plays for Dancers (published in 1921), in which he exploited the new medium. He urged his friends Bottomley, Binyon, Sturge Moore and Masefield to develop the style further.<sup>2</sup> The 'dissociations of symbolism'<sup>3</sup> of the Noh drama fascinated him, and he suggested to them that they make the most of it, with alterations to suit the English audience. The plays of Binyon and Bottomley written in this style were tried

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<sup>1</sup> W.B.Yeats's Introduction to Certain Noble Plays of Japan, Dundrum, 1916, vii.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by A.Nicoll, World Drama From Aeschylus to the Present Day, 1949, p. 657.

<sup>3</sup> W.B.Yeats, op. cit., vii.

out in Masefield's Garden Theatre:<sup>1</sup>

The stage lent itself to Noh conceptions. In using it, our lack of a dancer could, we found, be replaced by an element of narrative poetry (thus integrating the poetic content of the stage more completely) -- in the person of the Greek messenger.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There is curiously little information about this theatre. An article in The Mask (Florence), Vol. XV (1925), pp. 50-51, describes it as follows: '..... a simply constructed building in his garden ..... designed to accommodate about one hundred persons ..... The stage is broad and sceneries are not going to be allowed to be a nuisance'.

Lillah McCarthy's reference in Myself and My Friends (London, 1933, p. 250) shows that, despite its limitations, plays of various kinds were produced: 'All sorts of plays were acted .... plays by John Masefield himself, verse-plays by Yeats and Gordon Bottomley, plays by Lawrence Binyon and, of course Shakespeare's plays -- "King Lear", which is so rarely attempted in the theatre, was played there with John Masefield as Lear. The actors would be the casual company of players which Masefield's enthusiasm had got together. The Oxford voice would be heard answering to the Berkshire voice, the scholar to the peasant. One of the latter, who had played some grisly part in "Macbeth" and won all our praise, when asked after the performance what part it was he had played, replied: "I don't rightly know what the part be called, but I does a deal of killing".'

<sup>2</sup> Vide Nicoll, op. cit., p. 657.

Through their imitation of the Noh the English dramatists were led to evolve new techniques. Various aspects of the plays impressed these writers. Yeats, who believed in restoring the 'ancient sovereignty' of words and hated a large theatre with its mechanical apparatus of illusion, wanted close intimacy between the play and the audience. Bottomley was interested in a special kind of chorus, while others were merely interested in the difference of the form in general from the conventional realistic mode.

These new elements, symbolism, imagery, the mask, the chorus, musicians, dancers and stylised gestures were assimilated, and the result was not exoticism but the rejuvenation of English verse drama. It is of interest that T.S.Eliot evinced great interest in this form after he saw the production of At the Hawk's Well in March 1916 in Lady Cunard's drawing-room in London. He was introduced to it by Ezra Pound.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, in his review of Noh or Accomplishment in The Egoist, he showed that he was brooding on the various aspects of Noh, particularly its symbolism and 'image' character:

The more symbolical drama is, the more we need the actual stage. The European stage does not stimulate the imagination; the Japanese does ..... The 'image' character of Noh makes the play brief. It also prevents rhetoric.<sup>2</sup>

The Noh style has left a permanent impress on the poetic drama, although <sup>Professor</sup> ~~Miss~~ Ellis-Fermor claims that it has been suggestive, not dogmatic.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> T.S.Eliot, 'Ezra Pound', Ezra Pound: a Collection of Essays, edited by Peter Russell to be presented to Ezra Pound on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday, 1950, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> T.S.Eliot, 'The Noh and the Image', The Egoist, August, 1917, p. 103.

<sup>3</sup> Ellis-Fermor, The Irish Dramatic Movement, 1954, p. 85.

William Butler Yeats<sup>1</sup>

Yeats (1865-1939) wrote four plays, published together as Four Plays for Dancers, specifically in the Noh style. They are At The Hawk's Well (1916), The Dreaming of the Bones and Calvary (1917), and The Only Jealousy of Emer (1918). They precede and anticipate the last plays: Words Upon The Window Pane (1924) and Purgatory (1939). The Cat and the Moon (1926) is also in this style.

To Yeats, plays with no scenery and at the <sup>s</sup>ame time maintaining a remoteness from life were no novelty. One of his early plays, The House-Glass (1903), was produced with a bare set designed by Gordon Craig and played by a Japanese dancer before a green curtain.<sup>2</sup> He also explored the possibility of calling up the 'shallow river and the few trees and rocky fields of modern Gort'<sup>3</sup> in The King's Threshold (1903) and in some scenes of On Bailie's Strand (1904).

Significantly enough, Yeats chose the Cuchulain myth to dramatise in the Noh form. He left the popular theatre behind and went in search of the select audience who could get into the heart of the symbols he used in the 'aristocratic' theatre. He was in search of an aristocratic audience:

I have invented a form of drama, distinguished, indirect and symbolic, and having no need of the mob or press to pay its way -- an aristocratic form.<sup>4</sup>

In a later essay he says:

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller treatment of Yeats, see Chapter Nine, infra.

<sup>2</sup> W.B.Yeats's Introduction to Certain Noble Plays of Japan, 1916, Dundrum, p. ii.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. ii.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. ii.



.....I have begun to shrink from sending my muses where they are but half-welcome ..... I seem to myself more alive at the moment when a roomful of people have the one lofty emotion.....<sup>1</sup>

In At The Hawk's Well,<sup>2</sup> he goes back to the Cuchulain myth. ~~treated on a symbolic level~~ By using the lore of the Sidhe (fairies) he achieves a certain precision in his central thought -- the heroic nature of the hero, Cuchulain, in search of wisdom, destined to live a bitter life.

Although the theme of the play has its origin in the Cuchulain myth, it is at once lifted to the symbolic level. The young hero, Cuchulain, comes to the well of immortality, which represents wisdom, and meets an old man, who tells his tale:

.....I came like you  
When young in body and in mind, and blown  
By what had seemed to me a lucky sail.  
The well was dry, I sat upon its edge,  
I waited the miraculous flood, I waited  
While the years passed and withered me away.<sup>3</sup>

The old man has been waiting for fifty years to drink of the well of immortality. The Guardian Hawk<sup>4</sup> of the well symbolises obstruction in the pursuit of wisdom. When the water is about to rise, the Guardian cries the cry of the hawk, dances and lures the young hero away from the well, while the old man falls asleep. The young hero returns only to fight 'the fierce women of the hills' roused by the Guardian of the well. The <sup>play</sup> closes with the reflection of the chorus that:

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<sup>1</sup> At  
<sup>1</sup> W.B. Yeats's Note on 'The Hawk's Well', (The Wild Swans at Coole, Other Verses and a Play in Verse, 1917. P. 43.)

<sup>2</sup> This play has been produced in Japanese in Japan, vide. The Twentieth Century, September, 1957, p. 242.

<sup>3</sup> W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, 1952, p. 213.

<sup>4</sup> Note to At the Hawk's Well, p. 45.

Wisdom must live a bitter life.<sup>1</sup>

This theme is realised on the stage in terms of his new medium. It was performed in 1916, on the floor of a friend's drawing-room, and the players came in by the same door as the audience.<sup>2</sup> Three musicians, whose faces were made up to resemble masks, played a drum, a gong and a zither. They unfold a cloth, and as they do so they sing the song which presents images of the well and the hero:

I call to the eye of the mind  
A well long choked up and dry  
And boughs long stripped by the wind,  
And I call to the mind's eye  
Pallor of an ivory face,.....<sup>3</sup>

The folding and unfolding of the cloth aid the imagination of the audience. The three musicians who play the instruments unfold the cloth and recede a little so that the stretched cloth and the wall make a triangle with the First Musician at the apex supporting the centre of the cloth. On the black cloth is a gold pattern suggesting a hawk. The Second and Third Musicians now slowly fold up the cloth again, while the Third Musician sings.<sup>4</sup> The actors arrive when the cloth is being held in this manner; the folding and unfolding indicate the beginning and end of the play. The Young Man and the Old Man wore masks, while the Guardian of the Well, the Dancer and the Musicians had their faces painted to resemble masks.

Yeats had the best cast available. Henry Ainley played the Young Man, and Allen<sup>a</sup> Wade the Old Man. A Japanese dancer, Michio Ito, was the Guardian of the Well, and one of the Musicians was

<sup>1</sup> Collected Plays, p. 219.

<sup>2</sup> Note to At the Hawk's Well, p. 45.

<sup>3</sup> Collected Plays, p. 208.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

Dulac,<sup>1</sup> who designed the masks for the play. But Yeats was not satisfied with the production.<sup>2</sup>

The Only Jealousy of Emer is a sequel to On Baile's Strand and is another play based on the Cuchulain myth, first published in 1918 in Two Plays for Dancers and publicly performed for the first time in Holland.<sup>3</sup> A prose version called Fighting the Waves was written in 1928 and included in Wheels and Butterflies (1934). It was rendered into prose with a view to making it 'immediately intelligible to an average theatrical audience.'<sup>4</sup>

It has been variously interpreted.<sup>5</sup> Yeats was brooding on the

<sup>1</sup> Vide The Wild Swans at Coole, Other Verses and a Play, Dunderum, 1917, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Lady Gregory, (Post mark 10 April, 1916),

<sup>3</sup> The Letters of W.B. Yeats, ed. Allan Wade, 1954, ~~Appendix C~~ ~~1916~~, p. 611.

<sup>4</sup> Brigit Bjersby, The Interpretation of the Cuchulain Legend in the Works of W.B. Yeats, Upsala Irish Studies, 1950, p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> Preface to Collected Plays, 1934.

5 (i) E. Reynolds sees in the play a blend of philosophy and legend springing from an Eastern theory of the twenty-eight incarnations of the soul, corresponding to the phases of the moon. (Vide Reynolds, op. cit., p. 90)

(ii) Peter Ure sees in it the interdependence of Yeats's personal belief and the mythology of the Cuchulain myth (vide Towards a Mythology, 1946, p. 22).

Fundamentally these views are allied to each other; but we are inclined to give more credence to Peter Ure's views. Reynolds sees a connection between the play and that part of A Vision where the poet categorises humanity under the various phases of the moon. Although A Vision was published in 1925, Yeats's mind was working at full pressure on its various aspects from 1915 (cf. A. Norman Jeffares, W.B. Yeats, Man and Poet, 1949, p. 191). The poem, The Phases of the Moon, involving a dialogue between the two fictional characters - Aherne and Robartes - was published in the collection The Wild Swans at Coole (1916). Reynolds seems to link it with the reincarnation of Cuchulain.

theory of reincarnation as set forth in the Hindu philosophy.<sup>1</sup> The play is based on the Cuchulain myth, in particular the story, The Sickbed of Cuchulain and the Only Jealousy of Emer.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Yeats was fascinated by Hindu philosophy. The East as represented by India was made available to him particularly through Rabindranath Tagore and Shri Purohit Swami. In the case of Tagore, it was a two-way traffic. Both were benefited.

In 1912 he met Tagore and helped him to bring out his collection of poems Gitanjali, and blessed it with an enthusiastic introduction. (Vide Rabindranath Tagore, Gitanjali and Fruit Gathering, 1919). The essence of Gitanjali is drawn from the Upanishads -- the basis of the Hindu philosophy. Later on Yeats helped Shri Purohit Swami to translate the Upanishads from Sanskrit into English.

It is of interest that Tagore's symbolic dramas appealed to Yeats. The Post Office (1914), a two-act prose play, was produced in London in 1913 by the Irish Players. Yeats's last sentence of the Preface shows his interest in symbolic drama:

"On the stage the little play shows that it is very perfectly constructed and conveys to the right audience an emotion of gentleness and peace."

Then Tagore wrote The Cycle of Spring (1916), a four-act play in verse, and his other plays, Sacrifice, etc., are symbolic. (Vide Rabindranath Tagore, Collected Plays, 1936).

<sup>2</sup> Bjersby, op. cit., p. 45. In the saga Eithne Inguba is the wife of Cuchulain; Yeats bases his play on Lady Gregory's version where Emer is Cuchulain's wife and Eithne Inguba his beloved (cf. Cuchulain of Muirthemne, 1934, pp. 276-293, and reference to the source, p. 360).

The play's essential conflict lies in the love of Emer, Cuchulain's wife, and his mistress, Eithne Inguba, who meet beside his body, which is lying on the seashore, to decide which of them can win back his soul from the Sidhe. The poet prepares us for the conflict; the musicians sing of the women's beauty.

First Musician: (Speaking) I call before the eyes a roof  
With cross-beams darkened by smoke;  
A fisher's net hangs from a beam,  
A long oar lies against the wall.<sup>1</sup>

Emer rises above petty jealousy and sends for the mistress, and narrates how her husband became senseless. She asks/~~Emer~~ Eithne Inguba to call his name, as a mistress's voice is sweeter:

I am but his wife, but if you cry aloud  
With the sweet voice that is so dear to him  
He cannot help but listen.<sup>2</sup>

Inguba tries and fails, while Emer succeeds at a very great cost. Bricriu, the maker of discord,<sup>3</sup> wants her to renounce the 'mere chance that some day you'd be the apple of his eye again'.<sup>4</sup> When she renounces love, the Ghost of Cuchulain comes to life but calls on his mistress. The Musicians sing a lyric, which emphasises:

O bitter reward  
Of many a tragic tomb!<sup>5</sup>

Cuchulain is dressed in grave-clothes but is not dead; an image has been put in his place. Emer makes Inguba kiss his lips, and the kiss brings to life the Figure of Cuchulain.

The First Musician's song alluding to the series of incarnations of the soul is an example which brings out well the majesty of Yeats's verse:

<sup>1</sup> Collected Plays, p. 282.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., ~~xix~~ p. 285.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., ~~xix~~ p. 287.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., ~~xix~~ p. 288.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., ~~xix~~ p. 295.

How many centuries spent  
 The sedentary soul  
 In toils of measurement  
 Beyond eagle or mole,  
 Beyond hearing or seeing,  
 Or Archimedes' guess,  
 To raise into being  
 That loveliness?<sup>1</sup>

The poetry is characteristic of Yeats's later style. The play has all the elements of the Noh play exemplified in mask, musical instruments, ghosts, and the suggestive quality of the Sidhe woman's dress. Her mask and clothes suggest gold or bronze or brass or silver, so that she seems more an idol than a human being.<sup>2</sup>

The prose play, Fighting the Waves, is made more elaborate by the introduction of three dancers.<sup>3</sup> Yeats witnessed its production, and in a letter to Lady Gregory says:

The Irish Times to-day has a leader on the production of Fighting the Waves and the Apple Cart as both 'produced amid such stir of attention as seldom gratified the most notable dramatists', which is of course nonsense so far as my play is concerned but friendly. However they abate the compliment by thinking the first but 'an interesting experiment' and the second as 'no more than a skit' .....All (English papers) agree that the play was enthusiastically received.<sup>4</sup>

The Dreaming of the Bones is yet another Noh play, over which Yeats was brooding in the period prior to his writing the dialogue between two of his fictional characters, Michael Robartes and Aherne,

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<sup>1</sup> Collected Plays, pp. 281-282.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

<sup>3</sup> The play begins with a dance which expresses Cuchulain fighting the waves, followed by the chorus which has for its central theme the dance of the Goddess and the Ghost of Cuchulain.

<sup>4</sup> ~~Wade xxx xxx xxx xxx xxx 767x~~ Letter to Lady Gregory, August 21 (Postmark 1929), The Letters, p. 767.

which finally became A Vision.<sup>1</sup> This work sets forth many of the ideas expressed in the plays, particularly the Noh plays. Here he uses the Noh technique in dramatising an Irish myth. Having explored the 'heart mysteries' of the Cuchulain myth in At the Hawk's Well and The Only Jealousy of Emer, to which he was soon to return in Calvary, he finds a new system in another myth<sup>2</sup> and in the Upanishads.<sup>3</sup> Yeats's note on the play sums up his views:

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<sup>1</sup> The Letters,  
~~W.A.H.~~ p. 639. Ure discusses the community of thought between The Dreaming of the Bones and A Vision (cf. Towards a Mythology, Chapter IV).

<sup>2</sup> W.A.Henderson wrote out for Yeats the historical allusions to 'Dervorgilla' (cf. Preface to the Four Plays for Dancers, 1920). According to this Dermot and Dervorgilla are eternally condemned to purgatorial 'dreaming back' unless they find another traitor who can pardon them for their having brought the Norman invader to Ireland to settle a private feud. A Young Man sympathises with the lovers but refuses to forgive them.

<sup>3</sup> W.B.Yeats, A Vision, 1920, p. 220: Certain Upanishads describe three states of the soul, that of waking, that of dreaming, that of dreamless sleep, and say man passes from waking through dreaming to dreamless sleep every night and when he dies. The dreamless state is a state of pure light or of utter darkness according to our liking, and in dreams the spirit serves as a light for itself. There are no carts, horses, roads, but he makes them for himself.

Further on p. 236: The Dreaming Back is represented upon the cone or wheel by a periodical stoppage of movement. Referring to the Hindu belief in rebirth he says:

If a spirit can escape from its Dreaming Back to complete its expiation, a new life may come soon and be, as it were, a part of Dreaming Back and so repeat the incidents of the past life.

The conception of the play is derived from the world-wide belief that the dead dream back, for a certain time, through the more personal thought and deeds of life..... The lovers in my play have lost themselves in a self-created winding of the labyrinth of conscience.<sup>1</sup>

Yeats gives the play, written for a 'theatre's antiself', a local habitation by placing the scene in the ruined Abbey of Corcomore. The musicians as usual with their drum, flute and zither introduce the play. A Stranger and a Young Girl dressed in the costume of the past time encounter the Young Man who fought in Dublin and is fleeing for his life. The conversation, couched in tough and matter-of-fact lines characteristic of Yeats's later poetry, reveals to us the story of the Civil War and their flight. The play with all its various threads is somewhat overloaded. Ancient beliefs are introduced in the Stranger's reply to the Young Man about the dead dreaming back:

Some are consumed in fire, some withered up  
By hail and sleet out of the wintry North,  
And some but live through their old lives again.<sup>2</sup>

The change of scene in the Noh play is depicted through imagery in the song of the Musicians. While the speaking characters go round the stage, the Musicians sing of the 'Red Bird of March', an image often repeated, indicating that the speakers are at the summit of the hill. The Stranger describes the horrors of the Civil War, while the Young Girl tells the Young Man of their separation for the past seven hundred years. They are condemned to suffer 'hovering between a thorn-tree and a stone'.<sup>3</sup> Her lines inspire the Young Man, who is to be her saviour, with pity:

<sup>1</sup> Note on The Dreaming of the Bones, 1921, p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> Collected Plays, pp. 436-437.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 441.



Although they have no blood, or living nerves,  
 Who once lay warm and live the live-long night  
 In one another's arms, and know their part  
 In life, being now but of the people of dreams,  
 Is a dream's part; .....

They would have reconciled themselves to this state of life, but

Their manner of life were blessed could their lips  
 A moment meet; but when he has bent his head  
 Close to her head, or hand would slip in hand,  
 The memory of their crime flows up between  
 And drives them apart.<sup>1</sup>

The Young Man's sympathy and his description of the landscape lead  
 on to the horrors of the Civil War. His last words are significant:

I had almost yielded and forgiven it all --  
 Terrible the temptation and the place!<sup>2</sup>

The audience recover from the charm of The Dreaming of the Bones  
 while listening to the song of the Musicians:

Stretch neck and clap the wing,  
 Red cocks, and crow!<sup>3</sup>

Calvary (1920) is the last of the Four Plays for Dancers.

Here Yeats is preoccupied with the ritualistic interpretation of the  
 myth of Christ, later resumed in The Resurrection (1931). Much of  
 the play's mystery is cleared up by Yeats's notes to it. He used  
 the bird-symbolism and the Noh technique in order to emphasise the  
 objective loneliness of Christ in His sufferings on the Cross.  
 Yeats is not propagating anybody's point of view, except that of an  
 artist:

I have used the bird-symbolism.....to increase the  
 objective loneliness of Christ by contrasting it with  
 a loneliness, opposed in kind, that unlike His can be,  
 whether joyous or sorrowful, sufficient to itself.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 441

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 444

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 445; the red cock, like other birds, to Yeats is  
 a symbol of subjective life; vide Four Plays for Dancers, p. 35.

I have surrounded Him with images of those He cannot save, not only with the birds, who have served neither God nor Caesar, and wait for none or for a different saviour, but with Lazarus and Judas and the Roman soldiers for whom He has died in vain.<sup>1</sup>

The birds live without care for salvation. Lazarus finds comfort in the grave and is devoid of desire to live; Judas stands for treachery: he has betrayed Christ because He proved all-powerful. The Roman soldiers, who are shown gambling, stand for debased values. They are ready to rob Christ of His cloak and settle its ownership by throwing dice.<sup>2</sup> Thus, as Yeats puts it, in Lazarus and Judas he has represented the types of intellectual despair that lay beyond Christ's sympathy, and in the Roman soldiers a form of objectivity that lay beyond his help.<sup>3</sup>

In the Musician's song the subject of the play is stressed:

The road to Calvary, and I beside it  
Upon an ancient stone, Good Friday's come,  
The day whereon Christ dreams His passion through.  
He climbs up hither but as a dreamer climbs.  
The cross that but exists because He dreams it  
Shortens His breath and wears away His strength.<sup>4</sup>

There is a trance-like atmosphere; the mocking crowd jeer at him. A player with the mask of Lazarus demands from Christ his death. He is determined to die:

Death is what I ask,  
Alive I never could escape your love,  
And when I sickened towards my death I thought,  
'I'll to the desert, or chuckle in a corner,  
Mere ghost, a solitary thing'. I died.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Notes on 'Calvary', Four Plays for Dancers, 1921, p. 136.

<sup>2</sup> The allusion to dice is in the conversations of Robartes and Aherne, Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 136-137.

<sup>4</sup> Collected Plays, p. 450.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 452.

Judas despises Christ, and the Roman soldiers await his death. They dance, while Christ on the cross says:

My Father, why hast Thou forsaken Me?<sup>1</sup>

Even the song of the Musicians disturbs the atmosphere; their refrain is:

God has not appeared to the birds.<sup>2</sup>

The bird-image is the centre of interest.

Our enjoyment of the play will be enriched if we do not put too much emphasis on Yeats's interpretation of the Christian myth. He uses the Bible story just as he had used the Cuchulain story, mainly in order to experiment in the Noh form.

The Cat And the Moon (1924) was originally intended to come as a relaxation between At The Hawk's Well and The Dreaming of the Bones, but he dropped it as he thought it was in a different mood.<sup>3</sup> The introduction of the Musicians with their instruments, the treatment of a subject based on tradition, and the descent of St. Colman from Heaven justify the play's inclusion in this chapter.

It is an amusing anecdote in the lives of two beggars, one lame and the other blind, based on the belief that the blessed saint of St. Colman's well will cure their deformities. The beginning and the end are related in the Noh manner by the image of the Cat and

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 456

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 457

<sup>3</sup> Notes to 'The Cat and the Moon', The Cat And the Moon and Certain Other Poems, Dublin, 1924.

the Moon.<sup>1</sup> Yeats himself is not keen on reading these abstract meanings into this humorous play. His main idea is to immortalise the well 'within a couple of miles of my Galway house' sacred to St. Colman, which began a few years before to work miracles and was 'rejuvenated by a Gaelic League procession in its honour'.<sup>2</sup>

The play is an interesting example of Yeats's adaptation of the Noh technique. He discards poetry except for the three songs of the Musicians, and also for the first time one of the Musicians takes the place of an important character. In his last four plays, the Musicians act sometimes as chorus, sometimes as orchestra and sometimes as prologue and epilogue. The first Musician speaks for the Blessed Saint, gives eyes to the Blind Beggar, cures the Lame Man of his defect, and mounts on his back. The play's style is colloquial. The beggars speak the language of their natural selves and behave as they have been behaving for forty years. They quarrel and hit each other; this knockabout supplies the dance-

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<sup>1</sup> The Notes unveil the mystery of <sup>the</sup> beliefs mentioned in the poem. But Yeats himself is not definite about these meanings. He says: 'Minnalouse (the black cat) and the Moon were perhaps..... an exposition of man's relation to what I have called the Anti-thetical Tincture and when the Saint mounts upon the back of the Lame Beggar he personifies a great spiritual event which may take place when Primary Tincture, as I have often called it, supersedes Antithetical.....' Ure says the Blind Man represents the body, the Lame the soul, and the cat is the normal man seeking his anti-self. Vide Ure, op. cit., p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> Notes to 'The Cat and the Moon', The Cat and the Moon and Certain Other Poems, Dublin, 1924, p. 36.

element. The image of the Cat and the Moon recurs quite often.<sup>1</sup>

The three Musicians use the zither, drum and flute. As in the all these plays, their folding and unfolding of the cloth at/beginning and end of the play is accompanied by a song which provides an image that forms the central action of the play.

The art of the poet is disciplined; the verse, although at times irregular, is written with a view to recital, and Yeats himself declared that he had in mind the enjoyment of the few. More important for our purpose than the representational modes used by Yeats in these plays is the verse which runs through them. He was trying to fashion a medium which, together with the stage technique he used, would express his symbolic meaning:

I want to create for myself an unpopular theatre and an audience like a secret society where admission is by favour and never to many. Perhaps I shall never create it, for you and I and Synge have had to dig the stone for our statue and I am aghast at the sight of a new quarry, and besides I want so much -- an audience of fifty, a room worthy of it (some great dining-room or drawing-room), half-a-dozen young men and women who can dance and speak verse or play drum and flute and zither.....<sup>2</sup>

Later he says:

I seek, not a theatre but the theatre's anti-self,<sup>3</sup>

Thus Yeats makes use of myths from various sources. He continued to be fascinated by the Noh technique as late as 1931, when

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note what was passing in Yeats's mind at the time of writing this play. He wanted to write plays and poems on the model of the Indian poems dealing with folk-tales about men and animals. He had the specific example of Krishna, around whom many stories are built in the Mahabharata, an ancient epic. (vide: The Cat and the Moon and Certain Other Poems, Notes).

<sup>2</sup> Plays and Controversies, 1923, pp. 212-213.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

he wrote The Resurrection. His stage directions to the play<sup>1</sup> show that, while he originally intended to adopt a more conventional technique, on second thought he went back to something resembling the Noh form.

Gordon Bottomley.

The influence of the Japanese symbolistic technique of the Noh drama manifested itself in Bottomley's various experiments. Like Masefield, Sturge Moore and Binyon, he was wrapt up in in the art of

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<sup>1</sup> (1) On the stage directions to 'The Resurrection', vide  
Collected Plays, 1952, p. 579:

I had begun with an ordinary stage scene in the mind's eye, curtained walls, a window and door at back, a curtained door at left. I now changed the stage directions and wrote songs for the unfolding and folding of the curtain that it might be played in a studio or drawing-room like my dance plays, or at the Peacock Theatre before a specially chosen audience.

(ii) When At The Hawk's Well was produced in a theatre in the United States, Yeats expressed his dissatisfaction in a letter to John Quinn:

Fate has been against me. I meant these plays never to be played in a theatre, and now one has been done without leave; and circumstances have arisen which would make it ungracious to forbid Ito to play 'The Hawk' as he will.

I had hoped to escape the press, and people digesting their dinners, and to write for my friends.....(Anthony Thwaite, "Yeats and the Noh", The Twentieth Century, September, 1957, p. 240).

verse speaking. They organised verse-speaking festivals, intended to keep alive the art of poetic drama. Masefield's Garden Theatre at Boar's Hill, Oxford, was the scene of these efforts, and all four dramatists made attempts to adapt various features of the Noh technique to the English stage:

In the Japanese Noh theatre the paramount importance of perfect costume is made plainer than it ever has been elsewhere: the provision and design of a sympathetic background and the few properties and details that are to signify time and place are still for us objects of research, and all the more so in that a minimum is required instead of the customary maximum.<sup>1</sup>

This preference for a 'minimum instead of the customary maximum' led him to introduce changes even in the technique derived from Yeats. He found the device of curtain bearing and folding inadequate for his new medium. His predominantly lyrical plays treating various aspects of Scottish life demanded a special technique. He replaced the technique of the bearing and folding of the cloth by a chorus of voices interwoven with action.

Prior to writing Scenes and Plays in 1929 Bottomley in an earlier play, Laodice and Danae, where he dramatised the story of Antiochus Theos and Danae his kinswoman, had used the technique of three women-musicians singing from behind the curtain - a technique also used by Sturge Moore and intended to demonstrate to the audience the value of poetry.<sup>2</sup>

According to Bottomley, every subject in the theatre can be treated at two levels:

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<sup>1</sup> Bottomley, Note to Scenes and Plays, 1929, p. 122.

<sup>2</sup> This play along with Yeats's The Only Jealousy of Emer was produced by T.Gray at the Lyric, Hammersmith, on 28th February, 1930. Vide The Poet and Painter: Being Correspondence between Gordon Bottomley and Paul Nash, 1910-46, ed. C.C.Abbott and Anthony Bertram, 1955, p. 201.

- (1) on the level of everyday intercourse and colloquial speech,
- and (2) by making humanity vocal where it is unvocal, by making the stage a place where speech has become complete (regardless of external fact) and makes audible the grace of the soul, its grace of movement as well as of utterance. <sup>1</sup>

Thus he trained a chorus of verse speakers of the Scottish Association and gradually did away with the mechanism and equipment of the conventional theatre:

Now that poetry is belittled and misused and maimed in the theatre -- when it is admitted there at all -- the art of verse-speaking has had to be rediscovered for its own sake, and its followers have begun to ask for dramatic poetry that can fulfil itself in the performer, that does not need the mechanism and equipment of a theatre for its unfolding, but that can be produced in any room large enough for a gathering-place; and that by such intimacy it obtains opportunities for subtle ranges of nuance and effect that can be compared with those of a string-quartet: a chamber-drama to set beside our most precious heritage of chamber-music.<sup>2</sup>

Scenes and Plays (1929) is his first collection of plays for a 'Theatre Unborn'. It contains eight plays based on Scottish ballads. Bottomley called them 'ballad-plays', intended for performance on a platform or a low dais with the barest of stage

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by A. Nicoll, British Drama, 1955, p. 479.

<sup>2</sup> Bottomley, Note to Scenes and Plays, 1929, p. 121.



accessories. They need no picture-frame or built-up scenery.<sup>1</sup>

Of this collection, 'A Parting', 'The Widow', 'The Sisters' and 'The Return' are duologues treating simple but dramatic situations. Their poetry is austere but it lends itself to melodic utterance. No chorus is used.

Bottomley's reticence is noticed even in the most intense situation. In 'A Parting', the daughter is leaving her ailing mother most unwillingly in response to the call of her lover. The mother, although in need of her daughter's help, puts her daughter's happiness above her own:

You will not make me grieve,  
As for a year I have done, watching you  
Using on me exquisite, unconscious  
Delicacies of thought and manner and face  
That should be seen and felt in other places  
To bring you cherishing in youth and age:  
And when your far-off friend would be your lover  
And called to you, I knew that you must go.  
And more: and more: I knew that I must send you.<sup>2</sup>

The other 'playlings' are characterised by the use of a bare kind of poetry similar to that of the Noh plays.

<sup>1</sup> Bottomley, himself did not make great claims for these plays. In a letter of 6th February, 1930 to Paul Nash printed in Poet And Painter, p.197, he says, 'They are rather queer plays.....they seem to be written for anybody but actors to play anywhere but in theatres: and yet they are no good for amateurs, for they need trained speakers, especially in choruses.....I think I am getting somewhere with them. But actors and theatre people don't care about them.'

Bottomley also indicated in the same letter that John Drinkwater, who saw the plays on the London stage as his guest, did not think much of them. But Terence Gray, who was interested in dance-drama, liked the plays and helped to produce them at the Festival Theatre at Cambridge.

<sup>2</sup> Scenes And Plays, 1929, p. 5.

'Towie Castle' is Bottomley's first experiment in the Noh technique in any full sense. The curtain bearers and folders perform the function of a prologue. In their dialogue we hear the whole story. It is the story of a Queen and twenty-seven persons being burnt in the castle. The atmosphere of the castle is suggested by the bearing and folding device. Adam Gordon and a Girl are talking about the castle when the Ghost of the dead Queen who loves the land appears:

It is all ruin: but these were always the lands  
 And places of my people, and I return  
 Sometimes day after day  
 Because the feeling of them can give me life  
 And stir the intensity of concentration  
 That makes existence. Sight for ever remains;  
 And I can see no other place so clearly,  
 For I see no other place with so much passion.<sup>1</sup>

The meeting of the Ghost and human characters who have survived the holocaust emphasises the intensity of the tragedy. The play closes with the Curtain Bearer's reflection:

'Twere better that Towie should burn again  
 With its reverberations of pain,.....<sup>2</sup>

The play has all the features of a Noh play except the dance element.

'Merlin's Grave' uses a similar technique but on a larger canvas. The scene of the River Tweed and the rowing of the boat by three women are brought before our eyes by the words of the Curtain Folder and Bearer:

Folder: The sound of the water changes now:  
 A new sound flows along with its flow.  
 What ~~float~~ ~~on~~ are these like a flame and a flame  
 Who float on it darkly and never came  
 By paths that we trod? Are they spiritual?

Curtain-Bearer: They are maiden and mortal, though shining  
 and tall.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 48-49.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

Thus in Bottomley the Curtain Bearer and the Folders take part in the play's action more than in Yeats. The verse of the play is varied but unadorned.

In the two plays 'Ardvorlich's Wife' and 'The Singing Sands', he uses a multiple chorus -- Chorus and Semichorus. The themes are drawn from Scottish legend.

'Ardvorlich's Wife' starts on a vacant stage, hung at the back with a semicircle of grey curtains on which are painted mountains and snow-laden trees in white outline. The chorus of snow, eight in number, dressed in snow-white, is divided into First Semichorus and Second Semichorus. The First Semichorus introduces the story and the Second Semichorus continues it. The play deals with the return of the Strange Woman, Ardvorlich's Wife, who has been frightened away by the enemies who had enjoyed her hospitality and cut off the head of her brother. In her exile she has lost her senses, but she regains them after the birth of her child. She returns to normal life. When the chorus has prepared the audience and formed a circle, the Strange Woman dressed in fragments of recognisable garments emerges:

The blood is under the snow,  
My life is under the snow,  
With the things I know  
There is no more any being  
In me:<sup>1</sup>

Human characters are introduced to tell the tale of the House of Ardvorlich. Then her husband appears; she loses her immortal part and joins him. The Chorus of the Women sings:

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

Snow, we are the snow.  
 We have watched the mortals go,  
 With passions and anguishes  
 Among her unborn seed,  
 Away from our long ease.<sup>1</sup>

Thus a very delicate structure is woven. The unity of feeling is maintained by the chorus.

In 'The Singing Sands' a Chorus of Waves is used to present the story of a cave filled with the skulls and bones of MacDonalds killed in a fight between them and the MacLeods of Skye. The play again begins on a vacant stage with the singing of the Chorus of the Waves. The Chorus later divides into First Semichorus and Second Semichorus. The surviving human characters of the dead family are introduced:

This is the cave, Miss Helen. Do not enter.  
 The way is rough and narrow and not fit for a lady,  
 And even after three hundred years of time  
 There are men's bones to be seen, and smaller bones of  
 the same human shapes.<sup>2</sup>

Their lyrical dialogue discloses the death of Murdo, who smothered the woman he loved. The play closes with the Waves' solemn reflection:

What do the waters know?  
 Day and night, and the morning tides,  
 And the implicate unseen will that divides  
 Flow from ebb, ebb from flow;  
 That we do not fear or understand.<sup>3</sup>

The Choruses of the Snow-people and the singing sands delighted Bottomley. He was fascinated; he told Paul Nash:

I send you a little picture of my Snow-people. I  
 could really do something on these new lines of mine.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 98

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.107

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.118

<sup>4</sup> Poet And Painter, p. 201.

He considered 'The Singing Sands' a technical exploration of an unfamiliar form of drama. It was produced with great success by the Community Drama Festival in 1930.<sup>1</sup>

Bottomley's experiment in the technique of using a chorus instead of curtain bearing and folding is continued in Lyric Plays (1932). Like their predecessors, Lyric Plays were written for specific performers and a coterie audience. Three of these, 'The Bower of Wendel', 'Culbin Sands', and 'Suilven and the Eagle', were performed by specially trained actors. 'The Bower of Wendel' was performed by the Falkirk Company in Masefield's Garden Theatre in the winter of 1932, 'Culbin Sands' by the London Verse-Speaking Choir at the London Polytechnic in 1931, and 'Suilven and the Eagle' by the Norwich Training College for Teachers in June, 1932. With the assistance of Constance Herbert of Glasgow, 'a teacher of dancing and stage-movement of original and imaginative artistry',<sup>2</sup> he trained his speakers. In a note to the plays, Bottomley explains how he seeks to achieve ordered movement in dramatic poetry and a great increase in the range of expression by abandoning 'realistic intention and the accidents of naturalism'.<sup>3</sup> Thus he explores:

Unchartered beauty in the old grey way.<sup>4</sup>

A word must be said about Bottomley's choice of material. The Scottish legends provide him with the material he is in search of. In this respect he is very much like Yeats. What Yeats was doing in Ireland to dramatise Irish mythology, Bottomley did for the

<sup>1</sup> Note to Lyric Plays, 1932, vii.

<sup>2</sup> & <sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. v.

Scottish mythology. But there is an obvious difference in their handling of myth. The Irish myth achieves charm and beauty when recreated in the pages of Yeats; whereas in Bottomley the transfiguration of Scottish myth does not quite come off. Only the story remains vaguely in the mind of the reader. It is because Yeats is part of the life he recreates, whereas Bottomley, like an assiduous traveller, has listened to the stories or heard about them but fails to recapture their local colour.

In his desire to abandon 'realistic intention' Bottomley used natural and supernatural agencies to convey themes usually associated with dread and horror. This is at times overdone. In 'Culbin Sands' he recreates the dreadful atmosphere in which the estate of Culbin was washed away and only a child escaped and was brought up by a nurse. Here he uses choruses of winds, trees and witches. The choric device is used to realise tragic intensity, and verse in lines of varied length reaches dramatic heights:

Yet it breeds fury and has whips;  
It has all the passion of the hunting hound  
As well as the cry of the hunted beast.  
When it sounds in its zest it hears no prayer;  
It rushes; it surges; it can sunder and tear.<sup>1</sup>

In 'The Woman from the Voe' Bottomley uses Seal Men and Seal Women as the chorus. What interest us most are his use of the chorus and the curtain-bearing and folding. The setting requires sea and an island - the Island of Uist in the Shetlands. The play has had only one performance, at Norwich, and is an exploration of new methods of stage-craft in the community theatre.

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<sup>1</sup> ~~Index, p. 48.~~ 'Culbin Sands', Twenty one-Act Plays, selected by John Hampden, (Everyman), 1941, p. 201.

By 1938 Bottomley's ideas on the production of these plays had crystallised. In a note to his Choric Plays, he says:

I have no doubt that, if a replica of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre were available, I should find there all I need: a stage thrust forward, a curtain (in the form of the "traverse" in the middle of the stage-space instead of at the front), a balcony at the back, with half-enclosed space under it, and access to the stage from the auditorium as well as from the green-room. With these 'constants' and a modern lighting system the poet-dramatist could find a perfect freedom for his art.<sup>1</sup>

He reverts to the use of curtain bearing and folding in 'Fire At Callart', and the curtain is patterned with flames to depict the tragic scene. He discarded this method in Dunaverty, a tragedy, and The Falconer's Lassie, a comedy. These two plays have no elaborate stage directions. The Falconer's Lassie was produced at Edinburgh in 1938.<sup>2</sup> Both are meant for an open stage: Bottomley's distaste for naturalistic drama drives him to explore new methods derived from the Noh technique of Yeats:

They were written for such a stage in the belief that the dominant picture-frame stage of the contemporary realistic theatre was a hindrance to the use of poetry in the theatre, and a reason that verse has lost its old place there.<sup>3</sup>

The verse of these plays is written for stage speaking; it is unadorned, and as Austin Clarke puts it:

His poetry abandons the silent page, for it demands to be heard. It becomes an interwoven movement of living, soaring voices.<sup>4</sup>

Bottomley is steeped in Scottish themes. His experiments are varied, and his myth at times bursts the subdued framework of the

<sup>1</sup> Note to Choric Plays, 1938, p. 138.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted at the end of Choric Plays.

Noh technique, as in 'Bower of Wendel', one of the lyric plays where 'past rapture', a kind of wild beauty and passion, emerges out of the dark background of the Clyde. Having realised the inadequacy of the Noh technique, he has evolved his own definite style in the later choric plays.

Bottomley's use of a chorus-whether derived from the Noh or Greek drama - is a great contribution to dramatic literature:

.....he has given us not only poetry which is drama, austere, remote, yet real and beautiful, but something new besides: a form of drama in which for the first time the choruses are the protagonists. This invention no one has yet borrowed, but the choric speech was adopted by Mr. T.S. Eliot and Miss Elsie Fogerty for Murder in the Cathedral; others have followed, and still more do so.<sup>1</sup>

### Laurence Binyon<sup>2</sup>

Laurence Binyon's experiments with the Noh technique are confined to his Three Short Plays (1930): 'Godstow Nunnery', 'Love in the Desert' and 'Memnon'.

He is one those rare men who combine in themselves a fine taste for literature with a keen insight into art. Yeats had blessed his poetry and drawings. In 1901 he pronounced Binyon's Odes<sup>3</sup> one of the best books he had read during the whole year, and in 1932 he was immensely pleased with Binyon's The Drawings and Engravings of William Blake.<sup>4</sup> His poems written during the war brought him fame; by the time he came to produce his plays in Masefield's

<sup>1</sup> John Hampden, Introduction to Twenty One-Act Plays, 1941, xv.

<sup>2</sup> See page 78 supra.

<sup>3</sup> The Letters  
~~Hadexxxpxxxxitxx~~ p. 388.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 698.



theatre he had achieved considerable success as a dramatist.<sup>1</sup>

The influence of the Noh technique on Binyon manifests itself in his choice of material and the use of stagecraft. But he was more interested in festivals of spoken poetry, and the poetry in his plays is written with a view to recital on the stage.

The Three Short Plays were written for the Oxford Recitations, for a special stage, a stage without scenery. They were performed in various places with only a screen. 'Godstow Nunnery' and 'Memnon' were acted in Masefield's theatre in 1929, and 'Love in the Desert' had several performances in 1928. The last named was popular with schoolboys.<sup>2</sup>

'Godstow Nunnery' chooses a bare kind of setting like that of the Noh play and makes use of the characteristic ghost. The scene is set in a cloister, and the play deals with Rosamund, a child buried in the cloister, coming to life and conversing with Eleanor, one of the sisters, who tells the child about the joys and sorrows of life. It closes in a dream-like trance, while Eleanor is asking the child to find peace not on earth:

Keep ignorance;  
The wise world has no power to bless.  
Child, is there peace within these walls?  
Can peace be on earth?<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> His first play, Paris And Oenone (1906), is a tragedy in one act. Attila (1907) was produced at His Majesty's. Its interest lies in its production by Oscar Asche. Then came Ayuli (1923): see page 209 supra. Boadicea (1926), produced at Masefield's theatre, is a play in prose and verse. Three Short Plays appeared in 1930. In 1934, he wrote a play about Henry II, called The Young King, for presentation in the Chapter House of Canterbury Cathedral.

<sup>2</sup> Preface to Three Plays, 1930.

<sup>3</sup> Three Plays, p. 24.

Like Bottomley, Binyon concentrates on the verse dialogue. We get the feeling of the cold atmosphere and of the apprehension pervading the nunnery.

In 'Love in the Desert' Binyon builds a dream-like picture of the story of the lovers Laila and Majnun. Laila and Majnun have been lovers since their school days. But the story becomes tragic with Laila's parents marrying her to another. Majnun, crazed with love, goes into the forest and becomes the friend of the wild animals. When Laila's husband dies, she comes back to marry Majnun, too late.

Binyon begins his play near the climax. Laila is awaiting her lover in the company of a Nurse. The grimness of the situation is emphasised by its setting in a tent pitched in the desert. A dialogue between the Nurse and Laila foreshadows the tragedy:

Nurse: This is the desert. God befriend the lost!  
 Here the sand blows over the bones of men.  
 In such immense and burning barrenness  
 Can love live, even love?

Laila: My heart is afraid, it is beating against my side  
 As if it would break.<sup>1</sup>

Laila sees her lover in a dream, and the nurse also feels the presence of Majnun:

He is close. I feel the trembling of his hands  
 On the tent-rope. His shadow is in the door.  
 There is no word. He is entered. Still no word.  
 O they are drowned now deep in each other's eyes,  
 They are drinking of that never-tasted cup  
 That brimmed in solitude.<sup>2</sup>

But the lovers never meet in this world. The dream is merely symbolic. The dream is shattered:

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

Give me my dream back! Give me back my dream!  
 He looked into my eyes, seeking his dream,  
 And said nothing, and spoke nothing, and fled.  
 This was not Laila, that was not Majnun.<sup>1</sup>

'Memnon' is the last play in this technique, which he follows here very closely. On this occasion he goes to Greek mythology for his material. Memnon, nephew of Priam, the King of Troy, assists him against the Greeks and is slain by Achilles. Just before the battle Memnon enters a secret temple, and stands aghast before the oracle which foretells his death. He reveals this to his wife, Amastris.

In order to dramatise this story in the Noh manner, Binyon makes use of two Priestesses instead of three musicians as we have in Yeats. The two Priestesses have no musical instruments. They provide a prologue to the story. They tell us about Memnon and the siege of Troy. Memnon emerges from the temple and is met by Amastris. His strange talk is not intelligible:

There in the temple darkness was: and I  
 Drew in darkness where I stood alone  
 And listened. And the after silence seemed  
 To assume substance, and to build itself  
 About me, and roof me, not with stone alone  
 But power, amassed, fixed and immovable,  
 That seas might storm and might be broken on;  
 And this alone had power and I had none;  
 A silence that immured me as in a frost  
 Helplessly fixed; and like a lion's eye  
 Fate stared into my soul.<sup>2</sup>

Amastris consoles him, while the play closes with the mournful reflections of the two Priestesses anticipating the cruel fate that awaits Memnon:

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

Second Priestess: Trembling heart wait!

First Priestess: The silent, star-directed skies  
Have breathed it --

Second Priestess: Fate.<sup>1</sup>

Binyon made use of material drawn from various sources -- European, Persian and Greek -- for these brief plays. He adopts some of the Noh manner, but does not develop the Noh technique as Bottomley does. His characters and situations only serve him for lyrical reflection. We remember Binyon the lyrical poet more than Binyon the dramatist.

Thomas Sturge Moore<sup>2</sup> (1870-1946)

W.B. Yeats introduced Sturge Moore to Noh, and he proved to be temperamentally suited to this aristocratic symbolic medium. He was interested in Biblical and classical themes -- proper material for a symbolic drama.

He became known to the world of letters as a contributor of poems to The Dial. His choice of subjects shows his interest in obscure and mythological themes. Besides poetry, designing and engraving attracted him. He did designs for Yeats's books and for his own. His poems and plays have been collected in five volumes -- The Poems of T. Sturge Moore, Volume I (1931); Volume II (1932);

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> Sturge Moore is of special interest to the Indian student of English literature. His keen interest in mythology caused him to find in Rabindranath Tagore a kindred spirit. He took very kindly to the Indian poet and helped him translate his verse, sitting "long hours day after day by Tagore's side trying to realise the port and mien of his idiom" (Frederick L. Gwynn, Sturge Moore and the Life of Art, 1952, p. 49). The Crescent Moon, a collection of verses by Tagore, is dedicated to Moore. Later it was translated into French by Mary Sturge Moore.

Volume III (1932); Volume IV (1933); and The Unknown Known (1939).

His contribution to poetic drama is meagre in volume, but he has some importance for his experiments. Before he tried his hand at the Noh technique, using the device of curtain bearing and folding, he had written Aphrodite Against Artemis (1901) for a theatre in which 'the scenery would be done on a new decorative, almost symbolic principle'.<sup>1</sup> When this play was produced at the Liberty Theatre Club in 1906, it was bitterly attacked by William Archer under the caption, 'A Rival to Euripides'. 'After last night's exhibition, the author may be urged and even implored to hold aloof from drama'.<sup>2</sup>

But this criticism did not deter him from experiments. As a member of the 'Masquers', he continued to introduce innovations in his plays. He Will Not Come (1933), a play on the theme of Don Juan, is a 'drama to be overheard from behind a curtain'. 'Niobe' (in The Tragic Mothers, 1920) is a duologue between a Boy and a Girl, also to be heard from behind a curtain or screen.

Medea (1920) is the first play in which he uses the Noh devices. He uses curtain bearing and folding to dramatise the story. He modifies the Noh technique in that he does not use the musicians. The play was written in response to a suggestion made by Yeats.<sup>3</sup>

The curtain bearer and folders introducing the play invoke the goddess and tell the story of Medea before the action begins. It is impressively done:

<sup>1</sup> Gwynn, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> Note to The Tragic Mothers, 1920.

Curtain Bearer: Medea comes seeking her murdered boys;  
One little fellow gains by our friend's trance,  
And soon the younger will be served by yours.

First Folder: Why did she murder them?

Curtain Bearer: Jason, her husband,  
Tired of her, at Corinth, jurists held  
The rites by which he wed her in far Colchis  
Were naught by Wizardry, and ruled him free  
To espouse the daughter of their king.....<sup>1</sup>

Medea craves for the forgiveness of her children. She had forgotten that she was a votary to Diana, and that the murder of her children was an atonement to the Goddess of Chastity. The Curtain Bearer acts as a chorus. Medea sees her children 'viewless and intangible', reminiscent of the ghosts in a Noh drama, and asks their pardon:

Only if mother looks into your eyes  
Can her talk earn the pardon that she needs.<sup>2</sup>

The Curtain Folder's line suggests the inner meaning of the play:

The beauty of the wilderness  
Has most power when  
'Tis temple for a heart's distress.<sup>3</sup>

Medea appears as a nymph -- a part of nature -- and her maternal instinct is brought into full play by the dramatist's device of her prayer for the reincarnation of her children and atonement for her dreadful act. The play closes with the Curtain Bearer's reflection on life and death:

Death is life veiled  
By the pang which destroys the sense.  
Passion survives; and more daintily limbed,  
Man has to ail as he hailed;  
His new habiliment, though dimmed,  
Yet shines, by turns transfigured again  
As immortal beauty recovers from pain.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 25

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 25-26.

The conception of Medea as a mother longing for her murdered children is Moore's own. The situation is beautifully realised in verse that has descriptive value:

What can your listless bowels know of love?  
 Hunger for their forgiveness gnaws at mine.  
 How could I tell them ere they felt the steel?  
 Expected, - the blow had been far more cruel!  
 Cannot those eyes acquit me?<sup>1</sup>

'Psyche in Hades' (in Mystery And Tragedy, 1930).

The myth of Psyche fascinated Sturge Moore. He wrote a poem<sup>2</sup> on it in 'complicated prosody with a decorative prose gloss'<sup>3</sup> in 1904, and in 1930 wrote a drama 'Psyche in Hades' in the technique of Noh, using couplets.

He makes use of the story as narrated by Apuleius<sup>4</sup> to dramatise the love of Psyche for her lost lover Eros. It is the Melusina story of the man who is allowed to enjoy the company of his supernatural lover on condition that he never sees her. It is realised by the introduction of characters which have rich associations in the myth of Persephone: Dis, the king of the underworld and husband of Persephone; Eros the God of Love, who loved Psyche and abandoned her because of her curiosity; Hermes, the brother of Persephone; and Anteros, a false image of Eros. The characters are made formal by their dress and masks. Psyche is dressed in white, the symbol of purity. Persephone appears with an armful of autumn foliage. Hermes enters weather-tanned in copper-coloured vest and short brown cloak lined with deep purple, and Anteros with golden hair

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> 'Pan's Prophecy', 1904.

<sup>3</sup> Gwynn, op. cit., p. 110.

<sup>4</sup> The Metamorphoses or Golden Ass, tr. H.B. Butler, 1910, Vol. I.

and eyes filmed with violet, wearing a vest of a sullen blood colour on which two raven wings are stencilled as chained about his loins, and with his wrists tied together with a violet kerchief. The masks are patterned with Greek figures. Psyche narrates her story to the Ministrant Shade and breaks down full of grief. Mother and daughter withdraw, and the Curtain Bearer and the Folders comment on the situation and prepare the ground for the philosophic idea -- the longing of the soul for immortal love.

Anteros, who is the false image of Eros, is used to emphasise Psyche's feelings. His very presence frightens her, and the situation is dramatically conceived. Psyche fears for her future; she must ever find Eros and beware of espousing Anteros. Mother and daughter part; when the Ministrant Shade comments:

My heart's all grief! To see them part so soon  
Most dolefully perplexes that sweet tune,  
Which seemed to wed high passion to consent.<sup>1</sup>

The myth in simple terms means the purgation of the soul of all impurities and the search after an ideal.

The meaning is lost sight of in the poet's lines, which are sometimes obscure:

My meaning skirts the sea-line of thy ken  
Now, and tolls like cracked bell across the cold waves  
To one who cannot render help it craves.<sup>2</sup>

At times he is full of words; Psyche's description of her lover is heavily worded:

Thou, though no male most savoursome to kiss,  
Communest soul to soul, twangst not ~~the~~ body  
Like the strong lute-string which the husband played  
Delightedly.<sup>3</sup>

1 'Psyche in Hades', Mystery and Tragedy, 1930, p. 40.

2 Ibid., p. 3.

3 Ibid., p.21.



It is difficult to pronounce judgment on this play, as its meaning is often obscure. In any case the myth of Psyche is variously interpreted by different writers. However, our interest is in its use of curtain-bearers and folders, a procedure made popular by the example of the Noh plays. The play was first presented before a plain wall.

Daimonassa, a Tragedy, which is considered the best of Sturge Moore's plays,<sup>1</sup> uses one aspect of the Noh technique -- the musicians with zither, one of the three instruments used by Yeats. The play is based on the myth of Danaus and his fifty daughters (Pindar, Pythia, IV, 117). Kyrakaeus, ousted tyrant of Orchomenos, tells his two daughters, Ferusa and Daimonassa, to kill their husbands on the wedding night. Daimonassa obeys her father's orders, and Ferusa disobeys. The situation provides Sturge Moore with an opportunity to dilate on the ethical aspect of obedience and disobedience to a father. The play's interest lies in the dramatist's use of the musicians, who act as prologue and chorus as well.

Sturge Moore adapts the Noh technique in various ways. The use of the Curtain-Bearer and Folders in his major play, 'Psyche in Hades', is a tour de force, but the Musicians in 'Daimonassa' are less successful. His plays to be heard from behind a curtain show one aspect of his interest in the Noh convention, which demands the audience's concentration on the poetry. His strong philosophic habit of mind found a congenial medium in the symbolic Noh technique.

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<sup>1</sup> "Mr. Moore's greatest and only truly dramatic play, Daimonassa, .....it is Racinean rather than Shakespearean" (Yvor Winters, Hound and Horn, Vol. I (No.8), p. 543.

Where his inspirer, Yeats, used Celtic myth, he preferred the Greek. Like Yeats, he strove to emphasise the importance of poetry on the stage.

### John Masefield

This chapter on the influence of the Noh play on the verse drama of the period can be closed with a reference to Masefield's work, which combines the influence of the Noh play with Greek and Elizabethan tragedy.

Yeats's and Synge's demonstrations<sup>1</sup> of spoken poetry and play production at the beginning of the century affected Masefield considerably. He brooded upon their choice of themes for drama, and he felt that he should unearth the wealth of fable lying in lonely places in England.<sup>2</sup> He decided to start a group which would rekindle the nation's imagination through poetic drama and the speaking of poetry on the stage. He started the Oxford Recitations in 1923 to bring about some system of speaking poetry on the stage in a way which would be a delight to the speakers and also provide through competition an encouragement to the speaking of poetry thoughtfully and with feeling.<sup>3</sup>

Gilbert Murray, who has translated Greek plays, helped him to organise the contests. The festival was conducted annually for seven years and was a tremendous success. This success encouraged Masefield to turn his attention towards the theatre and the production of plays. He was fascinated by the Messenger speeches in classical drama:

<sup>1</sup> John Masefield, Some Memories of W.B. Yeats, 1940, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> John Masefield, So Long to Learn, 1952, p. 154.

<sup>3</sup> John Masefield, With the Living Voice, 1925, p. 22.

In attempting plays in verse, I thought much of the Mummers, the Sword Dancers and the Elizabethan theatrical companies..... I had learned enough of the theatre to begin to understand the mastery of the Elizabethan poets; they were of their theatre: they knew all its arts.<sup>1</sup>

While Yeats, Bottomley and Binyon make use of the Japanese technique pure and simple in writing plays in verse, Masefield demonstrates his interest in this technique by writing a play in prose on a popular Japanese theme. The Faithful (1915) is not purely in the Noh technique, but is based upon a famous Noh drama, The Vengeance of the Forty-Seven Ronin. The Faithful is mixed in manner. While the bare setting and the speech of the Herald, corresponding to the chorus in the Japanese drama, recall the manner of a Japanese play, it has traces of the Elizabethan drama too. The revenge motive is the basis of the main action of the play.

Asano, a Daimyo, is deprived of his ancestral land by Kira, another Daimyo, and is inveigled by him into committing an unpardonable breach of etiquette by striking him in the presence of the Imperial envoy, and is killed. Kurano, Asano's Counsellor, and his loyal friends suffer for a year in their resolve to be revenged on Kira. Ultimately they kill themselves in obedience to the Imperial command.

The play has three acts and two settings which are bare -- one the front part of the stage with a back-cloth, representing a Japanese landscape, and the other the back part, representing a room in a Japanese palace. The style is bare and unadorned. Masefield made a successful effort to combine the old Japanese manner with the robust Elizabethan passion seen in Kurano's assumed madness in Act II.

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<sup>1</sup> So Long to Learn, 1952, pp. 73-74.

The Herald's speech bridges the action between Act II and Act III. The play is also interspersed with lyrics.

(1934),  
 'End and Beginning', a play about the death of Mary Stuart, derives something from the Noh technique. The action of the play takes place in a small room in Fotheringay Castle. Instead of the musicians we have two women who enter on a lower stage and later go to the upper stage and sum up the play. Their dialogue is in couplets. After the execution of Mary her Spirit appears, and the play closes with a speech by the Spirit. The Spirit of Beauty is also introduced to address the audience on the theme of life's purpose.

It is difficult to agree with the remark of Nicoll<sup>1</sup> that the general influence of the Noh stage is seen in Masefield's Philip the King (1914), a play about the Spanish Armada in heroic couplets, and A King's Daughter (1925), a play about Jezebel in blank verse. But some influence of the kind can be discerned in the prose play, The Tragedy of Nan (1909), dedicated to W.B. Yeats.

Masefield is very close to the classical tradition, and his plays are characterised by classic simplicity and adherence to the 'classical' unities. His plays on the Christian tragedy, Good Friday (1917), The Trial of Jesus (1923), and The Coming of Christ (1926), are treated under the heading of Religious Verse Drama in Chapter VIII.

The technique of the Noh plays adopted by these dramatists enabled them to achieve remoteness in their poetry and simplicity in their scenery. In the hands of Yeats this technique was not

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<sup>1</sup> A. Nicoll, British Drama, p. 403.

merely formal or stylised but became fully assimilated to his manner of writing and produced an interesting new dramatic genre. He explored for the first time in English the full possibilities of the Noh drama:

It would be a stirring adventure for a poet and an artist, working together, to create once more heroic or grotesque types that, keeping always an appropriate distance from life, would seem images of those profound emotions that exist only in solitude and in silence.<sup>1</sup>

It became a convenient medium to restore the sovereignty of verse on the stage. Yeats and those influenced by him were deeply immersed in the art of verse speaking on the stage; they resorted to the Noh plays, which 'were at their best an image',<sup>2</sup> which made a demand on the imagination of the audience. The technique derived through Yeats by his fellow dramatists was modified considerably. Bottomley devised a special chorus; Binyon attempted to establish close intimacy between the actors and the audience; Sturge Moore, with a view to exposing his audience to the direct effects of poetry, used the Curtain-Bearer and Folder and wrote plays to be heard from behind a curtain; Masefield combined the Noh with other dramatic devices, to evolve a style of his own.

But this dramatic method has its own practical difficulties. It depends on trained dancers, chorus and speakers, and above all a picked audience. The assembling and ordering of symbols with a view to achieving an emotional pattern in a play needed a special kind of audience for its success. But, to survive, it would have had to break out of the barriers of the drawing-room and reach a wider audience.

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<sup>1</sup> W.B. Yeats, A Note to "At the Hawk's Well", The Wild Swans at Coole, 1927, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Ernest Fenollosa and Ezra Pound, Noh or Accomplishment, 1916, p. 65.

In spite of the full use of the potentialities of the Noh technique, Yeats sounded a note of pessimism:

Shakespeare's art was public; now resounding and declamatory, now lyrical and subtle, but always public; because poetry was a part of the general life of his people, who had been trained by the Church to listen to difficult words, and sang, instead of the songs of the music-hall, many songs that are still beautiful..... A man who had sung 'Barbara Allen' in his own house would not, as I have heard the gallery at the Lyceum Theatre, receive the love-speeches of Juliet with an ironical churring. We must recognise the change as the painters did when, finding no longer palaces and churches to decorate, they made framed pictures to hang upon a wall.

Whatever we have lost in mass and in power we should recover in elegance and in subtlety. Our lyrical and narrative poetry alike have used their freedom and approached nearer, as Pater said all the arts would if they were able to, 'the condition of music', and if our modern poetical drama has failed it is mainly because, always dominated by the example of Shakespeare, it would restore our irrecoverable past.<sup>1</sup>

But the cultivation of the Noh theory did leave a mark on verse drama. T.S.Eliot,<sup>2</sup> as a reviewer of Fenollosa and Pound's Noh or Accomplishment in 1917, showed an interest in the symbolic quality inherent in the Noh, which he used effectively in his plays written many years after.

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<sup>1</sup> W.B.Yeats, A Note to 'At the Hawk's Well', The Wild Swans at Coole, 1927, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Noh And the Image', The Egoist, August 1917, pp. 102-103.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### RELIGIOUS VERSE DRAMA

Our own age, though it has recreated a poetic drama, is hardly one which is instinctively attuned to religious modes of thought.<sup>1</sup>

This remark has a general relevance to the plays under consideration in this chapter. After centuries of separation verse drama has in our time come back to the fold of the Church, but it is impossible to feel that the reunion is entirely happy.

Religion has been a main inspiration of drama in the twentieth century. Many dramatists have sought to revive interest in verse drama by using biblical themes. The revived York Mystery Plays and Chester Mystery Plays in more recent years have attracted huge audiences, testifying to the perennial interest of these subjects.

Modern drama was born when the congregation in a church became an audience outside it. The most ancient and powerful dramatic effect is that of liturgical ritual upon a group of spectators or participants.<sup>2</sup>

But audiences are heterogeneous; some spectators are devoted to broad farcical comedy and others to burlesque, and some others, at least a generation ago, went to the theatre with a timid outlook and were shocked if there was mention of religious subjects. For a time, the theatre and religion were irreconcilable. H.A.Jones, who treated subjects nearing religion in conception in his prose plays and The Tempter, noted this kind of divided mind in the

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<sup>1</sup> H.D.F.Kitto, Form And Meaning In Drama, 1956, p. 233.

<sup>2</sup> J.Isaacs, An Assessment of Twentieth Century Literature, 1952, p. 143.

English audience at the end of the nineteenth century:

In every audience there is a much larger proportion of simply indifferent persons, who would be the first to disclaim any particular reverence for any doctrine.... yet who pay the ordinary Englishman's ear and lip reverence to the current creed. And these feel uneasy if religion is broached on the stage, because, having conveniently dispensed with it to a great extent in regulating their everyday lives, they think it may be very well allowed to remain in its present condition of honoured and respectable superannuation, as an affair of Sundays and parsons, and churches and chapels.<sup>1</sup>

But he advises the playwright not to neglect the treatment of religion on the stage, as religious themes would give sustenance to his play, and not to bother his head with the reaction of the audience. He saw the true relation of art and religion in Tennyson's lines:

I take possession of man's mind and deed,  
I care not what the sects may brawl;  
I sit as God holding no form of creed,  
But contemplating all.<sup>2</sup>

Davidson in his Mammon plays tried to establish the relationship between Man and God; The Dynasts shows:

Eternal artistries in Circumstance,  
Whose patterns, wrought by rapt aesthetic rote,  
Seem in themselves its single listless aim,  
And not their consequence.<sup>3</sup>

Modern religious verse drama took a definite shape with the inauguration of the festivals at Canterbury Cathedral in 1928.<sup>4</sup> Eliot, who had been exploring the religious drama, ancient and modern, gives us a definition which suits our purpose:

<sup>1</sup> 'Religion And The Stage', The Nineteenth Century, January, 1885, Vol. XVII, pp. 158-159.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by H.A.Jones, Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>3</sup> The Dynasts, 1926, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Vide, A.C.Ward, Twentieth Century Literature (1901-1940), 1928, p. 137.



The religious play is not a substitute for liturgical observance and ceremonial, but something different. It is a combination of religious with ordinary dramatic interest.<sup>1</sup>

The dramatists who wrote religious verse plays were not entirely isolated from the secular theatre. Masefield, Abercrombie and Bottomley before Eliot produced plays meant for the secular theatre. But they also wrote plays on the Christian faith in order to give sustenance to drama. They wanted serious drama to be informed by religious emotion. After the production of Murder in the Cathedral, Eliot claimed to see a danger in isolating the secular drama from the religious drama. In an address delivered to the Friends of Rochester Cathedral in 1937, he said:

There would be something wrong about the aim of developing and maintaining a religious drama as something having nothing to do with the ordinary stage. If we became strict Puritans, and abstained from attending any but religious drama, we should be wrongly cutting ourselves off from the life of the world. If we determined merely to preserve in ourselves two attitudes, one for the Cathedral drama and the other for the West End, we should be dividing our minds unjustifiably and with bad results. We need to strive towards a reintegration of life.<sup>2</sup>

The dramatists have always looked for models which are established in the imagination of the popular audience. In this chapter we study the verse dramatists whose themes are basically religious, and in most cases written for performance during the greater feasts of the Christian year.

### John Masefield

Masefield's first play on a Christian theme is Good Friday (1916), published by himself. To him, Christian themes had always

<sup>1</sup> T.S.Eliot, Religious Drama: Mediaeval And Modern, New York, 1954, (no page reference).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., (no page reference)

been a source of inspiration. In The Everlasting Mercy, a poem published five years earlier, he had dealt with the conversion of Saul Kane from a life of worldliness to a knowledge of Christ. The poem's appeal lay in its invocation of Christ.

In Good Friday, he deviates from the Gospel narrative and writes a drama <sup>about</sup> ~~and~~ Christ in a simple and direct way. He introduces a Madman who corresponds to a chorus, to emphasise the significance of the crucifixion and the message of Christ to the world which had discarded him. The play closes with his meaningful words:

Wisdom that lives in pure skies,  
The untouched star, the spirit's eyes:  
O Beauty, touch me, make me wise.<sup>1</sup>

The play was designed to suit his little Garden Theatre. It is written in rhymed verse. Its utter simplicity is indicated by its opening on the Passion-day of Jesus in the Paved Court of the Roman Citadel in Jerusalem. Pilate and Procula, his wife, are something more than biblical figures. They are human. But when Pilate asks Procula to describe her dream, she describes the cry heard in words which smell of artificiality:

A cry, no spoken word  
But crying, and a horror, and a sense  
Of the poor man's naked intelligence,  
Pitted against the world and being crushed.  
Then, waking, there was noise; a rabble rushed  
Following this Jesus here, crying for blood,  
Like beasts half-reptile in a jungle mud.<sup>2</sup>

The image of 'naked intelligence pitted against the world and being crushed' is rhetorical, but Masefield in his excessive desire to be

<sup>1</sup> Good Friday, 1917, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 4.



I told the crowd  
That only a bloody God would care for blood.  
The crowd kill kids and smear the lintel wood,  
To honour God, who lives in the pure stars.<sup>1</sup>

The Madman is a beautiful creation. Whom better could a poet have chosen to give expression to his philosophy of life?

I had a valley farm above a brook,  
My sheep bells there were sweet,  
And in the summer heat  
My mill wheels turned, yet all these things they took,  
Ah, and I gave them, all things I forsook  
But that green blade of wheat,  
My own soul's courage, that they did not take.  
I will go on, although my old heart ache.  
Not long, not long. Soon I shall pass behind  
This changing veil to that which does not change,  
My tired feet will range  
In some green valley of eternal mind  
Where Truth is daily like the water's song.<sup>2</sup>

Thus the Madman's voice rings through the play. He is at once choric and a participant in the play.

Other characters which acquire individuality are Procula and Longinus. Procula acts as a powerful advocate, but Pilate does not yield. She considers Pilate's decision to permit the crucifixion a crime and stabs her arm with a dagger in order to atone for it. Longinus, who shares the feelings of Procula, also urges Pilate to pray for forgiveness. The description of Pilate that he was a man cast to be firm evokes in his wife a speech of rich imagery:

The gouts of gore anoint  
That temple to the service of the worm.  
It is a desecration of our power.  
A rude poor man who pitted his pure sense  
Against what holds the world its little hour,  
Blind force and fraud, priests' mummery and pretence.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

-- a speech that condemns unjust authority. Herod and Pontius Pilate are also sufficiently human to move the reader.

Naturally the pious will be most affected by this play, but a lover of poetry notices Masefield's simplicity and his effortless evocation of the supreme moment on the Cross. Pilate asks what happened at the Cross. Longinus replies:

We nailed him there  
Aloft between the thieves, in the bright air.  
The rabble and the readers mocked with oaths,  
The hangman's squad were dicing for his clothes.  
And two thieves jeered at him. Then it grew dark.  
Till the noon sun was dwindled to a spark,  
And one by one the mocking mouths fell still.  
We were alone on the accursed hill  
And we were still, not even the dice clicked,  
Only the heavy blood-gouts dropped and ticked  
On to the stone.....<sup>1</sup>

One tends to disagree with the criticism of the Poetry Review that it is not a successful elaboration of the Gospel story, scarcely impressive, with no touch of inspiration.<sup>2</sup>

Masefield agrees with Aristotle that the plot is the prime element in tragedy, not the exploration of character or enunciation of thought.<sup>3</sup> The two principal innovations, the stabbing of Procula's arm and the figure of the Madman, though doubtless shocking to the traditionalist, are quite impressive.

The Trial of Jesus (1925), is another play, as the name indicates, dealing with the trial of Jesus by Pilate. It is a prose play interspersed with verse spoken by the choruses of men and women. It was written for a private performance at the Music Room, Boar's Hill, on May 9th, 1925. Thus the play did not come under

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 64-65.

<sup>2</sup> The Poetry Review, 1916, ii. p. 73.

<sup>3</sup> The Poetics, Chapter VI.

the Licensing Act, and the poet brings Christ on the stage. It was produced upon 'a small stage on two levels with a balcony above it at the back. The fore, or lower stage, was used mainly for the chorus, who sat, when not singing, upon stools at the sides'.<sup>1</sup>

The first chorus sings of the story of Troy and King Priam in order to introduce an element of foreboding, anticipating the tragedy. The lines of the chorus are irregular:

In old Troy town, King Priam's seven-towered citadel,  
Both rich in gold and bright with spears,  
The girl Cassandra had the gift  
To see into  
The darkness of the future time;  
And saw Troy burn and Priam go to dusty death.<sup>2</sup>

It is an impressive dramatisation of the Gospel story, distinguished by the presence of Christ, who is made to speak biblical language.

The writing of religious drama reached the dimensions of a movement stimulated by the institution at Canterbury Cathedral of an annual festival of music and drama. Masefield wrote The Coming of Christ to be performed in the Cathedral on Whit Monday and Tuesday, May 28 and 29, 1928.

It is a kind of morality play in which the characters are the Male Spirits, Men and Women, the Chorus, the Host of Heaven, and the Trumpeter. The Male Spirits are: the Power, the Sword, the Mercy, the Light, Anima Christi, Peter, and Paul. The Men are: Baltasar, Gaspar, Melchior, and the three Shepherds: Rocky, Earthy and Sandy. The chorus was accompanied by organ and pianoforte music.

<sup>1</sup> Author's Note, The Trial of Jesus, 1925, p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

The play's appeal is to the religious mind; it opens with the angel called the Power, followed by other Spirits, appearing on the stage and describing the power of God in verse that rhymes alternately:

The Power: I bring the Power of God as God directs,  
My hand is on the stars and on the tides:  
What Man least hopes or proud Man least expects,  
That Power I bring, which being brought abides.<sup>1</sup>

All the Male Spirits in turn sing of God's arrival on earth.

Masefield keeps very close to the biblical narrative. The Kings follow the star:

Friends, we have sought Him far and near,  
This Saviour King of whom we hear;  
We ask the way of Sage and seer  
But none knows where He is.<sup>2</sup>

The three Shepherds, Rocky, Earthy and Sandy, are also present at the supreme moment to welcome the 'little King of Peace'; their song is varied from long line to short line when they take up the litter of Mother and Child and bear it into the nave:

By weary stages  
The old world ages;  
By blood, by rages,  
By pain-sown seeds.<sup>3</sup>

The idiom of the play varies. The Shepherds converse in a dignified version of lower-class speech:

Now, my friends,  
Bring all this bitter folly to an end.  
You want to kill and Earthy wants to steal,  
Your tongues go clacking like a miller's wheel,  
If I'd been King and had you at the war,  
I would have seen you'd griefs to sorrow for.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Coming of Christ, 1925, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

On the other hand, Paul speaks the language of a cultivated man:

A tentmaker, of Tarsus,  
Who will deny you and denounce your followers  
To torment and to death: and then will see  
Your truth by sudden lightning of the mind,  
And then go through the world, telling your truth.....<sup>1</sup>

This variety enhances the poetic interest of the play. It is in fact a good closet drama, but as a stage-play is open to the criticism of the revived religious drama which Eliot expressed in 1954:

We perform the play in a closed theatre with scenery, instead of on top of a cart in the high street; and we tend to construct the scenery in terms of a fresco of Giotto, if not of the more opulent costume of some later period of Italian painting. We get a very pretty piece of pageantry, at the expense of the essential emotion of religious drama.....And if we want a living religious drama we must be prepared to accept something less sedative, and perhaps something which may cause us some discomfort and embarrassment in the process of getting used to it.<sup>2</sup>

Easter (1929) is a short play for singers; the characters are Persons and Spirits, and the events relating to the feast of Easter are dramatised in lines which rhyme alternately. The poetry of the play has the simplicity proper to such a theme:

Mary Magdalen: I have beheld my Master Face to face  
And heard His voice and looked into His eyes,  
He whom myself saw buried in this place.  
He said that on the third day he would rise.<sup>3</sup>

The verse of this playlet is designed to be sung, and is in fairly regular stanzas.

Masefield's religious dramas have a limited appeal. The reason for this should be clear: in these plays his appeal is to a coterie audience filled with religious emotion. But the

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> T.S.Eliot, Religious Drama, ~~xxxxxxx~~ (no page reference).

<sup>3</sup> Easter, 1929, p. 11.



endeavour is made to give them a universal feeling by clothing the main incidents of the Gospel story in poetry of a high order. The dramatist's preoccupation in writing these plays is to interpret the scriptures to drive home their message. He has said:

To the playwright there can be but one thought, that presently his thoughts will walk upon the stage, like living women and men, in a conflict vital to themselves, and he must deck them out to the world for that great hour with all that he has.<sup>1</sup>

In these religious dramas Masefield has made a worthy effort to attain to the ideal he here sets before himself.

Other Religious Plays before Murder in the Cathedral.

Gordon Bottomley

Gordon Bottomley's The Acts of Saint Peter was written for and produced at the Octo-Centenary Festival of Exeter Cathedral, in 1933. In a note to the play the author points out that it is intended for the special audience on the occasion, and also for general audiences. The dramatist's explicit aim is to create an atmosphere of faith and devotion. In order to achieve this, he uses a Chorus of Women, divided into two semi-choruses who introduce the theme:

One with its choristers in guise  
We enter this familiar place,  
Heirs of all those who in this wise  
Came together for holiness  
When earth was a harsh fierce wilderness  
To lovers of the soul's pursuits,  
To these dear precincts came to press  
Close, closer to their vision's fruits.<sup>2</sup>

The action, which is accompanied throughout by the comments of the Chorus, describes Peter's joining his Master, 'to teach, penni-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by J.C.Frewin, Dramatists of Today, 1953, pp.54-55.

<sup>2</sup> The Acts of Saint Peter, 1933, p. 2.

lessly',<sup>1</sup> his denial of Christ, and his agony that follows:

He speaks of a thief on a cross like His. To a thief.  
I would hang there if He would speak so much to me.  
But He will not speak to me again. Never again.<sup>1</sup>

Bottomley keeps close to the Bible. Peter and other disciples rally round to hear the prophecy couched in words with biblical echoes:

Men and my brothers, there had to be fulfilled  
That which the Spirit by the mouth of David spoke  
To be our assurance now.  
'My own familiar friend, in whom I trusted,  
Who ate with me my bread has wounded me',  
This, this was Judas, who was guide to them  
Who arrested our friend.<sup>2</sup>

The play's general appeal lies in Peter's fulfilling of the duties assigned to him by Jesus. The resentment of Herod and the feeling of Xanthippe, wife of Caesar, that she is irresistibly impelled to seek refuge in Peter's Message, provide incidents which stand out in the play.

In the history of the religious verse drama The Acts of Saint Peter has a special place. It is purposive and its verse is based on the idiom of the New Testament. 'How he went from me and came no more',<sup>3</sup> 'very brothers', 'I did my father's will' -- such phrases of biblical inspiration are strewn over the text. The lines of the chorus describing the supreme moment of Christ on the Cross show the vigour of verse based on a simple idiom:

They wounded His right hand first; they have torn His left  
hand now.  
He is white and clean and they injure Him with dirty hands.  
They have barely begun, and His life from His hands begins to  
flow.....<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

The myth and this kind of everyday language are the driving power behind the religious poetic plays of the thirties. A change in the temper of religious writing has taken place: an attempt to make religious verse drama really popular.

In the interpretation of the Gospel story, the dramatist has to care for the emotional basis and establish the relevance of the atmosphere of 'faith and devotion'<sup>1</sup> to modern life. Abercrombie<sup>2</sup> endeavours to do this in The Sale of Saint Thomas (1930). In this play we are shown how, to spread the Gospel in the world, the Apostles divided the countries among themselves. The lot of India fell to Thomas. After some hesitation he obeyed the lot, being shamed thereto by his Master. The story is dramatised in six acts. The play cannot be easily put on the stage as the scenes are set in various parts of the globe, including the Quay of an Arabian Port.

Abercrombie treats the legend, which has a clear centre of dramatic interest, with originality and dignity. The dramatist with his poetical powers and speculative imagination uses his typical blank verse:

Gundaphorus:

How to build palaces of souls, no doubt.  
And, Thomas, here's my point. I can suppose  
The laughing matter it has been for thee  
To hear this serious merchant-man believe  
I'd purchase thee to build of souls a palace.<sup>3</sup>

Metaphysics is combined with intellectual lucidity:

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<sup>1</sup> Note, The Acts of Saint Peter. ~~xxxxxxx~~

<sup>2</sup> Vide. Supra, p. 236 for Abercrombie's other plays.

<sup>3</sup> The Sale of Saint Thomas, 1930, p. 72.

Thomas: Beautiful is the sound of strings and pipes;  
 More beautiful the melody in the mind  
 Made of the sound; most beautiful of all,  
 Voices of viols and harps, trumpets and flutes,  
 Dulcimers, horns, consenting one with another,  
 And melodies in these voices each on each  
 Conferring grace, each its own loveliness  
 Elaborating in concord with the rest,  
 All to achieve one perfect amplitude  
 Of manifold music, a single dignity  
 Of shapely intellectual delight.<sup>1</sup>

Certain phrases: 'spiritual understanding!', 'beautiful congress of melodies', 'imploring passion', scattered all over the play, contribute to the success of the dramatic poem in its aim to create spiritual vision in the reader. The continuous use of the iambic pentameter and the absence of variety make it rather monotonous reading.

The Canterbury Festivals have done much for the revival of poetic drama. Religious drama in verse and prose has earned a wide acceptance rooted in faith. The English drama in this way returned to its birthplace and gave rise to many Morality plays.

Clifford Bax's The Cloak (1921)<sup>2</sup>, a studio play, may be regarded as a good example of the modern Morality play in one act. It was produced by the Travelling Theatre of the Arts League of Service.

Clifford Bax (1886- ), who was elected Chairman of the Incorporated Stage Society in 1929, had come to the dramatic world after abandoning painting. The introductory note to the play is revealing:

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Cloak', Seven Famous One-Act Plays, ed. John Ferguson, Penguin Books, 1953. The date of production is not given.

It is usually forgotten, except in text-books, that all drama had its roots in the religious instincts of mankind. This is no less true of English than of Greek and Chinese drama. In England, indeed, the traditional ritual used at the Eucharist served to set forth the Sacrament as a drama being reenacted; and the elevated choir or chancel made the earliest stage on which the 'mystery' plays, written by the clergy, and founded on sacred events, were produced for the instruction of the people.<sup>1</sup>

'The Cloak' is a modern mystery play.

In its severely limited cast and theme, it harks back to the ancient mystery play. There are three characters: an Angel, an Unborn Spirit and one Newly Dead. The Angel announces the theme:

We do not purpose now to bring you mirth  
But rather, if we can,  
To show how strange is Man  
And what it is that cankers life on earth.<sup>2</sup>

The Unborn Spirit is wishing

.....to be once more back on earth -- to be  
Woman or man once more!<sup>3</sup>

The Angel appears to lead it aright. It comforts the Spirit groping in darkness:

A gradual sleep  
A dwindling dawn, a tidal ebb of strength  
Past all your power to check, until at length,  
Drowned in that life, you wake -- to want and weep.<sup>4</sup>

The Angel, waiting to guide the footsteps of a ~~Dead~~ Woman, defines death and the fate of those who 'slip their bodies and, as men say, are dead':

These, though not visibly to their mortal view,  
Become a cloak, a richly-patterned cloak,  
That hides their true selves as a flame in smoke;<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

The Angel's mission is to see that the Dead Woman casts off her rich trappings (a tunic cloak that bears a complicated design) and becomes simple as simple can be. The one Newly Dead slowly gives up the trance memory of this world. When the Unborn asks the Dead Woman to throw away the cloak, she is unwilling:

This? But I worked at this my whole life through,  
 Making it from a thousand threads and scraps.  
 The intricate design  
 Marks me for what I am:....<sup>1</sup>

In the Dead Woman's analysis of the world, it is intended to describe the world and its people as 'a cruel and crafty race'. She throws away the cloak on the advice of the Angel and feels joy:

Flow to one rhythm -- as the sea bears the foam.<sup>2</sup>  
 The universe and I

The Unborn arrays herself in the cloak and makes up her mind to 'give burdens and not bear'.<sup>3</sup>

The play's lesson is simple and the verse is vigorous and has a value due to the simple grandeur of the total conception; the devising of a framework for the intended symbolism is well done. We are told that an atheist was converted and walked ten miles to see the play again at the next town.<sup>4</sup>

The stories of the Bible told in verse make a more direct appeal to the religious emotion than the mere prosaic drama:

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp.40-41.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid Vide Introductory Note, ~~xxxxx~~ Ibid., p. 31.

The Bible stories and the heroes of Biblical tradition are still part of family education. In religious plays of modern life popular success may be attributed to the sentimentality, the primitive religious emotions, that are appealed to, the emotional lure of sin and repentance, the sympathetic catharsis experienced in watching the resolution of the guilt complexes produced by the abominable system of repressive moral education to which the people have been subjected from infancy.<sup>1</sup>

Since the inauguration of the festival in Canterbury Cathedral, plays of religious leanings have been plentiful, but the most fruitful work has been produced since 1936. These plays are thus outside my field, but I think it appropriate to make a brief comment on them.

### T.S.Eliot

T.S.Eliot (1888- ), who has left models in all branches of literature, had been brooding on 'the possibility of a poetic drama' since 1920. Eight years later came his 'Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry'; and subsequently his various essays -- 'The Need for Poetic Drama', 'The Future of Poetic Drama' and, in 1954, Religious Drama: Mediaeval and Modern. Here he explores the drama of the Elizabethan Renaissance and ancient and modern religious drama. Eliot's attempts in the theatrical field are considerable, and in his essays he often reverts to a discussion of the theatre and justifies the use of the word 'poetics'<sup>2</sup> to describe his dramatic criticism. Even before his venture into drama he had shown his preference for Greek myth in Sweeney Agonistes, which, though not intended for the stage, has been acted with success.

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<sup>1</sup> Terence Gray, Dance Drama, 1926, pp. 13-14.

<sup>2</sup> Vide Giorgio Melchiori, The Tightrope Walkers, 1956, p. 104. The hint seems to have come from J.Isaacs, who calls Eliot 'the Aristotle of our day' (vide An Assessment of Twentieth-Century Literature, 1952, p. 37).

At the beginning of his career he declared war on blank verse, which he considered outmoded and exhausted. The dramatic possibilities of this medium were at an end. He has described Shakespeare's blank verse in its perfection as having shed 'the stiffness, the artificiality, the poetic decoration, of his early verse' and attained the simplicity of natural speech, and 'this language of conversation again (as) having been raised to great poetry'.<sup>1</sup> His aim in his verse drama seems to be expressed in these words. He redeemed blank verse from its moribund state and produced a kind of verse that the critics often describe as "poetry to the eye and prose to the ear". He led the way for subsequent writers of dramatic verse by producing a model:

Emotion and feeling, then, are best expressed in the common language of the people -- that is, in the language common to all classes: the structure, the rhythm, the sound, the idiom of a language, express the personality of the people which speaks it.<sup>2</sup>

But the emphasis on the language of the common people tends to produce unfavourable results: one can become too pedestrian. The reader enjoys a work of art at various levels; a theme of great dignity usually requires a language that befits it. Eliot is aware of this fact, when he makes the Knights in Murder in the Cathedral address the audience directly in a language that may be characterised as declamatory. But other characters speak poetry which is not far removed from ordinary everyday language. This demand for an everyday type of diction, though it goes back to Wordsworth, is a revolution in modern letters. Many dramatists, English and Irish, have carried this movement forward by using a

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<sup>1</sup> 'Poetry and Drama', On Poetry and Poets, 1957, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Social Functions of Poetry', On Poetry and Poets, 1957, p.19.



medium which has its roots in the contemporary vocabulary. The later Yeats produced 'colour-drained' poetry which echoed the melody of the speech of the Irish people about him. Synge's preface to The Playboy of the Western World re-states the theory in a way peculiar to himself. Sean O'Casey, perhaps the greatest living dramatist, uses the cadences of Irish folk speech. But they are careful not to become pedestrian.

Eliot carries the practice of using the language of every day to the furthest limit; he is wrapt up in it. Of the two early plays, Murder in the Cathedral has been performed on the commercial stage, and is much acted and read in academic circles.

Eliot as a writer of religious plays is unique in achievement. As far back as 1928 he bestowed considerable thought on this subject. One of the characters in 'A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry' says:

I say that the consummation of the drama, the perfect and ideal drama, is to be found in the Ceremony of the Mass. I say ..... that drama springs from religious liturgy, and that it cannot afford to depart from religious liturgy.<sup>1</sup>

He also states the aims and methods of the religious drama he was to write six years later:

We crave some liturgy less divine, something in respect of which we shall be more spectators and less participants..... The more fluid, the more chaotic the religious and ethical beliefs, the more the drama must tend in the direction of liturgy.<sup>2</sup>

Although he considers Murder in the Cathedral<sup>3</sup> his first play, The Rock had laid a sure foundation for Eliot's building of

<sup>1</sup> Selected Essays, 1953, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> Vide 'Poetry and Drama', On Poetry And Poets, 1957, p. 79.

religious drama. These combine a liturgical setting with devices from Greek drama, which is basically religious. The action of these two plays depends heavily on the use of a chorus: his remarks with regard to the use of Greek devices in Murder in the Cathedral have relevance for his plays in general:

There were two reasons.....which in the circumstances justified it. The first was that the essential action of the play -- both the historical facts and the matter which I invented -- was somewhat limited. A man comes home, foreseeing that he will be killed, and he is killed. I did not want to increase the number of characters..... I wanted to concentrate on death and martyrdom. The introduction of a chorus of excited and sometimes hysterical women, reflecting in their emotion the significance of the action, helped wonderfully.<sup>1</sup>

The Rock (1934). The chief value of this pageant play lies in its use of the chorus. Eliot considers himself not the author of the 'play' but only of the words,<sup>2</sup> some of the preliminary work having been done by others.

The play was written to raise funds for the 'Forty-Five Churches Fund of the Diocese of London', and the play was performed at Sadler's Wells Theatre on the 28th of May, 1934.<sup>3</sup> The Bishop of London, standing on the stage with Prince Arthur of Connaught, described it as 'fighting for the soul of London'.<sup>4</sup> This remark suggests the importance of the theme for London audiences. Its appeal to the audience in a general lies in the historical scenes, intended to illustrate the way in which church building was conducted in early times during the Danish invasions, and to imply a commentary on modern civilization.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 80-81.

<sup>2</sup> Prefatory Note to The Rock, 1934.

<sup>3</sup> Title page to The Rock.

<sup>4</sup> The Times, 29th May, 1934, p. 12.

The opening inspires devotion in the audience. It is set in an open space, with an irregular rocky hill in the middle. The chorus of seven male and ten female figures, all masked and dressed like stone figures from a niche, speak the voice of the Church:

Where is the life that we have lost in living?  
 Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?  
 Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?  
 The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries  
 Bring us farther from God and nearer to the Dust.<sup>1</sup>

The 2nd Male Voice's commentary on the civilization of the day is bitter and strongly reminiscent of the picture we get in 'The Waste Land':

The wind shall say: 'Here were decent Godless people,  
 Their only monument the asphalt road  
 And a thousand lost golf balls'.<sup>2</sup>

Against this degenerate picture is set the theme of building, depicted in short pageant scenes. The church is being slowly built; the workers face obstacles, but the work goes on. Members of different parishes participate, and the highlights of the play are famous occasions such as Mellitus's sermon and the conversion of London, the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Danish Invasion.

The second part contains shorter speeches. The scene between a Young Man of the time of Richard Coeur de Lion, who is about to take the Cross, and his sweetheart who talks to him about the joys of married life, is like an interlude and provides relief. The scene of the Tudor crowd exulting in their booty taken from the churches is spectacular.

The introduction of the Rock, a mysterious figure, who at the end of the play appears as St. Peter, adds to the religious character

<sup>1</sup> The Rock, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

of the play. The Rock with all its liturgical associations emphasises the dramatic quality:

I perceive approaching  
The Rock, Who will perhaps answer our doubtings.  
The Rock, The Watcher. The Stranger.  
He who has seen what has happened  
And who sees what is to happen.  
The Witness. The Critic. The Stranger.  
The God-shaken, in whom is the truth inborn.<sup>1</sup>

In the duologue of the Rock with the Leader of the Chorus the liturgical theme is constantly kept before the audience. The Rock has been identified with 'a figure and type of Christ'.<sup>2</sup> Towards the end of the pageant, the Rock appears as St. Peter. Eliot, who was bemoaning the degeneration of modern society, has found in the Rock image a firm foundation for life. The Rock as St. Peter speaks of this illumination:

You speak of your Church. You have spoken well.  
But we who behold the glory of the Lord  
With the face unveiled, we are transformed, made new  
Into the same image from glory to glory,  
As it were, to the Spirit of the Lord.<sup>3</sup>

In The Rock, Eliot gives prose dialogue to the workmen. The prose in most places is clumsy and full of colloquialisms:

Did you ever 'ear o' Darwin? Well, 'e was a scientific bloke what lived more 'n a hundred years ago, more 'n a hundred years ago, mind you, and 'e showed up the ole blightin' swindle as I can prove 'ere by this book which is published by the Rationalist Press Association for the price of one shillin'.<sup>4</sup>

The technique of the mixture of prose and verse is derived from the Elizabethan dramatists. The speech of the Chorus is

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Melchiori, op. cit., p. 127.

<sup>3</sup> The Rock, p. 86.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 31-32.

sprinkled with words and phrases from the Bible. The verse choruses are sometimes in long and sometimes short lines of brilliant dramatic movement:

In our rhythm of earthly life we tire of light. We are  
glad when the day ends, when the play ends; and ecstasy  
is too much pain.  
We are children quickly tired: children who are up in the  
night and fall asleep as the rocket is fired; and  
the day is long for work or play.<sup>1</sup>

These lines point towards his writing of the final choruses on a similar plan to the Gloria of the Mass in Murder in the Cathedral. Eliot was busy exploring whether or not the modern audience could respond to the poetry like the audiences of Shakespeare's time:

Can it catch the overtones of rhythm and meaning as the lines come to it from the actor's mouth? For in the theatre there is no turning back the page; if the poetry has been missed, it is gone for good..... The experience of The Rock was sufficiently encouraging to induce Eliot to accept an invitation given at one of the Sadler's Wells performances, to write the next year's festival play for Canterbury.<sup>2</sup>

The Rock has little dramatic value. The liturgical background combined with 'popular stage devices such as music-hall, ballet and mime', produce a 'celestial revue'; it was a case of 'versifying the drama'<sup>3</sup> for a local purpose.

While The Rock appeals most to a coterie audience, Murder in The Cathedral has a wider appeal. It has shed that kind of pious mist which surrounds the modern religious plays treated in this chapter as well as those cycles of plays -- York, Beverley, Wakefield, Coventry and Chester -- which flourished in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>4</sup> The reader does not find Murder

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> E. Martin Browne, introduction to Four Modern Verse Plays, (Penguin), 1957, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Eliot, 1954, p. 227.

<sup>4</sup> The York Mystery Plays have been revived, however, with considerable popular success.

in The Cathedral excessively traditional. But the craftsmanship is so mature that its appeal to readers lies on both the religious and the secular planes; and the impression it made on his fellow-dramatists was profound, though even at the time it was not unanimously praised.

Eliot went to Tennyson for the theme and to the origins of drama for technique. He combines the technique of Greek drama with that of the Mystery plays. The play is thus described by the Times reviewer:

In form it is something between a Morality and Chronicle play, the use of introspective symbols being subtly interwoven with a simplified historical narrative. <sup>1</sup>

In form, the play is closer to a Greek drama than to an English religious play. Eliot was using this technique deliberately,<sup>2</sup> and thus he is 'classicist'. This method imposed certain restrictions. Unlike Tennyson, he does not range far and wide. He does not tamper with history. In 'Becket' it is suggested that Becket had been crossed in love in early youth, and Rosamund Clifford is introduced for that purpose. Becket's saintliness is compromised when he heaves a sigh on bidding farewell to Rosamund:

Dan John, how much we lose, we celibates,  
Lacking the love of woman and of child! <sup>3</sup>

Eliot avoids the love element and other inessentials in order to give the historical event 'the contemporary relevance of the situation' and to emphasise Becket's death and martyrdom. He limits the number of characters and resorts to a Chorus which enables him richly to realise his ambition:

<sup>1</sup> The Times, 17th June, 1935, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Vide Poetry and Drama, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> 'Becket', The Works of Alfred Tennyson, 1901, p. 722.

A poet writing for the first time for the stage is much more at home in choral verse than in dramatic dialogue..... The use of a chorus strengthened the power, and concealed the defects of my theatrical technique.<sup>1</sup>

The ritual chorus helps him to raise the tale of the assassination to a philosophic plane. A choric speech written in a measure which avoids too much iambic, using alliteration and occasionally unexpected rhyme, describes the return of Becket to England:

Here let us stand, close by the Cathedral. Here let us wait.  
 Are we drawn by danger? Is it the knowledge of safety, that  
 draws our feet  
 Towards the Cathedral? What danger can be  
 For us, the poor, the poor women of Canterbury? What tribu-  
 lation  
 With which we are not already familiar?<sup>2</sup>

The comments of the Chorus are tragic and foreboding. The Messenger's speech establishes the main character in the audience's mind:

He comes in pride and sorrow, affirming all his claims,  
 Assured, beyond doubt, of the devotion of the people.<sup>3</sup>

Thomas enters and seeks to establish peace in the hearts of the chorus of hysterical women:

Peace. And let them be, in their exaltation.  
 They speak better than they know, and beyond your understanding.  
 They know and do not know, what it is to act or suffer.  
 They know and do not know, that action is suffering.  
 And suffering is action. Neither does the agent suffer  
 Nor the patient act. But both are fixed.  
 In an eternal action, an eternal patience.....<sup>4</sup>

The play is lifted to a higher plane of action when the four Tempters, who represent the innermost working of Becket's mind, are

<sup>1</sup> Eliot, Poetry and Drama, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Murder in the Cathedral, 1938, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.15.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.21.

introduced; the fourth Tempter has all the make-up of Thomas; the Archbishop's resistance to their persuasion is exciting. The first three Tempters, whose baits are 'pleasure and power and palpable price',<sup>1</sup> are almost thrust aside. The fourth Tempter tempts him with his own desires:

Seek the way of martyrdom, make yourself the lowest  
On earth to be high in heaven.<sup>2</sup>

But, after the deeply tragic choric commentary recalling the terror that they have suffered, he makes his decision:

Now is my way clear, now is the meaning plain:  
Temptation shall not come in this kind again.  
The last temptation is the greatest treason:  
To do the right deed for the wrong reason.<sup>3</sup>

He invokes the good angel which 'hovers over the swords' points',<sup>4</sup> and unafraid he walks to death. His death is a triumph of the Cross. While the Knights murder him, we hear the Chorus suggesting that the problems which confronted him are present even today.

The Knights, having completed the murder in a manner reminiscent of burlesque, justify their action. This attempt to break all conventions of drama is due to the poet's desire to bring the stage close to the audience.

We are impressed by the ingenuity with which Eliot maintains the balance between his two different dramatic genres, the Greek and the Jacobean. The Times reviewer, who saw the first performance, after having commented on the spiritual vitality of Speaight's representation of Thomas, dwells at considerable length on the medium. The long series of attempts at poetic drama has culminated in this impressive play.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 45.



Fifteen years after its first production, Eliot himself thought aloud about the verse of the play, He had succeeded in avoiding rhythm of the regular blank verse type which had become too remote from the movement of modern speech; he had kept the versification of Everyman in mind.<sup>1</sup>

Having seen the failure of the nineteenth-century verse plays in their use of blank verse derived from Shakespeare, he is right in not using blank verse. He had already used contemporary speech liturgically in The Rock; in Murder in the Cathedral a conscious endeavour was made to write in a way that might be generally understood. But at times the verse becomes highly self-conscious, and in places where he employs a limping jingle his aesthetic purpose becomes obscure:

Thomas. If the Archbishop cannot trust the Throne,  
He has good cause to trust none but God alone.  
I ruled once as Chancellor  
And men like you were glad to wait at my door.  
Not only in the court, but in the field  
And in the tilt-yard I made many yield.<sup>2</sup>

Eliot may have wanted to revive the memories of Everyman and appear homely and child-like. Thus:

Man's life is a cheat and a disappointment;  
All things are unreal,  
Unreal of disappointing:  
The Catherine wheel, the pantomime cat,  
The prizes given at the children's party,  
The prize awarded for the English Essay,  
The scholar's degree, the statesman's decoration.<sup>3</sup>

The frequent sententiousness of the verse stands in the way of its intended satirical nature: the same fault is seen in one of the Tempter's speeches:

<sup>1</sup> Poetry and Drama, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Murder in the Cathedral, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

Endurance of friendship does not depend  
 Upon ourselves, but upon circumstance.  
 But circumstance is not undetermined.  
 Unreal friendship may turn to real  
 But real friendship, once ended, cannot be mended.  
 Sooner shall enmity turn to alliance.<sup>1</sup>

But in some passages Eliot is successful in combining vigour of thought and vigour of expression; the speeches of the Chorus are sometimes both profound and vigorous. The moments of intensity and high authority are expressed in musical verse which is not monotonous:

Archbishop, secure and assured of your fate, unaffrayed  
 among the shades, do you realise what you ask, do you  
 realise what it means  
 To the folk drawn into the pattern of fate, the small  
 folk who live among small things,  
 The strain on the brain of the small folk who stand to  
 the doom of the house, the doom of their lord, the doom  
 of the world?<sup>2</sup>

Eliot resorts to prose when it is indispensable. A sermon delivered in verse would have been unnatural. Besides, the Archbishop's words on the nature of peace and martyrdom in prose bring him very close to the audience. It is as if they were really listening to a sermon in a church on a Sunday morning; the last words ring in their hearts:

..... I would have you keep in your hearts these words that I say, and think of them at another time.<sup>3</sup>

The speech of the Knights is prosaic and argumentative and strongly reminiscent of Bernard Shaw's rhetoric put in the mouth of the Inquisitor in St. Joan. Happily Eliot himself acknowledges the influence:

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 31-32.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

And in the speech of the knights, who are quite aware that they are addressing an audience of people living 800 years after they themselves are dead, the use of platform prose is intended of course to have a special effect: to shock the audience out of their complacency. .... I may, for aught I know, have been slightly under the influence of St. Joan.<sup>1</sup>

But Eliot's prose is the prose of a poet and more moving than Shaw's 'platform' prose: Eliot's strength lies in his use of rhymes so movingly employed in the prose sermon:

Reflect now, how Our Lord Himself spoke of Peace. He said to His disciples, 'My peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you'. Did He mean peace as we think of it: the Kingdom of England at peace with its neighbours, the barons at peace with the King, the householder counting over his peaceful gains, the swept hearth, his best wine for a friend at the table, his wife singing to the children?<sup>2</sup>

The use of the chorus needs comment. Eliot varies his technique in this play. In The Rock the liturgical chorus resembles that of Aeschylus; the chorus of the hysterical women is integrated more closely in Murder in the Cathedral and resembles the chorus in Sophocles. The women sympathise with the hero and also reflect in their emotion the significance of the action. Eliot also found it useful to cover up his weaknesses:

The use of a chorus strengthened the power, and concealed the defects of my theatrical technique.<sup>3</sup>

But this dramatic device is quite effective and provides a human background to the play of martyrdom. Later he found the device tedious and in his next play, The Family Reunion, although it is Aeschylean in inspiration, he reduces the chorus to two uncles and

<sup>1</sup> Poetry and Drama, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Murder in the Cathedral, p. 48.

<sup>3</sup> Poetry and Drama, ~~xxxix~~ p. 25.

two aunts, thus indicating a growing doubt of the suitability of the chorus for the modern audience.<sup>1</sup>

Murder in the Cathedral was a fairly considerable success in the world of letters and on the stage. It encouraged poets to make occasional excursions into poetic drama; its financial success was comparable to that of commercial plays, and it has even been filmed.

Eliot's later experiments -- The Family Reunion (1939), The Cocktail Party (1949) and The Confidential Clerk (1953) -- are directed to solve the problem of the medium of the poetic drama. His endeavour in his new poetic orientation was mainly to find a suitable substitute for Elizabethan verse. Shakespeare's impress is still too strong. A theatrical review of The Confidential Clerk closes on a note of pessimism:

Our conclusion is, then, that the best of the play is good prose drama; the high intelligence that manifests itself occasionally, insisting that Mr. Eliot did have some part in the writing, is swamped by the very theatricality that will, we have no doubt, ensure a long London run. The play .....makes a good evening in the theatre, but it makes a depressing one afterwards. The long search for poetic drama seems to have led only to the discovering how to write a successful West-End play; a remarkable achievement indeed, but a bitterly disappointing one.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Auden makes use of a chorus in The Dog Beneath the Skin and The Dance of Death. Peter Yates's The Assassin has a chorus. But on the whole the dramatists indicate that the importance of the chorus is diminishing. Martin Browne points out that it is out of place in the modern picture-frame theatre (vide Penguin New Writing, ed. John Lehman, 31, 1947, p. 91).

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Brooke, 'The Confidential Clerk: A Theatrical Review', Durham University Journal, March, New Series, XV, No. 2, p. 70.

After all, as John Crowe Ransom has put it, 'literary evidence is that Eliot is religious more by conviction than by grace'.<sup>1</sup>

The movement for the creation of a new verse drama has nevertheless been a significant movement. It may be that Eliot has not solved the problem of poetic drama, 'But he has perhaps brought us to a point at which a solution can be achieved'.<sup>2</sup> From the festival houses, religious drama has emerged and won success in the commercial theatres and has influenced theatrical thought.

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<sup>1</sup> The World's Body, 1938, p. 166.

<sup>2</sup> Williams, op. cit., p. 296.

## CHAPTER NINE

### YEATS'S VERSE PLAYS

#### I

I SOUGHT a theme and sought for it in vain,  
I sought it daily for six weeks or so.  
Maybe at last, being but a broken man,  
I must be satisfied with my heart, although  
Winter and summer till old age began  
My circus animals were all on show,  
Those stilted boys, that burnished chariot,  
Lion and woman and the Lord knows what.<sup>1</sup>

These are the opening lines of the poem in which W.B. Yeats tells how he came to write The Countess Cathleen (1892), his first poetic play. The poem as a whole is an indication of Yeats's desire to become a popular dramatist by dramatising 'allegorical dreams', 'vain gaiety', 'vain battle', 'vain repose' and 'themes of the embittered heart'; these 'grew in pure mind' and came into their own at the Abbey Theatre. But, contrary to his expectation that the Abbey would become popular for poetic plays like the Greek theatre, only prose plays flourished in it.

At a time when the imitators of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama were being hailed by the London critics, Yeats and his Irish colleagues were fashioning a new theatre. Yeats became the core of the dramatic movement:

He wanted to get into his verse 'a more manful energy' and knew that the way to tap that manful energy was to put himself into the theatre.....<sup>2</sup>

The Irish Literary Theatre founded in 1899 became a workshop in which his ideals as a dramatist were fostered. Yeats was work-

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Circus Animals' Desertion', Collected Poems, 1953, p.391.

<sup>2</sup> Padraic Colum, 'Early Days of the Irish Theatre', The Dublin Magazine, January-March, 1950, p. 18.

ing, among other things,<sup>1</sup> on the shape of a new poetic drama to come. He aimed at simplicity, discarded the romantic trappings of the theatre, and in the medium used in the play he wanted pompous rhetoric to be replaced by poetry composed of words used in common speech.

In his endeavour to fashion a new poetic drama which depended on music, simple stage make-up, sometimes achieved by masks, symbolic background, and above all the lively speech of his countrymen fashioned into poetry of lyrical beauty, he anticipated Eliot. One should not stretch this comparison too far. The similarities are seen in both waging war against the romantic drama of the last century, although, unlike Eliot, Yeats started with blank verse, and almost discarded it in his last play. It has been pointed out that Eliot evinced great interest in symbolic drama after seeing Yeats's At The Hawk's Well.<sup>2</sup> The language and metre of Yeats's Purgatory merited consideration with Eliot.<sup>3</sup> The poet-dramatists of differing intellectual climates sought for somewhat similar renovations in medium and material. Eliot's dramatic career has its root in liturgical sources and later on shifts to society; Yeats seeks his source material in 'the songs of Callanan and Walsh

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Una Ellis-Fermor draws attention to a certain re-vivifying of the ideas of the ancient Irish civilization (vide The Irish Dramatic Movement, 1953, p. 12).

<sup>2</sup> J. Isaacs, An Assessment of Twentieth Century Literature, 1951, p. 138.

<sup>3</sup> Poetry and Drama, 1951, p. 20. 'It was in ..... Purgatory that Yeats solved the problem of speech in verse, and laid all his successors under obligation to him'.

or old Irish legends'<sup>1</sup> and later on derives his ideas from 'Hindu thought, the Cabbala, Neo-Platonism, Rosicrucianism, Swedenborg and modern philosophy'.<sup>2</sup> Yeats's excursion into these strange realms of thought led him to produce drama in which the characters dreamt but rarely acted. His dramatic canvas is merely a vague enchanted land in which his characters see the world through 'magic casements', while at least Eliot was able to produce more definite results although their influence was short-lived.

Yeats's plans and methods for the Abbey Theatre were thus outlined:

The Irish Literary Theatre will attempt to do in Dublin something of what has been done in Paris and London; and, if it has even a small welcome, it will produce, somewhere about the old festival of Beltaine, at the beginning of every spring, a play founded upon an Irish subject. The play will differ from those produced by men of letters in London and Paris, because times have changed, and because the intellect of Ireland is romantic and spiritual rather than scientific and analytical, but they will have as little of a commercial ambition.<sup>3</sup>

In collaboration with Lady Gregory,<sup>4</sup> Edward Martyn<sup>5</sup> and a little later George Moore, Yeats began to 'dig out furrows with the sword'.<sup>6</sup> It was a difficult job to dramatise myth in a way congenial to the modern imagination and clothe dramatic passion in living words close to current speech. His determination is clear:

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<sup>1</sup> Beltaine. The Organ of the Irish Literary Theatre, ed. by W.B. Yeats, Dublin, 1899, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Vide The Times Literary Supplement, January 24, 1958, p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> Beltaine, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> & <sup>5</sup> Moore and Martyn dropped out of the movement after the third performance at the Irish Literary Theatre in 1901 (vide Plays and Controversies, 1923, p. 3)

<sup>6</sup> Plays and Controversies,<sup>1923,</sup> p. 16.



Let us go back in everything to the spoken word, even though we have to speak in lyrics to the Psalter or the Harp.....<sup>1</sup>

His dramatic theory is outlined thus:

First: we have to write or find plays that will make the theatre a place of intellectual excitement - a place where the mind goes to be liberated.....

Second: .....If we are to restore words to their sovereignty we must make speech even more important than gesture upon the stage.

Third: We must simplify acting, especially in poetical drama, and in prose drama that is remote from real life like my Hour-Glass.

Fourth: Just as it is necessary to simplify gesture that it may accompany speech without being its rival, it is necessary to simplify both the form and colour of the scenery and costume.<sup>2</sup>

Yeats and his followers did as they preached, but encountered opposition from the people. The presentation of The Countess Cathleen at first provoked controversy. The first night of Synge's The Playboy of the Western World is characteristic of the struggle that these doyens of the movement had to face. The first night caused one of the most famous of all theatrical riots, 'the "Playboy" riots'.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of these controversies the movement became a success. They went on giving what they thought good until it became popular, to use the words of Lady Gregory. With the help of Miss Horniman the Abbey Theatre was acquired in 1904 and was put financially on a sound basis in 1910. Yeats and his colleagues looked on their achievement with pride. He thus wrote in 1919:

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 45-49.

<sup>3</sup> 'A People's Theatre', Plays and Controversies, p. 206.

We have been the first create a true 'People's theatre', and we have succeeded because it is not an exploitation of local colour, or of a limited form of drama possessing a temporary novelty, but the first doing of something for which the world is ripe, something that will be done all over the world and done more and more perfectly: the making articulate of all the dumb classes each with its own knowledge of the world, its own dignity, but all objective with the objectivity of the office and workshop, of the newspaper and the street, of mechanism and politics.<sup>1</sup>

This theatre, as a sort of repertory theatre, acquired world-wide fame, and the actors undertook tours in England and America. The ideas behind the movement were not merely literary:

.....behind the writers and players was a national feeling that manifested itself through the young men and women belonging to the politico-cultural clubs in the Dublin of the time; it was they who gave the ~~an~~ project the spirit and breath of life.<sup>2</sup>

It was a collective consciousness that worked through their principal spokesman, W.B. Yeats.

An endeavour is made in this chapter to study the development of Yeats's dramatic poetry in plays other than those explicitly written in the Noh style.<sup>3</sup> In the early Yeats, there is close adherence to blank verse full of poetic ornament, and in the later Yeats there is the purgation of the ornament and intense concentration of the emotions in verse which is peculiarly Yeats's own. For some of his later plays he gave up his drawing-room audience and sought performances on the public stage.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>2</sup> Colum, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Vide Chapter VII. ~~20002502x~~

## II

Yeats's dramatic career can be divided into four periods: the first covers The Countess Cathleen (1892), and The Land of Heart's Desire (1894). His two prose plays Cathleen Ni Houlihan (1902) and The Pot of Broth (1904) preceded the next verse play, The King's Threshold (1904), which can be considered the beginning of the second period. He continued his cycle of heroic plays -- On Baile's Strand (1904) and Deirdre (1907), plays closely following the Greek technique of drama. Then came The Green Helmet (1910), The Shadowy Waters (1911), and The Hour-Glass (1914), which is linked with an earlier play, Where there is Nothing or, in its later form, The Unicorn from the Stars (1908). During the third period he wrote plays in the Noh technique. To the post-Noh period belong his five plays, A Full Moon in March (1935), The King of the Great Clock Tower (1935), The Herne's Egg (1938), Purgatory (1939), and The Death of Cuchulain (1939).

The Countess Cathleen is based on a folk-story translated from Les Matinees de Timothee Trimm.<sup>1</sup> Yeats considered it a parable comparable to the sacrifice of Alcestis.<sup>2</sup> He treats the parable in a way that illumines human relations in their moral aspect. It is his conception of the growth of love from the particular to the general that finds treatment here.

The scene of this play is laid in the Ireland of olden times; the country is suffering from famine. Two Demons disguised as Merchants wander about the country to buy souls for bread. Shemus

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<sup>1</sup> Note to 'The Countess Cathleen,' Plays and Controversies, p. 285.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 285.

Rua, a peasant, and his son Teigue, are enthusiastic about this bartering of souls. Countess Cathleen, full of the milk of human kindness, intercedes and offers to buy off the souls at the terrible price of her own. But the Demon Merchants are defeated as God's mercy intervenes, and she is saved. The Angel announces:

And she is passing to the floor of peace,  
 And Mary of the seven times wounded heart  
 Has kissed her lips, and the long blessed hair  
 Has fallen on her face.<sup>1</sup>

Aleel, the poet and lover of Cathleen, sings the epitaph, while Oona, representing Ireland, mourns the loss of Cathleen to the material world.

The play belongs to the Morality genre.<sup>2</sup> Yeats's source material encouraged him to write in this strain. But the play transcends the interest of mere folk-lore in its presentation of beauty and love, and moves a reader with no special knowledge of the original story. The straightforwardness of the Morality play is complicated by the introduction of Aleel, a poet and lover of Cathleen. But, as in a Morality play, the main strength lies in the expression of moral abhorrence at the selling of souls. Nevertheless, when the play was produced for the first time in the Abbey Theatre in 1899, the opposition was vehement:

.....accusing me..... of blasphemy because of the language of the demons or Shemus Rua, and because I made a woman sell her soul and yet escape damnation, and of a lack of patriotism because I made Irishmen and women, who, it seems, never did such a thing, sell theirs.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Collected Plays of W.B.Yeats, 1953, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> See Yeats's Note to the play in Plays and Controversies, pp. 285-294.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 290.

This did not deter Yeats from his purpose. A certain section of the Dublin audience was with him:

The stalls, containing almost all that was distinguished in Dublin, and a gallery of artisans.....insisted on the freedom of literature.<sup>1</sup>

The Countess Cathleen has also been produced in New York by Miss Wycherley with the addition of a love scene between Aleel and Cathleen.<sup>2</sup>

Yeats's interpretation of the drama is rewarding:

The play is symbolic: the two demons who go hither and thither buying souls are the world, and their gold is the pride of the eye. The Countess herself is a soul which is always, in all laborious and self-denying persons, selling itself into captivity and unrest that it may redeem 'God's children', and finding the peace it has not sought because all high motives are of the substance of peace. The symbols have other meanings, but they have this principal meaning.<sup>3</sup>

The play is set in famine-stricken Ireland. Through the family of Shemus Rua, a peasant, we learn of the dreadful disease creeping over the land. It is conveyed through the superstitious beliefs of the Irish people; grey hair fluttering, corpses leaving their graves, a herdsman meeting a man without a mouth, or eyes, or ears, his face a wall of flesh, and other signs of misfortune.

Shemus tells Mary, his wife:

I'm in no mood to listen to your clatter.  
Although I tramped the woods for half a day,  
I've taken nothing, for the very rats,  
Badgers, and hedgehogs seem to have died of drought,  
And there was scarce a wind in the parched leaves.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Note to the play in Plays and Controversies, p. 290.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

<sup>3</sup> The Letters of W.B. Yeats, ed. Allan Wade, 1954, p. 319.

<sup>4</sup> Collected Plays, p. 4.

The Demon Merchants, who symbolise base values, are merciless:

.....We buy men's souls  
And give so good a price that all may live  
In mirth and comfort.<sup>1</sup>

When the embodiment of pity meets them and strikes a bargain with them for her soul, their avarice reaches the limit. They sit above her tower like two grey owls<sup>2</sup> and await her death to seize her soul. But the noble heroine's sacrifice is so meritorious that her soul eludes the grasp of the Demon Merchants. Her passing away is magnificent:

Cathleen: Bend down your faces, Oona and Aleel;  
I gaze upon them as the swallow gazes  
Upon the nest made under the eave, before  
She wander the loud waters. Do not weep  
Too great a while, for there is many a candle  
On the High Altar though one fall. Aleel,  
Who sang about dancers of the woods  
That know not the hard burden of the world,  
Having but breath in their kind bodies, farewell!<sup>3</sup>

She dies. Aleel sings her epitaph. The Angel appears to assure the audience that 'she is passing to the floor of peace'.<sup>4</sup> The introduction of Aleel, the poet and Cathleen's lover, was a later addition.<sup>5</sup> Aleel serves no effective purpose in the drama; he shares, however, something with his creator: he is given beautiful poetry. After the death of Cathleen, he breaks a looking-glass and says:

I shatter you in fragments, for the face  
That brimmed you up with beauty is no more:  
And die, dull heart, for she whose mournful words  
Made you a living spirit has passed away  
And left you but a ball of passionate dust.  
And you, proud earth and plummy sea, fade out!<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 47-48.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>5</sup> Vide Plays and Controversies, p. 290.

<sup>6</sup> Collected Plays, p. 48.

It is through Aleel that we are made aware of Yeats's preoccupation with romantic love.

The play is in fairly regular unrhymed pentameters. The verse is characteristic of Yeats's immature poetry, and is full of prosaic passages:

First Merchant: There are some men who hold they have wolves' heads,  
And say their limbs -- dried by the infinite flame--  
Have all the speed of storms; others, again,  
Say they are gross and little; while a few  
Will have it they seem much as mortals are,  
But tall and brown and travelled -- like us, lady<sup>1</sup>

and later on:

First Merchant: As we came in at the great door we saw  
Your porter sleeping in his niche -- a soul  
Too little to be worth a hundred pence,  
And yet they buy it for a hundred crowns.<sup>2</sup>

The play points towards the symbolic drama more fully developed after 1916, when he came under the influence of the Japanese Noh.

The Land of Heart's Desire was first produced as a curtain raiser to a play by John Todhunter at the Avenue Theatre, London on March 29, 1894.<sup>3</sup> It is a play written in a new mood explained in a letter to George Russell ten years later:

In my Land of Heart's Desire .....there is an exaggeration of sentiment and sentimental beauty which I have come to think unmanly. The popularity of The Land of Heart's Desire seems to me to come not from its merits but because of this weakness. I have been fighting the prevailing decadence for years, and have just got it under foot in my own heart -- it is sentiment and sentimental sadness, a womanish introspection.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Collected Plays, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> The Letters Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> The Letters of W.B. Yeats, vide note 2, p. 231

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 434.

The play is conceived in the 'region of brooding emotions'<sup>1</sup> in which the characters of two different worlds are related -- the world of ordinary Irish men and women and the world of the Sidhe. Although it is a short play, the dramatic conflict is well maintained. The theme is the struggle for the soul of Mary Bruin between Father Hart, the priest, and her husband Shawn Bruin, on the one hand, and a Faery Child on the other. In this conflict the Faery Child, the immortal, wins.

Yeats draws his human characters from the actual world; Harts and Bruins actually lived in the village of Rosses at Rosses Point, Sligo.<sup>2</sup> The unimaginative Bridget Bruin is unable to understand her daughter-in-law, Mary, who prefers reading a book to washing-up. She is reading about fairies, and how a Princess Edane, daughter of a king of Ireland, heard a voice on a May Eve; she followed the song and reached the Land of Faery;

Where nobody gets old and godly and grave,  
Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise,  
Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue.<sup>3</sup>

Maurteen, her father-in-law, Father Hart and Bridget dissuade her from reading the book. Father Hart feels the hand of an evil spirit in it. But Mary, who is filled with 'dreams of discontent', is enchanted:

Come, fairies, take me out of this dull house!  
Let me have all the freedom I have lost;  
Work when I will and idle when I will!<sup>4</sup>

The Faery Child mixes with the family of the Bruins and understands the strange wild talk of Mary. She dances, converses with Father

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 434.

<sup>2</sup> The Letters, p. 908.

<sup>3</sup> Collected Plays, p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 61.



Hart, feels mighty when the Crucifix is removed from her presence, and at last invites Mary, the newly-married bride, to go with her to 'gaze upon a merrier multitude':

White-armed Nuala, Aengus of the Birds,  
Fiachra of the hurtling foam, and him  
Who is the ruler of the Western Host,  
Finvara, and their Land of Heart's Desire,  
Where beauty has no ebb, decay no flood,  
But joy is wisdom, time an endless song.<sup>1</sup>

Mary is spirited away; the play closes with the singing of faery voices outside the house.

The play also is in unrhymed pentameters, interspersed towards the end with tetrameters. The dramatist has put in some passages which are more ornamental than dramatic:

Father Hart: God spreads the heavens above us like great wings  
And gives a little round of deeds and days,  
And then come the wrecked angels and set snares,  
And bait them with light hopes and heavy dreams,...<sup>2</sup>

Although the play is full of 'stock poetic objects and manners',<sup>3</sup> it well portrays a girl dissatisfied with the humdrum village life, and is to be regarded as an expression of Yeats's own feelings. Raymond Williams<sup>4</sup> exaggerates the importance of the Sidhe element, which can be interpreted as a projection of Mary's desire.

The Shadowy Waters (printed in 1901,<sup>5</sup> acted 1904, revised 1906). Yeats had bestowed much thought on this little play since boyhood. It was first played by the Irish National Theatre

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> ~~Collected Plays, p. 56~~ Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Eliot, 1954, p. 212.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>5</sup> U. Ellis-Fermor, The Irish Dramatic Movement, p. 99.

Society at Molesworth Hall, Dublin, on January 4, 1904; then it had a number of productions subsequently in a revised form.

The play is concerned with the relation between man and woman; it is written under the spell of symbolism, and is conceived with 'sky, sea and cloud' as its characters.<sup>1</sup> This is realised through two enchanting characters -- Forgael and Dectora. It starts in a prosaic mood -- one of the chief characters is sleeping in the poop of a ship. The sailors who introduce the theme speak in prose; they are weary and their throats are shrivelled with thirst. The play's enchantment lies in Forgael dreaming of Dectora's red hair talking and ~~talk~~ in his sleep, and the sailors commenting on what he says. At the end of the play he winds her hair round himself, binding himself to her, and in their unity they grow immortal. The hair image plays an important part in this play.

We move through the enchanting play listening to the Sailors' designs. They try to persuade Aibric to kill Forgael and become their captain, but he is loyal to Forgael and refuses. Forgael, disturbed in his sleep, asks the sailors about the symbolic birds, who are his only pilots.<sup>2</sup> Aibric tells him:

They are to bring you to unheard-of passion,  
To some strange love the world knows nothing of,  
Some Ever-living woman as you think,  
One that can cast no shadow, being unearthly.<sup>3</sup>

The climax is reached when this Ever-living woman, Dectora, is brought to him by a storm. The lovers are absorbed in each other and are caught in the net - symbolic of their love. It is not easy

<sup>1</sup> The Letters of W.B. Yeats, p. 237, footnote 4.

<sup>2</sup> ~~Ibid. xxxxxx925x~~

<sup>2</sup> Vide Letter to Mrs. Emery, (?) July, 1905, The Letters, p. 454.

<sup>3</sup> Collected Plays, p. 150.

to break 'a mesh of the great golden net' in which they are entangled. The symbolic idea is emphasised in Dectora's speech:

What do I care,  
Now that my body has begun to dream,  
And you have grown to be a burning coal  
In the imagination and intellect? <sup>1</sup>

Dectora chooses to go with Forgael, and he gathers her hair about him:

Beloved, having dragged the net about us,  
And knitted mesh to mesh, we grow immortal;<sup>2</sup>

The play, to repeat the words of Wilson Knight used with reference to Shakespeare, becomes an expanded metaphor. The persons ultimately are not human at all, but purely symbols of a poetic vision.<sup>3</sup> This interpretation is strengthened by an early speech of Forgael:

I can see nothing plain; all's mystery.  
Yet sometimes there's a truth inside my head  
That makes all clear, but when the light is gone  
I have put images, analogies.....<sup>4</sup>

Yeats's emphasis on symbolism does not make him lose sight of the dramatic conflict. Aibric becomes jealous of the lovers' absorption in each other. He cuts the ropes and leaves the lovers in anger.

Yeats's references to this play in many letters<sup>5</sup> show us how it took shape in his mind. He invents a symbol which is 'magical and mystical' and clothes it with flesh. Eliot sees the play as an expression of the vague enchanted beauty of the pre-Raphaelite

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>3</sup> G. Wilson Knight, The Wheel of Fire, 1951, p. 16.  
Plays,

<sup>4</sup> Collected Works, p. 152.

<sup>5</sup>(i) Letters to O'Leary, Nov. 10, 1894, The Letters, p. 237.

(ii) Letter to Fiona Macleod, early January, 1897, Ibid., p. 260.

(iii) Letter to Frank Fay, 20 January, 1904, Ibid., p. 425.

school.<sup>1</sup> But to Yeats it was more a ritual than a human story.<sup>2</sup>

The verse of the play is loaded with 'drowsy beauty'.<sup>3</sup> Yeats says it is "probably the best verse I have written".<sup>4</sup> The best verse is given to the lovers. Forgael seems to anticipate the Poet in The King's Threshold, where the supreme function of poetry is made the theme.

The King's Threshold had its first performance at Molesworth Hall, Dublin, on October 8, 1903; It was also produced in 1914 at the Court Theatre, London, with new costumes designed by Charles Ricketts.<sup>5</sup> More than any other play written in this period, The King's Threshold has contemporary relevance:

It was written when our Society (the Irish National Theatre Society) was beginning to fight for the recognition of pure art in a community of which one half is busied in the practical affairs of life, and the other half in politics and propagandist patriotism.<sup>6</sup>

In the play Seanchan the poet fasts in order to restore the rights of pure art.

The source material was taken from an old story of Seanchan the Poet and King Guaire of Gort, and was considerably tampered with. Yeats 'sees the story from the poet's point of view, and not like the old story tellers, from the King's'.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Eliot, 'Yeats', On Poetry and Poets, 1957, p. 256.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Frank Fay, 20th January 1904, The Letters, p.425.

<sup>3</sup> F.R.Higgins, 'Yeats and the Poetic Drama in Ireland', The Irish Theatre, ed. by Lennox Robinson, 1939, p. 79.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to Clement Shorter, 27th May, 1899, The Letters, p.320.

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Charles Ricketts, 11th June 1914, The Letters, p. 587.

<sup>6</sup> W.B.Yeats, Plays for an Irish Theatre, 1914, p. 221.

<sup>7</sup> Plays and Controversies, p. 40.

The play shows a new technique which Yeats perfected in Deirdre. Its construction is rather like that of a Greek play,<sup>1</sup> though the death of the poet on the stage is not a Greek convention. Unlike The Shadowy Waters, the ethos of the play lends itself more clearly to conflict. It is one continuous argument about the vindication of the poet's ancient rights. In the Greek manner the play begins at the climax. The king, who stands for authority, in his argument with the Oldest Pupil of Seanchan sums up the issue:

But when he pleaded for the poet's right,  
Established at the establishment of the world,  
I said that I was King, and that all rights  
Had their original fountain in some king,  
And that it was the men who ruled the world,  
And not the men who sang to it, who should sit  
Where there was the most honour. My courtiers --  
Bishops, Soldiers, and Makers of the Law --  
Shouted approval; and amid that noise  
Seanchan went out, and from that hour to this,  
Although there is good food and drink beside him,  
Has eaten nothing.<sup>2</sup>

Seanchan's fasting has disturbed the King; he believes in the 'old foolish custom' that, if a wronged man dies starving on the threshold,

The common people, for all time to come,  
Will raise a heavy cry against that threshold  
Even though it be the King's.<sup>3</sup>

The poet's two pupils -- and the Mayor of the City -- fail to convince Seanchan. The Girls and the two Princes also fail in the

<sup>1</sup> Vide letter to Frank Fay, 8 August, 1903, The Letters, p.409.

<sup>2</sup> Collected Plays, pp. 108-109.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 108 (It is interesting that this practice has been known in India from ancient times: it is called dharna).

same mission; he is about to yield to Fedelm, his love, but ultimately his resolution revives. Even the King's anger is of no avail. Seanchan gives up his life for the right of the poets. The Youngest Pupil speaks of the race of poets of whom Seanchan was the eldest:

Long-throated swans upon the waves of time,  
Sing loudly, far beyond the wall of the world  
The race may hear our music and awake. <sup>1</sup>

The Greek pattern is noticeable not only in the structure of the play but also in the use of a chorus which expresses the collective mind. Fine rhythmic choric speeches, coming immediately after the lively prose dialogue of the Mayor and the Poet and others, show Yeats's efforts to move 'from dialogue to ritual incantation', to use a phrase from Raymond Williams.<sup>2</sup> They are full of stress and repetition:

First Cripple: The curse of the poor be upon him,  
The curse of the widows upon him,  
The curse of the children upon him,  
The curse of the bishops upon him. <sup>3</sup>

The pattern of these speeches is distinctly echoed in Eliot.<sup>4</sup>

Seanchan is overbearing in his refusal to respond to the requests of the Mayor, the King, and his own disciples. Yeats's personality must have been projected in him.

The verse is unadorned and has lost Yeats's earlier quality of 'drowsy beauty'. The prose speeches have the flavour of the

<sup>1</sup> Collected Plays, p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> Williams, op. cit., p. 214.

<sup>3</sup> ~~See~~ Collected Plays, p. 120.

<sup>4</sup> Vide speeches of the Chorus in Murder in the Cathedral, 1935, pp. 18-19.

Irish peasant. Brian the servant of Seanchan tries to persuade his master in his own simple way:

Master, eat this, it's not King's food that's cooked for everybody and nobody. Here is barley-bread out of your father's oven and dulse from Duras. Here is the dulse, your honour, it is wholesome, it has the good taste of the sea.<sup>1</sup>

The play demonstrates Yeats's desire to popularise poetic drama by using many techniques. He used Greek and Elizabethan methods -- the mixture of prose and verse, the pattern of stress and repetition, and the chorus.

In the plays that belong to the second period Yeats gives up his simple country beliefs and common Irish folk as material for his drama, and resorts to the famous Cuchulain myth, which has kings as heroes and lovers. The Cuchulain myth is the basis of his two plays On Baile's Strand and The Green Helmet; the popular story of the Irish Queen who eloped with Naoise is the theme of Deirdre.

On Baile's Strand had its first production at the Abbey Theatre on December 27, 1904.<sup>2</sup>

The life of Cuchulain enabled Yeats to construct a play in which the audience learn the dreadful facts of which the characters are ignorant. The technique of starting near the climax and gradually revealing the ghastly truth was perfected in the next play, Deirdre. The suspense natural to a Greek play is there kept up.

<sup>1</sup> Collected Plays, p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Lady Gregory, 24th November 1904, The Letters, p. 444.

Conchubar, the High King, has commanded Cuchulain to fight the young man from Aoife's country, who has challenged him. After a great deal of hesitation and taunting, he fights and kills the young man, who, unknown to him, is his own son. When he discovers his irretrievable mistake, his anger against the High King and himself knows no bounds. This is reported to the High King by the Fool and Blind Man, who correspond to the choric characters in a Greek drama. One of the highlights of the story is the taunting of Cuchulain, who has no wife, by Conchubar, who is surrounded by his family. The King says Cuchulain lives 'like a bird's flight from tree to tree'. Conchubar boasting of his family line provides a contrast to Cuchulain:

Conchubar: I am High King, my son shall be High King;  
 And you for all the wildness of your blood,  
 And though your father came out of the sun,  
 Are but a little king and weigh but light  
 In anything that touches government,  
 If put into the balance with my children.<sup>1</sup>

Cuchulain has no children of his own, but in the wildness of his / youth  
 he had an affair with a 'fierce woman of the camp' in Scotland, who  
 had borne him a son. Conchubar reminds him of it. Cuchulain,  
 although he has put affection away from his heart, now grows  
 lyrical about his happy days:

Ah! Conchubar, had you seen her  
 With that high, laughing, turbulent head of hers  
 Thrown backward, and the bowstring at her ear,  
 Or sitting at the fire with those grave eyes  
 Full of good counsel as it were with wine,  
 Or when love ran through all the lineaments  
 Of her wild body - although she had no child,  
 None other had all beauty, queen or lover,  
 Or was so fitted to give birth to kings.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Collected Plays, p. 256.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 258-259.



This picture of Aoife, the Great Queen of the North, comes to his mind when the young challenger encounters him:

I am of Aoife's country.<sup>1</sup>

Cuchulain advises the youth not to challenge him and offers him friendship, as he sees in him the reflection of the Great Queen -- 'a pale stone-pale cheek'. He sees in him 'a hot heart and a cold eye' and the fierceness of his beloved. The Young Man is adamant and refuses his gifts; meanwhile Conchubar also prevails upon him to fight. The refusal of the offer of Cuchulain is made all the more tragic by the dramatic irony of his utterances:

Boy, I would meet them all in arms  
If I'd a son like you. He would avenge me....<sup>2</sup>

Further:

Boy,  
If I had fought my father, he'd have killed me,  
As certainly as if I had a son  
And fought with him, I should be deadly to him....<sup>3</sup>

In a mood of frenzy he seizes Conchubar, who attributes this treasonable act to a witch. Then he fights and kills the Young Man. This violent scene closes with the First Woman of the chorus singing:

Life drifts between a fool and a blind man  
To the end, and nobody can know his end.<sup>4</sup>

This is significant, as the Fool and the Blind Man are part of the Chorus. While Cuchulain is wiping the blood off his sword, with a heap of feathers given to him by the Fool, the Blind Man reveals the ghastly truth:

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 264.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 269.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 271.

It is his own son he has slain.<sup>1</sup>

Cuchulain grows frenzied again and strikes at the chair on which the High King is sitting and calls him:

A maggot that is eating up the earth!<sup>2</sup>

Then he rushes into the sea, while the Fool and the Blind Man are left on the stage to describe the scene as he is swept away by the waves:

Fool: There, he is down! He is up again. He is going out in the deep water. There is a big wave. It has gone over him. I cannot see him now. He has killed kings and giants, but the waves have mastered him, the waves have mastered him!

... ..

Blind Man: There will be nobody in the houses. Come this way; come quickly! The ovens will be full. We will put our hands into the ovens!<sup>3</sup>

The play has an impressive ending; calm is established after the rage. But the dramatist exhibits an excessive fondness for the two choric characters, the Fool and the Blind Man. The central character is made to depend too much on them.

It begins with prose speeches and contains varied lines of poetry. The Chorus of Women speaks in rhymed tetrameters:

May the fire have driven out  
The Shape-Changers that can put  
Ruin on a great king's house  
Until all be ruinous.<sup>4</sup>

The short lines are an effective contrast to the unrhymed pentameters spoken by Cuchulain and Conchubar. This occasional interspersing of short among long lines suggests that Yeats is trying

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 276.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 277.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>4</sup> ~~Collected Plays, p. 262~~ Ibid., p. 262.

to do away with blank verse as a dramatic medium. The play's subdued note is disturbed by the spectacular scenes of witchcraft and dancing.<sup>1</sup>

A play on Deirdre was not new to the Irish audience. A.E.'s Deirdre, together with Yeats's Cathleen Ni Houlihan, was produced in a hall belonging to the Carmelite Fathers in Dublin in 1902.<sup>2</sup> Yeats in 1907 concentrated on the crisis in the love story and thus departed from A.E.'s version, whereas Synge, in the following year, kept close to A.E.'s handling of the legend and went farther in dividing it into three dramatic episodes in Deirdre of the Sorrows.<sup>3</sup>

Yeats's is the smallest canvas, avoiding the traditional narrative and isolating the climax from the inessentials of the story of conflict. He writes a one-act play in the manner of Greek drama. He concentrates on the cruelty of destruction, anticipating the stern feeling so often exhibited in the plays written towards the end of his life. Even in his approximation to the Greek play, Yeats introduces a new element in his Musicians, so frequently used in Noh plays and corresponding to a chorus.

Deirdre is the tale of a beautiful child nursed by a witch and destined to marry the old king, Conchubar. She elopes with Naoise, 'a young man, in the laughing scorn of his youth', just before her

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Una Ellis-Fermor relates the story to the English poem Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (vide The Irish Dramatic Movement, pp. 110-111).

<sup>2</sup> Padraic Colum, 'Early Days of the Irish Theatre', The Dublin Magazine, January-March, 1950, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> This theme also fascinated Gordon Bottomley, who wrote a four-act play in 1944 called Deirdre, now included in Poems and Plays, ed. by C.C. Abbott, 1953.

wedding is to take place. After wandering for half a dozen years, they come to Conchubar's kingdom as he has promised them pardon. Fergus, an old man, has arranged their ill-fated meeting with the King. At this point the play opens in a festive atmosphere. Fergus and the Musicians in a guest house are talking about Deirdre and Naoise. The audience hear of the preparations to receive the guests. Fergus, who has arranged a reconciliation, feels that Conchubar is converted:

I am Conchubar's near friend, and that weighed somewhat,  
And it was policy to pardon them.<sup>1</sup>

The First Musician says:

An old man's love  
Who casts no second line is hard to cure;  
His jealousy is like his love.<sup>2</sup>

An atmosphere of foreboding is established when dark-faced men with strange barbaric dress and arms pass one by one in silence. All is not well in that guest house. The Musicians understand Conchubar's murderous purpose, but Fergus, blinded by the loyalty of friendship, is unable to see into the dark heart of the king. He asks the Musicians to sing a song of welcome:

I'd have them hear  
A music foaming up out of the house  
Like wine out of a cup.<sup>3</sup>

When the guests arrive, Conchubar is not there to welcome them. Deirdre senses danger, while Naoise feels that the High King will not trap them. Fergus suggests that they should play chess, but Naoise is reluctant to play chess because the chessboard has evil

<sup>1</sup> Collected Plays, p. 174.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

associations. The feelings of the guests fluctuate between hope and fear. The Musicians express their sympathy with the victims, Deirdre infers from their song that treachery awaits her lover. The High King violates the rules of hospitality when he summons<sup>all</sup> the guests except Naoise, through a dark-faced Messenger, who says:

Deirdre and Fergus, son of Rogh, are summoned;  
But not the traitor that bore off the Queen.<sup>1</sup>

The lovers are in a trap:

Naoise: The crib has fallen and the birds are in it;  
There is not one of the great oaks about us  
But shades a hundred men.<sup>2</sup>

He asks for the torches to be lighted from the fire, and the game of chess goes on. The fire symbolising passion, and chess the impending disaster, prepare the audience for what is to come. The lovers relived their happy days; Deirdre asks for the last gift:

Bend and kiss me now,  
For it may be the last before our death.  
And when that's over, we'll be different;  
Imperishable things, a cloud or fire.<sup>3</sup>

The sympathetic chorus sounds a note of warning; Conchubar sees the lovers. Naoise prepares to meet him. Deirdre snatches a knife from the First Musician, giving him a bracelet. Conchubar comes back with the dark-faced men and makes the impossible demand that Deirdre walk into his house before the people's eyes; if she does so, Naoise will be set free. Deirdre kneels to Conchubar, asking him to pardon them. Her lover is gagged and taken behind the curtain unseen by her. The Executioners display their swords

<sup>1</sup> Collected Plays, p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>4</sup> Collected Plays, p. 191.

smeared with Naoise's blood, and Conchubar renews his offer to make her his queen. But Deirdre escapes the clutches of the old man a second time, kills herself with the dagger, and sleeps with her lover eternally. The Musicians announce that they are gone, and Conchubar cries out passionately:

And she has deceived me for a second time;  
And every common man can keep his wife,  
But not the King.<sup>1</sup>

A critic<sup>2</sup> describes the play as a fusion of the neo-classic tragedy of reason with the romantic tragedy of passion. The chief symbols of the former, the game of chess, and of the tragedy of passion, fire, are introduced to suggest the two types. The chess image does seem to bear this interpretation; otherwise it is difficult to see why a game of chess should be played in the inappropriate circumstances. The image of fire, however, is not so much emphasised as the evening sky<sup>3</sup> and does not seem to bear the interpretation put upon it.

The grim atmosphere, the Musicians sympathetic towards the victims (as the Chorus in Sophocles), the manner of death of the lovers, the report of Fergus, who performs the function of a messenger in a Greek play, show that the play is a modern approximation to Greek tragedy. The play is well constructed and interest is maintained. But the characters appear to move in a dreamy land. The austere atmosphere is maintained by the Musicians singing ballads which narrate events resembling the action. This led Edward Thomas to say that the play 'mingles the qualities of

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>2</sup> David Ridgley Clerk, 'Yeats's Deirdre', The Dublin Magazine, January-March, 1958, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Collected Plays, p. 191.

drama and ballad'.<sup>1</sup>

The speeches of the characters, though in fine poetry, are rather long, but the latter half of the play, till Conchubar raises the curtain to parade his triumph to Fergus, only to curse himself on seeing the lovers' dead bodies, holds the audience under a spell.

The Green Helmet, 'An Heroic Farce', is a play about one of the adventures of Cuchulain. It was played at the Abbey Theatre on March 19, 1908.<sup>2</sup>

The story is taken from the saga of Bricriu's Feast. Bricriu, or Poisontongue, took a delight in mischief-making. He invited the three heroes, Cuchulain, Laegaire and Conall, and their wives to a feast, but arranged that they should fight each other for the so-called 'champion's portion'. Yeats, however, alters the story considerably.

The stage directions are spectacular. The action takes place in a house of orange-red; the chairs, tables and flagons are black; the rocks are black with a few green touches; and the sea is green and luminous. Except the Red Man and the Black Men, all the characters are dressed in various shades of green. The Black Men wear a dark purple dress and have dark-eared caps. The dresses are intended to be startling.

The comic atmosphere is at once introduced by the conversation of Laegaire and Conall, who are boasting of their triumphs and talk of Cuchulain and his wife:

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<sup>1</sup> 'Yeats's Deirdre', Bookman, October, 1907, Vol. XXXIII, p.191.

<sup>2</sup> Footnote to a letter to A.H.Bullen, March 1908, The Letters, p. 505.

Laegaire:

I would he'd come for all that, and make his young wife know  
That though she may be his wife, she has no right to go  
Before your wife and my wife, as she would have done last night  
Had they not caught at her dress, and pulled her as was right;  
And she makes light of us though our wives do all that they can.  
She spreads her tail like a peacock and praises none but her man.<sup>1</sup>

Cuchulain meets them and they narrate to him their adventure with the Red Man whose head has been cut off and put back again. Next we hear of the Red Man's encounter with Cuchulain. The farcical element is seen in the shout of the charioteers and stable boy, and a romantic element in Emer's cry for Cuchulain to put off sloth and to love her.

The 'heroic farce' ends with the Red Man crowning Cuchulain:

I'm the Rector of this land,  
And with my spitting cat-heads, my frenzied moonbred band,  
Age after age I sift it, and choose for its championship  
The man who hits my fancy.<sup>2</sup>

This play about mock-heroic themes, coming at the end of Yeats's second period and before he started writing plays in the Noh manner, is to be considered a flight of fancy. Its interest is mainly in its verse. He abandons blank verse, and the lines have thirteen or more syllables and are in regularly rhymed couplets:

Red Man:

So you too think me in earnest in waging poll for poll!  
A drinking joke and gibe and a juggler's feat, that is all,  
To make the time go quickly--for I am the drinker's friend,  
The kindest of all Shape-Changers from here to the world's end,  
The best of all tipsy companions. And now I bring you a gift.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Collected Plays, p. 225.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>3</sup> ~~Collected Plays, p. 232~~ Ibid., p. 232.



This chapter on Yeats may be closed with a brief reference to the two plays -- A Full Moon in March and The King of the Great Clock Tower -- written in the post-Noh period but containing features in common with the Noh plays.

The attendants who introduce the plays take the place of the Musicians; musical instruments such as the drum and gong, and also **masks**, are used. The plays are highly formalised in the substitution of speech and music for painted scenery; and much of the effect depends on the dancing by the queen carrying a severed head, which occurs in both plays.

A Full Moon in March is a play about blood symbolism,<sup>1</sup> which, as in many ancient traditions, is associated with the Moon, which in turn is a symbol of change.<sup>2</sup> This is worked out through two characters, the Queen and the Swineherd. The Swineherd has come 'through dust and mire' at full moon to sing so well that he may win the Queen for his wife. The Queen asks him to sing his best song and he sings:

A song -- the night of love,  
An ignorant forest and the dung of swine.<sup>3</sup>

She thinks that he has insulted her and asks for his severed head.

The swineherd laughs:

There is a story in my country of a woman  
That stood all bathed in blood -- a drop of blood  
Entered her womb and there begat a child.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Edmund Dulac, December 10, 1934, The Letters, p. 830.

<sup>2</sup> Ideas of Good and Evil, 1903, p. 94.

<sup>3</sup> Collected Plays, p. 625.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 626.

He is executed, and the Queen dances with his severed head, and loves it and places it on her throne. The scene is reminiscent of the dance in Wilde's Salome. The play closes with the Attendants' dialogue:

What do they lack? O cry it out again.  
Their desecration and the lover's night.<sup>1</sup>

The images of the roulette wheel and of the moon are used to signify transitoriness. The phrase 'desecration and the lover's night' is repeated often to drive home the point that 'men beget and bear because of the incompleteness of our love',<sup>2</sup> whereas by implication the love of these lovers, which is not physical and therefore is purely spiritual, is complete.

The same theme is taken up in an equally obscure play, The King of the Great Clock Tower, produced at the Abbey Theatre on July 30, 1904.<sup>3</sup> Instead of the Swineherd we have a Stroller-poet who sings of the beauty of the King's wife, the Queen of the Great Clock Tower. He demands that the Queen shall kiss his mouth; the King becomes angry and orders his head to be cut off. The Queen dances with the head of the Stroller on her shoulder, showing her love for it, while the First Attendant sings as the Head:

Clip and lip and long for more,  
Mortal men our abstracts are;  
What of the hands on the Great Clock Face?  
All those living wretches crave  
Prerogatives of the dead that have  
Sprung heroic from the grave.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 630.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Olivia Shakespeare, July 24, 1934, The Letters, p. 824.

<sup>3</sup> Vide footnote, letter to Olivia Shakespeare, August 7, 1934, Ibid., p. 826.

<sup>4</sup> Collected Plays, p. 639.

The comment of the Attendants is choric in character.

The play's interest lies in its Salome dance, which Yeats says is an expression of horror and fascination.<sup>1</sup> In this play also, the union of the lovers is spiritual. Yeats himself felt dissatisfied with the theme:

'.....I don't like The Clock Tower which is theatrically coherent but spiritually incoherent.'<sup>2</sup>

A critic's view that these two plays are concerned with the descent of spirit into matter,<sup>3</sup> is probably just, but as the author admits, the theme is not satisfactorily worked out.

The verse of these plays has lost the lyrical beauty of the early plays, but has gained either a comic effect, as in the following passage, or the virile beauty of his later verse, such as 'The Tower':

Stroller: I had a wife. The image in my head  
Made her appear fat, slow, thick of the limbs,  
In all her movements like a Michaelmas goose.  
I left her, but a night or two ago.....<sup>4</sup>

But the tendency to replace blank verse as a dramatic medium is clear; the poetry is purged of ornament. In the next play, The Herne's Egg (1938), he uses a large number of four-stress lines.

These plays involving supernatural agencies are the result of many years of brooding over them and of his contact with 'heterodox mysticism' which he sought in various schools of philosophy -- Hindu thought, Neo-Platonism and modern philosophy:

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Olivia Shakespeare, August 7 (Postmark Aug. 9, 34) The Letters, p. 827.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Edmond Dulac, December 10, 1934, The Letters, p. 830.

<sup>3</sup> Vide a review of F.A.C. Wilson's W.B. Yeats and Tradition, in The Times Literary Supplement, January 24, 1958.

<sup>4</sup> Collected Plays, p. 635.

I was unlike others of my generation in one thing only, I am very religious, and deprived by Huxley and Tyndall, whom I detested, of the simple-minded religion of my childhood, I had made a new religion, almost an infallible Church, of poetic tradition, of a fardel of stories, and of personages, and of emotions, inseparable from their first expression, passed on from generation to generation by poets and painters with some help from philosophers and theologians.....I had even created a dogma: 'Because those imaginary people are created out of the deepest instinct of man, to be his measure and norm, whatever I can imagine those mouths speaking may be the nearest I can go to truth'. When I listened they seemed always to speak of one thing only; they, their lives, every incident of their lives, were steeped in the supernatural.<sup>1</sup>

He created an ivory tower for himself:

I planned a mystical order .....and for ten years to come my most impassioned though was a vain attempt to find philosophy and to create ritual for that order. I had an unshakable conviction, arising how or whence I cannot tell, that invisible gates would open as they opened for Blake, as they opened for Swedenborg, as they opened for Boehme, and that this philosophy would find its manuals of devotion in all imaginative literature, and set before Irishmen for special manual an Irish literature....<sup>2</sup>

The dream world had become part of Yeats's consciousness; it manifested itself in plays and poems from his very early years. His characters move on a plane of high romanticism, speaking words of rich import and beauty and moving far from the physical world. Leavis's judgement of Yeats's plays is tenable with a qualification:

.....his (Yeats's) resolute attempt upon the drama serves mainly to bring out the prepotence of the tradition he started in. His plays repudiate the actual world as essentially as his incantatory lyrics and his esoteric prose repudiate it. 'As for living, our servants will do that for us' -- the epigraph might cover all three. A drama thus devoted to a 'higher reality' of this kind could hardly exhibit the dramatic virtues.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W.B.Yeats, Autobiographies, 1955, pp. 115-116.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 253-254.

<sup>3</sup> New Bearings in English Literature, 1954, p. 38.

On the other hand Yeats is a passionate lover of the actual world. In him there is a strong attachment to life. It is curious that this devotee of Hindu thought is very much the reverse of an ascetic. He has given expression to it in unequivocal terms:

I am content to live it all again  
And yet again, if it be life to pitch  
Into the frog-spawn of ~~the~~ blind man's ditch,  
A blind man battering blind men;<sup>1</sup>

The style of his plays is largely derived from the romantic poets, although Yeats knew Hopkins's sprung rhythms.<sup>2</sup> He started with an iambic pattern as basis and drifted towards blank verse, but did not adhere to it in a mechanical way, and later on to somewhat irregular unrhymed four-stressed lines.

It is interesting that two major poets living almost contemporaneously strove to fashion a new verse based on the movement and idiom of modern speech. This is the very texture of modern poetic drama: Both Yeats and Eliot have tried to work it out.

Eliot's tribute in The Criterion sums up Yeats's achievement in poetic drama:

Mr. Yeats in Dublin performed a great service to English literature, and belonged as much to it, as Mr. Yeats in London. There are two aspects in which this statement is true. For one thing, the Abbey Theatre kept poetry in the theatre; and maintained literary standards which had long since disappeared from the English stage. If there is ever a dramatic revival in England in our time, it will owe a great deal to what was done in Dublin, however different may be the material, the ideas and the style.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'A Dialogue of Self and Soul', Collected Poems, 1955, p. 267. I am indebted to Professor Clifford Leech for this reference.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Dorothy Wellesley, December 21, 1935, The Letters, p. 845. '..... I am writing The Great Clock Tower in short lines but think that I shall not use 'sprung verse' -- now that I am close to it I dislike the constant uncertainty as to where the accent falls; it seems to me to make the verse vague and weak.'

<sup>3</sup> 'The Abbey Theatre', The Criterion, Vol. 14, 1934-35, pp. 610-611.

## CHAPTER TEN

### C O N C L U S I O N

I should not like to close without attempting to set before you.....the ideal towards which poetic drama should strive..... It is an unattainable ideal: and that is why it interests me, for it provides an incentive towards further experiment and exploration, beyond any goal which there is prospect of attaining ..... I have before my eyes a kind of mirage of the perfection of verse drama, which would be a design of human action and of words, such as to present at once the two aspects of dramatic and musical order. <sup>1</sup>

In these words, Eliot, looking back in 1950 upon the achievement of the verse drama movement, states the ideal which inspired the verse drama of the past half century. It is evident that the dramatists treated in this thesis made protests against the theatre, which had become 'a senseless self-reflection of man's skill'.<sup>2</sup> They attempted to escape from the naturalistic style of plays and to give the theatre its full emotional scope. The efforts of the Romantics and the Victorians had been in vain; the echo of Shakespeare was too loud in them.

In the eighteen-nineties the English theatre was opened to a fresh breeze from Scandinavia; the drama of ideas exemplified in some of the plays of Ibsen is to be seen also as a reaction against naturalism. William Archer translated Ibsen's plays into English, and Ghosts was produced on the occasion of the inauguration of the Independent Theatre in 1891. Subsequently, his symbolic and

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<sup>1</sup> T.S.Eliot, Poetry and Drama, 1950, pp. 33-34.

<sup>2</sup> Rossetti's phrase used by Yeats in Plays and Controversies, 1923, p. 73.

imaginative plays such as The Master Builder, Peer Gynt and The Wild Duck broke the 'peace of the English theatre',<sup>1</sup> and stimulated a return to poetic drama. But the climate of the theatre was not conducive to poetic drama; the plays of poetical content were not for the popular theatre; Yeats felt the pulse of his audience:

It cannot become impassioned, that is to say, vital, without making somebody gushing and sentimental. Educated and well-bred people do not wear their hearts on their sleeves and they have no artistic and charming language, and no powerful language at all, and when they are deeply moved, they look silently into the fireplace.<sup>2</sup>

This was not the problem that the Elizabethan dramatists had to face when they couched their drama in blank verse; their audience regarded blank verse as a natural medium of drama and had no inhibitions about enjoying poetry. How well the difference is summed up by G.D. Willcock:

The modern dramatist or novelist who subscribes to the canons of 'realism' strives by broken sentences, reproduction of clichés, current colloquialisms and even by devices of punctuation such as dots and dashes, to represent the short-breathed incoherencies of an age grown careless of speech. The Elizabethan could not only savour the quality of 'language such as men do use', but he also expected the dramatist to recall by his diction the divinity that hedged a king and to do his duty by all the great common-places -- Death the Skeleton and Time the Shadow.<sup>3</sup>

This fundamental factor was ignored by the dramatists of small talent who wanted to resuscitate the poetic drama under the auspices of Irving's Lyceum management. But first Yeats and later Eliot profited by the mistakes of their predecessors.

<sup>1</sup> A.B. Walkley, Dramatic Criticism, 1903, p. 182.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Leynton Hudson, The Twentieth Century Drama, 1946, p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> 'Shakespeare and Elizabethan English', A Companion to Shakespeare Studies, ed. by H. Granville-Barker and G.B. Harrison 1926, p. 134.

Robert Bridges's aspirations to fame on the poetic stage were high, but his experience was too narrow. His output in drama was large but he could not make a lasting contribution owing to his archaic medium and his inability to understand the theatre of his time. Hopkins in his comments on Bridges's more famous plays such as Nero, Ulysses and Prometheus pointed out the limitations of his attempt to imitate Shakespeare:

The example of Shakespeare.....has done ever so much harm by his very genius, for poets reproduce the diction which in him was modern and in them is obsolete.<sup>1</sup>

The deliberate imitation of Shakespeare produced results which were in the nature of a flash in the pan in Stephen Phillips, who had considerable acquaintance with the theatre. Phillips was favoured by circumstances; Benson and Beerbohm Tree discovered him, but he could never approach Shakespeare's power of expression and imagination. In the same strain continued Rudolf Besier, Comyns Carr and William Archer. They were confronted with the problem of meeting the new conditions of their time. The claims of the naturalistic drama were too powerful to ignore. However, even H.A.Jones, who wanted "to go ~~down~~ into the street, into the hotels, into the stores, and write down what we see and hear, and make it up into a play",<sup>2</sup> could not resist the temptation of echoing Shakespeare in a verse play. This imitation of Shakespeare has continued; the imaginative reconstruction of the biographies of Shakespeare by Clemence Dane and Charles Williams is to be seen as another aspect of this imitation.

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<sup>1</sup> letter to Bridges, May 17, 1885, Gerard Manley Hopkins (The Penguin Poets), 1953, p. 201.

<sup>2</sup> Literature and the Modern Drama, 1906, p. 147.



The verse drama took a new turn with John Davidson and Thomas Hardy. The play of ideas began to invade the realm of poetic drama; the nearest influence on a Davidson is Ibsen. The Mammon plays are full of ideas, they are a counterpart to the prose naturalistic drama. But they were never produced. So also The Dynasts, which was meant for mental performance, was produced only in a truncated form. Nevertheless, it was a fresh breeze blowing across the poetic drama. Hardy's chorus of the Phantom Intelligences is used peculiarly; it suggests inner conflict and projects a background of social life and establishes a link with the choric drama of the past.

The verse dramatists of the period show considerable dissatisfaction with the naturalistic play. The spectacular element in Flecker's Hassan was a substitute for poetry in drama and was a great success with the English audience. This dissatisfaction similarly expressed itself in the remote setting and background of Binyon's Avuli.

Showing nothing of the romantic and pictorial aspect of Flecker, the Georgian poets, particularly Gibson, tried to bring contemporary English life into verse drama. Their dramatic output was large, but they failed to reconcile these two disparate elements. It was left to Eliot, using a different technique, to achieve some success in this project.

The years 1890 to 1935 brought many new influences to bear on the English theatre. Two of these, the remote techniques of the Japanese and the Greek drama, especially enrich the content of

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verse plays. Some elements at least of the Japanese technique seem to have taken permanent root, while the Greek model has at times been freely adopted.

Yeats, unlike many others treated in this work, was closely associated with the theatre. His ideals were shaped, as it were, in a workshop. Yeats was searching for a new medium of drama in which he wanted to achieve remoteness in the treatment of poetic themes. For this purpose, the Noh was a suitable medium. But Yeats's genius tampered with the medium. His imagination ranged freely and followed Pound, who also evinced great interest in remoteness in art. Yeats discovered a community of thought between the material of Irish folk-tales and the material on which the Noh drew:

The adventure itself is often the meeting with ghost, god or goddess at some holy place or much legended tomb, and god, goddess or ghost reminds me at times of our own Irish legends and beliefs, which once, it may be, differed little from those of the Shinto worshipper.<sup>1</sup>

Yeats popularised the Noh among his fellow dramatists but its influence on English drama was short-lived. One suggested cause of this is that Yeats and Pound took over the conventions second-hand; they had not seen a real Noh play.<sup>2</sup> It remained the ideal of a coterie, and towards the end of his career Yeats himself, desiring a wider audience, felt dissatisfied. The influence of the Noh is only sporadic; the paraphernalia are too complex, and the drama could not remain in that aristocratic mould. But some aspects of the Noh, particularly the dance, made their impress on

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Anthony Thwaite, 'Yeats and the Noh', The Twentieth Century, September, 1957, p. 238.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 237.

Terence Gray, whose experiments at the Cambridge Festival Theatre from 1926 to 1933 were well received.

Yeats's plays on the Noh model have not completely failed. His insistence on scenic simplicity has caught the imagination of modern producers, and his use of symbolic methods has left a permanent impression on the English theatre. Yeats's imitators in the Noh style developed their own techniques: Bottomley's use of the chorus in two parts as protagonists indicates a possible line of development of verse drama.

While the Japanese Noh fascinated Yeats, he was also to a certain extent interested in the Greek ideal of the theatre, as exhibited in Deirdre. This influence is more clearly manifested in Eliot, who had been brooding on the application of this technique since 1932, when he wrote his comic poem, Sweeney Agonistes, Fragments of an Aristophanic Melodrama, with one of its two epigraphs from the Choephoroi. Beginning the play very near the climax, and supplying the narrative element to a certain extent through the chorus, appealed to Eliot. This technique proved successful in Murder in the Cathedral. The Family Reunion also stemmed from the Greek model, but was very different from its predecessor in theme and method. The rehandling of mythical and religious themes in such a way as to give them relevance to the modern period is another device to keep the verse drama alive on the stage:

Eliot.....has established a fundamental relation between ..... two cultures, and has shown a single abiding constant in both. Not only is the process engrossing and valuable per se: it has the added

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merit that it reinforces his choice of the Greek type of drama as a milieu through which to attempt the reinstatement of verse drama in English.<sup>1</sup>

Just as Yeats in his later plays abandoned the Noh technique in order to approach a wider audience, Eliot has progressively given up the remote methods of the earlier plays in an apparent effort to widen his appeal. In the three plays written after Murder in the Cathedral, ecclesiastical themes disappear, and the chorus is first reduced and then vanishes.

On looking back over these forty-five years of many-sided effort by a number of writers of small and great talent, one feels that the problems of a modern poetic drama are still unsolved. Excursions have been made into religious drama, into the Greek, the Mōrality, the Elizabethan and the Japanese, and into the Left-wing Theatre with its farcical element. These have had to struggle against the realistic drama in prose and the picture-frame stage, which on the whole has held its ground.

Are the defects of verse drama inherent or external? The verse drama of the contemporary period has to be approached on two levels - the manifest and the symbolic. It depends on the ability of the reader or the playgoer to discern these levels. Besides, the problem of language is acute. Verse on the modern stage is always slightly self-conscious, and brings an increased danger of sententious utterance. Eliot and his followers rightly avoid imitation of Shakespeare and recreate verse drama as a kind of naturalistic drama. But any verse gives audiences a kind of

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<sup>1</sup> John Peter, 'The Family Reunion', Scrutiny, Vol. XVI, No.3, September 1949, p. 223.

Sunday-feeling as if the play has no relevance to the rest of the week.

Since the days of the Abbey Theatre it has always been a problem to find actors who can enter into the spirit of verse drama and speak verse effectively. Thus the job of the verse dramatist in establishing contact between the actor and the audience is the more complicated.

A P P E N D I X 'A'LIST OF VERSE PLAYS TREATED IN THIS WORK AND OF CRITICAL WRITINGS  
RELATING TO THEM.

Unless otherwise stated, the plays were not performed.

1. ABERCROMBIE, Lascelles (1881-1938)
  1. Deborah: a play in three acts, 1913.
  2. Four Short Plays, 1922.
    - (i) The Adder: Produced at the Liverpool Repertory Theatre in 1913, and at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in the same year.
    - (ii) The Staircase. Produced at the Playhouse, Liverpool, 1920.
    - (iii) The End of the World. Produced at Bristol in 1914 and at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, 1915.
    - (iv) The Deserter.
  3. Phoenix, a tragi-comedy in three acts, 1923.
  4. The Sale of Saint Thomas, 1930.

CRITICISM, ETC.

1. L.Abercrombie, Preface to his Poems, Oxford, 1930.
2. Abercrombie, 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama', The Poetry Review, March, 1912, pp. 107-118. (A paper read before the Manchester Branch of the English Association).

3. Mary C. Sturgeon, 'Lascelles Abercrombie' in Studies of Contemporary Poets, 1916. (Revised edition, 1920).
  4. P. Thouless, Modern Poetic Drama, Oxford, 1934.
  5. Oliver Elton, 'Lascelles Abercrombie, 1881-1938', from the Proceedings of the British Academy, Vol. XXV, 1939, p. 30.
  6. Jack Lindsay, 'The Modern Consciousness', The London Aphrodite, 1928, p. 15.
2. ARCHER, William (1856-1924)
- Beatriz Juana, 1923.
- Lidia, 1923 (Now included in Three Plays, 1927).

CRITICISM, ETC.

1. "How William Archer impressed Bernard Shaw", Preface to Three Plays, 1927, pp. vi-xi.
  2. 'Preface to Beatriz Juana and Lidia', Three Plays, pp. 93-96.
  3. Philip Massinger, The Great Duke of Florence, ed. J. Stockholm, Baltimore, 1933.
  4. Thomas Middleton, Best Plays (Mermaid Series) ed. by Havelock Ellis, 1890.
  5. William Archer, The Theatrical World, 5 volumes (1893-1897).
3. BAX, Clifford (1886- )
1. The Cloak, A Studio Play, 1921, produced in the same year by the Travelling Theatre of the Arts League of Service.
4. BEERBOHM, Sir Max (1872-1957)
1. 'Savonarola' Brown, 1917. Now in Seven Men and Two Others, 1934.
5. BESIER, Rudolf (1878-1942)
1. The Virgin Goddess, 1907, produced in 1906 at the Adelphi Theatre.

CRITICISM, ETC.

1. A.E.Wilson, Edwardian Theatre, 1951.
  
6. BINYON, Laurence: (1869-1943)
  1. Paris And Oenone, 1906.
  2. Attila, 1907, produced at His Majesty's Theatre in the same year.
  3. Ayuli, 1923.
  4. Boadicea, A play in eight scenes, 1926, produced in Masefield's Theatre in the same year.
  5. Three Short Plays, 1930.
    - (i) Godstow Nunnery.
    - (ii) Love in the Desert.
    - (iii) Memnon.

Godstow Nunnery and Memnon were produced in Masefield's Theatre in 1929.

Love in the Desert had several performances in 1928.
  6. Arthur, 1931.
  7. The Young King, 1934, a play written for performance in the Chapter House of Canterbury Cathedral.
  
7. BOTTOMLEY, Gordon (1874-1948)
  1. The Crier By Night, 1902, produced by the Portmanteau Theatre in the United States in the same year.
  2. Midsummer Eve, 1901, produced by the Arts League of Service in 1930.
  3. Laodice and Danae, 1906, produced at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, in 1930.



4. The Riding to Lithend, 1907, produced at the Cambridge Festival Theatre in 1928.
5. King Lear's Wife, 1913, produced at the Cambridge Festival in the same year.
6. Britain's Daughter, 1917, produced at the Old Vic in 1922.
7. Gruach, 1918, produced at the Old Vic in 1922.
8. Scenes and Plays, 1929.
9. Lyric Plays, 1932.
10. The Acts of St. Peter, A Cathedral Festival Play, 1933, produced in Exeter Cathedral at the Octo-Centenary Festival in the same year.
11. Choric Plays, 1939.

#### CRITICISM, ETC.

1. Gordon Bottomley, A Stage for Poetry: My Purposes with my Plays, 1948: privately printed for the author by Titus Wilson & Son, Kendal.
  2. C.C.Abbott's Introduction to Poems and Plays, 1953, pp. 9-19.
  3. A Review of The Crier By Night in The Times Literary Supplement, December 5, 1902.
  4. Poet and Painter: Being the Correspondence between Gordon Bottomley and Paul Nash, 1910-1946, ed. C.C.Abbott and Anthony Bertram, Oxford, 1955.
8. BRIDGES, Robert (1844-1930)
1. Prometheus, the Fire Giver, a Mask, 1883, produced at a boys' Grammar School near Newbury in 1905.
  2. The First Part of Nero, 1885.
  3. The Feast of Bacchus, 1889.

4. Achilles in Scyros, 1890.
5. The Christian Captives, 1890.
6. Palicio, 1890.
7. The Return of Ulysses, 1890.
8. The Humours of the Court, 1893, Produced by the Oxford Dramatic Society in 1930.
9. The Second Part of the History of Nero, 1894.
10. Demeter, a Mask, 1904, acted by the ladies of Somerville College, Oxford, in the same year.

CRITICISM, ETC.

1. Edward Thomson, Robert Bridges, 1844-1930, Oxford, 1944.
2. F.E.Brett Young, Robert Bridges, a Critical Study, 1944.
3. Holbrook Jackson, The Eighteen Nineties, 1913, 1927 or 1939 editions.
4. Further Letters of Hopkins including Correspondence with C.Patrick, ed. by C.C.Abbott, Oxford, 1938.
5. Gerard Manley Hopkins, A Selection of His Poems and Prose, ed. by W.G.Gardner, 1953.
6. Robert Bridges, Collected Essays, Vols: XI, XII, XIII, XIV, Oxford, 1933.
7. N.C.Smith, Notes on 'The Testament of Beauty', 1931.
8. H.Ulrici, Shakespeare's Dramatic Art and His Relation to Calderon and Goethe, (translated by A.J.W.M.) 1846.
9. B. Ifor Evans, English Poetry in the Later Nineteenth Century, 1933.
10. Albert Guerard, Robert Bridges, Cambridge, 1942.
11. Laurence Binyon, 'Mr.Bridges's "Prometheus"', The Dome, Vol. II, Jan-March, 1899.

9. CARR, Joseph William Comyns (1849-1916)

1. Tristram and Iseult, a Drama in Four Acts, 1906, produced at the Adelphi Theatre in the same year.
2. King Arthur, a Drama in a prologue and four acts, 1895, produced at the Lyceum Theatre in the same year.

CRITICISM, ETC.

1. A.E.Wilson, Edwardian Theatre, 1951.
2. Bernard Shaw, Our Theatre in the Nineties, Volume 3, 1954.

10. DANE, Clemence ( )

1. Will Shakespeare, an Invention in Four Acts, 1921.

CRITICISM, ETC.

1. J.M.Robertson, 'The Evolution of English Blank Verse', The Criterion, ii, 1924-27.

11. DAVIDSON, John (1857-1909)

1. An Unhistorical Pastoral: 1877.
2. A Romantic Farce, 1878.
3. Bruce: A Chronicle Play, 1886.
4. Scaramouch in Naxos: A Pantomime, 1888.
5. Smith: A Tragic Farce, 1888.
6. Godfrida: A Play in Four Acts, 1898.
7. Self's The Man, a tragi-comedy, 1901.
8. The Knights of Maypole, a comedy in Four Acts, 1903.
9. A Queen's Romance: a version of Victor Hugo's "Ruy Blas" written for Lewis Waller in 1901 and produced at the Imperial Theatre, Westminster in 1904.

10. The Theatrocrat, a tragic play of Church and Stage, 1905.
11. The Triumph of Mammon, 1907.
12. Mammon and his Message, 1901.

CRITICISM, ETC.

1. B. Ifor Evans, English Poetry in the Later Nineteenth Century, 1933.
  2. Hayim Fineman, Davidson: A Study of the Relation of His Ideas to His Poetry, Philadelphia, 1916.
  3. John Davidson, Sentences and Paragraphs, 1893.
  4. Henry Bett, Studies in Literature, 1929.
  5. The Times, March 27th and 30th, 1909.  
April 1st, and 19th, 1909.  
September 20th and 22nd of 1909.
12. DRINKWATER, John (1882-1937)
1. Cophetua, 1911, produced by the Pilgrim Players in the same year.
  2. Rebellion, 1914.
  3. Pawns: Three Poetic Plays, 1917.
    - (i) The Storm, performed at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 1915.
    - (ii) The God of Quiet, produced at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 1916.
    - (iii) X = 0; A Night of the Trojan War, produced at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 1917.
  4. Abraham Lincoln, 1918, produced in England and America in the same year.

CRITICISM, ETC.

1. J.Drinkwater, Discovery, Being the Second Book of an Autobiography, 1897-1913, 1932.
  2. J.Drinkwater, The Gentle Art of Theatre Going, 1929.
  3. The Central Library Magazine, The Birmingham Literary Association, October 1917, Vol. XXIII, No.4, p. 473.
  4. T.L.Burton, 'John Drinkwater', The Central Library Magazine. October, 1938, p. 296.
13. ELIOT, Thomas Stearns (1888- )
1. Sweeney Agonistes - Fragments of An Aristophanic Melodrama, 1932, produced at the Westminster Theatre in 1935.
  2. The Rock - A Pageant Play, 1934. Written for performance at Sadler's Wells Theatre, 28 May - 9 June, 1934, on behalf of the Forty Five Churches Fund of the Diocese of London.
  3. Murder in the Cathedral, 1935, produced at the Chapter House, Canterbury Festival in the same year, and later at the Mercury and numerous other theatres.

CRITICISM, ETC.

1. Selected Essays, 1953.
2. Selected Prose, edited by John Hayward, 1953, a Penguin Book
3. The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, 1933.
4. Poetry And Drama, 1951.
5. The Three Voices of Poetry, 1935.
6. Religious Drama: Mediaeval and Modern, New York, 1954.
7. F.R.Leavis, 'T.S.Eliot's Later Poetry', Education and the University, 1943.

8. F.O.Matthiessen, The Achievement of T.S.Eliot, 1935.
  9. T.S.Eliot: A Study of His Writings by Various Hands, ed. by B.Rajan, 1947.
  10. T.S.Eliot: A Symposium, compiled by Richard March and Tambimuttu, 1948.
  11. H.Gardner, The Art of T.S.Eliot, 1949.
  12. Eliot's Writings in The Criterion (1922-39).
  13. Giorgio Melchiori, The Tightrope Walkers, Essays on Mannerism in Modern English Literature, 1957.
  14. The Times, Tuesday 29th May 1934, p. 12: contains a review of The Rock.
  15. The Times, Monday, 17th June, 1935, p. 10; contains a review of Murder in the Cathedral.
  16. Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Eliot, 1954.
14. FLECKER, (Herman) James Elroy (1889-1915)
1. Don Juan, A Play in Three Acts, 1925, produced by the Students of King's College, London, 1930.
  2. Hassan, 1922, produced at His Majesty's Theatre in 1923.

#### CRITICISM, ETC.

1. Geraldine Hodgson, The Life of James Elroy Flecker, Oxford, 1925.
2. The Letters of J.E.Flecker, ed./<sup>by</sup>Helle Flecker, 1926.
3. Some Letters from Abroad of James Elroy Flecker with a Few Reminiscences <sup>by</sup> by Helle Flecker, ed./J.C.Squire, 1930.
4. The Letters of J.E.Flecker to Frank Savery, 1936, privately printed. A copy is available at the British Museum.
5. Humbert Wolfe, Portraits by Inference, 1934.

6. Harold Monro, 'James Elroy Flecker', The Egoist, March, 1915, p. 39.
  7. The Stage, September. 27, 1923.
  8. The Times, September. 29, 1923.
  9. G.Wilson Knight, 'The Road to Samarkand', The Wind and Rain, Winter, 1944, pp. 93-103.
  10. G.Wilson Knight, Christ And Nietzsche, An Essay in Poetic Wisdom, 1949.
  11. Ashley Dukes, The Youngest Drama, 1923.
  12. Douglas Golding, James Elroy Flecker, 1922.
  13. Basil Dean's introduction to Hassan, an acting edition, 1922, pp. xi-xxiii.
15. GIBSON, Wilfrid Wilson (1878- )
1. The Stonefolds, 1907.
  2. Daily Bread: Dramatic Poems, 1910.
  3. Krindlesyke, 1922.
  4. Kestrel Edge and Other Plays, 1924.
  5. Between Fairs, 1928.

CRITICISM, ETC.

1. Sixty Three Poems Selected for use in Schools and Colleges by E.A.Parker, with a critical introduction.
  2. Edwin Muir, Introduction to English Literature, The Present Age, 1939.
16. HARDY, Thomas (1840-1928)
1. The Three Wayfarers, a pastoral play in one act, 1893, produced at Terry's Theatre, London, in the same year.

2. The Dynasts, an Epic Drama (1904-1908), reduced to one-third and produced by Harley Granville-Barker, in 1914. In 1943 Muriel Pratt's adaptation of The Dynasts was broadcast in the Home Service of the B.B.C.
3. The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall (begun in 1916, resumed and finished in 1923), produced in Masefield's Music Room in 1923.
4. The Play of St. George, as aforesaid acted by the Dorsetshire Christmas Mummers. Based on the version in The Return of the Native and completed from other versions and from local tradition: Cambridge, 1924, New York, 1928.

#### CRITICISM, ETC.

1. H.C.Duffin, Thomas Hardy, 1921.
2. Evelyn Hardy, Thomas Hardy, A Critical Biography, 1954.
3. A.J.Guerard, Thomas Hardy, Oxford, 1949.
4. J.T.M.Stewart, 'The Integrity of Hardy', English Studies, Vol. I, 1948.
5. C.E.White more, 'Hardy's Dynasts As Tragic Drama', Modern Language Notes, Vol. 39, 1924.
6. A.Chakravarty, The Dynasts and the Post War Age in Poetry, Oxford, 1938.
7. L.Abercrombie, Thomas Hardy: A Critical Study, 1912.
8. E.Brennecke, Thomas Hardy's Universe, 1924.
9. W.R.Rutland, Thomas Hardy, Oxford, 1939.
10. Gilbert Phelps, The Russian Novel and English Fiction, 1956.
11. Emma Clifford, 'War And Peace and The Dynasts', Modern Philology, August 1956, LIV.



12. Clifford Leech, 'Art and the Concept of Will', The Durham University Journal, XLVIII, December 1955.
13. Barker Fairley, 'Notes on the Form of The Dynasts', P.M.L.A., XXXIV, 1919.
14. Hoxie N. Fairchild, 'The Immediate Sources of The Dynasts', P.M.L.A., LXVII, 1952.
15. E.A. Horsman, 'The Language of The Dynasts', Durham University Journal, XLI, December 1948.
17. HERBERT, Sir Alan Patrick (1890- )
1. The Two Gentlemen of Soho, 1927. Now in Seven Famous One-Act Plays, ed. John Ferguson, 1953 (edn. 3).
18. HEWLETT, Maurice (1861-1923)
1. The Agonists, a Trilogy of God And Man, 1911.  
(Minos King of Crete, Ariadne in Naxos, The Death of Hippolytus)
19. JONES, Henry Arthur (1851-1928)
1. The Tempter, a Tragedy in Verse, 1898, produced at the Haymarket Theatre by Beerbohm Tree in 1893.  
In the Ashley Library, British Museum, there is an earlier edition: pp. 87 Chiswick Press (London, 1893?) Privately Printed.

CRITICISM, ETC.

1. Clayton Hamilton, Henry Arthur Jones, 1926.
2. Richard A. Cordwell, Henry Arthur Jones and the Modern Drama, New York, 1932.
3. Frank Wadleigh Chandler, Aspects of Modern Drama, 1929.

20. MASEFIELD, John (1878- )

1. The Tragedy of Nan, 1908, produced by the Pioneers at the New Royalty Theatre in the same year.
2. Philip the King, 1914, produced at the Covent Garden Theatre in the same year.
3. Good Friday, 1917.
4. The Trial of Jesus, 1925, privately produced at the Music Room, Boar's Hill, Oxford, in the same year.
5. The Coming of Christ, 1928, produced in the same year in Canterbury Cathedral.
6. Tristan and Isolt, 1937, produced in the same year by the Lena Ashwell Players at the Century Theatre, London.
7. Easter, 1929.

CRITICISM, ETC.

1. J.C.Trewin, Dramatists of Today, 1953.
2. John Masefield, Multitude and Solitude, 1909.

21. MOORE, Thomas Sturge (1870-1946)

1. Aphrodite against Artemis, 1901, produced at the Liberty Theatre Club, London, in 1906.
2. Tragic Mothers, 1920:
  - (1) Medea.
  - (2) Niobe
  - (3) Tyrfing.
3. Mystery And Tragedy, 1930, containing:
  - (i) Psyche in Hades.
  - (ii) Daimonassa, a Tragedy.
  - (iii) He Will Not Come, 1933.

CRITICISM, ETC.

1. Yvor Winters, 'Sturge Moore', Hound and Horn, Vol. 8, pp. 534-45.
2. F.L.Gwynn, Sturge Moore and the Life of Art, 1952.

22. PHILLIPS, Stephen (1868-1915)

1. Herod, 1901, produced at Her Majesty's Theatre in 1900.
2. Ulysses, 1902, produced at Her Majesty's Theatre in the same year.
3. Paolo and Francesca, 1900, produced at St.James's Theatre in 1902.
4. Iole, 1903.
5. The Sin of David, 1905, produced at the Savoy Theatre in 1914.
6. Nero, 1906, produced at Her Majesty's Theatre in the same year.
7. Nero's Mother, a drama in one act, 1913.
8. Faust, 1908, produced at Her Majesty's Theatre in 1908.
9. Pietro of Siena, 1911.
10. The King, 1912.
11. Armageddon, 1915, produced at the New Theatre in the same year.
12. Harold, a chronicle play, 1927.
13. The Adversary, 1913.

CRITICISM, ETC.

1. E.E.Hale, Dramatists of Today, New York, 1911.
2. F.W.Chandler, Aspects of Modern Drama, 1929.

3. Alice Meynell, 'Stephen Phillips', The Poetry Review, Vol. VII, 1916.
  4. B.R.S. Farrer, Herod Through <sup>the Opera</sup> ~~an Opera~~ Glass - A parody of Phillips's Herod, Oxford, 1901.
  5. J.T. Grein, Dramatic Criticism, 1900-1901, 1902, iii.
  6. Israel Zangwill, 'Poetic Drama and the War', The Poetry Review, 1916, ii.
23. SHAW, George Bernard (1856-1950)

1. The Admirable Bashville or Constancy Unrewarded, 1903.

CRITICISM, ETC.

1. Cashel Byron's Profession, 1921.
  2. The Shaw-Barker Letters, ed. C.B. Purdom, 1956.
24. SYMONS, Arthur (1865- )

1. Tragedies by Arthur Symons, 1916.
  - (1) The Harvesters
  - (2) The Death of Agrippina
  - (3) Cleopatra in Judea
2. Tristan and Iseult, a play in four acts, 1917.

CRITICISM, ETC.

1. T. Earl Welby, Arthur Symons, a Critical Study, 1925.
25. WILLIAMS, Charles (1886-1945).
1. A Myth of Shakespeare, Oxford, 1928.
26. YEATS, William Butler (1865-1939).
1. The Countess Cathleen, 1892, produced at the Abbey Theatre in 1899.

2. The Land of Heart's Desire, 1894, produced as a curtain-raiser to a play by John Todhunter at the Avenue Theatre, London, in the same year.
3. The King's Threshold, 1904, produced at Molesworth Hall, Dublin, in 1903.
4. The Shadowy Waters, 1901, produced by the Irish National Theatre Society at Molesworth Hall, Dublin, in 1904.
5. On Baile's Strand, 1904, produced in the same year at the Abbey Theatre.
6. The Green Helmet, 1910, produced at the Abbey Theatre in 1908.
7. Deirdre, 1907, produced in the same year.
8. At The Hawk's Well, 1916, produced in the same year in Lady Cunard's drawing room in London.
9. The Dreaming of the Bones, 1917.
10. Calvary, 1917.
11. The Only Jealousy of Emer, 1918, produced in the same year at the Abbey Theatre.
12. A Full Moon in March, 1935.
13. The King of The Great Clock Tower, 1935.

#### CRITICISM, ETC.

1. The Letters of W.B.Yeats, ed. by Allan Wade, 1954.
2. Letters from W.B.Yeats to Florence Farr, ed. by C.Bax, 1941.
3. The Irish Theatre, Lectures delivered during the Abbey Theatre Festival held in Dublin in August, 1938, ed. by Lennox Robinson, 1939.
4. Ronald Peacock, The Poet in the Theatre, 1946.

5. T.S.Eliot, 'Yeats', On Poetry and Poets, 1957, pp.252-262.
  6. Raymond Williams, 'W.B.Yeats', Drama from Ibsen to Eliot, 1954, pp. 205-222.
  7. Una Ellis-Fermor, The Irish Dramatic Movement (2nd Edition), 1954.
  8. Osman Edwards, Japanese Plays and Playfellows, 1901.
  9. W.B.Yeats's Introduction to Certain Noble Plays of Japan, Dundrum, 1916.
  10. Brigit Bjersby, The Interpretation of the Cuchulain Legend in the Works of W.B.Yeats, Upsala Irish Studies, 1950.
  11. Peter Ure, Towards a Mythology, Liverpool, 1946.
  12. W.B.Yeats, 'The Irish Dramatic Movement', Plays and Controversies, 1923, pp. 3-218.
  13. A.N.Jeffares, W.B.Yeats: Man and Poet, 1949.
  14. Beltaine, The Organ of the Irish Literary Theatre, edited by W.B.Yeats, 3 issues.
  15. Samhain, edited for the Irish Literary Theatre by W.B.Yeats, Dublin (1901-8).
  16. Padraic Colum, 'Early Days of the Irish Theatre', The Dublin Magazine, October-December 1949, pp.11-17, and January-March, 1950, pp. 18-25.
  17. Anthony Thwaite, 'Yeats and the Noh', The Twentieth Century, September, 1957, pp. 233-242.
27. ZANGWILL, Israel, (1864-1926)
1. The War God, 1911, produced at His Majesty's Theatre in the same year by Beerbohm Tree.

CRITICISM, ETC.

1. Joseph Leftwich, Israel Zangwill, 1957.
2. Harold Monroe, 'Dramatic Poetry and Drama', The Poetry Review, March 1912, iii.

A P P E N D I X B

## GENERAL CRITICAL STUDIES.

1. C.Andrews, The Drama Today, 1913.
2. William Archer, English Dramatists of Today, 1882.
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