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TWENTIETH CENTURY SCOTTISH DRAMA

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Doctor of Philosophy

by

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## SUMMARY

At the start of the twentieth century, Scotland had no indigenous dramatic tradition. From the Reformation onwards, the hostility of the kirk, the absence of Court patronage, and the poverty of the country in general, had stifled theatrical activity. By the time the stage became established north of the Tweed - in the later part of the eighteenth century - it did so as an offshoot of the English theatre.

The revival of interest in a Scottish Literary culture during the twentieth century has included a movement to establish a Scottish Drama quite distinct from English tradition, and this thesis presents a history and critical evaluation of that movement.

Before the first World War, the efforts on the one hand of "Fiona MacLeod", - who strove to emulate Yeats with dramatisations of Celtic myth, - and on the other of Graham Moffat - a popular writer of "Kailyard" plays - together with the example in Ireland of the Abbey Theatre, encouraged Alfred Waring to establish The Glasgow Repertory Theatre in 1909. This theatre brought to a theatrically impoverished Scotland the best of contemporary international drama and did its best to foster work from native playwrights. A trickle of interesting new work from Scottish authors appeared, only for the Glasgow Repertory Theatre to be closed at the outbreak of war in 1914. In the same period began the career of James Barrie, who rapidly proved that a Scot could write plays (whose personal commitment to a separate Scottish culture was slight). By the end of his long career, which spans forty years, Barrie had also proved that he was capable, on occasion, of transcending the limitations of the highly commercialised West End stage for which he chose to write.

After the First World War, the first determined effort to create a Scottish "Abbey" was begun in 1921, by the largely amateur Scottish National Players. For twenty years this body produced a mass of new Scottish plays, and if most of these were of mediocre quality, some were of a standard high enough to suggest that a dramatic achievement similar to Ireland's was a possibility. The plays performed

included work in verse, some attempts to employ Scottish dialect, portrayals of Highland life, historical romance, a few glances at the horrors of industrialised Scotland and some bitter satires on Scottish shibboleths. After 1930, however, the policy of the Players became increasingly cautious as financial worries grew, and their early successes bore little fruit. No major playwright was discovered.

With the decline of the Scottish National Players, there rose to prominence the dramatist James Bridie, who, like Barrie, directed his efforts to the professional - and therefore, at first, the English - stage. Unlike his predecessor, Bridie was quite obviously a Scot, writing within Scottish literary tradition. As a widely recognised contemporary dramatist, he was, therefore, of some importance to Scottish Drama; and he became unchallengeably its leader when in 1943 he founded The Glasgow Citizens' Theatre, with a professional company of Scottish actors and a stated aim to stimulate Scottish play-writing.

Other writers at this time were Joe Corrie, a prolific creator of plays of working-life in the mining and farming regions; and Robert MacLellan, a determined champion of the Scots tongue on the stage. In England, Scots-born Ewan MacColl was a pioneer of political theatre in Britain, a founder-member of Theatre Workshop and for some years its resident playwright.

The establishment of the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre provoked a flood of new plays by Scottish authors, and for a time it seemed that at long last the looked-for dramatic renaissance had occurred. A wealth of styles and subjects was apparent, the most notable, perhaps, being the combination of Scots language, excellent poetry, fantasy and satire, found in the plays of Alexander Reid, Alexander Scott, and Robert Kemp. Translations of French classics into Scots seems to have provided a substitute for the drama Scotland missed for two and a half centuries; and there were some interesting attempts to deal with social and spiritual ills in the contemporary world. This flourishing and lively period continued until the late 1950s, by which time its effects were being felt in theatres throughout

Scotland, most notably at the Gateway Theatre, Edinburgh, which sought to follow in The Glasgow Citizens' footsteps. Then came the "New Wave" of English Drama and the awakening of interest in Absurd Drama and the experiments being conducted in Europe and America. The demands made on Scottish Theatres to respond to these developments, coupled unfortunately to the suspicion and hostility of English directors unsympathetic to Scottish cultural aspirations, effectively smothered the budding Scottish Drama before it flowered. As yet, no Great Scottish Dramatist had made himself known, but a number of interesting and valuable talents had begun very convincingly to build a popular theatrical tradition that was quite distinct from England's.

For a number of years interest in the surge of new English and foreign plays obscured the value to Scotland of what had been lost. The link between literature - most especially poetry - and the immediacy and public nature of the stage, which seemed at least tenuously forged in the 1940s and 1950s, was snapped. Scottish dramatists turned away from Scotland and Scottish experience for their subject matter, and tended to ape the English stage for their manner. Scottish Drama became virtually non-existent once more, and Scottish theatre became provincial where before it had promised to be wholly distinct. Demand for native drama began to increase, becoming more vociferous when apparently ignored by the theatre in Scotland. It found an official voice in 1970 when the Scottish Arts Council declared its support for the creation of a Scottish National Theatre Company. Although the Arts Council's intentions are thought by many to be confused and ill-advised, its action has highlighted the failure of Scottish theatres to develop Scottish Drama despite the evidence of its artistic power and its popularity with Scottish audiences.

In general, although as a living tradition it exists in only the most tenuous form and remains dangerously dependent on the whim of a theatre system still orientated towards London, Scottish Drama has in the past proved capable of producing plays not only artistically satisfying, but quite outwith English tradition. Scottish playwrights have

tended - quite unselfconsciously - to work within a recognisable national literary tradition; and if kailyard sentimentality and tartan romance have at times received more attention from the Scottish Drama movement than they merit, it is worth noting that they do not represent the movement's total output.

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"Poetic tragedy represents a crucial stage in the literature of a people ... by means of it poetry becomes self-conscious, which is another way of saying that it becomes mature ...  
... a process in which both the mind and the imagination are put to their utmost stretch in an objectivization of all the conflicting powers of the poet, not in peace or suspension, but in intense action ...  
... poetic tragedy marks a great increase of self-consciousness in any literature in which it appears ...  
... a literature which lacks it probably lacks something which is necessary for the supreme kinds of poetry ..."

1

In 1900 Scotland had no indigenous dramatic tradition. Natural development of medieval forms - Moralities, Folk Plays, Court entertainments, and the like - had been checked by the antagonism of the puritanical, post-reformation Scottish Kirk and the absence of Court patronage, particularly after James VI's removal to Westminster in 1603. Sir David Lyndsay's A Satyre Of The Thrie Estatis (1540) is a Morality so advanced, and theatrically skilled that its apparent isolation as a literary form must be explained by the destruction of records and manuscripts; as A. J. Mill argues so convincingly, it is barely conceivable that such a play could be created without the existence of a living theatrical tradition in the land.

"There is, of course, no suggestion that the miracle plays and religious ridings in Scotland ever approached the magnificence of the great English craft cycles, or that the pageantry prepared by the citizens of Edinburgh in honour of royal guests could compete with that of London. Less favourable climatic conditions, the relative poverty of the country, the scanty population, and the comparatively late development of civic institutions, would all act as deterrent factors. But the difference was one of degree rather than of kind".

"In short, while Lyndsay's Satyre may represent the culminating point of medieval drama in Scotland, it was written against what ... must be regarded as a promising background."

2

The English Stage after the Reformation flourished under the

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- 1 Edwin Muir, Scotland Scotland, Routledge, Edinburgh 1936, pp. 77-81
- 2 A. J. Mill, Medieval Plays in Scotland, Blackwood, Edinburgh 1927, p. 101, pp. 103-4

patronage of a Renaissance court : not so the Scottish -

"Scotland was relatively unaffected by the Renaissance. The Universities were hampered by inadequate resources, and there were no richly endowed schools. During the period when London was evolving a rich and varied civic life, Edinburgh was the main battleground of the opposing forces of the French and English parties ... Above all, the Court was no longer the centre of national life. The long minority of James the Sixth, synchronising with a period of bitter internal strife, resulted in a succession of short regencies of precarious tenure." 1

The opposition of the Kirk, which enjoyed the support of the middle and lower classes, made aristocratic patronage vital to the theatre in Scotland. King James successfully crushed clerical objections to a permanent company of actors which he established in Edinburgh in 1601, and his protection enabled English companies to visit Scotland in 1594, 1599, and 1601; but since 1575 the Kirk had asserted the right to censor all plays,<sup>2</sup> and after 1603 there was no royal presence in the land to temper their zeal. In the fifty years which followed James' accession to the English crown, Scottish experience of theatre was confined to the pageantry which celebrated the king's visit to Edinburgh in 1617, and the coronation of Charles I in 1633.<sup>3</sup> That this dearth of drama might have been alleviated in more favourable circumstances is suggested by the careers of William Alexander, Earl of Stirling, Thomas Sydserf, David Crawford and Catherine Trotter, Scots who directed their plays towards the London Stage between 1604 and 1706.

In 1663 a play called Marciano was performed at Holyroodhouse and liberty granted to "Jon Ponthus, professor of physick",<sup>4</sup> to build a stage in Blackfriars' Wynd, Edinburgh, and thereafter theatrical performances began to re-establish themselves in the capital.

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1 A. J. Mill Medieval Plays In Scotland, Blackwood, Edin. 1927;p. 108

2 A. M. Mackenzie, Scottish Literature to 1714, Maclehose, London 1933. p.179

3 J. C. Dibdin, The Annals of The Edinburgh Stage, Cameron, Edinburgh 1888 p. 26

4 J. C. Dibdin, The Annals of The Edinburgh Stage, p. 26

In 1668 Sydsenf brought a company there and remained for a year. Play-going is recorded with increasing frequency up to 1689 in Edinburgh, with a fair measure of toleration from the Council - in 1672 the rights of players to costume was recognised in a Statute restricting forms of dress for other citizens.<sup>1</sup> In 1690 the Stuart dynasty was brought to an end, and the puritan William of Orange took the throne. Once more, the theatre in Scotland was stifled, and although The Beaux' Stratagem is recorded in Edinburgh in 1715 and The Beggars' Opera in Haddington in 1728, it was 1733 before any regularly performing company reappeared, and even then the conditions under which they were obliged to work were less than encouraging. Allan Ramsay opened the first purposely designed theatre in Scotland in 1736, only to have it closed by the authorities in 1737, and its company persecuted out of business by 1739. Yet in 1741 a theatre was again functioning in Edinburgh, under the guise of a musical concert followed by a "free" play, and since that year there has been an unbroken succession of theatrical performances in the city. Stephen Kemble managed a theatre in Edinburgh between 1794 and 1800; and later with Sir Walter Scott's assistance, Henry Siddons - son of the celebrated actress - enjoyed considerable success in association with the actor Daniel Terry. Elsewhere in Scotland, the establishment of drama was even more belated - in Glasgow for example, it was 1782 before a proper theatre was established in the city, its makeshift predecessor having been added two years previously to the succession of local theatres burned to the ground by religious fanatics.

The Scottish Kirk maintained its vigorous antipathy for the Stage throughout the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth. John Home, a clergyman who had the audacity to write for the playhouse in 1757 was obliged to resign from his pulpit; and his play Douglas provoked the Presbyteries of both Edinburgh and Glasgow to issue exhortations against attendance at the theatre, to be broadcast in every church in their charge.

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1 J. C. Dibdin, The Annals of The Edinburgh Stage, Cameron Edinburgh 1888 p. 27



Arnot, in his History of Edinburgh observed of the kirk that :

"the writings of their most prominent divines represented the Play-house as the actual Temple of the Devil, where he frequently appeared, clothed in a corporeal substance, and possessed the spectators, whom he held as his worshippers." 1

As recently as 1861 a popular preacher was declaring publicly that "the pit of the Theatre Royal is HELL".<sup>2</sup> Although the middle classes gave enthusiastic support to the stage, the attitude of the Kirk - which influenced a vast section of the Scottish people - was unfortunate, to say the least. The rhetoric of the pulpit in itself may well have subverted part of the social role of the theatre in Scotland, and by condemning the stage, channelled the dramatic impulse in the less public areas of prose and poetry: many commentators have observed a pronounced dramatic quality in Scottish literature; in the Ballads, and in writers like Burns, Hogg and Stevenson.

The prolonged struggle to establish theatre in Scotland effectively killed the native tradition as represented by A Satyre Of The Thrie Estatis. Allan Ramsay's The Gentle Shepherd (1725)<sup>3</sup> is the only play after 1603 to have a Scottish identity not wholly associated with superficial local colour, although its Scots language is rather awkwardly mated with Augustan pastoral and heroic couplets.<sup>4</sup> Ramsay's use of his native tongue was alone sufficient to provoke disparaging criticism from the Edinburgh Literati, "North Britons" to a man; they much preferred John Home's Douglas (1756), an Ossianic exercise in declamatory grandeur in which Scotland contributes only a romanticised backcloth to the tragedy. Scottish settings of this type were greatly popularised after Sir Walter Scott

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- 1 Arnot, History of Edinburgh, Creech, Edinburgh 1788, pp. 366-7
  2. W. Baynham The Glasgow Stage Forrester, Glasgow 1892 p. 10
  - 3 J. Jackson, in The History of the Scottish Stage, Peter Hill, Edinburgh 1793 writes The Gentle Shepherd was "rescued from oblivion" in 1747, "by printers men who produced it themselves as a benefit" in Edinburgh (p. 318)
  - 4 D. Craig Scottish Literature and The Scottish People Chatto/Windus 1961 p. 61

delved into the Highlands to provide exoticism for his novels: dramatisations of his own work rapidly reached the stage - Rob Roy in 1818, The Legend of Montrose in 1822 - and imitators produced a Mary Stuart in 1825 and a Charles Edward in 1828. Throughout the nineteenth century the trend was continued, romantic Scott-land being bodied forth in Victorian melodrama while the less highly-coloured realities of Scotland were ignored. With the return of serious intent and high artistry to drama towards 1900 came the flowering of a native Irish drama: the success of Dublin's Abbey Theatre soon prompted the suggestion that it might be emulated elsewhere, and the twentieth century has been marked by various attempts to establish a wholly independent drama in Scotland.

Briefly, the development of Scottish Drama in the twentieth century is as follows. After a few isolated gestures towards indigenous drama on various levels, notably Fiona MacLeod's delvings into Celtic myth and Graham Moffat's quaint kailyard caricatures, the Glasgow Repertory Theatre, founded in 1909 by Alfred Waring in pursuit of the then avant-garde repertory ideal, fostered - on a small scale - the work of local playwrights. At the same time on the London stage James Barrie was building his remarkable career as a playwright, displaying a quite breathtaking command of theatrical technique which seemed to stem from the flair for dramatic verse and prose of Scottish literary tradition. Barrie proved beyond all doubt that a Scot could actually transfer this quality to the objectivity of the stage. The success of some of the Scottish plays performed at the Glasgow Repertory Theatre encouraged others more directly committed to a purely native theatre to form an equivalent to Ireland's Abbey Theatre in 1921, although the idea had been mooted in 1913 only to be stifled by the outbreak of war in 1914. Known as the Scottish National Players, this body was responsible for the creation of a native acting company who rapidly proved to be of above-average ability, and - for a time at least - a veritable flood of new Scottish plays. The subject-matter of these plays ranged over industrial slum and highland cottage, historical romance and contemporary "commitment", pursuing comedy and tragedy in verse and prose, Scots and English. While the dominant impression

is of lightweight domestic comedy and romance, there were frequent examples of work of a far higher standard, attempting seriously to confront deeply-felt emotion. The Scottish National Players recruited to their cause some estimable directors, the most famous of whom was Tyrone Guthrie, and until the mid-thirties maintained a steady stream of new plays contributed by a "school" of playwrights, headed by John Brandane. Financial worries in the semi-amateur company prompted a shift to a less venturesome policy in the 'thirties, and thereafter their importance waned until they were snuffed out by the war in 1939. This decline in the 'thirties was balanced by the rise to prominence of James Bridie, who like Barrie was successful in London's West-End, but unlike him dramatised contemporary provincial life and was in his use of setting, theme and style, quite obviously a Scotsman. Bridie is the key-figure in Scottish Drama, a playwright of prominence in Britain whose dedication and activity were responsible for the creation of Scotland's first professional native theatre. The Scottish torch was taken up in the mid-thirties by fresh amateur groups, the most notable being Glasgow Unity Theatre, formed in 1941, which added to a commitment to promote Scottish Drama, the refreshing vigour of working-class theatre and a crusading theoretical spirit. It was in the productions of Glasgow Unity that Scots language made its first large impact, as used by native authors and also in translations of foreign classics. Then in 1943 came a development which seemed for some time to ensure Scottish Drama a healthy growth to full maturity, the creation under James Bridie's direction, of the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre, the first fully professional establishment dedicated to native efforts. Until 1960 the movement stimulated at the Citizens', reinforced by a similarly motivated theatre in Edinburgh in 1953, the Gateway, and by the annual Edinburgh International Festival of Music and Drama, instituted in 1947, hovered constantly on the brink of a cultural triumph worthy of comparison with the Abbey Theatre. Tyrone Guthrie's revival of A Satire Of The Three Estates at the 1948 Edinburgh Festival, using a company based largely on the Citizens' Theatre, was widely regarded as the omen of a glittering future for Scotland on the stage. Certainly the Abbey's minor playwrights found

Scottish counterparts at this time; and the tapping of ballad and folk sources, and the confident employment of the Scots tongue on the professional stage marked a significant advance over earlier achievements. The revolution in British Theatre instigated by "the New Wave" of dramatists in the mid-nineteen fifties effectively stifled Scottish efforts: somehow there was no native dramatist who could meet the challenges from England and abroad in such a way that Scottish Drama would continue to develop without dislocation. Producers became suspicious that Scottish plays were synonymous with outdated modes, and by the time new Scottish playwrights appeared who had – at least in part – assimilated contemporary European techniques, their nationality proved an almost insurmountable barrier to presentation. Only one has so far won a measure of wide acclaim, Cecil Taylor. Ironically, one of the pioneers of the "New Wave" was Scottish playwright and folksinger Ewan MacColl, who with Joan Littlewood was a founder-member of Theatre Workshop and for several years its resident dramatist. By 1970 the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre had ceased to have any claim to the title of Scotland's unofficial National Theatre, and had become merely an offshoot of English repertory. The Edinburgh Gateway Theatre closed its doors in 1965, and its supposed successor, the Edinburgh Lyceum, although recruiting a body of Scottish actors, had failed to become the new home of indigenous drama. Two new "bijou" theatres, the Close Theatre in Glasgow, and the outstanding Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh, devoted themselves to avant-garde international drama.

The loss of a national drama despite its apparent potential up to 1960 was felt in certain quarters to be sufficiently disappointing for the Scottish Arts Council to turn its attention to the problem. In 1970 that body produced a report which among other recommendations proposed the establishment of an officially recognised Scottish National Theatre Company. Regardless of the controversy aroused by technical details contained in this proposal, response to it, no matter how critical, has generally shared the concern which prompted it; the need for theatre in Scotland to re-discover an intimate contact with the people of Scotland.

If in the detailed historical account and critical appreciation of Scottish theatrical ventures, plays and playwrights which follows, there appears to be scant reference to drama in other parts of the world concurrent with Scottish experience, this is simply because Scottish Drama developed largely in isolation from such influences. Ireland alone provided Scotsmen with inspiration - all too frequently it was either misleading or misunderstood. Other countries and playwrights, particularly Norway and Ibsen - as James Bridie seems in part to have realised - may well have proved as valuable to Scotland. Ireland itself fell victim to such isolation in later years: after the "Golden Age" of Yeats and Synge, it exiled O'Casey and steadily lost its originality and strength, until it depended almost entirely on revivals for its international reputation.

INTRODUCTION

James Matthew Barrie, after success as a novelist, turned in 1891 to the theatre and discovered in it his perfect medium. He rose rapidly to prominence among the dramatists of his day, and maintained this position for well over twenty years – to the last a distinctive and paradoxical figure.

It is curious that where the various movements to create a body of Scottish Drama sought the success which attended the Abbey Theatre in Ireland, so James Barrie finds a parallel in the West-End career of the Anglo-Irish George Bernard Shaw. Both authors shared a sense of comedy and satire, both adapted the prevailing naturalism of the early twentieth century to accommodate their imaginative fantasies, and both found a vast measure of fame and fortune through their plays. The point at which they differ effectively draws attention to the feature which ultimately makes Barrie of lesser stature than Shaw, and indicates the failure of so many of his plays. Satire in Shaw is directed against society: in Barrie its target is manners, the concern being for individuals rather than institutions. In The Admirable Crichton, it is not a hierarchal society which is questioned but an unnatural artificial structure which can elevate incompetents like Loam and Ernest far above Crichton, the born leader. This sympathy for the individual unfortunately becomes, in many of Barrie's plays, exaggerated to the point of maudlin sentimentality and superficial indulgence in emotionalism. Shaw may employ the most extravagant fantasy, but he does not lose sight of a more objective and harsh reality. Barrie's dreams all too often become refusals to face life.

"Both men had a sense of fun: but whereas Shaw united an effervescent Irish wit with a serious sense of purpose, Barrie was completely possessed by the spirit of Scottish humour, and of a serious sense of purpose he owned little or none. Both men, of course, were essentially sentimental, but their sentimentalisms derived from disparate sources: Shaw's was the sentimentality of the mind, Barrie's of the heart. Shaw's intellect had a flashing brilliance, a brilliance hardly to be matched in his age – and certainly not anywhere else in the contemporary theatre – but intellectual brilliance does not always imply wisdom,

and of wisdom, save in one or two of his plays, there are only occasional glimmerings: Barrie had wisdom, but not the mental force by which wisdom attains power. Barrie had no new ideas to express: Shaw so habitually dwelt in a world of ideas and concepts that often human beings became lost amid the notions. In life, as on the stage, Shaw was ever attracted by extravagant oddities of all kinds, whereas Barrie quietly delighted in the fascinating complexities of the ordinary and the seemingly commonplace."<sup>1</sup>

As a craftsman, Barrie is in the first rank. That he can construct a plot is unquestionable in the light of Dear Brutus and The Admirable Crichton, in which deceptively easy development and subtle contrast of character and scene are abruptly matched by supremely confident excursions into the supernatural. Lob's enchanted wood and Crichton's desert island are, on the face of it, equally incredible, yet each is accepted without question.

His mastery of characterisation and dialogue is sufficient to lend strength and engaging atmosphere to plays which are quite undistinguished by their intellectual content; and when the dramatist has something to say, there is no question of his being listened to and understood. Barrie can thus instil immediacy in the most far-flung flight of his imagination. His characters command the respect of real people, and when they are made to act out some whimsical day-dream, the artificiality becomes obvious and is plainly intended to be so. Dialogue without one superfluous sentence has Barrie never guilty of "telling" instead of "showing", though sometimes he tries to "show" more than is humanly possible.

This craftsmanship is allied to a keen sense of the theatre, its limitations and its possibilities. Never an innovator, Barrie instead made the fullest use of the elaborate staging fashionable in his time. His employment of the most finely detailed naturalism in the service of fantasy has already been observed, and the effect which he achieved by this was to give to his dreams exactly the same tangible reality as everyday life. He did not hesitate to ask for real waterfalls or ghostly visions, and Peter Pan was not the only

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1 A. Nicoll, English Drama, 1900-1930 Cambridge University Press, 1973 p. 345

occasion on which actors were expected to fly.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, this sense of theatre had another aspect that was not in the least adventurous. As Sir Ifor Evans notes in his History of the English Drama, Barrie "very often seems to be holding himself back as if anxious not to overtax the intellect or imagination of his audience."<sup>2</sup>

That his own tendency to indulge in unashamed escapism echoed the desires of a large proportion of his audiences is unquestionable, and despite the frequent appearance of undeluded satire and clear hints of cynicism, it is difficult to determine the extent of his commercial instincts. However, sincere or not, uncritical lapses into sentimentality proved enormously successful for him: at their best when Barrie seems fully engaged, producing Quality Street; at their worst, Rosalind or A Kiss For Cinderella.

His talent for the technical requirements of drama was matched by a wide and versatile range of situation and subject matter. He was capable of dark pictures of pessimistic reality as well as unrestrained flights of light fancy; Old Friends and The Will providing a surprisingly sombre contrast to Alice Sit by the Fire and The Little Minister. His satirical genius gave birth to The Twelve-Pound Look and The Admirable Crichton; which make strange bedfellows for that most outstanding of all his creations, the contemporary pantomime Peter Pan; and the delicate period-piece, Quality Street. Dear Brutus and Mary Rose, which figure in his highest achievements, defy categorisation by serving subtle psychological and spiritual exploration through the medium of supernatural artifice which is somehow never questioned by the spectator.

Although most of his settings are conventional – of the middle-class drawing room variety – he does not hesitate to carry his action to desert islands, enchanted woods, or the Scottish Highlands. Walker, London is played entirely on a houseboat, and The Old Lady Shows Her Medals is set in a working-class one-room basement flat, with

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1 In Mary Rose

2 I. Evans, History of the English Drama, Macgibbon and Kee, London 1965, p. 178



an eye for detail which must have been drawn from Barrie's own experiences in his younger days. Dreams too, take on concrete form in his hands. Pantaloone, a peculiar little venture into the harlequinade, employs a setting reminiscent of a doll's house, and A Kiss for Cinderella contains a remarkable scene depicting a cockney child's vision of a royal palace.

Such theatrical dexterity in fact serves quite a narrow range of themes, most of which spring from and are concentrated upon, a sense of regret at the increasing limitations imposed on life by Time. Nostalgia is the emotion most frequently evoked by Barrie, especially in his sentimental mood. Repeatedly the symbol of the child or youth is contrasted against adults less hopeful, courageous, and honest, and a haunting sense of loss pervades the atmosphere. Barrie is fascinated by Change and Chance: both his finest achievements and his superficial pot-boilers stem from his readiness to day-dream about hypothetical possibilities, the "might-have-been" of Dear Brutus. In his less penetrating moments, this is manifested by dual personality - Phoebe's masquerade in Quality Street, Babie's wanton gypsy in The Little Minister. His fantasy does succeed in dealing with Time, however, whenever he openly confesses his artifice: the plays of real merit, Dear Brutus, Peter Pan, Mary Rose, and The Admirable Crichton unhesitatingly lift their characters out of normality by introducing the enchanted place, be it island or wood, which either "turn the clock back" and wipe out years of restriction or simply dispense altogether with Change.

Barrie's other major theme is the worship of idealised womanhood, and plainly stems from his unusually claustrophobic relationship with his possessive mother. It is possible that his feelings towards women were somehow connected with his preoccupation with Chance and Change, and stem from the highly disturbing period of his childhood when he consciously strove to "replace" his dead brother in his mother's eyes. In his maturity he is certainly always conscious of the solipsistic manipulation implied in parental possessiveness: Will Dearth and his "might-have-been" daughter in Dear Brutus lead us very close to a nightmare of self-gratification. Barrie's

youthful heroines are always impossible paragons of vivacity, wit, elegance and mystery, Shakespeare's Rosalind carried beyond the sublime into the ridiculous. In his worst moments the playwright also bestows upon them childish innocence, and motherly love, giving rise to creations like Moira Loney in Little Mary and the cockney Cinderella. The mother-figure also figures largely in his plays, again distorted by his adulation beyond credulity, enshrined by him in Peter Pan, What Every Woman Knows, and The Old Lady Shows her Medals. Sex has absolutely no place in Barrie's work, and it is of considerable interest with reference to his childhood that after his divorce in 1908, it is not the youthful heroine which alters in his plays, but the mother. In Old Friends (1910) the air of frigid Calvinist self-righteousness around Mrs. Brand is inescapable, and by the time of A Well Remembered Voice (1917), Barrie is bitterly rejecting his sometime idol. Although he occasionally confesses satirical self-knowledge concerning his attraction to youthful beauties, he clings to his ideal. Though The Adored One farcically exposes the dangers of such inflated worship - in it a beautiful murderess is joyfully acquitted, despite her candid confession of guilt - Barrie insisted in making the title-role of The Boy David (1936) a female one, a boyish girl rather than an effeminate boy. The men in Barrie plays are for the most part accepted as creatures more gross and selfish in their natures, requiring either deflation by a "Rosalind" or redemption by a Mother.

Attention has already been drawn to Barrie's sentimental tendencies. Such unqualified worship of impossible female ideals combined with his predilection for nostalgic or wistful visions of the past lead all too easily towards writing self-indulgent entertainments which carefully avoid any semblance of unpleasant truth or genuinely felt emotion: plays like The Professor's Love Story and A Kiss for Cinderella are mere wallowings in superficial sentiment, and Barrie has an unfortunate habit of declining into such facile escapism after he has evoked situations of considerable potency. A recurring and highly important feature of his work is a pattern of development which establishes a youthful ideal, contrasts it with a grimmer present reality, and then through a dream of recaptured opportunity

seeks reconciliation with or transcendence of the tempered ambitions of maturity. In Dear Brutus this is handled superbly; but elsewhere the dream turns its back completely on life's problems. When the latter occurs, Barrie's technical genius serves only to emphasize the silliness of his escapism, and there is a strong sense of betrayal at the conclusion of many of his plays. Barrie's own attitude is paradoxical. Certainly the concept of fantasy as a means of ordering experience is extremely attractive to him, and is capable of very high achievements. Yet when a character in one of his earliest works - The Wedding Guest (1900) - turns the full weight of Barrie's sarcasm against the rose-tinted "kailyard" view of life, it is difficult to excuse many of his later excesses of sentiment, especially as his satirical impulse never loses its impetus. The charge of playing to the gallery whatever the artistic price, can never be far from Barrie's lesser plays.

He first flexed his theatrical muscles in 1891, with two one-act plays, Becky Sharp and Ibsen's Ghost; also collaborating with Merriott Watson in writing Richard Savage. Ibsen's Ghost, a burlesque of contemporary enthusiasm for the Norwegian playwright, was, as they say, "well received" - at one performance, a man in the pit found the piece so diverting that he had to be removed in hysterics.<sup>1</sup>

The first indication of his technical competence came in the following year with his first full-length play, the farce Walker, London. This may be regarded as a virtuoso performance on Barrie's part, a demonstration of his total mastery over an established form which makes great demands on the playwright to maintain rapid pace and play of humour. Like most farces, Walker, London depends heavily for its effect on quickly moving action, and is therefore difficult to summarize. Let it suffice to say that a cockney is mistaken by a well-to-do family for a famous African explorer, and that after dallying comically with the affections of the females, he returns to his betrothed. The action is set on a houseboat, giving full rein to the

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1 Intro. to Peter Pan. The Plays of J.M. Barrie Hodder & Stoughton, 1948 (1928) p. 441

contemporary enthusiasm for elaborately realistic stage effects; topical satires on a medical student and an intellectual feminist provide lively sub-plots; and the major tension of the play – the possibility of the impostor being revealed – is spiced by the arrival of his forlorn bride-to-be. The first production ran for almost two years; a measure of success which provoked the comment that Barrie "could have been the greatest writer of well-made plays ever known".<sup>1</sup>

In his novels, Barrie had discovered a formula for success by charging his pictures of Scottish life not simply with the quaintness of a Lilliput – for the indulgent laughter of contemporary readers whose sense of superiority was thus invoked – but also with vast doses of mawkish, self-indulgent and wholly false emotion.<sup>2</sup>

Attracted as he was throughout his life to satire as well as fantasy, he now attempted to combine this formula with a comedy of manners entitled The Professor's Love Story (1894). William Archer, the critic, greeted its first production with unqualified criticism:

"... a calculated disloyalty to Art ... a patchwork of extravagant farce, mawkish sentiment, and irrelevant anecdote".<sup>3</sup> Even an enthusiastic defender of the play had to agree that it was "incredibility itself",<sup>4</sup> claiming that "the victory was not so much one of Art as of Charm...".<sup>5</sup>

The same defender has provided an indication of exactly what he meant by "charm", and shows incidentally the kind of appeal which Barrie so assiduously cultivated in so many of his plays :

"In The Professor's Love Story he (Barrie) brought the atmosphere of Scottish rural life at harvest time across that remorseless frontier .. its honey-suckle-laden cottages with their tell-tale lighted windows o' nights, its pleasant lanes, stooks of corn, trysting trees, and dryly cautious Scots labouring men, as canny in the affairs of love as in less sentimental matters, all created a most enjoyable illusion"

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- 1 W. R. McGraw, Barrie, The Critics, Studies in Scottish Literature, Vol. 1, 1963-4 p. 112
- 2 G. Blake, Barrie and The Kailyard School, Baker, London 1951 p. 58
- 3 Archer, quoted by H.M. Walbrook in J.M. Barrie and The Theatre, White, London 1922, Ch. 3 p. 44 (footnote)
- 4 H.M. Walbrook, J.M. Barrie and The Theatre, White London 1922, p. 43
- 5 H.M. Walbrook, J.M. Barrie and The Theatre, p. 44
- 6 H.M. Walbrook, J.M. Barrie and The Theatre, p. 43

500 performances attest to the commercial success of Barrie's formula. Against this rose-tinted background is played the story of Professor Goodwillie, who because of distracting symptoms cannot work. The illness is diagnosed as love. The Professor, we are asked to believe, cannot think who he is in love with, though it is clearly his attractively vivacious secretary. Pursued by a determined Dowager and thwarted by his well-meaning sister, the Professor eventually recognises the truth and everyone lives happily ever after. The cloying sentimentality of the play is unrelieved by Barrie's attempts at satire. Lady Gilding, the Dowager, is an undistinguished member of the theatre's legion of lady predators whose ill-conceived antics are embarrassing rather than comic, stock figures of mockery whose mere presence the dramatist thought worthy of laughter.

By adapting for the stage his novel The Little Minister Barrie discovered a perfect vehicle for the sentimentality which had – financially, at least – saved the Professor's Love Story. The social satire to which he was attracted did not mix well with ungoverned emotional responses, for together they demanded cynical realism and blind self-deception at one and the same time. By replacing the satire with melodramatic pseudo-history and a fair measure of fantasy, Barrie lifted his audience away from harsh facts into a Never-Never-Land of childishly innocent adventure. The adjective "childishly" is not intended to denigrate the playwright : it is the most fitting way in which to describe the appeal of The Little Minister (1897) – it is a children's story for adults, and much of the pleasure of the play is derived from the suspension of adult knowledge and disbelief. H.M. Walbrook writes of "a public still rather haunted by Ibsenism taking refuge in the sentiment and romance of the play and the purity and sweet atmosphere of it;"<sup>1</sup> and a much less impressionable Thomas Moulton admires Barrie's "free and apparently irresponsible gift of playing with Puck like a brother".<sup>2</sup> Gavin Dishart, Babbie, and the weavers of Thrums are really but a few

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1 Walbrook, J.M. Barrie and The Theatre, White, London 1922 Ch. 4, p. 54

2. Moulton, Barrie, Cape, London 1928, p. 115

steps from Peter Pan.

Not only did Barrie find a perfect commercial mixture and production of themes in The Little Minister, he also proved beyond shadow of doubt his ability to construct a play. His talent in this direction had already been remarked in Walker, London. Here for the first time it was allowed full play, and the result is a wide variety of swiftly but powerfully drawn characters whose conversation never flags, whose motivation within the conventions of the tale never falters. Variety of action is carefully balanced throughout to maintain a swift pace which is yet fully under control, and no confusion arises from what is, after all, a reasonably complicated inter-weaving of plots. Credit must be given to Barrie for setting his romance in a background of violence and grim religious rigidity,<sup>1</sup> even if the former was made melodramatic and the latter caricatured. The idea of the Auld Licht minister infatuated by a beautiful dancing gypsy who appears mysteriously in the woods and for a while thwarts all his plans and overturns his integrity was a masterstroke to be added to the more conventional pledge of her love to another. The notion is on one level plainly ridiculous, yet on another level it is disquieting in its possibility - Gavin Dishart is just the type of strong-willed, well-intentioned but naive puritan to find a wild, high-spirited and exotic girl utterly irresistible.

The Scots working-folk in The Little Minister, while treated vastly better than those in The Professor's Love Story, are still subject to distortion, though less frequently is this for cheap comic effect. Overall they are part of the light fantasy which pervades the play's brilliantly evoked atmosphere: weavers and elders are grim as a child might see them, Thomas Whammond standing out dignified and strong in the dark pride of his righteous religion. However, the portrayal of Nanny in Act II and the "poem" incident in Act IV, when the kirk elders bar the minister from his own manse and pulpit for his "irreligious" love-lyric to the gypsy, permit H.M. Walbrook to describe the "distressed and desperate weavers" battle with the

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1 H.M. Walbrook, J.M. Barrie and The Theatre, White, London 1922, Ch. 3, p. 55

soldiery as "picturesque"; and the elders "in their black suits and stove-pipe hats, and with their unctuous Scots drawl, their canniness, their moral scruples, their diverting hypocrisy, and their unamiably sincerity" as "a continual joy".<sup>1</sup>

Several features of The Little Minister are worth noting because of the relation they bear to later plays. One of them, the strange but compelling air of fantasy so clearly defined as to assume the quality of another "reality", has already been noted. Also of importance is Babbie's double personality as gentlewoman and gypsy, a theme which occurs frequently in Barrie's work, though of lesser importance; and the vision of Babbie as an idealised, self-sufficient, witty, vital heroine. This is one of the types of idolised women who appear so often in Barrie's work.

Just as The Little Minister may be taken as the initial focus of Barrie's continuing preoccupation with fantasy, sentimentality, and the sublimated Woman; so his next piece, The Wedding Guest, is representative of the other strain in his personality, the desire to deal soberly with the hard realities of life, rather than escape into dreams.

As a realist in the vein of Ibsen, Barrie was a dismal failure. The Wedding Guest (1900) is plainly derivative, uncomfortably stilted, and finally capitulates in a "happy-ending" awash with the celebrated Barrie pathos. A mysterious woman appears at the wedding of the artist Paul Digby and Margaret Fairbairn, and is eventually revealed, after prolonged mystification, as Mrs. Ommaney, Digby's former mistress. Margaret, appalled by the lie beneath the honourable face of her life, rejects Paul, insisting that he accepts his responsibility towards the distressed woman. However, Mrs. Ommaney herself is eventually removed as coincidentally as she arrived, and the happy

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1 H.M. Walbrook, J.M. Barrie and The Theatre, White, London 1922 Ch. 3, p. 55

couple return to each other again. Barrie is reduced to crude melodrama in order to breathe a semblance of life into the ponderous moralisms of his play, even to the point of having Mrs. Ommaney overcome by a trance-like state in which she inadvertantly reveals all. In the last Act there is a glimmer of a better quality, when the playwright's sense of irony is allowed to approach the satirical. For a brief moment the charmingly ineffective Mr. Fairbairn reveals himself as a petulant self-seeker whose only concern is to safeguard his complacency, and is met by the sarcasm of Mrs. Ommaney.

One passage is remarkable from the pen which produced The Professor's Love Story, Quality Street, and A Kiss for Cinderella: Fairbairn proposes that Mrs. Ommaney should be assisted to Australia.

Mrs. O.            Let him go on. You were to say, I think that I could write to them once a year?

F.                    At Christmas time.

Mrs. O.            Saying what a beautiful peace had come into my life, and baby is such a comfort, and that sweet-smelling flowers are growing up the porch of my rustic home!

F.                    (delighted) Yes Yes!

Mrs. O.            Honeysuckle?

F.                    Anything you like.

Mrs. O.            I should prefer honeysuckle. It is usually honeysuckle. Do let it be honeysuckle.

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Plainly, Barrie recognised inflated emotion as a form of self-deception and escapism: that he continued to employ it throughout his career as a dramatist is an indication of the considerable extent to which he played to an indiscriminating and infantile "gallery". To this incentive of a proven form for success must be added the influence of The Wedding Guest's bad reception. Clement Scott condemned the "machine-made ethics" of a writer "endeared to suburban villas",<sup>2</sup> others thought it naive, to the point of immorality.

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1        The Wedding Guest, The Plays of J. M. Barrie, Hodder & Stoughton 1948 (1928) p. 265

2        Walbrook, J. M. Barrie and The Theatre, White, London 1922 Ch. 5 p. 63



It took Barrie ten years before he ventured down the path of naturalism once more, and he soon retraced his steps.

He did not give himself over entirely to purely commercial writing however. The recognition that he was ill-equipped to deal with life "in the raw" persuaded him to place his irony in harness with his imaginative whimsy, and the result could be startling, as with The Admirable Crichton, a brilliant tour-de-force only two years after The Wedding Guest; or with Dear Brutus, which together with Peter Pan, marks the summit of his achievement.

Little Mary (1903) returned to light comedy, in a frivolous and occasionally maudlin account of Moira Loney, a little Irish girl trained by her grandfather to save the English aristocracy from indolence provoked by their culinary over-indulgence. His strict instruction that the efficacy of his cure – a sensible, frugal diet – will be negated if its true nature is discovered, prompts Moira to pretend that she has a mysterious supernatural medium, "Little Mary", to work her miracles. After confounding medical science, she is persuaded to reveal her secret: The utter simplicity of her method combined with her utterance of the gross and offensive word, "stomach", abruptly terminates her popularity with the rich idlers she has temporarily invigorated. As they turn their backs indignantly, one man steps forward to Moira, ageing Lord Carlton, who ends the play on a moist-eyed, smiling note by proposing marriage to the delighted girl. Trivial as it is, Little Mary indicates Barrie's skill in identifying the areas of light comic relief most acceptable to the middle-class audiences of his day – sentimentality, the mildest hypocrisies of the English caste system exaggerated for humorous effect, and the social criticism of the "problem play" watered down and converted to farce. Moira Loney herself is an early example of Barrie's pre-occupation with unlikely variations of the mother-figure – although in later stages of Little Mary Moira is simply an attractive eighteen-year old, the play begins with her aged twelve, "old fashioned . . . very earnest and practical and quaint, with all the airs of an experienced mother, "looking after the children of the widower next door.

## THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON

The first triumph of Barrie's art, is without doubt, The Admirable Crichton, (1902) a brilliant social satire which appeared in the same year as Quality Street. The gentle ironies of Quality Street take on here a strength and vitality which dominate the play and show Barrie at his incisive best. H.M. Walbrook describes it as "... a play which, beyond all others, extols and glorifies a man of the labouring classes ...", and observes that "in England and America, and even in Paris, it was hailed as one of the most penetrating dramatic social pamphlets of the day".<sup>1</sup> The play offers no solutions to the contradictions it so deftly uncovers. Barrie is concerned with people as individuals rather than as instruments of a social theory, and as a result, he escapes the dangers of purely topical interest. This lack of commitment, perhaps of a belief that social change would bring equal justice to all, does not mean - as some critics in the past have pleaded - that Barrie actually sought to maintain the remnants of feudalism in Britain.<sup>2</sup> The play clearly shows Crichton as the best man not only on his island but in England too. His lack of opportunity in England can only reflect sadly on that country's institutions, just as the unconcern of Loam's family for Crichton's fate condemns their assumption of superiority. Crichton's defence of hierarchical society is no more seriously intended than Loam's ridiculous attempts at egalitarianism; and Crichton's insistence on following nature is suspected from the start by Loam, who knows full well how little his social status is due to his own efforts.

The first act is a superb exposition of character, situation, and plot. The aristocratic family are seen in the full splendour of their indolence and self-interest. Ernest betrays the shallowness of his nature from the outset by disburdening his utterly inconsequential epigrams on all and sundry, and practising poses around the room

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1 Walbrook, J.M. Barrie and The Theatre, White, London, 1922 Ch. 5 p. 55

2 Patrick Chalmers The Barrie Inspiration, Peter Davies, London 1938 p. 200

in the hope that he will be called upon to speak at Lord Loam's universally -detested "radical" tea-party. Of Loam's three daughters, who quarrel genteely and incessantly, only Mary displays any real character; and for the moment it is wholly engaged in maintaining an icy-cool, awesomely grand, and utterly detached selfishness. Loam himself is a bombastic incompetent who boosts his ego by forcing the servants to have tea with him and be his "equals" - once a week. The painful embarrassments of this singular institution are unobtrusively but firmly alleviated by Crichton, who loyally saves his master from unnecessary humiliation when Loam's ponderous oratory stumbles to a forgetful halt. Details of the family's proposed sea-cruise are expertly delivered by the playwright under the guise of a servant's "demarcation dispute", and the mood of the act softens imperceptibly as the young ladies drift into negligent slumber. Simultaneously, Barrie reaches the peak of Crichton's - and his own - thought: "Circumstances might alter cases; the same person might not be master". Thus by the end of Act I, Barrie has, with more than a sufficiency of humour, established the social context of his theme, presented his characters and hinted as to their future roles - Lady Mary becomes a distinct and strong-willed contrast to Crichton's quiet efficiency - and laid the seeds of his plot to "alter the circumstances" by shipwreck. With the disaster at sea, he contrives to place his characters in the fantasy world so vital to his imagination, an island isolated from the conditions which rule accepted everyday life. It is only here that his concept of Chance in the fate of men finds the freedom necessary to it.

The island which we find in Acts II and III is literally that of our dreams, and we accept without question the impossible achievements of Crichton on it, the electric light and mill. Barrie's whimsy takes full advantage of the situation, and the whole impression is of quaint but effective tributes to the butler's ingenuity. The manner in which Crichton assumes command of the group is a masterpiece of the writer's economy, with no word spoken while one by one the family gather round his cooking-pot.<sup>1</sup> Mary alone dis-

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1 M. Ellehauge, *Striking Figures Among Modern English Dramatists*, Lavin, Munksgaard, Copenhagen 1931 p.133

tinguishes herself by the vestige of dignity she retains even in this hour of helpless defeat. Act III presents Crichton at the height of his magnificence surrounded by his devoted "subjects" and the fruits of his invention. All social pretension has vanished, and the atmosphere is one of health, confidence and freedom, though Crichton as "the gov." is somewhat disquietingly drawn towards barbaric splendour. Any reserve fades, however, when he proposes marriage to a more-than-willing Lady Mary in a scene remarkable for its soaring pitch of human aspiration:

Crichton : (again in the grip of an idea) A king!  
Polly, some people hold that the soul  
but leaves one human tenement for another  
and so lives on through all the ages. I  
have occasionally thought of late that, in  
some past existence, I may have been a king.  
It has all come to me so naturally, not as if  
I had it out, but as if I remembered.

Or ever the knightly years were  
gone,  
With the old world to the grave,  
I was a king in Babylon,  
And you were a Christian slave!

It may have been; you hear me, it may  
have been.

Lady Mary : (who is as one fascinated) It may have  
been.

Crichton : I am lord over all. They are but hewers  
of wood and drawers of water for me.  
These shores are mine. Why should I  
hesitate; I have no longer any doubt.  
I do believe I am doing the right thing.  
Dear Polly, I have grown to love you;  
are you afraid to mate with me?  
(she rocks her arms; no words will  
come from her)

'I was a king in Babylon,  
And you were a Christian slave'

For a few moments splendid fantasy is in command, only to burst like the bubble it is as a rescue ship arrives. Suddenly, all is as it was in England. Crichton is once more merely a butler, and only Mary seems to realise what has happened. Left alone with Crichton, she attempts to re-assure him, but he is determined that "Bill Crichton has got to play the game".

Barrie, at his best, expresses the abrupt reversal of hope with stark simplicity :

(There is a salt smile on his face as he shakes his head to her. He lets the cloak slip to the ground. She will not take this for an answer; again her arms go out to him. Then comes the great renunciation. By an effort of will, he ceases to be an erect figure; he has the humble bearing of a servant. His hands come together as if he were washing them.)

Crichton (it is the speech of his life) "My Lady".

(she goes away. There is none to salute him now, unless we do it.)

The counterpointing of the almost Nietzschean love scene with first the chaotic jubilation of the rescued, then the gradual isolation of Crichton up to the "speech of his life" could not be bettered. The insensate cruelty of a dream so completely destroyed is overwhelming, and had the author sought merely to deal in his recurring currency of the vital illusion, he could have ended here.

Instead he goes on to insist on the social relevance of the events on the island. Act IV is an exposure of hypocrisy in the Loam family which lies very close to bitterness. Ernest has written a history of their deprivations in which he figures as romantic hero, and "There are many kindly references to the two servants who were wrecked with the family, and Mr. Wooley pays the butler a glowing

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tribute in a footnote." Mary is to marry Lord Brocklehurst, but his mother suspects impropriety on the island, and the whole facade of respectability is placed in jeopardy by her inquisition. The family flounder ever deeper into suspicion, and yet again it is Crichton who rescues them; not by lying blatantly, as his "betters" do, but by carefully phrasing the truth. His last action is one of unhesitating self-sacrifice, announcing his resignation as Loam's butler to save Lady Mary from discovery. Once more, no one appears to notice, and the family retire for dinner without a second thought about their saviour's insecure future. Mary alone recognises his worth; and once more Barrie proves his ability by making her the vehicle for bitterness rather than Crichton.

Lady Mary : Do you despise me Crichton? (the man who could never tell a lie makes no answer.) I am ashamed of myself but I am the sort of woman on whom shame sits lightly. (he does not contradict her.) You are the best man among us.

Crichton : On an island, my lady, perhaps; but in England, no.

Lady Mary : (not inexcusably) Then there is something wrong with England.

Crichton : My lady, not even from you can I listen to a word against England.

Lady Mary : Tell me one thing: you have not lost your courage?

Crichton : No, my lady.  
(She goes. He turns out the lights,

The Admirable Crichton is an exercise in irony rather than in satire; stemming from a profound sense of human folly and vulnerability. Attachment to a political theory would have reduced it merely to the level of argument, and such social pleading rapidly loses immediacy. It is also an indication early in his career as a dramatist what Barrie is capable of when he has the strength to face squarely his intuitions

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of the fantastic. The island is a magnificent dream of Chance; but it is a dream. When reality breaks through once more, Barrie reaches deep into the frustrations and sorrows of life. That The Admirable Crichton is also " . . . an entertainment with something in it for everyone who thought, or felt, or had a sense of humour, a sense of pathos, an appreciation of life, or an eye for beauty"<sup>1</sup> is a tribute to the immense theatrical skill and imagination of the author who framed the deepest emotions within such a fast-flowing but cohesive comic adventure.

In 1905 came the first performance of a play which has become synonymous with Barrie's name, Peter Pan, ". . . the best thing he has ever done, the thing most directly from within himself".<sup>2</sup> It was the greatest risk he ever took in the theatre - when he gave it to Frohmann, the impresario and his friend, it was accompanied by Alice-sit-by-the-Fire to secure Frohmann from loss -<sup>3</sup> but the risk proved justified: the stage history of Peter Pan is outstanding compared to any other modern play. As in The Admirable Crichton he discovered a perfect expressive focus for some of his deepest compulsions, managing to match his imagination with the demands of theatrical entertainment without falsifying the finest nuances of emotion. Peter Pan is not simply a wonderfully refreshing pantomime which employs the redskin and pirate mythology of modern children, it is the perfection of an adult's wistful dream of an age of innocence long dimmed by the knowledge of frustration and guilt. Barrie devotes himself singlemindedly to the fantasy of remembrance and lost opportunity which features so often as part of his plays: untouched by the mundane actuality of the world, this fantasy occupies all of Peter Pan, escaping the hollow compromises which mar the author's lesser works.

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1 D. McKail, The Story of J. M. B. . . . Peter Davies, London 1941 p. 355

2 Max Beerbohn in Barrie and the Critics, by W. R. McGraw, Studies in Scottish Literature Vol. 1, 1963-64 p. 119

3 D. McKail, The Story of J. M. B. p. 355

First and foremost, Peter Pan is for children – if adults share the pleasure, it is because to a large extent, they temporarily surrender their years – and adventures takes a very large share of the play.

Barrie's achievement was to discard the debased and often obscure traditions of late-Victorian pantomime in favour of the contemporary features of the child's imagination,<sup>1</sup> bloodthirsty encounters on desert islands with red indians, wolves, and buccaneers. To these he added the creations of his own whimsy, Tinkerbell, the mermaids, the nurse-dog, Nana, and of course, Peter Pan himself. The mortals who become caught up in the action – Wendy, John and Michael, as well as the Lost Boys – combine the qualities of real children with those which children dream about. Here are no impossible panderings to adult requirements, no cherubic personifications of virtue; instead there are selfish, quarrelsome, impetuous boys and a maternally dictatorial girl, injected with courage, strength and magic. Around them swirls all the peculiar lore of childhood; redskins who die impassively when attacked at night because superstition forbids them to fight, wolves which retire baffled when their potential victim looks at them from between his legs, pirates whose murderous instincts must always be checked by their incessant need for cabin-boys.

There is even a magical location for all these fancies in the Never Land, where the most daring venture into sensational dangers will always have its happy ending preserved by the presiding spirit of the island, everybody's youthful hero, Peter Pan. The pace of the pantomime is double-quick and packed with suspense, ranging rapidly from the excitement of the Darling children learning to fly, to the tragedy of Wendy's shooting by Tootles, the wonder of the Mermaids lagoon, and the exhilaration of the last battle with Hook's pirates. Barrie clearly is in his element, judging exactly his youthful audience, providing them in quick succession with Nana, the dog who is nurse to the Darlings, the longed-for ability to fly like a bird, and a swift uncomplicated introduction to the marvellous island.

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1 Moulton, Barrie Cape, London 1928, p. 166



He even writes in as an integral part of Peter Pan that most necessary feature of pantomimes, audience participation; for Tinkerbell's life can only be saved in Act IV if all the children in the auditorium shout their belief in fairies.

Though it is from this remarkably successful appeal to the contemporary child that Peter Pan has won its deserved fame, there is another aspect of the play, which though of less immediate importance, throws an interesting light on Barrie as a dramatist and as a man. Peter Llewellyn Davies, one of the boys "adopted" by Barrie and for whom Peter Pan was written refers to it as "that terrible masterpiece".<sup>1</sup> As with the other high points of his career as a writer, Peter Pan deals with a world which coexists with normality, a world from which time has been removed and dream becomes fact. There is the boy who never grows old, Peter Pan "a reincarnation of the universal Pan",<sup>2</sup> the quintessence of youth, fantasy and innocence.

"To be sure, Peter is selfish, just as any child is selfish, without being aware of it. But Peter is also a symbol of that youth which we would all gladly recapture if we could only go back to the threshold between irresponsible childhood and the next stage, knowing what we do now, realizing all the suffering that we have passed through and that we have brought on others"

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Peter is distinct from all the other characters in the play in that he is the creation of an adult imagination. In the Dedication to the Five which prefaces the printed version of the play, Barrie surmises to his "adopted children" the Llewellyn-Davies boys :

"Perhaps we do change; except a little something in us which is no larger than a mole in the eye, and that, like it, dances in front of us beguiling us all our days. I cannot cut the hair by which it hangs.

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Peter Pan is the wistful memory which beguiles the weary adult mind.

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1 Janet Dunbar, J. M. Barrie Collins, London 1970, p.138

2 Moulton, Barrie Cape, London 1928, p. 166

3 Roy, J. A., J. M. Barrie Jarrolds, London 1937, p. 189

4 Peter Pan p. xvi

Barrie's mother-fetish provides another prominent feature of Peter Pan. The ideal is set by the protective love of Mrs. Darling for her children, which is never shadowed as her husband's is, by lapses into self-protective bullying. Peter takes Wendy to the Never Land to be a mother to the Lost Boys, and even the dreadful pirates are sufficiently human to capture her because they too lack a Mother. Wendy's interpretation of her role, in which she assumes an almost omnipotent authority, is both a portrayal of a girl at play, and a rather more disturbing inference about parenthood which was to appear more strongly in Barrie's later work. Of interest in this context is the tale Peter tells of once returning home only to find "the window was barred, for my mother had forgotten all about me and there was another little boy sleeping in my bed".<sup>1</sup> In the difficult days following his brother's death in 1867, when Barrie attempted desperately to take his place in his mother's affections, the boy was sent to the ailing Margaret Ogilvy.

"Is that you? I think the tone hurt me, for I made no answer, and then the voice said more anxiously, "Is that you?" again. I thought it was the dead boy she was speaking to, and I said in a little lonely voice, "No, it's not him, it's just me"

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The idea of a boy who can never grow up is a mother's, rather than a child's;<sup>3</sup> and the dangers inherent in creating a dream-child, which appear more consciously in Dear Brutus, yet lie beneath the surface of Barrie's pantomime.

Lastly, Peter himself is almost tragically aware of his inability to enter the real world, and this may be a reflection of the dramatist's own problems. Barrie's personal life is a highly disturbing mixture of excessive idolatry of attractive women, fanatical possessiveness in his relations with them and their families, and an apparent incapacity to establish an emotionally secure and mutually satisfying relationship with any of them. Peter Pan displays an odd fear of being physically touched by other people,<sup>4</sup> and despite the most

1 Peter Pan Act 4

2 Janet Dunbar, J. M. Barrie Collins, London, 1970. p. 22

3 Janet Dunbar, J. M. Barrie p. 141

4 J. A. Hammerston, Barrie, Sampson, Low, Marston & Co., London 1929 p. 256 (This detail is apparently an afterthought on Barrie's part absent from the earlier performed versions of Peter Pan.)

determined pursuit, escapes a commitment to Wendy's proffered love and domesticity. One of his most frequently quoted lines "To die would be an awfully big adventure" – said to be the last words of Barrie's impresario Charles Frohmann when the Lusitania was torpedoed – finds a more significant echo in the stage directions which close the play, expressing the feelings of a man so often trapped by fancies which always tend towards escapism :

In a sort of way he understands what she means by  
"Yes, I know" but in most sorts of ways he doesn't.  
It has something to do with the riddle of his being. If  
he could get the hang of the thing his cry might become  
"to live would be an awfully big adventure . . .

The most pervasive single feature of Barrie as a playwright is a repeated descent into mawkish sentimentality. Most of his plays are touched in this way somewhere: some of great promise, such as Mary Rose or the one-acters Barbara's Wedding and A Well Remembered Voice come to grief through over-emotional intrusion; a great number seem to consist of little else but gulps and swallows and wistful, weepy, smiles. Of the latter, two are outstanding: one a disaster of confused intentions which is unified only by the thick sugar coating applied to its surface; the other and much more successful, written with sentiment as its core, Quality Street. It is in such plays that his feminine idols – the child, the youthful heroine, and the mother – are most prominent.

The disaster – at least artistically – is A Kiss for Cinderella, an incredible example of escapist nonsense written in 1916. Doubtless the dark realities of World War swelled the market for plays of this type, and Barrie did not hesitate to take his opportunity. Many critics have observed his peculiar ability to write in a style which answered the needs of ever-changing taste in entertainment. The play concerns the discovery by a policeman of a little cockney girl who acts as mother to an international collection of orphans – the Allies are well represented, the Hun depicted as an ill-tempered infant. The girl half-believes herself to be Cinderella, and a large section of Act 2 illustrates her dream of Prince Charming. In the last Act she is discovered in a nursing-home suffering from exposure, with the policeman proposing marriage to her. The bashfully

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equivocal stage direction at this point "Dr. Bodie has told him something", gives notice of the whole sickly-sweet atmosphere. Barrie cannot or will not bring his audience to face facts, even in his own script. The girl's dream alone is of a different calibre. It is Cinderella's ball as imagined by a cockney girl: the King and Queen, for example, being visualised as they appear on playing cards.

A Kiss for Cinderella strains to combine as many features as possible which will elicit uncritical response to unreality. Cinderella, whose very name should remind the audience of childhood fantasy, is the traditional Dickensian waif at the mercy of poverty. She is also one of Barrie's witty, managing maiden-heroines, as seen in her "penny" Shop, *Celeste et Cie*; and then transforms herself into the playwright's goddess, the Mother, surrounded now by even smaller waifs. No attempt is made to conceal these creaking devices, and only sensibilities blunted or distorted by war could find A Kiss for Cinderella in any way acceptable.

Quality Street (1902) is an entirely different case. Here indeed is a sentimental play, but one which is well conceived and much more soundly written.

Set in the Napoleonic Wars, it is a heart-fluttering genteel romance in which Miss Phoebe, after initial disappointment and seeming resignation when her loved one goes off to the war instead of proposing marriage, succeeds eventually in winning him. "Not since Cranford has our lavendered literature produced a more exquisite store."<sup>1</sup> The main concern of the play is not so much in the development of the love interest - in the nature of things the conclusion is hardly unpredictable - but in the poignant abandonment of Phoebe's youth and vitality in Act II. Barrie's preoccupation with passing time is here finely drawn, with none of the cheap and hackneyed tricks which predominate in A Kiss for Cinderella. In Act I, the young Phoebe is contrasted against the old maids with their air of dignified fragility and regret, epitomised by Susan's carefully preserved but never used wedding gown. In Act II, Phoebe has marked the passage of ten years by donning an old maid's cap herself, and

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1 Moulton, T., Barrie, Cape, London 1928, p. 2

this shadow of her former self is set first against a classroom of high-spirited children, then against the thoughtless cruelty of Charlotte and her beau, Ensign Blades. The object of her affections, Captain Brown, returns home in the foolish expectation of finding no change, though he too has suffered the passage of time. Barrie's appeal to the nostalgia of his audience does become unbearably over-concentrated on several occasions, but as Dennis McKail observes "it is held in check until nine-tenths of any audience is completely under the spell".<sup>1</sup>

Acts III and IV are beyond credibility, however, for they ask that the audience accept not only Phoebe's magical ability to turn the clock back for herself, but also that her masquerade as her own mythical niece could be maintained for more than a few minutes. The plot becomes increasingly mechanical, melodrama rapidly outweighing emotion, losing touch completely with the mellow tones of sadness which lent a vital depth to the first Acts.

Quality Street is redeemed from the fate of Barrie's other sentimental plays by its structure. Not only does it deal in nostalgia and the fantasy which springs from wistful regret, wistful speculation on the "might-have-been"; it actually demonstrates how this mental process occurs. Youthful aspirations are seen declining into the dullness of the years; lost opportunity and lingering regret are made explicit; and following immediately is the haunting dream of youth and opportunity restored as if by magic. The impossibility of Phoebe's masquerade does not lessen the potency of its attraction: Phoebe and Brown reject the impossible vision of youth restored in their final coming together. It is this surviving flicker of honesty which saves the play from the folly apparent in Rosalind.

Rosalind is a one-acter written in 1912, and contains every fault of which Barrie was capable. Strikingly similar in many ways to Quality Street, it exaggerates fatally the sentimentality of that play,

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1 McKail, D.; The Story of J. M. B., Peter Davies, London 1941, p. 329

upsetting the extremely delicate balance between bitter-sweet emotion and ludicrous self-indulgence. Phoebe posing as her ten-years-younger niece is transformed here into Mrs. Page, a middle-aged actress who can at will shrug off twenty years to appear as her "daughter", Beatrice Page, darling of the popular theatre. Having retreated to the obscurity of a seaside village to escape the public eye and become "herself" again, Mrs. Page is met by a distant but passionate admirer of her "daughter". For his benefit she once more assumes her public disguise before finally revealing the truth. Nothing daunted, the young man merely presses his suit harder, and the curtain falls on Mrs. Page compacently basking in his admiration. The deliberate invocation of Shakespeare's heroine merely emphasizes Barrie's shortcomings and adds pretention to abuse of feeling and credulity as the chief features of this foolish trifle.

The same refusal to accept loss inspires the unusually obscure Pantaloon, which, though it enters the realm of fantasy honestly enough, fails to display any sense of vitality. Regret for the passing of the Harlequinade prompted Barrie to revive its characters in an obscure allegory of their decline. Not even a liberal dosage of sentiment could inspire interest or excitement in the play's plainly visible pointlessness.

Quality Street, The Little Minister and Rosalind all depict Barrie's ideal of the youthful heroine. His next ventures into sentimentality featured the obverse of this coin, the idolised mother.

Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire (1905) has a strong element of satire and self-mockery about it, and is in many ways an attempted virtuoso performance in dramatic technique.<sup>1</sup> The playwright fails to achieve this by betraying the contrivances of his plot through the superficiality both of the characters, and the audience's involvement with them. If Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire had developed on the lines indicated by the opening as a light satire on the stilted conventions of theatrical melodrama, it might have succeeded quite well. The duplication of a traditional melodramatic situation in Act II is

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1 Walbrook, H.M. J.M. Barrie and the Theatre, White, London 1922, Ch. 10 p. 109

superb in conception and the expertise with which it is handled. Barrie's mistake is that all too readily he begins asking that a plot effervescent with farcical undertones be taken seriously. Having adopted the recognisable style of burlesque, he expects to convince the audience that a happy ending might not occur, and fails. In so doing responses of feeling are called for which are totally out-of-place, and the play is falsified by the resulting confused intention.<sup>1</sup> Even that most enthusiastic critic of Barrie's plays, H.M. Walbrook, has admitted this.

"(Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire) opened as a comic fantasy, developed into a highly complicated and artificial entanglement, and ended as a very pretty and rather pathetic comedy"

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The first Act is a well-written exposition of the comic intentions of the play. It contains an excellent parody of adolescent pretension when Amy and her alter ego, Ginevra, confuse the stilted conventions of the theatre to which they have only recently been exposed, for the passions of real life. It is this which leads them to mistake the platonic friendship of the family friend Steve for an illicit relationship with Alice. In the second Act, Amy attempts to retrieve the situation as she has been taught by melodrama. She visits Steve at his chambers to obtain Alice's "letters", and is trapped in a cupboard when her parents arrive. Barrie handles this magnificently, for all falls out exactly as it would do in the most predictable offering of the Victorian Stage, yet here it is completely fresh and has great vitality. Inevitably, all is revealed before her father in the most incriminating style, but Barrie, instead of seeking laughter and a quick curtain, asks for tragic solemnity and tears.

The last Act continues in vain to repeat this demand while the farce is brought to conclusion. As a result, the comic effect is undermined by prolonged, weak sentimentality, and the play stumbles to an ineffective end. The false expectation that such paper-thin characters could be taken seriously ultimately makes Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire, in Dennis McKail's words "a curiously feeble and foolish play".<sup>3</sup>

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1 M. Ellehauge Striking Figures Among Modern English Dramatists. Lavin Munksgaard, Copenhagen 1931, p. 140, p. 141

2 Walbrook, H.M., J.M. Barrie and the Theatre, White, London, 1922 Ch. 10 p. 109

3 McKail, D., The Story of J.M.B. Peter Davies, London 1941, p. 370

Motherhood also inspires Barrie's next play, What Every Woman Knows (1908) but in a rather curious way. The play is a straightforward piece of conscious fantasy, tracing the fortunes of a plain, apparently undistinguished woman who marries – by arrangement rather than love – the rising politician John Shand. Always afraid that she will hold him back, the woman, Maggie, is eventually discovered to be his "eminence grise", secretly inserting into his speeches the magical touches which win him political acclaim. Challenged by a beautiful aristocrat for John's love, Maggie engineers in masterly style a mutual disillusion for the infatuated pair, and a humbled and contrite husband at the end discovers love for the wife he had discounted. The first two acts, though hampered by a whole family of caricatured self-made Scotsmen – uneducated, money-wise bumpkins whose ponderous concern for sister Maggie leads them to "buy" Shand as a husband, present the audience with the makings of a deeply-felt domestic tragedy. In Act I, Barrie deliberately understates his central character, her sole prominence being her acceptance of the conditions which bind Shand to her. In Act II she shows her sensitivity. Hopelessly overdressed and highly conscious of her inadequacy as the social complement of Shand's political career, Maggie is brought face to face with all the graces she lacks in the person of the languorous, sophisticated Sybil. Hopefully she reverts to a demonstration of intellect to restore her self-confidence, only to make a fool of herself in attempted conversation in French with the Comtesse de la Briere. Act II ends with her resumption of a cheerful public mask for the benefit of the constituents: but it is plain that the announcement of marriage at this point is much more a public act than one of love. Despite the flatness of the subordinate characters, the play by this point has displayed Barrie's customary grasp of stage-craft, and its two central figures have developed more than sufficiently for their hollow marriage, and its potential in pain, to be taken seriously. As happens so often with Barrie's plays, this initial promise of honesty is discarded: and rather than face the consequences of the situation he has built, the dramatist instead concludes with a pretty and reassuring fable. Maggie no longer is badly dressed; instead



she wears "a little grey frock that not only deals gently with her personal defects, but is in harmony with the room".<sup>1</sup> She becomes a quiet but omnipotent force, managing her husband's political career so successfully, yet so secretly that he seems in reality only a puppet who represents her at Westminster. She wins the unstinted admiration of the Comtesse, – who represents worldly wisdom – by her inspired deception of Venables, the government minister. She shows John both that Sybil's charms are superficial, and that he is less than half the man he esteemed himself to be. Finally she makes him love her, by showing him the "comic" aspect of the situation, a wholly unconvincing device. The curtain falls on his laughter. What Every Woman Knows is indeed "a play about a man who married his mother."<sup>2</sup> To escape the anguish which looms up at the end of Act II, Barrie turns Maggie into the very paragon of the mother on whom a small son dotes; someone to be admired for their superior wisdom, their practicality and their protectiveness. That such possessiveness denies independence and in this case virtually emasculates John Shand is an unfortunate and probably unintended implication of Maggie's fairy-tale elevation.

Following hard on the heels of What Every Woman Knows comes an expression of Barrie's darker nature, doubtless provoked by the experience of his painful divorce from Mary Ansell in 1909. These proceedings brought the dramatist face to face with the dichotomy between his fondest illusion and hard reality, and Old Friends (1910), a one-act play, is a bitter exposure of complacency. Strikingly it is not the youthful heroine which suffers a change but the mother-figure. In it, for the first time, Barrie presents his beloved Mother-figure as a grim harbinger of inescapable fate.

Old Friends opens with the cheerful Stephen Brand entertaining his friend, the Reverend Carrol, on the occasion of Brand's daughter's engagement. Brand abounds in self-confidence, jesting easily on the problems of having a daughter. Carrol is a nonentity, "much loved by his parishoners because he never looks trouble in the face".<sup>3</sup>

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1 What Every Woman Knows Plays of J. M. Barrie, Act III, p. 704

2 J. A. Roy, J. M. Barrie Jarrolds, London 1937 p. 200

3 Old Friends, Plays of J. M. Barrie, introduction, p. 749

Also present is Mrs. Brand, noticeably quiet, reserved and un-demonstrative. Disturbing undertones quickly appear - Mrs. Brand and her daughter appear to share some secret which they keep from Stephen, and he is obliged to confess an irrational fear of the dark. After the women retire for the night, it is revealed that Stephen has been an alcoholic, though no longer: despite Carroll's attempts to invoke divine providence in the cure, Stephen insists that he can find no good reason why the urge to drink left him. He is however, haunted by shadows, which he says are "like old friends come back". Carroll departs, and Brand's daughter soon shows herself to be in the grip of alcoholism. His wife informs him that this is the secret she has been hiding, and lays the blame on his shoulders. He did not give up his habits, they gave him up; and now they have returned for his daughter. Barrie affords only slight relief from Mrs. Brand's harsh judgement in the daughter's sympathy for Stephen. On the whole, Old Friends inclines towards the melodramatic, depending too much on a compressed development and the almost supernatural intrusion of Stephen's fear of darkness. Nevertheless, the guilty bleakness of the vision and the mother's pitiless Presbyterian righteousness mark a startling contrast with the Barrie of previous light-hearted years. Alcoholism inflicted by a malignant force of destiny, heedless of innocence or guilt is a deeply disturbing concept which shows Barrie drawing upon his Scottish background where drink, demons and the divine have been repeatedly associated.<sup>1</sup>

A similar darkness of spirit pervades The Will and Half and Hour both written in 1913. The Will is an assault on materialism which begins in a sentimental picture of youthful love and ends in the hopeless emptiness of a wealthy man whose dreams of contentment have been mortally cankered.

With impressive economy, Barrie marks the progress of the malaise over the years by locating the action in a lawyer's office - "time

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1 George Douglas Brown's The House With The Green Shutters, for example; and on the stage Malloch's Soutar's Water, Bridie's Mr. Bolfry

is passing but . . . the office of Devizes, Devizes and Devizes goes on". (Framed engravings of successive monarchs sufficient to indicate change). First a struggling young couple, very much in love, are seen arranging the husband's will. The wife thinks it unlucky, but he is touchingly conscious of his responsibilities as a married man. This attractive impression is replaced by the same couple in middle-age, now quarreling over the terms of the Will. Mrs. Ross is now "not so much dressed, as richly upholstered. She is very sure of herself. Yet she is not a different woman from the Emily we remember; the pity of it is that somehow this is the same woman."<sup>1</sup> She and her husband still show respect for each other, but it is the respect of contestants in a competition; love has somehow been eroded by Philip's success in business. In the last scene we find Sir Philip Ross in mourning for his wife, cutting his wastrel children out of the will and leaving all his money to his business rivals, highly conscious of the utter waste money has made of his life. As a short play, The Will is very successful, moving quickly but fluently with a minimum of superfluity. Although Barrie's message is straightforward enough, he avoids the melodramatic effects apparent in Old Friends; deriving excellent but never overstated symbolic effect from the fatal cancer diagnosed in the Devizes' clerk at the time of the original will, and from the confused dotage of Devizes Senior in the final scene. By these means the undertone of corruption is sounded early - "a black spot, not so big as a pin's head, but waiting to spread and destroy me in the fullness of time"<sup>2</sup> - and the memory of youthful delights and ambitions is recalled in juxtaposition with the embittered Philip.

Half an Hour is a racy but wholly artificial melodrama in which materialism and the purity of women's love take some hard knocks. The play opens with a splendidly-written domestic battle between an incompatible husband and wife. He is a purse-proud successful bourgeois ; she a decadent, highly sophisticated aristocrat.

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1 The Will, Plays of J.M. Barrie p. 822

2 The Will, Plays of J.M. Barrie p. 822

Wealth and social status rather than love have drawn them into an unhappy union, but the last straw has apparently come for the wife. When her husband goes to change for dinner, she flies to her lover, intending to travel with him to Egypt – seen as one of Barrie's "islands", an escape from present ties into wish-fulfilment – but Chance intervenes before they can depart: the lover is killed in a street accident. With hope thus crushed, the woman decides to return to her husband's home rather than face a life of misery and poverty alone. Whether her flight has been or will be discovered takes up the rest of the play, but no comfort is derived from her successful deception. One man, the doctor who attended the death of her lover, has turned up at her dinner party, and to him is given the role of conscience. Some women, he says, would never have returned to live a lie for the sake of comfort, but would have lived on true to the dead. Half an Hour is a slight piece, heavily dependent on coincidence, rapid action, and sensational suspense; nevertheless, the mood of emptiness and betrayal is indicative of altered sensibilities in the years after his divorce.

His vision of a feminine ideal was only partially altered, however. In 1910, as well as Old Friends he had written The Twelve Pound Look, a short but effective satire on masculine pretension and self-esteem which features one of the more credible of his bright and youthful heroines. There is perhaps a hint of deeper personal disillusion, in that it carries What Every Woman Knows to the point of rejecting the male completely, but it is only a hint which should not be overemphasised.

The Twelve Pound Look concerns itself with the spoiling of a very satisfying day for Sir Harry Sims by the unfortunate and accidental intrusion into his home by his ex-wife, Kate. It is not actual Sir Harry yet, but the accolade lies in his immediate future, and he is discovered practising the ceremony before his somewhat brow-beaten second wife with all the pomp and circumstance of his egotistical imagination. After basking a little in the admiration of his servants and his wife, he goes off to resume a less stately and more conventional appearance, leaving his wife to instruct the typist he has sent for to answer the congratulatory letters of his

acquaintances. The typist, Kate, is an instant contrast to the expensively attired but timid Lady Sims, for though plainly dressed she exudes a sparkling air of confidence and lack of illusion. Her efficiency with the typewriter elicits unqualified admiration from Lady Sims, though her rather contemptuous familiarity with the hypocritical tone of the letters – it is not the first time she has handled the false humility of the publicly honoured – somewhat deflates the poor confused woman. Harry reappears, discovers that the typist is the wife whom he divorced for deserting him, and attempts to turn her grandly out of the house. She has no objection to leaving, but in the process – which takes rather longer than Harry anticipated – his dignity receives the crippling blow of discovering why Kate left him. The "other man" was only a convenient fiction: in fact, the co-respondent was a typewriter. Kate had found in this machine not only a means to support herself, but complete independence from the puppet-like life she had led as his wife. The only thing which prevented a more precipitous departure was the necessity of saving money for this marvellous machine. Harry is dumb-founded, but his vindictive boorishness comes to his aid, and he restores his confidence by bullying Lady Sims. Just before she retreats at his command however, she asks a question – which does not strike home until after she has left the room – about the price of typewriters. The Twelve Pound Look is written with great skill and verve, and ranks as one of the finest short plays Barrie ever wrote, in which the central satire is supported by a well-constructed development, excellently rounded characters, and tightly-controlled, witty dialogue.

The Great War which drew from Barrie's pen A Kiss for Cinderella also inspired a series of topical One-Act plays, all of which depended largely on the susceptibilities of a war-time audience. The first of these, The New Word (1915) is in retrospect rather less chilling than the others in the capital it makes of a period filled with fear and tragedy. The central idea, that parents and children are embarrassed and frustrated by conventions of behaviour when they attempt to display emotions, is well conceived. From it, Barrie derives a considerable amount of dry, ironic humour. There is even a point where he permits the appear-

ance of disquieting doubt about the war, when the mother says :

I wouldn't have had one of you stay at home, though I had had a dozen. That is, if it is the noble war they all say it is. I'm not clever, Rogie, I have to take it on trust. Surely they wouldn't deceive mothers ...

Even at this moment, when reality thrusts its ugly visage through the screen of middle-class respectability which Barrie has constructed with his finest skill in dialogue,<sup>1</sup> the starkness of the question is softened by a simultaneous appeal to pathos and sentiment. Ultimately, it is this appeal which overrides all other aspects of the play, which reaches its climax when the new second lieutenant finally overcomes his mawkish, public-school coyness and manages to say : "Good night, dear father". The father is left alone, "rubbing his hands", and the curtain falls.

The Old Lady Shows her Medals appeared in 1917 in the midst of public disillusion concerning the war. Barrie does not pursue the question he asked through the mother in The New Word: instead he merely intensifies pathos. At no time can this play be called ridiculous: its sentimentality is too closely aligned to deep tragedy to become laughable; and in the guise of comic relief there is a strongly satirical vision of the cheap cruelties of Home Front patriotism. How the two came to be allied in one play is something only Barrie could explain: the result is an overwhelming sense of betrayal, both of his public and of himself. The old mistake occurs once more. He convinces that he is dealing with a reality of some harshness, brings the audience to the very brink of naked, often unpleasant truth, then shies away into platitude and self-indulgence. The charwomen depicted in the first part of The Old Lady Shows her Medals form an uncompromising impression of petty jealousy and sadism as each in turn boasts of the privations of her soldier-son or squirms

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McKail, D. , The Story of J.M.B. Peter Davies, London 1941, p. 492-3

with the agony of being outdone.

Mrs. Dowey :           And women in enemy lands gets those pencil letters and then stop getting the same as ourselves. Let's occasionally think of that.

(she has gone too far. Chairs are pushed back)

The Haggerty Woman: I ask you!

Mickleham :           That's hardly language, Mrs. Dowey.

Mrs. Dowey :           Kindly excuse. I swear to death I'm none of your pacifists.

Mickleham :           Freely granted.

Mrs. Twymley :        I've heard of females that have no male relations and so they have no man-party at the wars. I've heard of them, but I don't mix with them.

Mickleham :           What can the likes of us have to say to them? It's not their war.

Mrs. Dowey :           They are to be pitied.

Mickleham :           But the place for them, Mrs. Dowey, is within doors with the blinds down.

Mrs. Dowey :           That's the place for them.

Mickleham :           I saw one of them today buying a flag. I thought it was very impudent of her.

Mrs. Dowey, a typical Barrie mother-figure, turns out to be one of "them". She has discovered a Dowey in the Black Watch who she pretends is her son because it was "everybody's war", but hers. Private Dowey turns up to see his "mother" however; and after an angry scene with her, confesses that he is a friendless orphan who is willing to join in her secret game. From then till its tearful, bravely smiling end, the play is an exercise of inflated sentiment. Following this honeyed path, Barrie ultimately succumbs to the temptation of manipulating the soldier's death in a bizarre and flagrantly obvious attempt to draw tears from his audience. The Old Lady, according to unactable stage directions, displays an "air of triumph" as she looks silently at his bonnet and medals.

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The sweetness of the latter part of the play is abruptly made suspect by the uncomfortable memory of the charwomen's "competition" in suffering. One could almost believe that Barrie, having blotted out the satirical impulse with which he started, finally played a bitter joke on his audience by daring them to face reality, knowing his challenge would go unanswered.

The death of a son also provided the theme of "A Well Remembered Voice" (1918), in which the suspect Mother figure of The Old Lady is more explicitly damned. It opens with a seance in which a grieving mother, Mrs. Don, attempts to call the spirit of her son Dick killed in the trenches. Her husband silently reads his paper, refusing to take part in the exercise. Barrie rapidly recruits sympathy for this lonely man, making him the passive target of the spiritualist's condescending criticism. Suspicion begins to grow that Mrs. Don's intensity of grief has become little more than a fetish by which she elevates herself above the heads of grosser sensibilities. When the son's ghost does appear, this feeling is confirmed, for he comes not to her but to the father. Conventions of restraint which falsify life seem to be carried beyond the grave, falsifying death as well. Dick insists that his father must not display any grief, but "keep a bright face"; and their conversation circles around trivia about fishing and public school, increasingly invoking the most sugary and superficial sentimental response to its awkward coyness. The appearance of Laura, Dick's sweetheart, is an unashamed demand for tears. A Well Remembered Voice is interesting in two particular aspects. One is that it looks forward to Mary Rose in the central notion of the lost one returning, though here Barrie does not hint at the darker implications as he does in the later play; and also in the suggestion of a confused mysticism when the seance provides the password between life and eternity. The other is the unprecedented assault on the mother, a complete reversal of Barrie's expected sympathies. Mrs. Don is a swiftly drawn but powerful impression of a woman who has betrayed her loss by appropriating it to bolster nothing greater than her solipsistic self-righteousness. Her possessiveness and elaborate mourning are revealed as extensions of her desire for adoration. With A Well Remembered Voice, Barrie achieved the final stage



of a process rejecting the mother-figure from his dreams of perfection, which first began with the grim, Calvinistic Mrs. Brand in Old Friends.

The last of the "wartime" one-acters, Barbara's Wedding, which did not appear until 1927, is the most successful of the four, by virtue of the moderation of feeling once strained to breaking point during the years of carnage. It remains a sentimental play, appealing directly to nostalgia, regret and platitude. The vast question which underlies the skillfully written dream-like action of the play, is how such pointless waste of life between 1914 and 1918 could be allowed to occur. Though he does not seek an answer, Barrie almost achieves brilliance in the posing of the question. For most of the play he manages to avoid descending too deeply into facile sentiment; and for once discovers a vehicle other than the supernatural to carry the breadth of his imagination. Figures move around the central character, the crippled Colonel, emerging briefly into a clarity which is in itself confusing. Time has ceased to operate normally, and people age and alter alarmingly: memory, not action, is being portrayed. As the Colonel struggles to draw meaning from the incidents which pass before him, the audience sees in compressed form the brightness of pre-war youth, the sundering of friendships, the tragedy of war and its aftermath. That the Colonel cannot make sense from his experience could have become a fine crystallisation of Europe's catatonic inability to understand what had befallen it. Instead, the introduction of the "serene", conventional wife, and the contrived pathos of the ending, reduces Barbara's Wedding ultimately to the status of moral complacency and self-deception.

In 1917, the year in which he wrote the boring, sub-standard adaptation of the failed "Leonora", this time called Seven Women: and the war-time sop "The Old Lady Shows her Medals"; Barrie also completed the finest play of his entire career, Dear Brutus. In it, he at last fully and honestly grasps one of the major themes which haunts his work, the speculation about alternative lives, the escape from present difficulties through a "second chance". It is also notably free from idolatry of Womanhood.

The play opens by presenting a rather mixed group of people all gathered under the roof of their mysterious host, Lob. As Act I develops, it becomes clear that his guests have one thing in common, a feeling that their lives have been wasted by a wrong choice in the past and a trait of dreaming wistfully about what might have been. Lob is well aware of this, and, no ordinary mortal, persuades them to search for a magic wood which superstition holds will enable them all to recover their lost opportunity. Even before they can leave the house, however, the magic wood materialises in the garden; and despite dire warnings from the butler, they joyfully go to seek a better life.

The wood is not quite what they expect however. The haughty Lady Caroline discovers a haughty husband in Lob's proletarian butler Matey; Joanna, the noble, self-sacrificing lover who was happily destroying the marriage of the brilliant barrister, Purdie, finds herself cast as the abandoned wife, and Mabel Purdie as the centre of Jack's "true" affections; Coade, instead of dutifully concentrating on a lifetime of study, gives his all to Pastoral idleness; Alice Dearth is plunged into poverty where she expected unbounded wealth. Will Dearth alone finds in the Wood the alternative life he has dreamed of for so long, in particular, a captivating daughter; only to sense the nightmare which is bound up with such heightened perfection, and to discover tragic despair when the real world claims him once more.

In the last Act, the adventurers return one-by-one to the normality of Lob's house, there to be chastened by their experience. Barrie does not offer the Wood as a healing power, however. The sudden illumination of self-knowledge is not in itself sufficient to effect change, and the destruction of life's illusions is as potentially harmful as beneficial. The Purdie triangle is not reconciled by the business in the wood. Joanna now recognises in the lawyer the habits of a philanderer, whose nobility and passion are subservient to his self-indulgence. Mabel is already aware of this, and neither woman feels particularly attracted to him. Purdie himself is soon caught adopting the same heroic poses as before, and is doubly disillusioned by knowing that his past life cannot be

put behind him.

Purdie : No, no, Mabel, none of that. At least credit me with having my eyes open at last. There will be no more of this. I swear it by all that is -

Joanna : Baa-a, he is off again.

Purdie : Oh Lord, so I am

Mabel : Don't Joanna

Purdie : (His mind still illumined) She is quite right - I was. In my present state of depression - which won't last - I feel there is something in me that will make me go on being the same ass, however many chances I get. I haven't the stuff in me to take warning. My whole being is corroded. Shakespeare knew what he was talking about -

'The fault, dear Brutus is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings'

Joanna : For 'dear Brutus' we are to read 'dear audience' I suppose?

The negative effect of their experience continues to reverberate as they await with rather malicious relish, the return of the others from the Wood. Matey and Caroline are suitably discomfited: she for her abandoned social pretension; he for continued shady dealings. A pleasing, apparently sentimental note is struck by Coade, who proposes to his wife a second time; but it becomes discordant when she observes that his solitary happiness in the Wood may indicate that Coade could find contentment with her or without her. Finally, there is deeply felt tragedy in the misery which seems woven throughout Alice's destiny, and in Will Dearth's terrible realisation that his dream could have been made real if only he had had the will to pursue it. Barrie, in an enigmatic stage direction which has been followed optimistically by producers, permits "hope"... for the brave ones".

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S. D. (If we could wait long enough we might see the  
Dearth's breasting their way into the light of the  
Wood)

Such optimism is absent from the body of the play.

The Magic Wood which plays such a prominent part in Dear Brutus is so brilliantly prepared for and so effectively employed by the dramatist that its validity is never questioned. The fantastic imagination embodied in it permeates the play from the outset, the characters being figures in a tightly controlled allegory rather than naturalistic representations of objective reality. This can be seen from the mathematical precision with which Dear Brutus is organised. The structure of the play as a whole recalls The Admirable Crichton and Peter Pan, a movement from the physical and temporal present into a strange, timeless dream-world, then back to the starting point and the restraints of normal life. The characters are neatly divided into four small groups each satisfactorily developing an aspect of the theme and a different facet of Barrie's mind. Light comic relief is provided by Matey and Lady Caroline and their pretensions. The triangle of Joanna, Mabel and Jack Purdie fully exposes the author's intention, presents the lower end of his spiritual scale, and indulges his satirical impulse. The Coades allow a measure of sentiment made acceptable by its final qualification. Lastly, the sombre depths of the theme of Chance are plumbed by the Dearth's, who alone are never treated lightly by Barrie. Opposed to these groups is Lob, the mysterious instigator of the proceedings, who cannot escape identification with the author. Lob is the personification of the fantastic, a strange and disquieting figure. Through him, Barrie conveys the essential ambiguity of fantasy, making him a combination of childishness and undreamt of age, of pathetic weakness and awesome power. Two incidents stand out as indications of his character: the childish petulance of his tantrum when his guests decide not to hunt for the wood,

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Dear Brutus Plays of J. M. Barrie p. 1008

and the chilling simplicity with which he pushes Matey through the french window.<sup>1</sup> The rapture he displays is always mixed with terror, an ambivalence supported by a sense almost of malice in the flowers and trees with which he is associated. It is no coincidence that Barrie stresses both light and darkness in the stage setting which opens the play, suddenly reversing the polarity when electricity illuminates the darkened room and the ghostly-bright garden dims by contrast. The garden and the Wood, though different from more familiar surroundings, are just as real.

Barrie wastes not a single word as he leads us towards the Second Chance. The opening scene, when Matey is challenged by the ladies as a thief is both a plunge into single action and the introduction of the theme, for the butler pleads :

"It's touch and go how the poor turn out in this world;  
all depends on your taking the right or the wrong  
turning . .  
When I was young, Ma'am, I was offered a clerkship  
in the city. If I had taken it there wouldn't be a more  
honest man alive today. I would give the world to be  
able to begin over again"

His is a thought which finds a ready echo in the hearts of the others, more or less explicitly, through the first Act. The scene also prepares for the age-old Lob. The first dark current appears with the host, for after Matey's warnings about him frightening the villagers and the remark "I wouldn't go into the wood"; the first topic which he broaches is precisely about the wood. He childishly insists that his guests look for it, and their preparations separate them sufficiently for their characters to be unfolded; first Joanna, Purdie, and Mabel; then the disillusioned Dearth, Alice embittered by Will's alcoholism and failure. Even at this low point in their lives, the couple demand respect. They at least do not deceive themselves, and Barrie draws them with subtlety :

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1 Dear Brutus Plays of J. M. Barrie p. 1008-9

Alice :           Well, I found I didn't care for you, and I wasn't hypocrite enough to pretend I did. That's blunt, but you used to admire my bluntness.

Dearth :          The bluntness of you, the adorable wildness of you, you untamed thing! There were never any shades in you; kiss or kill was your motto, Alice. I felt from the first moment I saw you that you would love me or knife me.

(Memories of their shooting star flare in both of them for as long as a sheet of paper might take to burn)

Alice :           I didn't knife you.

Dearth :          No, I suppose that was where you made the mistake. It is hard on you, old lady. (becoming watery) I suppose it's too late to try to patch things up?

Alice :           Let's be honest; it is too late, Will.

It is Will Dearth who, after refusing to join the search party, checks their departure from the room by opening the curtains to reveal the Wood. It is also Will Dearth who forces Lob to tell what the Wood gives, and assumes a grim leadership in advancing through the french window. The revelation of the wood in this manner has often been praised as technical genius, and though Bridie, Barrie's successor in Scottish drama, places it with good reason well within the ability of many playwrights,<sup>1</sup> it remains a strikingly effective device. The shock value and stark reality thus given to the Wood are obvious, but just as important is the implication of an omnipotent authority embodied in it. Up to this point, the Wood and the search have been created as a "lark" by the house-party. Now it seems that the Wood has come specifically for them. Similar movements from light comedy into increasing darkness of spirit and fear are developed in each of the remaining two acts, until finally, we are left with the

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<sup>1</sup> Bridie, Tedious and Brief, p.154-5 Constable, 1944, London

enigmatic image of Lob distantly tending the garden in broad daylight.

The undeniably superb skill with which "Dear Brutus" is written is more than matched by the rigid and ruthless honesty Barrie applies to his theme.<sup>1</sup> Here there is no refuge in sentimentality or escapism: the sombre issues raised are not ultimately distorted into platitudinous anodynes; imaginative fantasy does not decline into self-gratifying day-dream. Dear Brutus has frequently been interpreted as an exposition of character as destiny, that as one cynical critic put it "things can never be the same again but always are."<sup>2</sup> Certainly Barrie seems to regard this as true for most men, that their faults and mistakes would always appear no matter what chances they received in life; but it should be noted that in Dear Brutus character is equated with destiny only for those who seek excuses for the present with "If only..." Will Dearth does not look for an excuse for his life: he wistfully dreams of the promise he failed to fulfil.

To him is given a second chance much more terrifying in its consequences than those which merely allowed faults a different environment in which to operate. In the Wood, Will Dearth recovers his promise, and once more is a lusty and cheerful painter, wholly absorbed in his work and at one with the world. To him also is granted the dream of his life, a daughter. With Will and Margaret, Barrie reaches the same intensity as haunts his creation of Lob, an intensity which appears only once again, in Mary Rose. Gradually the gilded enchantment of the father and daughter becomes clouded. Margaret is a being materialised from Will's imagination, whose every feature and action has been deliberately planned by him; and though his love is plain to see in the desire to give her the stars as her first memory, the realisation that she is simply a puppet-like creation wholly under his manipulations is peculiarly chilling. The anguish and cruelty potential to the situation is explicit in the close of Act II, as Margaret runs lost and deserted

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1 J. A. Roy, J.M. Barrie Jarrolds, London 1937 p. 214

2 J. A. Roy J.M. Barrie p. 215

through the trees, crying "Daddy, come back; I don't want to be a might-have-been". It is for moments like this that James Bridie sees Barrie as "the only legitimate descendant of the ballad writers".<sup>1</sup>

Dear Brutus is the high point of his career, the only time when his imagination and skill conjoined successfully to place sober profundity and far-ranging fantasy side-by-side. He almost repeated the performance with Mary Rose, years later, but there the supernatural had superceded the dream, and he failed in the end to avoid an empty gesture towards a "happy ending". If Peter Pan showed Barrie as a genius of the fanciful, Dear Brutus proves unquestionably his rare but powerful talent for expressing the deepest sorrows of human life.

Ever since Quality Street Barrie's work has been haunted by the spectre of lost youth. Peter Pan is the perfect embodiment of this willo' the wisp vision dancing before us "beguiling us all our days!"<sup>2</sup> Dear Brutus is a searching examination of the adult regret for the past from which the apparition rises. In Mary Rose (1920), Barrie is carried over from the use of fantasy as a symbolic device to a direct confrontation with the supernatural. Mary Rose is a ghost story.

It is not however a superficial indulgence in idle speculation or sensation. The emotions which are stirred by the play are deep and mysteriously powerful; the theme "as old as the hills of dream . . . the theme of James Hogg's Kilmeny",<sup>3</sup> the return of the lost one to a world aged and alienated in their absence.

The story is a simple one. By the device of a war-weary soldier's reminiscence, Barrie carries us back in time to those halcyon days of middle class comfort before the first World War; and there we see the slightly exaggerated innocence and childishness of Mary Rose amidst the benevolent smiles of her placid, gentle parents. Only one shadow falls across this pleasing impression of contentment

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1 J. Bridie One Way Of Living, Constable, London 1939 p. 111

2 Introduction to Peter Pan, Plays of J.M. Barrie

3 J. A. Hammerton, Barrie, Sampson Low, Marston & Co. London 1929 p. 289



and fragility, an incident in Mary Rose's past, which her parents feel obliged to tell her boyish fiance. Once when she was eleven years old the family visited the Hebrides. There on a tiny island which local superstition thought strangely perilous, Mary Rose vanished. After being given up for dead, she reappeared twenty days later with no knowledge that time had passed. Naturally this tale interests, but does not deter Simon from marriage. Four years later, Mary Rose and Simon rediscover the island, land upon it, and once more Mary Rose vanishes into the Kingdom of Faery in a scene which cannot fail to stun an audience with fear and awe. She is not lost forever though. Fully twenty-five years later she returns, only to find her parents much aged and her husband almost unrecognisable. Worst of all, she cannot find her baby boy, and is unable to grasp the meaning of the passage of years which she has missed. The play returns to the soldier, who, it transpires, is her lost son - and in the final scene he is confronted by the ghost of Mary Rose, eternally searching for her child.

Barrie maintains a rigid simplicity in the development of the tale, saving it from the diffusion of sub-plot and parallel. Time and Change dominate the play: the bleak and darkened present of the deserted house into which the brutalised Australian soldier enters, looks back at first wistfully to the pre-war contentment with which it compares so ill. A double cycle of movement transcends the limitations of Time and emphasises the apprehension of eternity in the figure of Mary Rose. The ultimate confrontation is in the 'present' to which Mary Rose must come to find her baby; the sledge-hammer blow which strikes at the audience is in the return of the lost girl to the dubious haven of her parents' home, its familiarity distorted by the onset of age. Barrie deliberately opens each "flashback" scene in the Morland's home with a similar incident, a childish squabble between Mr. Morland and Mr. Amy. In the first, there is charm in the triviality; in the second, the charm is eroded by grief for the tragedy in Act II. When Mary Rose once more enters the house, her aged father is totally incapable of coping, and seeks refuge in his collection of prints. Similarly, the scenes with Harry (Mary Rose's son) and Mrs. Otery, subserve the main theme by their sense of being haunted by the past. There is

from the start an unspoken conflict between these two in which she tries to conceal the history of the house from him, spiced by her obvious fear of a very present danger. Barrie makes very good use of the tensions established by the unspoken implications behind their bland conversation.

The second disappearance of Mary Rose is a tour-de-force of the dramatist's imagination. The island - once more for him, the location beyond Time - in Act II is visually and atmospherically the most concrete image of the play, every stone and bush reproduced in naturalistic detail, brightly lit by the sun. Behind it can be seen an expanse of loch on which Cameron, the highlander, rows his boat, and beyond that a dark mass of hills. The tone at first is light and airy; Cameron providing an educated version of Scots rustic comedy in the manner so endeared to English audiences, and the young couple a picture of sentimental romance. To Cameron falls the task of explaining the island's reputation, which is dismissed with laughter by Mary Rose, with rather less ease by Simon. He is more at pains to conceal her past disappearance from Mary Rose, however, than to find danger on the island. She does feel a strange touch of apprehension however, sufficient to warn the audience that all is not well; but before this can rob the event of its shock, the island, with the terrifying ambivalence of the supernatural, once more swallows Mary Rose.

"(Simon) looks up and she signs that she has promised not to talk. They laugh at each other. He is then occupied for a little time in dumping wet stones from the loch upon the fire. Cameron is in the boat with his Euripides. MARY ROSE is sitting demure but gay, holding her tongue with her fingers like a child.

Something else is happening; the call has come to MARY ROSE. It is at first as soft and furtive as whisperings from holes in the ground, 'Mary Rose, Mary Rose'. Then in a fury as of a storm and whistling winds that might be an unholy organ it rushes upon the island, raking every bush for her. These sounds increase rapidly in volume till the mere loudness of them is horrible. They are not without an opponent. Struggling through them, and also calling her name, is to be heard music of an unearthly sweetness that is eeking perhaps to beat them back and put a girdle of safety round her. Once MARY ROSE'S arms go out to her husband for help, but thereafter she is oblivious of his existence. Her face is rapt,

but there is neither fear nor joy in it. Thus she passes from view. The island immediately resumes its stillness. The sun has gone down. SIMON by the fire and CAMERON in the boat have heard nothing. "

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The discovery of her absence is almost immediate, and its meaning given by Cameron's silent fear to land on the island. The curtain rapidly descends on Simon desperately calling for his lost wife. This is what Bridie means when he writes of Barrie suddenly making " a gesture that raises the hair on the scalp. "2

"We have a blind spot to the real magic – that drawing aside quickly and as suddenly dropping back of the veil before we have time to see what is beyond"

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And when Mary Rose, a memory from the nostalgic past, an embodiment of youth and innocence lost to the adult world, comes back unchanged a quarter of a century later, Barrie squarely faces his own dreams and shows the utter impossibility of their physical life. There is no place for Mary Rose in a much-changed world: her presence has become a stark reminder of mortality, for everyone else. Having gone so far, Barrie attempts to push further, and carries Mary Rose, unchanged though now a ghost, beyond the lifespan of parents and husband, still not comprehending the passage of time which she cannot feel. He brings her as far as the ultimate confrontation with her baby son, now a battle-hardened soldier and as far removed from his infancy as could reasonably be imagined. Then Barrie fails. He is unable to maintain the nervous tension implicit in a situation fraught with crushing emotion; and instead twists suddenly aside into a false and cheaply sentimental end-piece. Mary Rose never learns the devastating truth of her existence: her son keeps back his identity from her, and she once more hears the Call, now in the form of celestial music.

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1 Mary Rose, p. 1127, Plays of J. M. Barrie

2 Bridie, J., One Way Of Living Constable, London 1939 p. 111

3 Bridie, J., One Way Of Living, p. 111

From a suddenly bright and star-filled sky.

"The smallest star shoots down for her, and with her arms stretched forth to it trustingly she walks out through the window into the empyrean. The music passes with her. Harry hears nothing, but he knows that somehow a prayer has been answered." 1

After the awesome scene on the island, such a shallow and artificial ending all too clearly belongs to the genre of Peter Pan, and grossly distorts the impact of the play.

This retreat from the intensity so carefully developed throughout the play prevents Mary Rose from achieving the stature of Dear Brutus, and this can only be occasion for sorrow. The development of Margaret the "might-have-been"<sup>2</sup> into Mary Rose, the symbol of Barrie's most haunting and ever-present dream, could have become the summit of his achievement in drama, if only his courage had held to the last page.

Shall We Join the Ladies? the first act of an unfinished play was performed at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in 1921 by a dazzling cast including Dion Boucicault, Sybil Thorndyke, Gerald du Maurier, Lillah McCarthy, Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson and Marie Lohr. It is something of an enigma, as the brilliance with which it is written, the predominantly melodramatic atmosphere and the sensational but mystifying climax could well suggest a satiric intention on Barrie's part. His virtuoso manipulation of a conventional situation – the house-party cut off from the world by a host seeking the murderer of his brother from their number – inevitably stirs memories of Alice Sit-by-the-Fire with its burlesque of exhausted theatricality.

The curtain rises on a dinner given by the mysterious host, Sam Smith. Immediately the guests discover they are thirteen at table. From this prophetic incident, Barrie whirls straight into Sam Smith's announcement that he has invited those implicated by the death of his brother in order to root out the target for his vengeance. Suspicion then falls on each guest in turn, with such

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1 Mary Rose, Plays of J. M. Barrie, p. 1127

2 T. Moulton Barrie Cape, London 1928 p. 188

conviction that by the end of the Act utter confusion appears to reign. The ladies withdraw while Smith quizzes the gentlemen over a drink. Just as they decide to end the suspense and find the criminal, a dreadful scream is heard from one of the absent ladies and as everyone rushes towards the chilling sound, the curtain descends.

Shall we join the Ladies? is as cleverly written as any of Barrie's plays, and remains a well-conceived theatrical tease to perplex and delight the author's admirers. As an illustration of his technical capabilities it is outstanding.

After a period of fifteen years in which he wrote nothing of importance for the stage, Barrie wrote The Boy David in 1936, at the suggestion of Elisabeth Bergner, the actress.<sup>1</sup> After a tolerable welcome in Edinburgh, it was taken to London, where it proved a total failure. It was a severe blow for the dramatist who had pinned to the play all his hopes of a final masterpiece by which he would be remembered. Excuses have been sought for him in the altered tastes of the theatre public which made any excursion in the fantastic unacceptable, and in the illness which prevented Barrie from his normally close supervision of the production. It certainly is true that years without a working contact with the theatre had robbed him of the talent for judging the exact mood of the public so often remarked in him; and that in his absence the production struggled through recurring difficulties with actors and designers.<sup>2</sup> Yet these considerations cannot exonerate Barrie's responsibility for a play which, in the last analysis, is stilted, slow and fragmented: worst of all it reduces one of the few truly well-known epic tales to a level of maudlin "pathos" virtually unrivalled even by Barrie's previous essays in the grossly sentimental. Bridie's Tobias and the Angel, a "biblical" play as light, fantastic and whimsical as anything of Barrie's, was no flop.

There are a few good points in the play. Saul is gifted with a strong

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1 J. Dunbar J.M. Barrie Collins, 1970 p. 292

2 J. Dunbar, J.M. Barrie p. 294-5

if predictable character, rising to Promethean defiance of his fate before the humiliating failure of his murder attempt in Act II. There is fire, vitality, and cunning in his treatment of Nathan, the messenger from Samuel, in Act III where the two men engage in a verbal wrestling bout. When David and Saul are brought together, Barrie shows some of his old talent for dialogue, counter-pointing the innocence of their first conversation with the audience's knowledge of what is to come, balancing David's trust against Saul's painfully determined treachery in the dead Goliath's tent. The central point of the play, the slaying of the Philistine giant, achieves competently a rhythm of crowds of men as a chorus to the single voices of David, Ophir, and Goliath's armour-bearer, which gives way to the deadly hush which precedes the duel.

Overall, however, the play fails to grip the imagination. Up to the end of Act II, it survives the author's sentimental tendencies. A third Act follows which contributes little to the play and confuses its intentions to the point of chaos, consisting almost entirely of prophetic visions of the future dreamed by David on his return to Bethlehem after slaying Goliath. These are lightly skimmed over by the dramatist, and when they culminate in the set-piece speech "How are the mighty fallen" quoted direct from the Old Testament, their superficiality is made transparent by the sudden eruption of matchless declamation and deeply-felt emotion amidst Barrie's sugary preciousness. A similar device is present in Act I, when David stuns Samuel - and no doubt, a rather less adulatory audience - with the twenty-third psalm. In neither case is the quotation incorporated into the play: they are external decorations whose weight threatens to destroy rather than enhance. In the case of the twenty-third psalm, the artificiality and chauvinistic sentiment is particularly noticeable:

Samuel :            "... soon, David, shall your sheep and you  
                         be parted, and the well of Bethlehem will  
                         know you no more. "

David :             Never shall I leave my sheep. I do love the  
                         fold. Sometimes when I am sitting with my  
                         harp in the fields and the sheep bells are  
                         pleasant - then do I make thoughts.

Samuel : Stand there David, and tell me one of the thoughts you have made while you kept the sheep.

David : Behold. (he stands in front of SAMUEL with his hands behind his back, like one saying a lesson, and speaks very simply.) The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;  
He leadeth me beside the still waters.

(SAMUEL rises and looks away, moved. Then he puts a hand on DAVID's head).

Samuel : (controlling himself and trying to speak lightly)  
You must finish that thought some day, David.

The character of David himself is one of the weakest conceptions of Barrie's mind, especially when compared to Peter Pan and the Lost Boys, for David is psychologically – and almost physically – a girl, the successor to the waifs in Little Mary and A Kiss For Cinderella. Elisabeth Bergner, for whom the play had been specially written, was disturbed by David's effeminacy so much that after several rehearsals she advocated that a boy should replace her in the part.<sup>1</sup> Saul is powerful but stereotyped, and the secondary characters mere puppets used to "set the scene", readily discarded for most of the concluding Act.

The most obvious clue to the play's failure is apparent in the language Barrie has forced upon its characters, redolent with "thee" and "thou", searching after ponderous Biblical echoes, as when Saul vows "to strip this base tenement of its littleness. To serve the Lord without ceasing till I join those who dwell in dust."<sup>2</sup> Together with eclectic detailing of trivia in dress and mannerism, such deliberate – and largely unsuccessful – archaisms reveal The Boy David as costume-drama employing quaintness for its own sake.

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1 J.Dunbar J.M.Barrie Collins 1970,p.294

2 Act II p. 1214

Finally, The Boy David, after radically altering the actual biblical events to serve an ill-conceived and confused purpose, ends with a scene of unwarrantable emotionalism in which the playwright asks wherever possible for real sheep and goats as a background. David and Jonathan are found together at the start of their legendary friendship as small boys playing around Goliath's spear. This ultimate reduction of scale, and indulgence in mere prettiness delivers the coup de grace to what slight stirrings of emotion at the spectacle of inexorable fate the play might previously have aroused.

The Boy David was a failure in the theatre, never winning the popular support of the playwright's earlier better written entertainments. It did not deserve more; it was, as Janet Dunbar observes, "a bitter swan-song to a long, wonderful career..."<sup>1</sup> Six months after it opened at His Majesty's Theatre in London, Barrie died, aged 77, a disappointed man.

Comparison has already been made between Barrie and Shaw, and their relation to their national dramatic movements. Neither could be said to have wielded any specific influence on the plays of their fellow-countrymen, and neither showed much interest in writing specifically Scottish or Irish plays. Yet in Barrie's work there is all too clearly that marked flavour of satire which is such a strong element in Scottish literary culture from the days of Philotus and A Satire of the Three Estates right down to the present day; and the tendency of Scottish writers to portray solipsistic manipulations of human beings, becomes in plays like The Little Minister, A Kiss for Cinderella, and The Old Lady Shows Her Medals, the mainspring of the action, with the dramatist as an omnipotent and whimsical ring-master. This is what disturbs George Blake when he writes of Barrie "holding out his characters at arm's length, as it were, and making them perform their antics to our sardonic, even sadistic delight".

That the satire, solipsism and sentimentality can be present in a single work, such as Dear Brutus or even The Old Lady Shows

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1 J. Dunbar, J.M. Barrie Collins 1970 p. 298



Her Medals, makes Barrie peculiarly Scottish, in that he combines the two major strands of Scottish literature, unrestrained fantasy and a realism that is markedly cynical. Often it is impossible to distinguish between the two extremes, impossible to tell whether Barrie indulges his audience or ridicules it. The ambiguity of his attitude is paralleled by the profound ambiguity of his better plays, when the supposed blessing offered to the character becomes increasingly qualified until, to some at least, it seems a curse. His enchanted Islands, his offer of the Second Chance, rarely fail to leave a taste of ashes in the mouths of those who so confidently welcome escape from the present. Such ambivalence is also one of the most outstanding features of the plays of Scotland's other major playwright, James Bridie; a fact which can only place Barrie within the context of a Scottish cultural tradition.

The sentimentality which mars so many Barrie plays is also firmly within the trend in Scottish writing over the last century, from Barrie's own "Window in Thrums" to the contemporary journal, "The People's Friend". Furthermore, where Scotland's serious dramatists – those attempting to explore the human condition – found little inspiration in Barrie, he can be regarded as the founder of the peculiarly Scottish institution of the "kailyard" drama. His early success, The Little Minister, found enthusiastic though theatrically very inferior imitators almost immediately, the most notable being Graham Moffat. These remain remarkably popular even today among Church drama groups and other amateurs whose interest is in the lightest of parochial entertainments, and were, indeed, all too frequently present on the professional stage in Scotland at the Edinburgh Gateway Theatre in the late 1950's.

The most important achievement of James Barrie was, quite simply, to write in his lifetime a large body of work which was almost always theatrically effective and on occasion also gripped the imagination with deep emotional stirrings.

"(It is) easy . . . to dismiss him merely as an unthinking sentimental-ist and to ignore the peculiar and subtle qualities he possessed . . ." <sup>1</sup>

He showed with Peter Pan, Dear Butus, and Mary Rose that the drama was not a medium forever locked to the Scottish creative mind. His inability to judge the relative significance of the fantasies he so often expressed in his plays seems to reflect a general Scottish failing exacerbated by the self-gratifying desires of the West-End theatre audiences. Flights of fancy which on occasion carry him deep into the spirit more often become idle and rather infantile day-dreams. For thirty years he was one of the dominant writers for the British stage, displaying an impressive technical mastery and a remarkable skill for dialogue together with an uncanny sense of timing plays to coincide with the exact mood of the theatre-going public at any given time. In all his career, this sense only failed him once, and that, unfortunately was with its disastrous conclusion, The Boy David. George Bernard Shaw's remark that "the popular stage, which was a prison to Shakespeare's genius, is a playground to Barrie's . . .", <sup>2</sup> is largely true: very rarely did Barrie attempt to move outwith the stage conventions of his time, preferring to exploit existing conditions rather than act as innovator. As a result, the majority of his plays now seem to belong to the era before the Great War, certainly before 1930. <sup>3</sup> Even The Admirable Crichton has lost its edge with the breakdown of class-rigidity and the decline of the aristocracy.

And yet, somehow, there are a few of the plays which continue to startle and to move the audience. James Bridie captures the essence of Barrie as a dramatist, when after discounting his technical ability and his more contemptible, even risible characteristics, he continues:

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1 Allardyce Nicoll, English Drama 1900-1930, Cambridge Univ. 1973 p. 346

2 Shaw, Shakespeare and Mr. Barrie. Dramatic Opinions and Essays Vol. 2 Constable 1909 p. 367

3 R. McGraw Barrie and The Critics, Studies in Scottish Literature Vol. 7 1963-4. p. 130

"I think his title to genius exists in this: that he was the only legitimate descendant of the ballad writers. In the midst of a long succession of posturings he would suddenly make a gesture that raised the hair on the scalp ... It is the ballad quality that makes Mary Rose so inescapable. You may find Mary Rose contemptible or even hateful but it haunts you ... It is a pity that Barrie had not that sublime confidence in his own genius that other great writers have ... "

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A pity indeed that the talent which produced Mary Rose and Dear Brutus should have been squandered so sadly on maudlin sentiment and melodrama.

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1 J. Bridie One Way Of Living, Constable, London 1939 pp. 111-112

## CHAPTER THREE

### WILLIAM SHARP

If Barrie is in some ways the Scottish counterpart of Shaw, then Yeats may also be said to have his Scottish equivalent – though of questionable ability – in William Sharp – "Fiona MacLeod" – a well established literary figure at the end of the nineteenth century, who died in 1910. Sharp a poet, biographer and critic, was sufficiently interested in drama to become the Stage Society's first Chairman, and did much to introduce to Britain the work of Maeterlinck and the Belgian dramatists. Under the pseudonym of "Fiona MacLeod" he had won popular, though transient, acclaim with works rooted in Celtic mythology, and under this guise in 1900 he completed two plays, The House of Usna and The Immortal Hour. Sharp was not motivated by any strong desire to establish a Scottish or even a Celtic theatre; he was, if anything, cosmopolitan rather than nationalistic by outlook. The Belgians he admired so much certainly wielded an influence on him, and he perhaps sought in Gaelic legend the desired symbols unsullied by the stultified Classical overtones of their Greek and Roman counterparts, for his "psychic dramas" – dramas of the mind and spirit, rather than of physical action. In this attempt to find a dramatic expression for the purely spiritual, Sharp was no Highland Mystic, though this may at first seem so. Writing of Yeats in 1902, he demonstrated his grasp of the common-sense necessary in the theatre: "One may speak with the tongue of angels, but the accent must be human and familiar".<sup>1</sup>

### THE HOUSE OF USNA, THE IMMORTAL HOUR

The House of Usna was performed at a meeting of The Stage Society in April, 1900, together with two short plays by Maeterlinck. Written as a "psychic drama", the abstracted nature of the figures who appear makes the play rather difficult to judge by accepted theatrical standards.<sup>2</sup>

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- 1 Alaya, Flavia. William Sharp, "Fiona MacLeod", Harvard 1970, p.185 (quotes Sharp's The Later Works of Mr. Yeats, North American Review, 1902)
- 2 Alaya, F., William Sharp : "Fiona MacLeod" p.187

Centred around the obsessive guilt of Concobar, High-king of Ulster, for the treacherous murder of his rival in love, Naysa, and Naysa's brothers, the champions of the royal house of Usna, the play begins with the first report of the killing of Concobar's son by the harper Cravetheen. Cravetheen, consciously identifying himself with retributive fate, exults in being "the Voice of the House of Usna", even when captured by Concobar's men; and his role as the mouth-piece of the High-king's tormented conscience finds an increasing number of mournful or threatening echoes as the play progresses.

The second Act presents the major stumbling block for The House of Usna, being completely static and repetitive, wholly devoted to symbolising Concobar's obsession, anguish and self-justification. As yet unaware of his son's death he is seen as the subject of a profound irony as he defies the pessimistic wisdom of the druid, Duach, and strives desperately to assert that the sins of the past can be redeemed. He ignores the facts of his threatened kingdom and the prophecies of total eclipse for all Ireland, turning desperately to fantasies of his lost love, Deirdre. All the while, the boy Maine, utterly detached from the king's troubles, chants "Deirdre is dead! Deirdre the beautiful is dead, is dead." Concobar, finally is brought to accept present reality, and the Act closes in elegaic mood with Coal's song in praise of the lost glories of the beautiful city, Emain Macha.

The last Act begins after Concobar has heard of his son's death. In his bitterness, he will not at first execute Cravetheen, as death now appears to him as a release from present pain.

Cravetheen's exultant "cry of the House of Usna" on finding this out, goads Concobar to fury, and he sends the poet to a lingering death. Defying the Gods, Concobar rantingly urges his soldiers to victory on the morrow, but Cravetheen's voice is once more heard calling its mournful triumph, and the curtain descends on the High-king paralysed by the weight of guilt and anguish which finally overtakes him.

The House of Usna obviously has little appeal within conventional mores of drama, and not even as poetry can it be said to succeed. William Sharp was no Yeats, despite the similarity in subject matter

and treatment. Total dismissal of the play is however checked by the strange but very real quality of hypnosis which is generated within it, lulling the mind into acceptance of the awesome inevitability of its conclusion.

The Immortal Hour, though even less successful in the theatre than The House Of Usna, achieved distinction when it provided the basis for an opera by the composer Rutland Boughton; in which form it was played on 216 successive nights at the Regent Theatre in 1922, the longest run for any opera composed wholly in Britain.<sup>1</sup>

The play presents the myth of the Irish King, Eochaidh, and his brief year of glorious love with Etain, a princess of the immortal race of the Sidhe. Behind the doomed King's tragic aspiration is the sombre and disquieting figure of Dalua, the Dark Fool of Celtic Mythology, a personification of madness and fearful power who is avoided by the Gods themselves. Dalua causes Etain and Eochaidh to meet, and though he pleads that he is compelled to do so by a force beyond him, he seems to be identified with it, an impression reinforced by the subservience shown to him by the mysterious spirit-voices in Act One, Scene One. Eochaidh has renounced all his royal power to pursue his dream of perfect, immortal beauty; and because he does so not in humility but in desire for possession, he is drawn by Dalua to the love of Etain, whose memory has been blotted out by the Dark Fool's touch. After a single year with Etain as his Queen, Eochaidh is confronted by a mysterious youth, who challenges him to a chess-game, and the prize at stake for the King is his "heart's desire" - "To know no twilight hour / Upon my day of joy"<sup>2</sup> - and for the youth a Kiss upon the hand of Etain. The youth wins, and is revealed as Midir, Etain's lost love among the Sidhe, who after enchanting the court with a magical song, restores her memory; and together they fly from the mortal world. Dalua, who in answer to

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- 1 E. W. White : *The Rise of the English Opera* p. 150  
(*Ivanhoe* 1891, 160 performances; *Rape of Lucretia* 1946,  
83 perfors.)
- 2 F. MacLeod, Poems and Dramas Heinemann, 1910 p. 376

Eochaidh's agonised cry, "My dreams! My dreams! Give me my dreams!" gives him by a fatal touch of his hand the only dream that remains, "the dream of death".

The atmosphere generated by the sonorous verse and repetitive, slow rhythms of The Immortal Hour is remarkably powerful. The figure of Dalua is peculiarly disturbing, and the tension created by his plain manipulation of events and the nervous fear of Manus and Maive, rustics who prefer ignorance to terrifying knowledge, in whose threatened house Etain and Eochaidh first meet, is maintained through the play by Etain's fragmentary memories and the heavy foreboding which accompanies the appearance of Midir. Rather more theatricality is apparent than in The House of Usna: all the essential action occurs on the stage, and the changes in scene provide a lively contrast of bleak wilderness, rude cottage, and royal palace. The opening of Act Two is particularly splendid, organised purely in terms of spectacle with music and massive salutes from warriors and priests. The climax of the play is short and sharp, and does not rely on a torrent of poetic passion from Eochaidh.

Much of the success attending the operatic version in 1922 was due to the escapist desires of a post-war public – Boughton confessed shame and perplexity at the "hysterical enthusiasm quite out of keeping"<sup>1</sup> with the mood he had hoped the work would engender. Yet even in 1914, The Immortal Hour had proved popular at the Glastonbury festival; and the play remains an interesting and surprisingly dramatic portrayal of Celtic legend.

William Sharp is the only Scottish playwright to seek his subject-matter in Celtic mythology, though many subsequent writers had a far more intimate connection with Gaeldom. This serves as an indication of the major distinction between the Irish and the Scottish movements towards national cultural revival. The myths yet current in Ireland had long since vanished in Scotland, even in the Highlands; and the differences between Scottish and English cultural traditions

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1 The Rise of the English Opera, E. W. White, Lehmann, London 1951, p. 150.

were far less marked – to the extent that some still argue that there is no difference.



## GRAHAM MOFFAT

One of the most striking features of native Scottish drama over the course of the twentieth century has been the persistent and popularly successful "Kailyard" strain, the only dramatic form to draw on nineteenth century roots and establish a tradition recognisably national in character. Fulfilling all too literally the aim to foster "plays of Scottish Life and Character", the mark of the kailyard drama is the one-act domestic comedy of working-class life, in which a farcical plot is supported by a plethora of supposedly typical Scottish habits and expressions. A very large proportion of the humour is derived from implied ridicule of characters whose intelligence has been deliberately negated to emphasize their quaintness. Even in less extreme examples, the dominant atmosphere is sentimental cosiness, parochialism, and couthy "common-sense" invariably requiring considerable assistance from fortunate coincidences bordering on the miraculous. The popularity of such plays, with their emphatic "Scottish-ness", has created an unfortunate atmosphere around the amateur drama in Scotland, however unjustly in the light of its more serious endeavours, and exercised a damaging influence on the work of the Scottish National Players who in the years between the wars attempted to establish an "Abbey Theatre" in Glasgow.

The leading exponents of the kailyard play are Graham Moffat and J. J. Bell, the latter being responsible for a number of particularly mindless but popular one-act plays. Moffat, however, deserves rather more attention: his full-length plays about Scottish village-life are, if nothing else, lively, and their successful documentation of dead or dying local customs endeared them to Scottish audiences, especially in the colonies. Moffat's father was an elocutionist, a "respectable" form of entertainer, whose speciality was as "A delineator of Scottish Life and Character".<sup>1</sup> Following in his father's footsteps, Moffat rapidly discovered that his own talent lay particularly in the mimicry of the Scots peasant, and it only required the visit of the Abbey Theatre's Irish Players to Glasgow in 1905 to turn his thoughts to the drama. Forming a company which

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1 Join Me In Remembering, G. Moffat p1; WL Moffat, Cape Province 1955

depended to a large extent on members of his own family, most of whom had music-hall experience, he sought for Scottish plays, and finding none, decided to write them himself. Known originally as the Scottish National Players - a title later adopted and made famous by an amateur company in Glasgow between the wars - Moffat's company produced his plays for many years, and always was very much a family concern. A Scrape o' the Pen, Bunty Pulls the Strings, Susie Tangles the Strings, and Granny achieved often staggering success - perhaps most notably outside Scotland: 161 performances of A Scrape o' the Pen in London's Comedy Theatre in 1912; and Moffat, his wife and daughter, as actors in the plays, rapidly became identified with certain parts.

The outstanding feature of most of these plays is their atmosphere not simply of nostalgia, but of childhood reminiscence. There is a Dickensian flavour of incomprehension and caricature about the adults portrayed, and Bunty Pulls the Strings, the most popular of them, significantly makes a feature of a young boy, the irrepressible Rab. They tend also to be set deliberately in the not too distant past, documenting at some length the quaint aspects of dress and custom which very often bear no relation whatsoever to the theme of the play.

After finding his feet with curtain-raisers and one-act plays performed as part of music-hall programmes, Moffat produced his first full-length work, A Scrape o' the Pen, at the Atheneum Hall, Glasgow, in 1909. This is probably the most satisfying of his plays, in that the plot depends least on melodramatic effects and overt sentimentality is at a minimum. It also provides an acceptable *raison d'être* for its concentrated dose of Scottish custom by being built around the double celebration of Hogmanay and a village wedding. The action moves from the farm of Honeyneuk - a name in itself redolent of cosy well-being - to the town cross of Minniehive. As the folk of the village prepare to welcome the New Year and the marriage of Beenie Scott and Geordie Pow, a secret drama is conducted in the Inglis family when news arrives of their son Alec, missing in the Tropics for seven years. Alec, a ne'er-do-well, in the past courted Jean Lowther, now married happily to Hugh Menzies, who runs the Inglis farm. He also left behind him a

pregnant girl who died in childbirth, and his illegitimate daughter, Eppie, has been brought up by his ageing parents with Jean Lowther's assistance. All this is revealed by the highly contrived and apparently motiveless visit of Mrs. Baikie, an English woman, who bears with her a notebook of Alec's discovered in Africa. The notebook contains a contract of marriage drawn up on the night of Alec's flight from home, between himself and Jean Lowther. His father, Mattha, is at first driven by his sense of abstract legalism towards a denunciation of Jean's "bigamy", though she has not seen Alec since she signed the fateful paper; but is persuaded by his wife Leezie to a more humane concealment of the contract. The family go out to the town cross to bring in the New Year with songs and whisky, and to throw slippers and rice at the newly wedded Beenie and Geordie, and return to find an unlooked-for "first-foot". To their astonishment – though not to the audience's – Alec, the black sheep, has returned home. Trying to claim his bride, he discovers her marriage to Hugh Menzies, and broken-hearted bitterly confronts Jean and his parents, threatening to reveal all. Leezie tells him of his daughter, Eppie, and while he visits the child argues with Mattha about destroying the contract, the only evidence of Jean's youthful foolishness. They decide against such a deliberate lie, instead presenting the evidence to Alec on his return, and appealing to his better nature. Touched by finding Eppie, the living evidence of his own guilt, Alec relents, Jean's happiness is safeguarded, and the Inglis family is reunited in love.

This plot is carefully balanced against the colour and festivities of the wedding party and Hogmanay, and is never allowed to overshadow the dramatic evocation of nostalgia. The recreation of the midnight singing and subsequent hilarity is quite well-managed, and although the play as a whole presents a rather rose-tinted picture of Scotland, Moffat is not afraid to show alcohol and even drunkenness, and successfully pokes fun at the rigid orthodoxy of Martha's presbyterianism. A Scrape o' the Pen was a major success for Moffat, not least in financial terms. Apart from its long London run, it was also toured extensively to Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa, along with Moffat's next,

and indeed, most widely-known play, Bunty Pulls the Strings.

Possibly influenced by the popularity of James Barrie's novel dealing with Scottish Puritanism, The Little Minister, the major feature of Bunty Pulls The Strings (1911) is the depiction of religiousness and rigidity and hypocrisy. The plot itself is melodramatic and especially in its latter stages, clumsily handled.

Bunty Biggar acts as housekeeper for her widowed father, Tammass, a stern but well-intentioned elder at the village kirk, and Moffat's child's-eye view of the past is explicit in the sabbatarian conflict which opens the play, as Bunty not unwillingly joins in her young brother Rab's irksomeness at the restrictive conventions of a Scottish Sunday. Significantly, the villain of the piece, "a tall thin, vinegary old maid, with hard features", Susie Simpson, makes a fetish of such grim religious excess, continually seeking lapses in observance in the two youngsters which she instantly reports to their father. Rab's sense of life provides a positive contrast to Susie's cruel and petty self-righteousness. Bunty is to be married in the immediate future to Susie's nephew, Weelum, a dull-witted clown though supposedly the youngest elder in the kirk; and Susie soon reveals her secret purpose, which is to ensnare Bunty's father as a mate for herself. In a rather well written passage, she attempts to win him with a series of pointed double-entendres which Tammass rejects by deliberately answering only at the surface level. Enraged, Susie takes out her spite on the unfortunate Weelum, and stalks off. At this point Tammass Biggar's past catches up with him, in the shape of Eelen Dunlop and her niece Teenie: Eelen has, many years before, been jilted at the altar by Tammass, but though she is in an excellent position to destroy his respectability and career, she desires little more than the return of money she lent to him. Susie Simpson is seen eavesdropping on their conversation as Tammass makes his damning confession that he has no money available - he has even temporarily appropriated Susie's capital - and his assets are frozen until the local mills start working again.

Armed with this information, and perhaps understandably piqued, Susie attempts to destroy Tammass's reputation at church that day, before the congregation. Tammass retains his dignity, stolidly refusing to

discuss business on the Lord's Day, and is saved from immediate disgrace by the supposed wit of Bunty. A further and more telling blow is struck at her father with the news that Rab, resentful of his father's strictness, has run off to Glasgow.

In the final act, Bunty Pulls the Strings is jerked to a happy conclusion by Bunty's highly unconvincing talents, as she first sacrifices her wedding savings to Tammas, then secures him a wife in Eelen Dunlop, arranges a suitable position in Glasgow for the chastened Rab, and finally outwits Susie Simpson by discovering that the vindictive old maid has herself appropriated an inheritance which rightfully belongs to Weelum. By a miraculous coincidence, the mills upon which Tammas Biggar's livelihood depends begin production once more. The staggering ineptitude of the concluding act is made all the more noticeable by the rapid and confusing series of plot-complications in the first act, and the increasing dependence on starkly contrasted caricatures as the play progresses. At the end of Act I, Moffat even has Susie Simpson furtively draining a glass of whisky; and in order to assert Bunty's intelligence and initiative, has to reduce all the other characters to a level bordering on the moronic.

The success of the play may be explained by the emphatic "Scottishness" of the background to the plot, and certainly the author's directions concerning costume are strikingly detailed, emphasizing principally the quaintness of a past era. But the single most remarkable feature of the play is the second act, outside the village church, which requires no less than twenty extras, plus a sheep-dog. With these Moffat strives to recreate a Dickensian view of a Scottish congregation assembling, and thus wins the hearts of emigre audiences of Scots in the colonies and the delighted amusement of less nostalgic audiences in London. Mercifully, Bunty Pulls The Strings only occasionally employs overt sentimentality to support its clumsy comic effects.

It was succeeded after the Great War by Susie Tangles The Strings in which the action was set in the years of Bunty Biggar's childhood, and once more depicted Tammas Biggar and Susie Simpson. It is a

similar collection of childish impressions of life in Scotland, but the period depicted is outwith the personal recollection of Moffat's audience, and he depends very much more heavily on sentimentality. The plot is almost totally unsurprising, sharing the inanity of Bunty Pulls The Strings. Susie Simpson is housekeeper to the local minister, and has high hopes that he will propose marriage to her; therefore she rejects the advances of Wull Todd, a shoemaker with poetic aspirations. His heart lies elsewhere with Nannie Ormiston senior, the sweetheart of his distant youth. Nannie, however, has had an illegitimate child, young Nannie, who has unwittingly come to work as a servant in the minister's house. Discovery of her identity calls upon her the wrath of the "godly" Susie, and when the minister proposes to Nannie senior, indignation spreads throughout the village – despite the saintly life led by her since her disgrace. Wull Todd and another man, Jeems Gibb, sympathising with the minister's feelings, blackmail the chief elder, Tammas Biggar, over his desertion of Eelen Dunlop, persuading him to forget his hypocritical expressions of horror and lend his social status to the minister's supporters. The last elder to maintain his objections to the match is rather unconvincingly won over by Wull and the kirk choir, but Nannie senior is claimed by the man who once seduced her, now a wealthy young laird, and she weds him, explaining to the stoic but saddened clergyman that he is in love with a memory of her youthful beauty. For a little while, Moffat allows his audience to wallow in sweet regret, and then concludes the play by drawing the minister's attention to young Nannie, literally his dream come to life. The similarity to James Barrie's romances is here quite striking. They immediately fall in love, and the curtain descends as they embrace before a stunned Susie Simpson.

As background, there is a veritable epidemic of love-matches in and around the village, mostly comic, and for the most part playing heavily on distinctly unromantic financial bargaining. There is the spectacle of a "highland washing" with young girls tramping clothes in huge tubs of water, hymn tunes are fitted with nonsensical comic rhymes on the advice of a General Assembly disturbed by the "profanity" which frequently accompanied choir practices. Moffat justified the



Wullie :                   The whole row, I tell ye. The folks furniture  
is out on the street (Andra crosses down and  
looks out of the little  
window R.)

Granny :                 Then we're burnt out of house and hame?

Andra:                   It's the hand of fate!

Jenny :                 It's a pity ye ever gave up this house. Uncle  
David's difficulties are only temporary, and  
there's Uncle Sandy in Canada - he could give  
more than he does.

(While speaking, Jenny goes  
to bedside and draws Granny's  
curtains fully back. She then  
looks out from the little  
window, R.)

Granny :                 Sandy's crops have failed this year, and that's  
why he's free to come home for our diamond  
weddin! A queer diamond wedding it'll be if we  
canna get enough to keep us.

Andra (coming           Ay! Ay! I see there's great need for economy.  
left a little)

Needless to say, Sandy's crops have not failed - "it was just a joke  
to increase the joy of the jubilee" - and he makes the old couple a  
present of their old family home.

Moffat's attitude to these depictions of Scottish life and character can  
only be regarded as that of a man who saw in his fellow-countrymen  
a quaintness and absurdity which, exaggerated, provided excellent  
fare for the astonished mockery of foreigners and the excessive senti-  
mentality of nostalgic Scots in the colonies. He frequently referred  
to the Scottish peasants' "unconscious humour, a phenomenon that is  
seldom found south of the Tweed", which put more bluntly is an  
invitation to those who know better to laugh at stupidity and ignorance.  
Even when he sought to depict something akin to grief in his characters,  
Moffat could not restrain this desire : "The humour of Mattha and  
Leezie" - in A Scrap e o' the Pen - "being mostly of the uncon-  
scious kind, never disappears even during the most pathetic scenes



of the play". It is disturbing and depressing that so many Scots followed Moffat's example in their attitude to Scottish characters and locations, and even to themselves<sup>1</sup> – chronically unwilling or unable to take their emotions seriously. The Gateway Theatre in Edinburgh successfully – and frequently – revived Moffat's plays as recently as the late 1950's.

Allardyce Nicoll gives Moffatt credit for popularising portrayals of Scottish life using Scottish dialect on the London Stage – Bunty Pulls the Strings ran for over 600 performances at the Haymarket in 1911 – but the effects of such popularity have only proved detrimental to Scottish Drama as a whole, branding the whole movement in many eyes with the mark of parochial infantility.

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1 Compare the role in which Harry Lauder cast himself to Moffat's characters.

THE SCOTTISH REPERTORY THEATRE

The first development of any importance in the movement to establish serious drama in Scotland was the founding in Glasgow during 1909 of the Scottish Repertory Theatre Company by an English theatrical agent, Alfred Waring.

It would be difficult to over-praise Waring: let it suffice to say that single-handed he created the company, and for five years wore himself out keeping it alive. First a bookseller's assistant, later a printer and stationer, he graduated through amateur drama with William Poel's Elizabethan Stage Society to a professional association with Frank Benson's Company as a highly successful advance-booking agent in 1900. The repertory idea in theatre was in its infancy at this time,<sup>1</sup> and Waring seems to have rapidly committed himself to it. In 1901, Benson's Company joined with Curtius' German Players for a short repertory season at the Comedy Theatre, London: three years later, Waring toured as actor-manager with Mrs. Palmer's Company in repertory. In 1905, he became advance agent for Beerbohm Tree, and in the following year volunteered his now considerable abilities in the organisation of the Abbey Theatre company's first visit to Britain. The Irish players were particularly well received in Glasgow, and Waring was sufficiently impressed by the city's audiences to consider it as a site for Miss Horniman's proposed "Abbey" in Britain. When Manchester was selected for the Horniman venture, Waring decided to approach Glasgow on his own behalf to establish not simply a carbon-copy repertory theatre on the lines of the Abbey in Dublin, but a repertory theatre which truly belonged to the people of Glasgow, a "citizens' theatre".

Neil Munro, novelist and also a director of the new company, has captured the spirit of Waring's particular inspiration :

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1 The birth of the Abbey Theatre, the Gaiety Theatre in Manchester, and the Vedrenne-Barker association at the Court Theatre are well-documented contemporaries of the Glasgow Repertory Theatre, all fired by the same principle, to break from the restrictions of West End practices.

"Our aspirations at that time were simple, and uncomplicated by any ideas of specially fostering purely Scottish drama, which really had no existence yet, or of training to professional status Scottish actors still at the amateur stage. Any kind of 'experimental theatre' for research into and the development of a new technique for the Scottish Stage was not in contemplation. We asked for no more than a local theatre which would appeal to intelligent audiences. The old tradition of the Stock Company was still strong in Glasgow, even in a generation which had never seen a stock company of resident actors. It was such a theatre Waring organised at remarkably short notice and introduced to Glasgow in the spring of 1909".

1

The aims of the Scottish Playgoers Company, as it was then known, clearly set down in its prospectus, lend support to Munro. These were :

- 1 To establish in Glasgow a Repertory Theatre which will afford playgoers and those interested in drama an opportunity of witnessing such plays as are rarely presented under the present Touring Company system.
- 2 To organise a Stock Company of first-class actors and actresses for the adequate representation of such plays.
- 3 To conduct the business of Theatrical Managers and play producers in Glasgow and other places, so as to stimulate a popular interest in the more cultured, important and permanent forms of dramatic art.

2

It is plain from these terms that Waring saw his principal task as the formation of a company with highly professional standards to perform plays of serious artistic intent. However, there was one other aim defined in the prospectus, one which did in fact receive considerable attention over the years from Waring, with the example of the Abbey Theatre before him and his Scottish colleagues.

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1 N. Munro The Brave Days Porpoise, Glasgow 1931 pp. 288-9  
2 The Repertory Theatre, A record and a criticism PP. Howe, Martin, Secker, London 1910, pp. 65-66

This fourth aim was :

- 4 To encourage the initiation and development of a purely Scottish Drama by providing a stage and an acting company which will be peculiarly adapted for the production of plays national in character, written by Scottish men and women of letters.

1

The financing of the Scottish Playgoers Company was a radical departure from the practices of the London West-End entertainments industry. The necessary capital was raised by subscriptions from the people of Glasgow, thus making the Scottish Repertory from the outset the "citizens' theatre" of Waring's dream, and the phrase was incorporated in every programme printed from 1909 until the closure in 1914.<sup>2</sup>

This direct involvement of the city's inhabitants at the grass-roots level nearly failed: £1000 had been agreed as the necessary minimum to establish the venture, and only twenty-four hours before the last acceptable date, £80 had still to be found. However, the £80 duly arrived, and a lease was taken on Howard and Wyndham's Royalty Theatre in Sauchiehall Street, where on Monday, 5th April, 1909, the curtain rose on the Repertory Company's first production, You Never Can Tell by George Bernard Shaw.

The play was well received, and the company congratulated by an enthusiastic public; but complete success was not immediate - nor indeed was it to come before Waring's health had been exhausted by the struggle. After seven weeks of production, the initial capital was exhausted; but the plays presented - nine altogether, three of them new, and including work by Shaw, Galsworthy and Bennett - had been so widely acclaimed that shareholders required little persuasion to double their stake. A further season in the Autumn justified their confidence with the first performance in English of Chekov's The Seagull - for which London was to wait a further four years.

By then, the fourth aim of the prospectus was already being faithfully attended to. In April 1909, Waring had staged Admiral Guinea, an

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1 P.P. Howe, The Repertory Theatre, a record and a criticism, Martin, Secker, London 1910, p. 66.

2 It was "... the first playhouse of its kind to be supported, not by an individual sponsor, but by public subscription..." Allardyce Nicoll, British Drama 1900-1930 p. 264.

undistinguished melodrama written over twenty years before by R. L. Stevenson and W. E. Henley, which must have contrasted sadly with the other plays in a season including An Enemy of the People, Strife, and the Voysey Inheritance. The autumn proved rather more fruitful for Scottish drama, however. George Hamlen, a chemist from Ayrshire, displayed a promising dramatic ability in his comedy Barbara Grows Up; and this was followed by Neil Munro's specially written Christmas entertainment, MacPherson, which presented humour, wholesome satire, and a well-constructed plot in a style so unmistakably Scottish as to earn it a cosmopolitan rebuke from The Literary Student for being "too local in character".<sup>1</sup> During the four years which followed, Scottish playwrights continued to receive favourable treatment from the Repertory Company, and if war had not broken out in 1914, it is more than possible that a dramatic revival would have occurred for Scotland as well as Ireland. George Hamlen proved his talent with a hard look at hypocrisy in his play, The Waldies; and his efforts were supported by promising work from Donald Colquhoun and J. A. Fergusson.

The kailyard element of Scottish sensibility also thrived under Waring's attentions in the plays of John Joy Bell, author of Wee McGreegor and Oh! Christina, which survived the World War, while the less escapist fell by the wayside.

The real achievement of the Repertory Company lay not in the establishment of a Scottish Drama, but in the presentation of a vast and impressive range of the best in international drama to audiences hitherto restricted to a diet of approved London "hits". As a result, the idea of a "citizens' theatre" for Scotland did not die with the outbreak of war in 1914: its spectre haunted the twenties and thirties, eventually to find full reincarnation in James Bridie's Glasgow Citizens' Theatre, established in 1943.

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1 The Literary Student No. 1 Dec. 1909 (Glasgow)

In February 1912 the Russian actress Lydia Yavoraka was engaged for a production of Gorki's Lower Depths; three months later a visit was arranged for the Abbey Theatre Company with a repertoire of Irish plays by Lady Gregory, Ervine, Yeats, Murray, and Synge. A translation of Bjornson's Witch appeared for the first time on a British stage in 1910, and a controversy was stirred in some newspapers over the private performance in 1913 of George Bernard Shaw's "censored" play, Mrs. Warren's Profession. The Glasgow Herald did not give way to the opportunity for sensationalism: their critic reported that the audience "were far from suffering moral damage, on the contrary, they were probably much the better for witnessing drama so frank, direct in statement, and so sound in teaching"<sup>1</sup>. This provides a fair reflection of the level of sophisticated interest in serious drama which Waring had instilled in the Glasgow public. Plays by Arnold Bennett, Harold Brighouse, John Galsworthy, and, of course, George Bernard Shaw were prominent and recurring features of the Royalty Theatre's repertoire.

Production standards themselves were of a high order, and many members of the Company were to become well-known in later years. Harold Chapin the playwright and W. Armstrong, who became director of the Liverpool Repertory Theatre, both served as Assistant Stage Managers under Waring. Harley Granville-Barker, already a celebrated figure, came first as an actor with Lillah McCarthy in Man and Superman, and then as artistic director, initially to produce Bjornson's Witch.

Despite artistic success, however, the theatre did not thrive as it might have. In the first year the company recorded a loss of over three thousand pounds, and though in each successive year losses were substantially and progressively reduced, no profit had been made by the end of 1913. Waring, worn out by the continual struggle to make ends meet, and already having been forced to rest for several

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1 Glasgow Herald, April 11, 1913 p. 8

months in the autumn of 1912, felt himself unequal to the task and resigned from the Repertory Company, to be succeeded by Lewis Casson. Ironically, Casson's first season, from January to April, 1914 showed a profit of £780. Although the expense of spirit on Waring's part for four arduous years can hardly be rejected out-of-hand, it would be equally unfair to Casson to stint his praise for fear of reducing his predecessor's stature. Waring had struggled hard and had brought the Repertory Company at last to the turning point in its finances: to Casson goes the credit of using this new, secure base to the fullest extent possible. His three months season averaged one new play every week, giving considerable attention to less well-established playwrights - to the extent that some of the older members of the Board of Directors felt that he was over-reaching himself, despite the financial success of his policy.

The Repertory Theatre ended what was to be its last season with a performance of Man and Superman on the 25th April 1914. At a shareholder's meeting in May, Colonel F.L. Morrison, the company's lawyer, confessed his pleasure that a profit had at last been obtained, but warned against the pursuit of a bolder artistic policy in the autumn season.<sup>1</sup> Before his advice could be put to the test, the First World War broke out. The uncertainty of the first few months of war affected the directors of the Repertory Company no less than other people: they decided to postpone the season until the way ahead could be seen more clearly. Howard and Wyndham found that the Royalty was more profitable when presenting music-hall and revue in answer to war-weary escapists, and by the Armistice the original Repertory Company had dispersed. No-one seems to have had the courage necessary to start again from scratch - five years of carnage, propaganda and despair had destroyed what sensibilities had been developed in pre-war days. The sense of disillusion is expressed by William Power in his reminiscences, when he writes bitterly : "By 1919 most of the people who would have supported a

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1 N. Munro The Brave Days Porpoise Press 1931 p.290

professional repertory theatre were dead or ruined. The profiteers who had succeeded them were interested only in 'leg-shows' ".<sup>1</sup> The £700 profit which had been put in the bank in 1914 to await more favourable circumstances was eventually transferred to promote a less ambitious venture supporting Scottish drama, and perhaps was used to best advantage there, under the wing of the St. Andrew's Society.

Neil Munro wrote of Waring "... he was within an ace (16 years previously) of securing permanently for Glasgow the sort of theatre it still protests that it yearns for. It was while it lasted, the more remarkable an achievement, in as much as Glasgow had no clear idea what it wanted till Alfred Waring, a total stranger, came to this city with a persuasive tongue and a passion for the Repertory Theatre".<sup>2</sup>

The end of the Scottish Repertory Company did not signal the death of Waring's dream, however. The idea of a national theatre for Scotland which he and his company had instilled did not fade completely, even during the worst years of the depression. The measure of the Scottish Repertory Company's importance to drama in Scotland is to be found in the name chosen for its ultimate successor: the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre.

George Hamlen, a chemist from Stevenston, had three plays produced by the Scottish Repertory Company, Barbara Grows Up, Colin in Fairyland - a pantomime - and The Waldies; the last of which, though not outstanding, is a serious attempt to come to grips with the uneasy conscience of Scotland's industrial middle class.

The first play, Barbara Grows Up, was staged in 1910 and though displaying a measure of the writer's talent, and his attraction towards social problems, it fails to overcome a distinct air of artifice. The play is a comedy of manners concerning a very young wife of a rather older husband, who quarrels impetuously with him over his dismissal of some factory workers. After rather farcical complications in which she, Barbara, changes her allegiance from one

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1 W. Power Should Auld Acquaintance, Harrap, 1937, p. 91

2 N. Munro The Brave Days Porpoise Press 1931, p. 288



unemployed man to the next - there are not enough jobs for all - a reconciliation is brought about by her husband's witty, wordly-wise sister.

The major characters are fairly well drawn, if recognisably stereotyped. Barbara herself is a satisfying picture of a naive young girl whose childish impulses remain as yet outwith her control, tending towards mercurial and irrational extremes and changes of opinion. Her youthful excess of idealism is particularly convincing, but unfortunately the answers which Hamlen provides for her indignant queries are not. The sister, Margaret, is instantly recognised as a not very original depiction of the charming and sophisticated older woman, but her part in the plot is marginal, and she exists really as a foil against which to set Barbara. Kenneth, Barbara's husband, is a strong-willed well-intentioned businessman, a rather weak attempt at the "reasonable" man perplexed by his wife's extremes of temper and the difficulty of finding justice for all in a competitive situation.

The working-class O'Briens are mere caricatures, who can be safely regarded as "Stage-Irish"; their drunkenness, pseudo-religious rhetoric and noisy disorderliness providing Barbara Grows Up with a rudiment of rustic comedy. Purdie is more interesting, in that he is a less familiar caricature, and a peculiarly Scottish one, a cynically calculating "nasty body" of the variety found in the industrialised South West. The cast is completed by Janet, the servant in the Morrison household. The same age as Barbara, she provides an effective comparison to her by her more hard-headed attitude, for the most part being a yardstick of domestic common sense against which her master and mistress may be measured. Her youth prevents an identification with Margaret, and her criticisms of Kenneth's selfishness are more telling for their lack of sympathy. It is through Janet that Barbara at last learns the necessity of tact and moderation when opposing interests confront.

Although the characters and each turn of the action up to Act III are acceptable, Barbara Grows Up comes to grief in the last act.

Hamlen employs as a catalyst for the domestic upheaval Barbara's reactions to redundancies at Kenneth's factory, business experiencing a depression at the time. First Purdie has come to her, pleading years of service to the firm and the fact that he is too old to find alternative employment: many younger men have been kept on at the Factory. Barbara takes up his cause, only to be confronted by the O'Brien's, who claim that Purdie's reinstatement has robbed them of a livelihood, and they have a large family to support. Barbara attempts to alleviate their distress with gifts. Having raised, albeit with a comic overtone, the spectre of very real social crisis, the author turns the last Act into a trite and self-righteous dismissal of the problem, showing that Purdie is in fact quite wealthy enough to live comfortably on his savings, and that the O'Brien's are drunken wastrels with jobs waiting for them in the "ould country".

This refusal to face the consequences his argument seems to be leading to, combined with the highly artificial "growing up" of Barbara – she gives a demonstration of womanly wiles which makes Kenneth, but only Kenneth, gasp with surprised helplessness – brings the play to a noticeably shallow climax.

The only truly successful element of Barbara Grows Up is the remarkable portrayal of childish hysteria in an adult, which the author captures in Barbara. This feeling persists to the very end of the play, despite the assertion that the heroine is beginning to find maturity, and to a large extent undercuts the conclusion. This evocation is further developed – to the point of nightmare – in Hamlen's The Waldies, a much more satisfying work.

Before The Waldies was produced, Hamlen wrote for the Repertory Company a pantomime, Colin in Fairyland, which they performed in December 1910. Colin in Fairyland makes an interesting comparison with Barrie's Peter Pan, which appeared five years earlier. Barrie fashioned his fantasy from the myths of contemporary childhood rather than the worn-out tales of traditional pantomime, and Hamlen attempted to produce a Scottish variant. As such it is not wholly successful, populated as it is with conventional elves and fairies – the Scottish element stems mainly from Colin's father, supposedly a reincarnation

of Thomas the Rhymer, and a parody of Scottish Puritanism in Part II scene 2. There is however a distinct flavour of satire about the play, which places it within Scottish tradition rather than English: in the persons of the Duke and Duchess of Brodick, the pretension and stupidity of the aristocracy are mocked; and the parody of Presbyterian Temperance at Lucky McGraw's Tavern was powerful enough to threaten the original production with a storm of indignant churchmen.

The final judgement of the pantomime must however be that despite such flickers of vitality and interest, in general, it lacks intensity and satisfies neither child nor adult, falling rather awkwardly between satire and fairy-play.

The Waldies received its first performance in the hands of the Stage Society at Haymarket in 1912. Much more successful artistically than Barbara Grows Up, it raises a serious question of morality which is fully and convincingly dealt with, though the "Ibsenite" style was a little dated and conventional even in Hamlen's time.

The Waldie family, conventional in their rigid adherence to respectability, are an effective symbol for contemporary society. At first, the faults displayed seem trivial, indeed laughable. Euphemia seems to express only a natural youthful glee when she deceives her father in order to attend a revivalist meeting of which he disapproves; and Mrs. Waldie's helpless desire for peace at any price in her lively household is sympathetically attractive. The faults become more sinister when they reveal ruthless self-interest and deny any unpleasant truth. Aleck, the son, threatened with the exposure of his gambling debts, takes advantage of Euphemia's new-found but superficial religious zeal at the prayer-meeting to filch some of the jewellery she donates. Ross the evangelist, not wishing to accept rich gifts from over-excited young women, insists on returning the gems and Aleck's plan goes awry. The Waldies, at first grateful to Ross, discover the discrepancy, and Ross is accused of a clever attempt to defraud. Hannah, who has previously displayed some concern for the truth, stumbles upon Aleck's guilt, and strives against vigorous opposition from her mother to make him confess and restore Ross's tarnished reputation. Unable to persuade him, Hannah de-

cides to tell Waldie before Aleck's unscrupulous creditor can. Waldie, shocked but determined to deal justly, is bitterly disillusioned about his family when his wife, Euphemia, and her fiance Leslie choose hypocritical concealment of the criminal and attempt to "reimburse" Ross for his inconvenience. Aleck eventually brings himself to confess: Hamlen stresses that the boy is in many ways a victim of circumstances. The others risk nothing but respectability, and thus seem much the worse. The affirmation of truth destroys the Waldies as a family, and the author withholds all but the vaguest hints of optimism from the ending. Hannah and Ross indicate the possibility of romance between them, and Waldie finds in Hannah a measure of solace. For the others, including Aleck, there is not much hope, and the disturbing image of Mrs. Waldie's vituperative self-regard lingers in the memory to shadow what consolation exists in Hannah and Ross.

Each character is developed with an ease which overcomes even the slightly high-flown virtues of Ross and Hannah, the notable successes being Waldie, Mrs. Waldie, and Euphemia. A slight degree of exaggeration is felt in each case, justified by the resultant effect of honest goodwill blinded and enmeshed by a web of deception and triviality. The first Act achieves quite happily the accurate evocation of a family squabble over the tea-table, and the falsity of Waldie's apparent strength is seen when after the initial silence – rather fearful – which greets his entrance, he proves malleable to Euphemia's expert manipulation. The first obvious crack appears in the ponderous edifice when Aleck abruptly and without a qualm demands money from his mother to pay his debts. The arrival of the creditor, Pritchard, though rather artificial so soon after Aleck's declaration, finally brings the characters into proper perspective: Hannah's apparent awkwardness is a concern for reality, Aleck and Euphemia are strangely lacking in conscience, and Mrs. Waldie is a weak-willed pragmatist. Pritchard's excellent manners – which remain even under open challenge from Hannah – foreshadow the later development of the play, when Hamlen draws attention to the "respectable" preference for face-saving lies.

Euphemia's discovery of religion soon proves to be a tool in her attempted flirtation with Ross, and her vitality nothing more than an insatiable, often petulant demand for material pleasure and other people's attention. Mrs. Waldie becomes hysterical in her re-criminations when she realises that Aleck's guilt is not to be "hushed up", and is employed by the author to overshadow the unhappy resolution of the play. Aleck and Waldie, although technically "saved" by Hannah, are yet embittered by the experience, and their future holds little promise. Thus are the scales weighted against hope by the author, whose position is that of making a last, desperate attempt to resurrect the fading religious ideals of his society, recognising as he does so that his attempt clearly comes too late.

Although set in Scotland, both The Waldies and Barbara Grows Up are quite clearly within the conventional modes of the west-end: naturalistic, middle-class, unsensational. Ironically, it is Colin in Fairyland which found successors through its very parochialism - in the renowned Scottish pantomimes of the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre, half a century later.

On May 16th 1910, The Repertory Company produced Jean by Donald Colquhoun. Although it was the author's first attempt at the stage, this short play shows considerable promise, unfortunately never to be developed further. The play centres around the unseen character of Jean, a servant girl in the farm of James Milroy, a sixty year-old farmer in the south west of Scotland; and the action concerns only two people: James and his son, Sandy. Both figures are convincingly drawn without any lapses into what lovers of the kailyaird call "pawkiness".

"Their outlook has been moulded by influences which have told on Scottish character right through the nation's history ... But his (James') regard for "gear" is born not out of complacency of possession, but of a recognition of its cost, and of what its lack in early life has entailed to him in labour and privation ... (Sandy) is about 27, slow of speech, dour, and suspicious of sentiment, with that boorishness of manner which so often marks a man who has not quite found himself, and half suspects that others know him better than he does"

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1 Introduction to Jean, D. Colquhoun, Gowans & Gray, Glasgow 1914.

Clearly Colquhoun is seriously concerned with the portrayal of working class country life and speech – the play confidently employs Scots dialect throughout – undistorted by the superficial sentimentality or comic buffoonery of Barrie's *Thrums* or Moffat's *Lintiehaugh*.<sup>1</sup>

James has kept his son toiling on their holding for many years without any prospect of substantial reward, with the long-term view of bequeathing him a soundly established farm and a modest fortune. Sandy, however, is chafing under the yoke, and unprepared to await his father's death. The play opens with James' return from town, and Sandy's ponderous, awkward announcement that he would like to emigrate to Canada. To this end he asks his father for a lump sum of money, a request which hardly pleases the old man.

Attempting to restrain Sandy's ambition, James outlines all the benefits which will accrue if he remains where he is for just a little longer. He has been warned by his doctor that his own health cannot be relied upon in the future. Becoming rather cautiously sentimental, the old man charges his son to take good care of Jean the servant-girl after his demise, adding as explanation the fatal fact that the girl was taken in by the family as a "fallen woman". Thus, unwittingly, James brings about the climax of the play, for Sandy had intended to take Jean to Canada as his wife. Goaded by the destruction of his faith and dreams, his rage bursts forth in a tide of anguished blind destruction. James, as his life's ambition crumbles to dust, his son departing in anger and Jean's happiness in ruins, has a heart-attack and dies unheeded by the roaring Sandy. Turning to his father, Sandy finds him dead; remorse sweeps over him and as the curtain falls, he vows to stifle his false pride for the sake of Jean's happiness.

From the point of James' collapse onwards, the play has a slightly hollow ring. The rising atmosphere of melodrama robs it of its earlier conviction and Sandy's repentance is too abrupt and

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1 Curiously, Allardyce Nicoll in British Drama 1900-1930 (1973) states that Jean is set in Lancashire.

artificially cramped to carry the weight of feeling required of it. The onset of James' heart-attack itself seems curiously stilted, and the emotions which provoke it not quite strong enough. The flatness of "I dinna ken whits wrang wi me. Tak' me ben the hoose. I'm queer. I'll gang and lie doon a wee" reflects the weakness which mars the end of Jean. An imbalance is thus created which inclines all the weight to the slow increase of tensions before the climax, resulting inescapably in a sense of unnecessary protraction.

On the whole, though, Jean contains sufficient promise to indicate Waring's faith in the possibility of a Scottish Drama. Colquhoun employs the Lanarkshire dialect with confidence, giving no concessions to Anglicised tastes, but refraining from a chauvinistic "Scottishness" of parochial obscurities.

The characters are well conceived, creditable personalities, neither heroically inflated nor comically reduced – James' display of the "traditional" Scottish tight-fistedness is sufficiently associated with his pride and his enduring struggle with the land to save it from low comedy. Finally dialogue is well handled to reveal subtlety of character and maintain dramatic tension. Especially of note is the abrupt demand for money which Sandy makes, really an attempt to assert himself which fails, before his father's strength of mind :

Sandy : Will ye gie me a stert – in Canada?  
James : Canada? dinna talk havers.  
Sandy : (irritably) It's no havers. I want tae stert for mase!!  
James : Sandy, it's no' like that I'll kin leeve long.  
Efter I'm awa' ye'll hiv the ferm.  
Sandy : Ye'll leeve lang enough – and I'm gettin' auld.  
James : (sadly) I dinna understaun' ye, Sandy.  
Sandy : Wull ye gie me the siller, that's a' I ask?  
James : Siller?  
Sandy : Ayr, siller to staint mein ma ain ferm. I wid pay ye back, Wull ye gimme it?  
James : (all his doggedness comes out in answer to his son's persistence, and his tone becomes peremptory.

He crosses to his old seat by the table, and faces his son, determined to crush this revolt at once, and finally)

Ye ask me a direct question. I'll gie ye a direct answer. I will not. I widna dream o' daein' a sic-like thing.

Sandy : An I'm to stay on here?

James : Aye

Sandy : And work like a servant?

James : No, Sandy, no' like a servant – like a son.

Sandy : Till ye dee?

James : Aye.

Sandy : (he realizes now that he is no match for his father, but the hopelessness of his position brings out a last word, full of bitterness. He rises slowly from his seat, and makes a few steps aimlessly, his eyes averted from his father) Faither, I wisht ye wis deid.

James : (looking up at him – quietly – after a pause) Eh, Sandy, Sandy, ye shouldna hiv said that.

Sandy : It's true.

James : I dinna doat but it's true, and I dinna say but whit ti's naitural, but ye shouldna hiv said it, Sandy, ye shouldna hiv said it.

Sandy : I canna help it – it's true

James : (quickly) And whit if it is true? Mony's the time I wisht ma faither wis deid, but I never hid the impidence tae tell him that tae his face. It's no' the thing. And forby, Sandy it's no' verra judeecious."

The movement from the initial confrontation to that naked statement – "I wisht ye wis deid" – is both profound in its observation and economic in its implication of concealed but irrepressible feeling.

Not a major play, Jean nevertheless provides a very early example of extremely competent writing, using Scottish dialect without strain and depicting life in the country in quite distinctly Scottish terms, underived from Irish sources.



## ANTHONY ROWLEY

Anthony Rowley – a pseudonym for Arthur Guthrie, a businessman turned art critic – was a less promising Scottish contributor to the Glasgow Repertory Theatre. His plays A Weaver's Shuttle (1910), and The Probationer (1911) are heavily-padded, imitative and trite; ponderously pursuing the mannerisms of the West-End and heavily dependent on Barrie-like sentimentality. Superficially set in Scotland, one deals with industrial strife, the other with hypocrisy and religion: both find complacent, clichéd solutions to the problems supposedly embodied in them; and in each, the use of Scottish dialect and even accent is restricted to subsidiary characters from the lower orders – who are, for the most part, comic.

In A Weaver's Shuttle, carpet manufacturer Cotterell almost brings disaster on his head by so antagonising his weavers that they are on the brink of strike-action. His own patented weaving shuttle is so unstable that it frequently damages carpets, for which the weavers are penalised by a system of fines designed to discourage shoddy workmanship in the factory. The crisis is complicated when Cotterell denigrates the social status of his son Clem's sweetheart, Jean Ronald, daughter of his foreman Hugh Ronald. Hugh overhears and walks out of the factory, insulted. Clem saves the day however, persuading the weavers back to work by suspending the fines and winning his father's consent to adopt Hugh Ronald's improved shuttle. A rather "mysterious" visitor, Lady Baxter, turns out to be the firm's financial saviour, and at her instigation, Hugh is made a partner. She then marries Cotterell. For its length – which is considerable – the play contains surprisingly little matter: its portrayal of industrial relations is risible – the delegation sent to negotiate with Cotterell comprises a left-wing radical who is of course also stupid, lazy, and maladroit, and a master-craftsman virtually crippled with the embarrassment of complaining to his employer; and the sunny conclusion is so readily achieved that one wonders retrospectively if there were any problems to be surmounted in the first place. Significantly, much is made of a strange sub-plot which suggests a tenuous love growing between Lady Baxter and

Cotterell's widower son Robert, whose little daughter Jean provides the play's urchin-appeal: it is to them that the curtain-lines are given in an ending particularly cloying in its irrelevant sugariness :

(Lady Baxter indicates for the first time her acceptance of Cotterell's suit but, in passing Robert, she gazes wistfully at him for a moment, while he returns the look. Hugh Ronald stands up and stretches himself, while Robert is lost in reflection for a second or two: he recovers at the sound of Hugh Ronald's voice)

Ronald :            We'll have plenty of pairtners goin' aboot noo, Mr. Robert; baith male and female. I've long possessed the best pairtner in the world; and there's your father - one canna be positeeve, but it looks as if he was hankerin' efter a guid ane; and there's Mr. Clement, who seems quite pleased wi' oor Mary. But who is to be your pairtner, Mr. Robert; who are you going to marry?

Robert :            That is a problem, Hughie: where is the little woman for me? Who am I going to marry?

(Jean who has come downstairs, slipping into the room in her white night-gown and soft bedroom slippers, overhears her father and rushes into his arms.)

Jean :                Me! daddy, me! Oh just marry me. I thought you were never, never coming, daddy; so I just came down for you. (Murmurs) Me, just me.

Rowley's next play, The Probationer, is if anything even less inspiring. The Reverend William Logan, a saintly Scottish cleric, is protected from the knowledge that his son John, directed towards the Ministry by his father's ambition but now struggling with agnosticism, has stolen expensive books from a local bookseller. Neil Dinning, one of Logan's closest friends, is suspected of the crime and loses his job in the bookshop before he discovers the true criminal. Heroically trying to suppress the truth for Logan's sake, Neil confesses falsely, but is almost immediately found out by the bookseller, who agrees to conceal the crime and restore Neil's position. Young John, contrite, decides to go to the South Seas

to trade with the natives and perhaps become a missionary for his father's sake, a self-effacing but surely unlikely course for an agnostic. The tale is quite baldly contrived, not even recreating its clichés satisfactorily.

"To anyone acquainted with the history of the Scottish Stage the most important feature of the Glasgow Repertory Spring Season of 1914 with the production of Campbell of Kilmohr. This little play, which does for Scottish History what Lady Gregory's work has done for Irish History, differs as widely from the rhetorical tragedy of Douglas as it does from the pastoralism of The Gentle Shepherd. (Even) today the Scottish Stage depends mainly on the work of English playwrights and on the visits of English touring companies. But the recent successes of the Repertory Company points to the possibility of the permanent establishment of a Scottish Repertory Theatre; and in Campbell of Kilmohr we have a new and significant type of Scottish drama."<sup>1</sup>

Thus writes the Glasgow Herald critic in the introduction to the printed edition of J. A. Ferguson's play, Campbell of Kilmohr, the most notable Scottish work produced by Alfred Waring, and one which influenced the development of Scotland's greatest dramatist of the century, James Bridie.

Campbell of Kilmohr finds its setting in the Highlands just after the "Forty-Five; predictably enough perhaps it deals with the crushing of the Jacobite Gaels and has as its background the pursuit of the defeated Prince Charles. The major conflict of the play is one as dear to the Scottish writer as is the setting: the romantic, almost fanatical imagination of the Highlander opposed to the pragmatic materialism of the Lowland Scot. The action is extremely simple. A Highland family smuggling food to the fleeing Prince are caught in the act by government troops under the direction of Campbell of Kilmohr, a lawyer enforcing the "Pacification" of the Highlands. He attempts by threat and persuasion to discover the Pretender. When all else fails, he offers the young Morag her

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1 Introduction to Campbell of Kilmohr, Gowans and Gray, London and Glasgow, 1915

sweetheart's life in exchange for the information. She tells him all she knows, and Campbell, in triumph, rushes to take his quarry, allowing his men to kill Dugald, Morag's lover, out of hand. The play closes with the girl's agony and old Mary Stewart's poetic appeal to posterity to enshrine the name of the murdered man. Ironically Campbell is on a fool's errand, for Morag's information though given in good faith, has been false. Dugald had misled her in case the redcoats questioned her.

The central conflict is a microcosm of Scotland's two cultures: the few words and intense emotions of the Gael, opposed to the subtle legalism and worldly pragmatism of his Lowland relations whose birthright was long since sold for more marketable currency. Ferguson is careful not to paint too rigid a picture in black and white: his respect for the Highlanders does not result in overt romance – the full tragedy of the little play lies in the utter hopelessness which underlies Mary Stewart's final invocation, the knowledge that History will obscure this single murder within a day, almost forget the entire bloody episode within a century. Campbell himself is strangely compelling, a clever and ruthless man pitting his knowledge of worldly weaknesses against the alien, mystical feelings and habits of his opponents. The hollow at the centre of his own life is apparent in the disregard in which he holds others. The cruel jest he makes of Dugald's execution – he promises to save the young man from hanging, then has him shot – is peculiarly the spite of the hopeless. Caught in the tangle of conflicts is the English soldier, Sandeman, trapped by his Scottish ally into deeds of vengeance which stem from Campbell's spiritual jealousy rather than from political expediency.

The play as a whole is a superbly understated design for the final tragedy, achieving with remarkable economy an ironic conclusion, both complex and emotionally profound. There is an artificiality about Campbell's verbal virtuosity which is paralleled by the heightened intensity of the Highlanders' simpler speech, subtly underlining the dehumanised personality of the "civilised" man; and the moment when the long-overlooked Morag offers her desperate bargain to the Edinburgh lawyer is perfectly timed,

surprising yet inevitable. Ferguson exploits to the full the contrast between physical reality, human aspiration, and the hopeless, defiant gesture which paradoxically reconciles defeat and victory, in a manner which calls to mind the plays of Synge. Physically, the tragedy of *Campbell of Kilmohr* lies in the gratuitous murder of Dugald and his family's sorrow. Spiritually, however, it is in the false triumph of Campbell's intense intellect, and in Mary Stewart's final speech denying the sorrow of her son's murder :

"Och! be quiet now, I would be listening till the last sound of it passes into the great hills and over all the wide world... It is fitting for you to be crying, a child that cannot understand, but water shall never wet eye of mine for Dugald Stewart. Last night I was but the mother of a lad that herded sheep on the Athole hills: this morn it is I that am the mother of a man who is among the great ones of the earth. All over the land they will be telling of Dugald Stewart. Mothers will teach their children to be men by him. High will his name be with the teller of fine tales... The great men came, they came in their pride, terrible like the storm they were, and cunning with words of guile were they. Death was with them ... He was but a young lad, with great length of days before him, and the grandeur of the world. But he put it all from him. "Speak," said they, "speak, and life and great riches will be for yourself." But he said no word at all! Loud was the swelling of their wrath! Let the heart of you rejoice, Morag Cameron, for the snow is red with his blood. There are things greater than death. Let them that are children shed the tears ...  
Let us go and lift him into the house, and not be leaving him lie out there alone."<sup>1</sup>

Campbell of Kilmohr is undoubtedly the high point of Scottish dramatic achievement under Waring's influence. Colquhoun's Jean was a work which boded well for the future, but was not in itself outstanding; Hamlen was a competent writer, but lacked originality, following the milieu of the "problem-play" which developed in the wake of Ibsen. Ferguson's play alone can be compared favourably with those of the contemporary Irish dramatists, without being merely imitative. As the first effective dramatic portrayal of a distinctly Scottish cultural inheritance, Campbell of Kilmohr is the first milestone on the stony road towards a wholly Scottish Drama.

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1 Campbell of Kilmohr, Gowans and Gray, London, Glasgow 1915

Of the other Scottish dramatists whose work was produced at the Repertory Theatre, there is little to be said at this stage. John Joy Bell and Neil Munro each produced adaptations of their novels and prose sketches, very much in the "kailyard" tradition and for the most part extremely superficial and devoid even of theatricality. Bell dramatized Oh! Christina, Providing for Marjorie and Wee MacGreegor; Wee MacGreegor later being adapted as a children's play and published by Gowans and Gray. Even in this form it evinces no dramatic talent. Munro's contribution was even smaller. Apart from the occasional curtain-raiser, revivals of the creaking Stevenson-Henley melodramas, and productions of the internationally established Barrie, only one other Scottish play was performed. This was Marigold, by Charles Garvice, a curious and unexciting mixture of genteel Edinburgh middle-class romance and stereotyped kailyard pseudo-satire. Marigold, the heroine, is the child of a retired colonel, and a Frenchwoman who deserted the family many years before the play opens. With the visit of Queen Victoria to the Scottish capital as background, Marigold first escapes an arranged marriage with the narrow-minded, hypocritical Earl of Kettinfoot; then falls in love with the highly personable Lieutenant Archie Forsyth; and finally achieves the reconciliation of her parents - for this, it is necessary that her mother turns up under an assumed name, now a celebrated actress. The characters are utterly hollow, at best reaching the level of caricature, often failing even that. Marigold inexplicably has the speech of a dairy-maid and the manners of an utterly naive middle-class schoolgirl. What humour exists is strained to breaking-point, and the play as a whole may fairly be judged by considering that one of the comic "highlights", derived from Hood's Book of Heroines is the jingle about Cleopatra :

"Alas she died, historians relate,  
From having found a misplaced aspirate"

THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL PLAYERS

Although the Glasgow Repertory Theatre failed to survive its struggle to win a large, regular audience and financial security, its effect on Glasgow – and indeed, Scotland – was considerable. Its brief flowering created a taste for serious drama freed from the restrictions of the London companies who toured with West-end successes; it suggested, tentatively perhaps, that a peculiarly Scottish dramatic movement was worthy of consideration: and it implanted in many minds the enduring notion of a "citizens' theatre", closely identified with the local community.

The number of Scottish playwrights whose work was performed at the Repertory was small and generally of little lasting merit, yet they provided a spark which kindled many imaginations. The Scottish National History Exhibition in 1911 featured several plays and pageants mostly in a rather inflated romantic style, and in 1913 the authors of these works – academics and respected men of letters – joined with the St. Andrew Society of Glasgow to form a symposium on the question of Scottish drama and how it could be fostered. A. P. Wilson, a Dumfries man then working as the manager of the celebrated Abbey Theatre in Dublin, was invited to join them, and on the advice of a leading Scottish amateur actor, Ralph Purnell, the St. Andrew Society was persuaded to found a "School of National Drama" closely modelled on the Irish example.<sup>1</sup> A committee was appointed who studied between fifty and sixty plays with a view to production, when War broke out and the plans had to be shelved.

The project was revived in 1920, and with Wilson as producer a company of amateurs – who were in fact paid for most performances – formed while suitable material was sought. Adopting the title of the Scottish National Players, this company began what was to be one of the most important dramatic careers in Scotland with a triple bill of new Scottish one-act plays in January, 1921: Chatelard, by

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1 Glasgow Herald, January 17, 1922

C. S. Black; Cute McCheyne, by A.P. Wilson; and Glenforsa by John Brandane and A. W. Yuill. None of these was particularly memorable, but it is indicative of the intention of the Players that each was couched in a different mode of language: "straight" English, Ayrshire dialect and a rather refined form of West Highland speech, respectively.<sup>1</sup> Their reception was encouraging, and in the following April, a similar programme of plays was presented - Harold Chapin's The Philosopher of Butterbiggins, first performed at the Glasgow Repertory Theatre, The Mother, by George Blake, and The Baillie's Nominee, by David Martin. More new plays were performed in the Autumn, and as the ambitions of the company expanded, their connection with the St. Andrew Society, which could not undertake the financial responsibility of a sustained theatrical "campaign" was terminated. The shareholders of the defunct Glasgow Repertory Company were invited to transfer their holdings to the Scottish National Players, which raised over £400, and after appeals to various other sources the new company began its independent existence with a total capital of almost £700. Following the road adopted by the Irish Players, a Scottish National Theatre Society was formed at the beginning of 1922, its objects being :

- (a) to develop Scottish National Drama through the productions by the S.N.P. of plays of Scottish Life and Character.
- (b) to encourage in Scotland a public taste for good drama of any type. - and
- (c) to found a Scottish National Theatre. 2

The last aim was felt to be especially important, and a fund was established specifically for the endowment of such a theatre in Glasgow. The second aim was never seriously pursued.

The Scottish National Theatre Society in this form controlled the company's finances until 1928, and these were to be the "golden" years of the S.N.P. , though it was 1950 before the movement

1 The Scottish National Theatre Venture, Bone & Hulley, Glasgow 1953.

2 Glasgow Herald Jan. 17. 1922



finally vanished. They quickly established a reputation as actors of considerable talent, receiving much praise from John Masefield and John Drinkwater for their handling of verse-drama;<sup>1</sup> and in October 1922 performed A Valuable Rival by N.F. Grant, and Cute McCheyne, before the King and Queen at Balmoral Castle. Several of the company became professionals – Elliot Mason, Morland Graham and James Woodburn were to discover fame in London and America. Their producers also had ability and included, besides A.P. Wilson, another pioneer of the Abbey, W.G. Fay; F.D. Clewlow, a future principal drama director in Australian Radio; Moultrie Kelsall, later one of Scotland's best known actors; and most illustrious of all, Tyrone Guthrie. The plays they produced in this period, although generally of a disappointingly low key, were not uniformly so. After finding their feet in the initial years with one-acters either broadly comic or romantically adventuresome, and George Blake's dark, cumbersome character-studies, they discovered a slow but regular supply of much more promising material, each better than the last, so that the S.N.P. seemed to be advancing steadily up a ladder at the top of which would be found the first masterpiece of the expected dramatic renaissance. In 1923 The Glen is Mine and Gruach provided the first taste of artistic success, followed by The Treasure Ship in 1924, James the First of Scotland in 1925, Soutarness Water and Count Albany in 1926, and in 1928, The Coasts of India. The identity of almost all the plays performed, at least until the early thirties, was very distinctly Scottish with respect to setting and character, and most of the dramatists employed Scots dialect with considerable facility. Comedies were presented which did not rely on the self-destroying reductive idiom of the kailyard; dark and ominous character-studies spurned the misty, tartan romanticism of Scotland or neo-Ossianism for a harder naturalism; dramatic verse was discovered in the plays of

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1 The Scottish National Theatre Venture, Bone & Hulley, Glasgow 1953, p. 35

of Gordon Bottomley and Robert Bain; and in Count Albany Bonnie Prince Charlie, Scottish historical chauvinism's romantic archetype, was subjected to the exposing wind of bitter irony.

Regular tours in the country districts were initiated, with mixed results. Playing in any hall where a theatre could be improvised, the Players with considerable dedication subjected themselves to the rigours of audiences less sophisticated and a good deal less partisan than their regular and uncritically enthusiastic Glasgow support. In this venture, they struggled to overcome a deeply rooted desire to disbelieve – summed up in the overheard remark, "If they are as guid as the papers wad make oot, d'ye think they'd waste their time coming to Locherbie?"<sup>1</sup>

"In towns with over 2000 inhabitants, the man in the street stayed away in large quantities" ... (elsewhere) ... "the farm servants rolled up and in some places literally fought to get in."<sup>2</sup>

In Troon, with a population of 9474, only 136 people came to see the performance. In Gatehouse, with a population of only 528, 323 people jammed themselves into a 250-seat hall.<sup>3</sup> From these figures it is plain that in at least some areas, there was a considerable demand for drama, and there can be little doubt that the work of the S.N.P. on their tours did much to encourage the great expansion of amateur drama throughout Scotland between the two world wars. To this effort must be added occasional radio broadcasts, the first coming in 1924.

Nevertheless, the Scottish National Players were still lacking a permanent theatre of their own, and as the years passed the necessity of a secure base became increasingly apparent.

"The Abbey was enabled to establish itself first in Dublin as an 'artistic' theatre appealing only to quite a limited group. Popular success came much later. The early stages were possible because there was a building of the right type and size, which enabled the company to evolve a distinctive style of acting and production, and to play to full houses, while yet drawing on quite a limited section of the public."<sup>4</sup>

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1 The Scottish Player, 14th November 1923.

2 The Scottish Player, 14th November 1923

3 The Scottish Player, 14th November 1923

4 The Scottish National Theatre Venture p. 15 Bone & Mulley, Glasgow 1953

Because of the limited amount of capital available – it should be remembered that the S.N.P. operated during a major economic depression – the strategy adopted had been that the players should through their productions, earn enough cash to build a theatre. This they never succeeded in doing, and in fact barely managed to remain solvent. Some, including Bridie and Brandane, felt that the company should become professional, but few were prepared to take such a risky step. In 1928 therefore, a bolder step was taken by the creation of a joint-stock company with a desired capital of £10,000. In fact, only half of this sum was raised but this was sufficient for the renting of rehearsal rooms and workshops, and the hiring of staff including a producer, assistants, typists and a stage-carpenter. The Players had never been in any way radical in the past – indeed the conservatism of their board had driven Guthrie and several playwrights to distraction – but they tended to be directly involved in the productions. The board of the new company was, artistically at least, ominous in its established and rather distant opulence. The Duke of Montrose was its honorary president; its office-bearers, Sir James Barrie – a phenomenally successful West-End playwright whose contribution to the national dramatic movement was nil – Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson, Neil Munro the novelist, and John Buchan, well established as a novelist and politician. The rest of the board comprised of a retired colonel turned timber-merchant, a managing director, a chartered secretary, a professor of medicine (Bridie), the Northern area director of the B.B.C., and an author, J.L. Waugh. More business-like in their attitude, the majority of them were more prepared than the members of the Scottish National Theatre Society to recognise defeat.

At first, victory seemed imminent. Though fewer programmes were presented in later years, between 1931 and 1932, the search for a permanent theatre was twice almost concluded. When a wealthy citizen of Glasgow expressed considerable interest in the scheme, plans were drawn up – rather too ambitiously, it would appear – for a building to accommodate 1000 people: unfortunately the only available site was bought for the Glasgow and West of Scotland Commercial College. A similar fate befell a project to adapt a

disused Church building, which was lost to the local orthopaedic clinic. The Players were thus obliged to continue using theatres quite unsuited to their needs; large commercial establishments which they could never hope to fill or Y.M.C.A. premises "with hopelessly ill-equipped stage, where . . . (the S.N.P.) were just one more in a series of amateur performances"<sup>1</sup>. By 1934, most of the capital was exhausted despite the tactic of financing the rest of the year's work by extending the annual Christmas run of a "safe" favourite - normally a Barrie. In the face of vigorous opposition from the Players, the board of directors put the company into liquidation.

Refusing to abandon their aspirations, the Players elected from their number a small executive body and continued with production, covering their costs and even making profits,<sup>2</sup> until the outbreak of war dispersed them. In this period the type of play presented by the S.N.P. underwent a noticeable alteration: there were now far fewer new Scottish one-acters - indeed, there were far fewer new plays of any description - and much more stress was placed on established successes. The dramatists whose names recur in this period are Hal D. Stewart, James Bridie, and James Barrie, of whom only Stewart made any real attempt to continue the "Scottish Life and Character" strain, and then only occasionally. Between 1935 and 1940, out of 26 plays performed by the S.N.P., only five were new works. In the previous five years there had been three times that number of first performances. The remaining 21 reflected the tastes of the better English Repertory Companies at second hand - even Bridie's plays had become established elsewhere. The initiative in the Scottish Dramatic movement had clearly passed into other hands, to the Scottish Community Drama Association, where many dramatists who began with the S.N.P. found a large market for their works, to the Scottish Region of the B.B.C., and to the Curtain Theatre, opened in Glasgow in 1933.

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1 The Scottish National Theatre Venture, p. 15 Bone & Hulley, Glw 1953

2 Hal D. Stewart, letter to Scottish Theatre, October 1969, "when I left them at the end of 1937 they were not only paying their way but had an accumulated nest egg of about £800.."

Moultrie Kelsall attempted after the war to revive interest in the company and its aims, and secured a new play by a rising Scots playwright, The Walls of Jericho by Robert Kemp, which was toured round Scotland for thirty performances in 1948. No further productions were mounted. In the midst of the war which had effectively destroyed the Scottish National Players, two new companies of exceptional vigour had been born, the left-wing amateur Unity Theatre, and the professional Glasgow Citizens' Theatre. The S.N.P. could compete neither with the grass-roots radicalism of the one, nor with the polished and exuberant Scottish-ness of the other, and by 1948, two more Repertory Theatres in Scotland were devoting attention to Scottish Drama. In 1950 hopes of further production were abandoned and the company was formally wound up.

The significance of the Scottish National Players in the Scottish dramatic movement is a vital one. They were the first theatrical company to regard themselves as having a peculiarly nationalist mission which would affect all Scotland – the Glasgow Repertory Theatre had been much more local in its conception.

Tours throughout Scotland, in both town and country, were initiated from the outset of the S.N.P.'s career, and continued until the very end. There was much co-operation with Scottish Region of the B.B.C. in broadcasting Scottish plays, using S.N.P. actors and frequently, adaptations of plays from the S.N.P. repertoire. It was as a Scottish rather than as a Glaswegian company that they visited London, and played before the King and Queen at Balmoral. The policy of plays pursued over their twenty-year span of activity was quite blatantly nationalist – their secondary aim, "to encourage in Scotland a public taste for good drama of any type", received but scant attention: whereas *Scottish Life and Character*, drawn from an extremely wide range of cultures and influences from croft to city, were if anything over-exposed on S.N.P. stages.

The necessary prerequisite of dramatic renaissance was the creation of a first-rate acting company, and there can be little doubt that in this the Scottish National Players were strikingly successful.

"Our main achievement, as I see it, was that we provided a valuable training ground for talent: the best in Scotland, and one of the best in Britain; and more important, that we were one of the links in the chain that will ultimately result in some form of indigenous drama in Scotland"

This is Tyrone Guthrie's assessment of the work of the Scottish National Players; it is significant that in the 1950's when the above was written, he still looks to the future for Scottish plays worthy of international recognition. James Bridie was rather more favourably disposed towards the S.N.P.'s playwrights, though his praise is at best cautious:

"The S.N.P. achieved a great deal. On the acting side it proved that there is almost an unlimited supply of acting ability in Scotland if the actors are properly directed and given something to act. More surprisingly, it unearthed a remarkable number of competent dramatists . . . . for a brief period, it looked as if we were going to have a school of dramatists. There was a freshness and vitality there, and little of the cloying sentimentality that hitherto made Scots plays like treacle baths. . . "

1

In truth there was to be no great "school of dramatists". The Irish experience was not repeated in Scotland, for though several plays were written and produced which were more than merely competent, few were sufficiently durable to be of any lasting importance, and none achieved international stature. This is not to say that such work had no value; but its limitations were severe and must be recognised.

The deliberately national bias in choice of plays hovered rather dangerously on overt, uncritical nationalism, most especially in the early years of the S.N.P. between 1921 and 1930. "A demand has been created for Scottish plays in the vernacular, which in turn is creating its own supply" wrote one observer in 1930 :

"At the moment the younger dramatists have been writing more with the object of satisfying that demand than to express any original views. The result is that Scottish Drama, a true and national expression of Scottish Life has yet to be written",

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1 J. Bridie, Dramaturgy In Scotland, 1949 (printed in Proceedings of the Royal Philosophical Society of Glasgow Vol. 74 pt. 1. (LXXIV)

2 D. Sutherland - Scottish Stage, Dec. 1930 p. 93

and Tyrone Guthrie was to complain :

"Some of our Board considered it their duty to press for plays by Scottish authors, if possible in the vernacular; and advocated the presentation of even raw and amateurish scripts provided that their authors were Scots. "

1

It was presumably this motive which moved the S.N.P. to produce J. J. Bell's agonisingly unintelligent Exit Mrs. McLeerie no fewer than 26 times - the first performance being in 1928, thereby permitting no excuse in inexperienced enthusiasm. This nationalist attitude was combined with a certain conservatism of taste which inevitably shied away from extremes and eccentricities of experience or expression, indicating that the much-hailed lessons of the Abbey Theatre had been but poorly learned. As a result, the two playwrights whose influence was most strongly felt around the S.N.P. were, up to 1928, Brandane, and thereafter Bridie; one of whom portrayed a romantic city-dweller's view of the Highlands, while the other - at least with regard to the S.N.P. - rarely failed to escape the superficiality of his satirical whimsy. At least one playwright was driven by the S.N.P. selection board to a state of desperation. In an article for 'The Scottish Stage' in 1933, Murray McLymont, author of the successful play The Mannoeh Family criticised them vehemently :

"If the Scottish National Theatre Society demand that Scots dramatists shall pretend that Scots people and things are other than they are, shall ignore existing conditions and perpetuate the hoary tradition of glens and pipers, of kail and kitchens, of mulches and tappit hens, then I, for one, am never likely to be of much use to them . . . Damn tradition! Damn our sentimental habit which stands in the way of truth and turns an artist into a romantic pervert . . . "

2

It would be unfair to say that the S.N.P. never escaped from conservatism: but it is true that the overall impression of their work is of romantic retrospection and kitchen-comedy.

Lack of a permanent theatre may have contributed to this, with the resulting need for a good box-office. The rapid expansion of the Scottish Community Drama Association which followed in the wake

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1 The Scottish National Theatre Venture, p. 16 Bone & Hulley,

2 M. McLymont, The Scottish Stage, May 1933, p. 69

of the S.N.P. certainly took the 'box-office' view, drawing playwrights like Corrie towards the perennially popular kitchen-comedy rather than more progressive directions. Ultimately, however, the explanation rests within the S.N.P. itself, and its board, "a model of *douce* and dignified discretion".<sup>1</sup> Having created an acting company of considerable merit, they lacked the ruthlessness to risk the enthusiastic welcome received in 1921, for the determined pursuit of a high standard of play. The history of the Scottish National Players is one of many beginnings, and no conclusions. The amateur actors turned professional and sought their fortune elsewhere. The producers did likewise. Without their example, it is difficult to see how the Scottish Community Drama Association, the Glasgow Citizen's Theatre or indeed, Scottish Region of the B. B. C. could have developed as they did. Tyrone Guthrie described them as a link in a chain which would produce eventually an indigenous Scottish drama. The S.N.P. were more than that. They took the first conscious step along the road towards a committed national drama, which for good or ill is the most important feature of dramatic development in Scotland in the twentieth century.

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1 The Scottish National Theatre Venture Bone & Hulley, p.16



## GEORGE BLAKE

In the first two years of their existence, the Scottish National Players produced three plays by George Blake, a Scottish novelist popular with his contemporaries, especially for his portrayals of the ship-building industry on the river Clyde. These plays, though hardly outstanding, provide an interesting indication of the main directions adopted, and their consequent limitations, in this first concerted attempt to establish a consciously national dramatic tradition.

The three plays performed by the S.N.P. are The Mother, Fledglings, and Clyde-Built. The first is a tragedy of the Highlands and its crofters, the second a more light-hearted confrontation of the Highlands and the industrial Lowlands, the last a dark picture of ruthless self-seeking in the industrial heart of Scotland. Three different aspects of Scotland are thus depicted which became the staple diet of the developing Scottish drama: the Highlands as romantic or tragic; the contemporary Highlander as a wise, cheerful and successful opponent of modern superficiality and inhumanity, concealing his wisdom under a cloak of simplicity; and the Scottish industrial world of the lowlands. On occasion these conventions gave rise to works of perceptiveness and skill: more often they limited severely the depth of feeling which alone creates drama rather than play-acting.

The action of The Mother (1921) takes place in the kitchen of a Hebridean croft in Ardlamey. Blake successfully evokes an atmosphere of timeless continuity by the close integration of three generations in the Gillespie family, Calum, the grandfather, Morag his daughter-in-law, and Alistair her son; and by the repetitive phrases of Old Calum, endlessly intoning the watchword of their way of life, "Aye a Gillespie in Ardlamey". The family display great gentleness and understanding towards each other, and Calum and Morag carefully respect Alistair's soaring spirits, doubts and shyness as he goes to propose to his sweetheart. The harmony is ended by the arrival of the laird's factor, John Catto, significantly a lowlander who presumably fails to appreciate the beauties of the

Gillespies' tranquil existence. Catto by contrast is overbearing, vindictive and deceitful, toying with Morag's guilt-stricken conscience with hints and allusions to her shaming, long past adultery with him, while her husband was still alive. Having played cat and mouse with her to his gratification, he suddenly and with brutal directness informs her that the whole family are to be evicted to make way for the laird's "improvements". Not even the knowledge that Alistair is his bastard son touches him to avert this catastrophe; and he is impervious to Morag's threat of public exposure of his misdeeds, confident in the knowledge that what to him would be a minor embarrassment would to her be a killing shame, blighting not only her own name on the island, but stigmatizing that of her son, as well. Catto leaves her to break the news of eviction to Calum and Alistair but she cannot bring herself to tell the old man. Instead, she waits until the laird visits the croft the following afternoon, and tries to explain to him in person what eviction means to a highland crofter family. He is embarrassed by the direct confrontation with a victim of his economy, but nevertheless determined in his course of action. Morag breaks down, the laird leaves; Catto lingers on, making light of the woman's anguish. Alistair meantime, has returned home, spurned as a bastard by his sweetheart, for Catto has betrayed Morag's secret. He overhears Catto and Morag as his mother attempts to make the factor feel some responsibility as the young man's father, rushes in enraged to assault him, and in his passion kills him. The Gillespie family is now broken: Alistair is forced to seek refuge overseas, leaving Morag no hope of seeing him again, and the play ends ironically with Old Calum, unaware of the murder, mumbling "Aye a Gillespie in Ardlamey".

The atmosphere of The Mother is powerfully grim and its portrayal of life closely identified with place and custom is successful: but the effectiveness of its simple plot and painful conclusion is hampered by somewhat wooden dialogue which robs Morag and Catto, the principal figures, of conviction as living people; and the theatrical effects which Blake attempts are clumsy - Calum's catchphrase is repeated to the point of distraction.

Blake does display a tentative sensitivity to Scottish speech rhythms, however; and makes an effective contrast between the fluid locutions of the West Highlands and the Lowland Scots dialect of Catto. Clearly some debt is owed by Blake to J. A. Ferguson, whose Campbell of Kilmohr had been presented by the Glasgow Repertory Theatre in 1914, and through him to the Irish peasant plays of the Abbey Theatre; but there is sufficient native feeling in The Mother for it to escape mere imitation.

In Fledgelings (1922) Blake turns to comedy, though the setting is similar, this time an inn on a west coast island.

"Mr. Blake perhaps treats the Highlander as rather too credulous; it is doubtful if even in the "Islands" the people are quite so unsophisticated as the little circle who make the comedy in this Hebridean inn.

The village eagerly anticipates the return on a visit of Duncan Galbraith, who left it years before with no very good reputation. But Duncan is said to have prospered exceedingly in Glasgow, and is credited with having made his fortune. On the contrary, he returns in the rakish garb of the Glasgow 'Keelie', with the accent, the manners, and the ethics of that interesting tribe. He is in reality penniless, a bookmaker's tout, but with fluent and lying tongue he easily imposes on the villagers, and paints Glasgow so alluringly as a city of golden pavements that he persuades nearly all the little community to abandon their simple life and seek easy fortune in the city... he is aided in his evil plot by a wanton, Cissy, a not very convincing type of rural adventuress schooled in city ways. She for a time estranges Colin, an honest fisherman, from his betrothed, Ketron, and makes futile efforts to gain possession of nineteen pounds with which Colin contemplates entering upon the conquest of Glasgow. Colin is not quite so simple as that, and his Highland shrewdness is proof against her wiles. Ultimately Duncan stoops to theft and extracts the money from Colin's trunk. But Old Anna, the mother of Colin, who of all the characters is the truest type and who throughout reveals Celtic caution and penetration, is witness to the theft and ultimately surrenders (one wonders why) £10 to Duncan, who, along with his fair accomplice, makes mean exit... The lovers are reconciled, and the Hebridean adventurers, persuaded of their folly, decide to continue the placid island life. The play is cleverly constructed, admirable in dialogue, and clever in some of its characterisation, but the theme is rather thin to carry through three acts. . . . "

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1 Glasgow Herald, Jan. 25, 1922.

Clyde-Built (1922), is a stilted, sub-Ibsen "problem" play about a middle-class family, the Crocketts, who for several generations have been involved in Clydeside ship-building. Every few lines the phrase "Clyde-Built" is employed with a thrill of pride, and Blake's brand of Clydeside chauvinism is clarified by ritual invocations about the cheap unreliability of foreign made ships, post-war jerry-building and Yankee trickery. Sir William Merson, financier and ship-builder from England and the heavy villain of the piece, is even rather Jewish in his appearance: Blake has no scruples about appealing to prejudice - any prejudice - in directing his audience's sympathies.

The Crocketts have for years built life-boats of great reliability for the ships which sail from the Clyde. Matthew Crockett, believing the business to be secure, has retired, and his son Tom has through instability and lack of "character" allowed financial disaster to overtake the firm. Matthew has two middle-aged daughters, Helen, a spinster, socially pretentious but also cynically ruthless; and Mary, whose husband a naval officer, died at sea. Mary's daughter Jean, the major focus of the play, is in love with a young seaman, Harry Douglas; though Mary opposes the match. Tom Crockett attempts to repair the fortunes of the family business by arranging a marriage between Jean and Stanley Merson, whose father may be persuaded to arrange a financial takeover. Young Harry Douglas goes off on his first command, a ship built by a Merson yard, and in his absence the Crocketts are faced with bankruptcy. The whole family, except the ageing Mrs. Crockett, prepare to "sell" Jean to Stanley Merson. News from abroad reports Harry Douglas and his ship as missing, presumed lost, and Jean, pressurized by the cynicism and self-interest of her family, numbly consents to be Stanley's wife. The great Sir William Merson arrives to seal the bargain by merging the Crockett's business with his own, when Harry Douglas returns. The playwright now asks the audience to believe that Harry's ship literally fell apart the first time it encountered rough weather, but that the crew were saved by the famed Crockett lifeboats. Old Matthew Crockett tears up the merger agreement, Jean is saved, and Merson has to face a court of enquiry - though Blake suggests

that his lawyers may yet get him off the hook. The lovers go off in triumph, and Matthew is left alone in darkness, facing a foreboding future but filled with his rediscovered self-respect and pride.

Given that Blake's portrayal of the post-war economic crisis which crippled the shipbuilding and heavy engineering industries of Clydeside is simplistic and naive in the extreme, the relationships in the play are well-conceived, if handled in rudimentary fashion. As in The Mother, dialogue is unsatisfactorily wooden. Blake is at his best in Clyde-Built in his portrayal of the disappointment of Matthew Crockett, the proud but honest self-made man, in the failure of his expectations in his son. The early enthusiasm for industrial and financial achievement gives way to a betrayal of its over-simplified ideals and increasingly cynical social elitism, and the Crockett family becomes a symbol of well-being and mutual trust undermined by social and financial ruthlessness and pervasive self-interest. The play is, however, crippled by Blake's repetitive chauvinism about Clydeside and a culminating act which by descent into melodrama arbitrarily denies the outcome demanded by the very real forces invoked previously. Clyde-Built was however favourably received by audiences in Glasgow, its topicality and local familiarity overcoming all other considerations.

Blake wrote another play, The Weaker Vessel, an extremely short piece which clearly is derived from Synge's Shadow of the Glen. It is also his best work in terms of characterisation, for in it at last Blake created credible personalities. The Weaker Vessel shows the attempt of a young wife married to a hard, middle-aged husband, to taste real love and romance with her lover. The lover is too unimaginative and conventional to understand her need for freedom and her desire for honesty, and is content to seize the opportunity of her husband's absence at the fishing grounds to snatch one night of passion. A woman arrives with news that the husband is missing at sea, and the lover rejoices at the new future which now opens before them – though his dreams are somewhat inclined towards domesticity. The husband returns: the lover flees by the back window. With hard, cold cynicism, the husband mocks his wife's poetic aspirations and her lover's high-flying promises,

finally inviting her to leave the house and take her chance with freedom. The curtain descends as she hesitates. The debt to Synge is obvious, not least in the poetic language, yet The Weaker Vessel displays a subtlety of observation and feeling not apparent elsewhere in Blake's plays.

After this, Blake turned his full attention once more to prose writing, leaving the impression that his ventures in the drama sprang from a sense of duty towards a worthy cause – Scottish drama – rather than from more personal and immediate expressive needs.

His stagecraft is barely adequate – except in the highly imitative The Weaker Vessel – and the tedious monotone in which Clyde-Built is conducted suggests that the author was far more at home in prose than in dramatic dialogue. His characterisations never achieve a solid existence on the stage. In his favour it must be said that he did at least take his subject-matter seriously: his crofters are a far remove from the eccentric caricatures of Graham Moffat's kailyarders; and the issues he struggled with were of contemporary relevance.

## J. A. FERGUSON

Emotional excess was also largely missing from the plays of J. A. Ferguson, whose early play, Campbell of Kilmhor was the most notable Scottish work discovered by the defunct Glasgow Repertory Company before the first world war. Ferguson wrote about the Highlands in a manner strongly reminiscent of Synge, and the S.N.P. after reviving Campbell of Kilmhor followed it with The Scarecrow in 1923 and The King of Morven in 1926.

Described by the author as a "Halloween Fantasy", The Scarecrow is a well-written light comedy based on a very simple situation. The action takes place in the outshed of a small Invernesshire farm, in which the cow has been repeatedly milked in the middle of the night, despite a strong lock on the shed door. The old woman of the farm calls in the local policeman to catch the culprit - a thick-witted, boastful young man, recently posted from Tiree and somewhat inclined to relish the power of his authority - and hints darkly at witchcraft in the strange thefts. The young girl who lives in the farm is almost caught by them as she slips food to her lover, a deserter from the navy, who is hiding in a large barrel in the shed. There follows a long contest in which the girl tries to persuade the policeman to abandon his vigil, ending at last when she fascinates him with tales of the supernatural. The scarecrow leaning against the barrel is said to be bewitched, she claims, and sometimes it comes to life. The young sailor in the barrel overhears, takes the hint, slowly rises and stalks out, carrying barrel and scarecrow with him, and the policeman faints. The action is very straightforward but the characters are exceptionally lively, and Ferguson makes excellent use of humour and suspense.

Where Campbell of Kilmhor with its overtones of Synge had yet remained distinctly Scottish, The King of Morven is more plainly derivative of the Irish playwright. The King of Morven has as background the Highland clearances, and its principal character is McCaskill, the factor for the village of Morven, on the West Coast of Scotland. Through conversation with his cold, remote wife and an itinerant tinker, it is learned that McCaskill has

arranged for the forcible emigration of the entire village to make way for the landowner's sheep. The tinker laments that he has passed through a desert landscape where before were thriving communities, revealing as he does a flair for the poetic which at times sounds rather contrived in his mouth:

"Where now are the men of Morar, of Appin and Morven and Moidart, the men that were good company? Where are the kindly people? Cold are their hearths now, and over the worn steps of their doors the wild nettle blowing in the wind."

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He also exposes the treachery of the clan chiefs and their abuse of the People's loyalty; at which the outraged factor opens the door to turn his uninvited guest out. His ears are stung by the sound of wailing carried on the wind as the dispossessed are rounded up. McCaskill tries in vain to blot out the sound by winning the tinker's companionship, but is rebuffed and cursed when the traveller realises the meaning of the sounds outside. McCaskill's wife now openly rejects him; and in viciously petty revenge he tells the sailors from the emigrant ships that wife and tinker are rebellious villagers who have escaped their net. Alone in the empty house, the factor becomes aware of the ghostly sounds of the deserted glen, the wind blows out his lamp and the rain begins to tap on the window. The tinker's prophecy, that McCaskill, "the king of Morven" will never escape the haunting of his conscience, has begun.

The sombre mood of the play is well sustained by the silent conflict between McCaskill and his wife and his nervous unease. Tension is maintained first by the tinker's ignorance of the situation, later by the sailor's: and the climax of the action is brief and un-melodramatic. It is unfortunate that in spite of the accuracy of the historical background, the debt to the Irish theatre in style and poetry distinctly outweighs the attempts to inject specifically Scottish characteristics of thought and expression.



## ROBERT BAIN

Robert Bain's James the First of Scotland (1925) is not a great play, though like Gordon Bottomley's Gruach it caused a considerable stir when first performed. Written in 1918 with the old Glasgow Repertory Theatre in mind, it is more than competent in its careful selection of incident and in its pseudo-Shakespearian blank verse. It presents – without inflated heroic romanticism – the political life and eventual murder of one of Scotland's greater kings, judiciously intertwining the developing conflict of interests between monarch and nobility with the legendary events of popular history.

In twelve scenes, Bain traces the king's life from the young man, newly acceded to the crown, popular with the common people as their champion against the anarchic tyranny of the nobles; through the consolidation of his power and its accompanying growth of ruthless cunning; to the fatal point where his power becomes brutally whimsical and a band of desperate lords unite to assassinate him. If at times the individual relationship of succeeding scenes is tenuous, and the scenes themselves a trifle confusing in their crowded incident, the overall impression is of coherent unity. The final catastrophe is well prepared for, through the alienation of the king's supporters by his tyrannical lapses and his own fatalistic acceptance of doom-filled prophecies. The end itself is derived unadorned from legend, and has the starkly dramatic quality of the ballads in its refusal to embroider its documentary of word and action.

Tone and tempo in the play are varied considerably: from the opening scene in a confused and dissolute Scotland with the athletic young king mingling unrecognised with the common people at a fair; to the grandeur of the court and its tense muted conflicts of will between nobility and monarch; the informality of royal soldiery perfunctorily searching an inn after their great victory over the Lord of the Isles; the tapestry-like splendour and refinement of James' private chambers; and the eruption of violence which precedes the tragic lament which concludes the tale. Woven throughout is the unmistakable irony of the ballads, the prophecies and omens which mark the king's progress towards death. An eclipse darkens the sky at the moment

when James allows full rein to his ruthlessness against his unruly nobles; a wise-woman foresees in his righteous anger as a young man, the iron will which ultimately repulses him from the affections; his fate is sealed when he tries to escape his murderers through a cellar blocked at his own express order - to prevent tennis-balls being lost from his games-court. The deliberate and superficial deployment of blank verse to "elevate" some aspects of the play is never allowed to become an exercise in bombast or grandiose verbal elaboration, and, as in the following fairly typical passage,

Queen : A phial of rose-water! How it fills  
The air with sweetness.

King James: My good, brave Hatto,  
You have wrought a wonder on me. When I think  
Of all you have perilled on the stormy seas  
To bring this phial of summer to the queen  
I am ashamed of all my turbulence.  
My lords, this little phial in my hand  
Is stored with more of knightly courtesy  
Than I have ever known in all my life.

(Act III, P. 56)

acts as a stylised device embodying social hierarchy which accords well with the ballad-like impression of the play as a whole, especially as it is balanced by the Scots prose of the commoners. The play is concluded with Maurice Buchanan's brief but compelling lament for the death of the common folk's royal hero.

There are good moments and bad in James the First of Scotland. The battle against the Lord of the Isles and the Highland chief's subsequent conversion to James' cause is weak and unconvincing, though the soldiers provide a concrete symbol of the King's dependency on the commons. The wise-woman who haunts the play becomes less credible the more frequently she appears, and the episode with her in Act 4 obscures the king's attitude to her prophecy rather than illuminates it. Furthermore, Bain inexplicably undercuts the verse employed so effectively throughout the play, in the last Act, by abruptly introducing James' reputation as a poet, and quoting

directly from the glittering stanzas of The King's Quair. Bain's own poetic efforts can only suffer from the comparison.

These faults limit, but do not crush the achievement of Bain's play. Its unromantic objectivity in accounting for the decline in personal attractiveness which accompanies the King's rising political fortunes; its consistent invocation of inescapable destiny through prophecy; and the rigidity with which, in general, material extraneous to the central themes is excluded; unite to produce a directness and simplicity already observed in discussing the murder-scene. It is these features, quite clearly within the old ballad tradition, which impart life and strength, and perhaps a certain bleak grandeur to James the First of Scotland, ensuring it a worthy position in the history of the Scottish National Players.

#### GORDON BOTTOMLEY

The performance of Gordon Bottomley's play Gruach in 1923 marked the first major success of the Scottish National Players. Bottomley was by that time already recognised as a poet and as an experimental playwright, whose attempts to restore verse to the theatre had since 1900 produced highly imaginative blank-verse plays based mostly on early British, Celtic and Norse mythology. Such included The Cries by Night (1900), Midsummer Eve (1902), The Riding to Lithend (1909), King Lear's Wife (1915) and Britain's Daughter (1921). Of these King Lear's Wife shares with Gruach origins in Shakespeare,

"In these plays Bottomley displayed a peculiar power of dealing with primitive nature. His early Britons and Scots are not just modern characters uttering their thoughts in verse; they are given an individuality of their own - a greater brutality, a sterner indomitability of purpose, and a greater simplicity. By exploring these qualities, Bottomley succeeded in doing what few authors of his time achieved creating the atmosphere of another race and time. Yet in essence he was merely pursuing the old path: his plays were no more than variants of the style cultivated by so many in the previous century."

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1 Allardyce Nicoll, British Drama, 5th Ed. (revised) p. 318-9 Harrap, London 1962

Gruach takes as its subject the first fateful meeting of the young Macbeth and the woman who becomes his wife and eventually his tragic queen, the lady Gruach. Although brought up as an orphan in a remote part of the Highlands, the blood of a defeated royal house runs in her veins, and for this reason a marriage has been arranged between her and the heir of the family she lives with, Conan. Openly resentful of this future with the dull-witted, pedestrian bridegroom, but unable to defy grim, cold Morag, his mother, Gruach is instantly attracted to an unexpected visitor lost in the winter snow, MacBeth. In the night her restless spirit betrays her infatuation by bringing her to him in a sleepwalking trance, and the truth thus revealed between the pair, they resolve to flee together, risking death from pursuit and from blizzard. Though Macbeth is a warrior, a taker of risks, it is Gruach's reckless daring which assumes the lead: inevitably, as the audience knows from Shakespeare, her dominance in their relationship will lead them both to disaster. To their successful escape in this play Bottomley adds another irony – that servants discover their flight, but are afraid to report the calamity to Conan; Gruach ends with his unwittingly hollow complacency over the securing of his beautiful bride.

Bottomley here creates a highly satisfying gallery of characters who support this plot: Morag, mercilessly submitting herself and others to a primitive and inhumanly rigid family duty; Conan, her brow-beaten son, seeking at last to satisfy his smouldering resentment by becoming husband and master to the contemptuous Gruach; Fern his sister, timid, acquiescent, loving and repressed, a gentle spirit ailing under a harsh life; and some quickly sketched but dramatically effective servants whose refusal to leave the limits of familiar, regulated experience makes its own telling contrast to the intensity and daring of the principals. Gruach and Macbeth themselves are somewhat obvious and indeed, romanticised – she in particular is a familiar type of "wild, impulsive" heroine – but in general their deficiencies do not detract from their function in the play.

A fair measure of theatrical ability is apparent in the devices Bottomley employs to body forth his thematic intentions. The loosely "Shakespearian" verse which he uses throughout escapes mere bombast and pretention. His flower-imagery - Gruach first enters carrying a great tangled bunch of wild-flowers into the forbidding austerity of Morag's hall; later she chooses the hellebore for her own flower, and finds a purple flower in Macbeth's helmet - is if unsurprising, nevertheless effective for its economy. Tension is added to the action by repeated ironies, as when Morag and Fern decide that Gruach's fate is inescapably bound to Conan's and therefore rigid in its predictability, only for Macbeth's arrival to overturn the balance of forces in the household; or when the unexpected visitor, loyally praising the Queen he serves with formal extravagance, unknowingly provides a lyrical fanfare of praises to accompany Gruach's entrance in the fairy-tale finery of her wedding-dress.

Gruach has its weaknesses, particularly in its two major characters who fail to develop but instead tend to repeat the same superficial characteristics in different circumstances. Bottomley is thus led to prolonging the details of their escape to no fresh purpose. Generally, however, the play remains an interesting and theatrically aware variation of the Celtic Myth strain, comparing well with William Sharp's efforts in the 1900's.

After Gruach, Bottomley came under the influence of Japanese Noh plays and of Yeats' Four Plays For Dancers. He forsook established theatrical forms and sought to create a "drama of the soul" through experiments with verse, dance and symbolism, in the collections Scenes and Plays (1929) Lyric Plays (1932), Choric Plays (1939) and Poems and Plays (1953). His commitment to Scotland and 'purified' verse-drama led him further and further away from a wide audience. It was not the semi-professional Scottish National Players to whom he turned, but the fragmented and transient membership of the Scottish Community Drama Association. His playlets became increasingly orientated towards self-conscious minorities - esoteric, romanticised and precious, dramatic verse rather than

verse-drama. A key is provided to much of his later work in the introduction to Poems and Plays which observes "... the affinity of poetic drama was not, he held, with prose drama at all, but with opera". As opera, indeed, many of Bottomley's plays might find the vitality they at present lack - even as William Sharp's The Immortal Hour did with Rutland Boughton's music. Without music, their static stage-qualities, elaborate and complex lyrics, repetitiveness and incorporeal abstraction promote unrelieved uniformity of tone and result in boredom.

"On the stage, utterance usually accompanies action or explains it; but when poetry is performed between persons, the fact that their intercourse is raised to the poetic tension often causes the action to be on the spiritual level; and when that is the case, the words become the action..."

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Worse still, Bottomley imagined that the legends - often grippingly stark - which he employed required comforting postscripts to alleviate the distress of their cruelties, invariably falsifying the emotions which they had stirred. Some of his plays nevertheless succeed briefly in creating unusual effects quite beyond the reach of many playwrights more theatrically able but less boldly imaginative.

The most remarkable of the works in Scenes and Plays, Ardvorlich's Wife provides an example of Bottomley's better capabilities. The chorus with which the play opens and closes is formed by eight women in white, who form a chanting "ballet" of the snow. Between them and Ardvorlich's distracted wife a curious bond is formed of shared experiences beyond the human, and the incantatory power of the piece is found in the author's careful orchestration of their voices.

The Lytic Plays collection is the most substantial of Bottomley's offerings, displaying some of his finest experiments, most of his most prominent faults. The theme of overlapping time-scales found in these plays became a prominent feature of all the author's subsequent writing and stylistical elements derived from Yeats and Noh theatre, particularly the use of a curtain symbolically folded and unfolded to create new stage-spaces, are meticulously observed.

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1 G. Bottomley, A. Stage For Poetry pp. xiii-xiv T Wilson, Kendal 1948

Mairsaili's Weeping, the most theatrical of the Lyric Plays is typically hampered by over-elaboration. The reiterated phrases of the chorus with which the play opens have the hypnotic attraction of waves on a beach, evoking continuity and permanence. When the technique is continued unvaried for the remainder of the play it becomes tedious. The first part of the play relates how Mairsaili, abducted by Macaintoisich with her parents' connivance, swears that he will never see her tears. Rescued from him, she suffers his jealous vengeance years later when he kills her husband and three children to make her break her vow. In her grief she is confronted by her parents and reminding them of their part in the abduction, she turns them away with a curse. Up to this point the vigour of the conflict and the rawness of the emotions which spring from it maintain the audience's interest but when the play goes on to a lengthy postscript in which Macaintoisich, now fugitive, encounters Mairsaili to explain himself and find peace in the anguish they share, placid "wisdom" seems a most unsatisfactory conclusion to the extremes portrayed earlier. "Bottomley has his philosophy to express" writes Priscilla Thouless :

"... partial reconciliation ... though written with delicacy sentimentalizes the story and softens and blurs the life of the poem, the hard, taut vitality by which it lives. "

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Of the Choric Plays, only The Falconer's Lassie draws attention to itself, and then because it marks a total departure from experiment. As if to prove that the author was still capable of writing within a conventional mode, this is a straight-forward historical comedy.

In 1945 Bottomley glanced briefly at the professional stage once more before retiring even further into Celtic mists, writing a conventional love-comedy based upon an eccentric custom performed annually by the students of St. Andrew's University, Kate Kennedy.

Bottomley died in 1948, his dream of restoring verse to the stage unrealised. His plays since 1921 seem in retrospect deliberately esoteric, their use of Scottish legend suspect and romanticised. All too often his highlanders and choruses ring false :

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1 Priscilla Thouless, Modern Poetic Drama p. 184

"One is uneasily reminded . . . of Barrie's ghillies,  
of the Stage Scotchmen, all nature's gentlemen,  
consumed with a desire for learning. . ."

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There is much pretended grandeur in his themes which evaporates rapidly on closer inspection. Only as a determined experimenter with form did he find true value, and his experiments seem to have led directly away from the public stage. Despite his dedication to Scottish drama, his practical contribution to it is minute: he found no imitators – he rarely found spectators – and he did not popularise the mythical themes he was so fond of. Unlike the legends of Ireland, those of Scotland had ceased to be current: by turning to them, Bottomley effectively shut himself off from the contemporary world.

### JOHN BRANDANE

In co-operation with another leading figure in the Scottish National Players, A. W. Yuill, Brandane wrote Glenforsa, a romantic adventure set in the West Highlands in 1760, and one of the three one-act plays with which the S.N.P. began its career in January 1921.

The young laird of Oskamull awaits the arrival of his friend, MacKinnon of Glenforsa, who will be eloping with Grizel Cameron, younger daughter of the laird of Draolinn. From Oskamull's housekeeper it is learned that Oskamull's heart is set upon the older daughter, Elspeth, though she is supposedly infatuated with Glenforsa who has spurned her. Glenforsa, it seems has a reputation as a rake and a wastrel. Glenforsa duly arrives with a heavily veiled woman, who turns out to be not Grizel but Elspeth, who has tricked Glenforsa in the darkness of the night in order to save her sister from shame and bitter disappointment. Glenforsa now sees the error of his ways, and once more declares his love for Elspeth, explaining that their estrangement was caused by her misunderstanding of his opposition to the Jacobite rebellion and his own subsequent pride. Elspeth is thrown into confusion by this, and cannot decide instantly to fly with him to church – after all, five minutes before, Glenforsa was to marry her sister. The young laird's self-esteem is once more

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1 Priscilla Thouless, Modern Poetic Drama p. 181



damaged, and in bitterness he forces his friend Oskamull to gamble with him, losing in the process not only the last of his inheritance but also the ancestral lands of his clan. He then deliberately insults Elspeth and Grizel and is challenged by Oskamull, already angered by jealousy over Elspeth and Glenforsa's insistence on the gambling stakes. They cross swords, but Glenforsa, the better swordsman, comes to his senses, and the conflict is ended by Elspeth's decision to accept him. Oskamull, his disappointment rather crudely mollified by Elspeth's suggestion that her younger sister may be more suited to him, returns Glenforsa's forfeited lands, and helps the lovers to escape when the pursuing laird of Draolinn is heard approaching outside.

Glenforsa is nothing more than an adventure story with Stevensonian echoes. Heavily dependent on its rapid changes of action, the characters are mere stock-figures without life or originality. Nothing in the play bears the least resemblance to adult experience, and the whole tone of the entertainment is of superficial escapism into a romantic never-land.

In November of 1921, Brandane's first wholly individual contribution, The Change House, was performed by the S.N.P. Considerably better than Glenforsa, it attempted a drama of emotional tensions rather than physical action. The background to the play is the accidental murder of a soldier by "Iain Dubh", master of the brig Margaret; and the arrest, trial, and sentencing to death of another man, Callum, for the crime. Iain Dubh having put to sea after the accident is not even aware that the soldier is dead, let alone that Callum is to be hanged. He returns to the island, and learns the grim news from Donnacha McLean, the local innkeeper. He tries immediately to organise a rescue attempt to save Callum from the rope, but the local men will not take the risk unless Iain Dubh's crew join them, and the Margaret has been forced to run south in the face of a storm leaving its captain stranded and alone. Into the inn, or change-house, come Seonaid and Flora Macleod, the cousin and sister of the dead soldier, unaware of his fate and believing him to be merely ill. Horrified, Donnacha tells the truth to the

cousin, Seonaid, and together they keep Flora happy in her illusion. Ironically, Flora and Iain Dubh are lovers, and he does not know his victim's identity until Donnacha takes him aside. Seonaid explains to Flora only that her brother is dead, omitting Iain Dubh's part in the affair; Brokenhearted and stricken by the grief he has brought to his lover, the seaman attempts to give himself up to the vengeful military authorities, only to be forcibly restrained by Donnacha and the villagers, who believe that even his confession would not save Callum's life. Finally, Flora learns the whole truth from an embittered Seonaid. She forgives Iain Dubh for his folly but cannot forget the blood that has been spilt. The play ends as Iain and Flora accept the bitterness of fate, and part forever.

Though the sentiments of the play are frequently strained and the characters remain stereotyped, The Change House is a marked improvement on Glenforsa. There is a healthy atmosphere of people performing everyday jobs, rather than conspicuously "Scottish" pursuits, and kilts are mercifully absent. Set only seven years after the Forty-Five, The Change House makes no reference to that frequently romanticised episode, and expresses no overtly nationalistic sentiment. Faults exist: an attempt to find poetry in the love-scene between Flora and Iain Dubh fails through low intensity and lack of vitality; and not enough is made of the tensions round the concealment of truth from Flora or of the final climax. Donnacha's violent outbursts against the Mcleods remain inexplicable and melodramatic, and where Seonaid's violent emotions provide a sharp contrast to the numbly philosophic Flora, none of the characters is more than a rigidly conceived and unoriginal sketch.

The following year, Brandane joined forces with Yuill once more to write The Spanish Galleon, a drab and unstimulating play built around an historical event, the sabotage of the Spanish galleon San Juan Bautista in Tobermory Bay, in 1588. Confusing in its employment of historical data and melodramatic in the love-affair which complicates the plot, the play comes to a conclusion of overstrained dramatic irony as the government agent in Tobermory,

Smollett, after denying the pleas for delay from a clansman whose relative has been taken by the Spanish as a hostage, gives the order for destruction, only to learn that his own son has gone aboard the doomed vessel.

In 1923 came a three act comedy which by far outshone any of his earlier work – and indeed, much of his later work – being indeed, one of the outstanding plays in the record of the Scottish National Players. The Glen is Mine is probably the best Scottish play of the country versus town variety, though rich as it is in comedy, it still fails to handle adequately the real implications inherent in the opposition.

The central conflict of the play is between Angus, an elderly but spritely crofter; and the laird's son, Charlie Murray, who having taken over the running of his father's estate, tries to establish a mine to dig the iron-ore deposits discovered on it. Angus's cottage lies in a mountain glen which the young man wishes to transform into the site for a hydro-electric dam, and Angus eventually decides that he does not wish to be disturbed. Charlie attempts to force the old man out by persuading McPhedran, a merchant who appears to hold the entire countryside in debt, to bankrupt Angus.

Brandane shrewdly and with admitted bias wins for Angus, in the first Act the sympathies of the audience. He is careful not to paint a blatantly false picture of a crofter's life – having broken ribs and a leg in an accident, Angus has to recuperate under the care of a local farmer's wife, his own croft lying at the end of a long and difficult climb up the hillside. As a patient he is less than perfect, plaguing his neighbour, Mrs. Galletly, with his restless energy and his bagpipes. In a scene with the old laird, Colonel Murray, the tenant-landlord relationship is cordial, though clearly less paternalistic than the colonel wishes, though the colonel is genuinely concerned with the welfare of the people on his estate. The doctor arrives to examine Angus, and it is from him rather than from his son that the Colonel learns of the mining project. A little later, it is revealed that Charlie's motives are not purely concerned with benefits to the estate – he seeks in mining-rights a quick remedy to his financial troubles, caused by unwary speculation. After

outlining to Angus the benefits the scheme will bring to the district, Charlie attempts clumsily to buy him out, only to be rebuffed by the crofter's sharp-witted caution and thorough legal knowledge of the Crofters' Act. In contrast to Charlie's brusque and overbearing manner, Angus is placid and humorous, and is plainly well-liked by the colonel, the doctor, and the Galletlys. Where Charlie's decision has been so hasty as to become effective before he has troubled himself to inform his father, Angus insists on time to consider whether he will abandon his croft; and only after hearing both sides of the argument over industrialisation vehemently declared by his daughter, Morag, and her sweetheart Murdo, does he decide to remain in the glen.

Charlie's attempt, through McPhedran, to apply force to Angus, provides The Glen is Mine with an excellent sub-plot and considerable comic material, as the wily crofter pits his wits against threatening bankruptcy. Having sold a poached stag's head to the English surveyor, Stockman, as a trophy, Angus secretes it by mistake in McPhedran's vehicle. McPhedran then offers the laird and Charlie a lift, and the incriminating head is discovered when Charlie sits on the antlers. Angus does not hasten to explain.

The last act is something of a disappointment, the problems raised earlier in the play being brought to over-swift conclusions and the author's humour becoming noticeably thinner than before. Murdo inherits a distant croft, and Morag and he are thus unimpeded in their marriage plans. Angus resents the prospect of his daughter leaving him, refusing in his bitterness the apology and offer of assistance from a suddenly conciliatory Charlie Murray. The Colonel succeeds where Charlie has failed, but not before Angus has been promised a vacant neighbouring croft for Morag and Murdo. Angus is then assisted to pay off his debts to McPhedran as Charlie turns his mind to forestry, an improvement to the estate which arouses less passion than the mining project.

The only major criticism of The Glen Is Mine is that Brandane, having in Act I posed the very real problem which faces the Highlands - whether to retain unspoilt beauty and simplicity in the face of

depopulation, lack of amenity, and even poverty; or to introduce the wealth and ugliness of industrialisation – becomes partisan in his attitude and facile in his rather hollow "solution" to the conflict. "The complications solve themselves too easily, in fact they almost vanish..."<sup>1</sup> After using Murdo and Morag as the champions of the respective viewpoints, and phrasing Morag's indignation in the terms of youthful, escapist romanticism – she talks about "the old hunting pastoral days . . . . the wild free open life", meaning presumably the placid repetition of meagre subsistence farming on the crofts – Angus finally hardens his heart against the mine without any more convincing argument. Charlie's motives and actions are increasingly damning, and Brandane fails to restore him to good grace with the pathetic claim in the last act that he was prompted to desperate measures by his regard for a favourably disposed but exceptionally wealthy young lady. This avoidance of genuine argument suggests that the scales of judgement in The Glen Is Mine are weighted towards pastoral ideals inevitably tinged with romanticism, despite the author's initial refusal to depict a peasant life of idyllic bliss – remember Angus' broken leg, and the problems it causes.

The terms of Brandane's one-sided argument are reflected in the characterisation. Angus is a lively and sympathetic figure, even if his canny Highland wisdom and sense of humour suggest a not uncommon stock character. The determination with which he opposes Charlie is seen in the less edifying form of childish stubbornness in the last act, and Brandane successfully holds Angus above too much sentimental indulgence, even when the bagpipes are tucked triumphantly under his arm. The other rural characters, McPhedran and the Galletlys, are excellent: the author has with considerably shrewdness, made the Galletlys not from the Highlands, but from Ayrshire, and there exist a subtle contrast of speech and manner between them and the crofting community, which adds to the variety and depth of the play. The Scottish habit of dry sarcasm is put to good purpose in the sly innuendo with which McPhedran greets his customers and debtors. The Colonel and Charlie are less satisfactory, and never achieve the sense of life felt in the other characters. Morag and

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1 Kurt Wittig, The Scottish Tradition in Literature, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, 1958, p. 315–6

Murdo are unsurprising but acceptable stage lovers. The comedy is generally rich and good natured, if situational; and if the last act is somewhat less gripping than the others, it is only in the awkwardly manipulated exits and entrances of Act 2 that Brandane's technical ability really lets him down.

The Glen Is Mine, with its pleasing comedy and over-optimistic rather than romantic conservatism about the Highlands had great appeal to urban audiences and was the second most frequently produced play in the S.N.P. repertoire. Fifty years later its attraction has diminished only slightly, its lively humour defending it against the inroads of less credulous critics.

In some ways more successful – though not with regard to popular acclaim – is The Treasure Ship (1924). In this comedy, Brandane finds firmer ground for his study of materialism and the Highlands. His method is to set a sharp-witted and at times farcically complicated pursuit of easy money against an unpretentious but more attractively positive example of renunciation.

According to legend, the wreck of a Spanish Galleon lies somewhere at the bottom of Torlochan Bay; and in the village of Torlochan, a Treasure Ship Syndicate headed by Fraser, the local doctor, and McLaren, the grocer, has for some years been searching for it with as yet only marginal success. A few items of Spanish gold brought to the surface in the diving operations are exhibited in Fraser's home, beside his collection of pewter. The first act introduces the situation and the principal characters, and indicates the devious depths to which the fortune hunters are drawn. Fraser seizes every opportunity in and out of the surgery to sell shares in the Syndicate, and is accused by McIver the joiner of neglecting his poorer patients. The assistant doctor, McDonald, in love with Fraser's daughter Iona, is being thwarted in his applications for an independent post by Fraser's insistence on providing references not merely glowing but incandescent in their exaggerated praise, none of which are likely to impress "bolshevik" Parish Councils. On this matter, Fraser is utterly unapproachable, and after an exchange of insults, McDonald enters into an intrigue with Iona to change the older doctor's mind. To this

end, they arrange to meet in the garden later that night. Fraser and his associate McLaren have meantime decided to stage a fake robbery of the gold on exhibit in order to win publicity for the Syndicate, and employ their diver, Cooney, to effect the theft. Cooney does so, but unfortunately gets drunk beforehand and asks McIver to assist him. Iona and McDonald see the whole episode, and confront Fraser in a wholly successful attempt to blackmail a new, carefully dictated reference for the young man. Overnight, the "robbery" plan is knocked awry by Cooney's inebriation, for he is arrested in the dawn feeding whisky to the seagulls on the pier. McIver reveals his own part in the burglary to Fraser, forcing him to cancel his medical bill; only for both of them to discover that Cooney has stolen the wrong exhibits – he has gone off not with the gold, but with Fraser's pewter. They are forced to unbelievable lengths to conceal the treasure from the local policeman, who groundlessly imagines himself to be a detective of skill and perception. Finally the treasure has to be wrapped in a bed-quilt and dropped out the window, and to allay suspicion, Fraser announces that a reward is being offered. McIver promptly collects the valuables and announcing that he has just discovered it, holds out his hand for Fraser's money. In a somewhat protracted fourth act, the entire episode is rounded off and put in perspective by the discovery of a wreck and the raising of new treasure by the Syndicate's new diver. In the midst of great popular excitement, Fraser receives the new specimens, only to discover that they are his own collection of pewter. Aghast at the prospect of discovery – there are experts journeying from London to examine the find – he is saved by his hitherto quiet and respectable wife, who tells him he must arrange another burglary.

The farce itself is well conceived, especially in the double-dealing self-interest of the accomplices in crime. Fraser and McLaren are sufficiently aware of the commercial side-effects of the Syndicate to quarrel fiercely in attempts to conduct diving near their respective chemist's and grocer's shops; and McIver's outsmarting of Fraser is uproariously brazen. The agonies induced by the initial crime are quite credible, and lead inevitably towards Mrs. Fraser's instruction that the whole process must begin again. Outside this whirligig of

trickery stand Iona and McDonald, laughing at Fraser's antics before leaving Torlochan to marry and work in another village far removed from the mad pursuit of elusive wealth.

Where the farcical humour is rich and the denouement highly effective, characterisation in the play is non-existent and the progress of the plot unnecessarily protracted. Iona and McDonald may be acceptable in their capacity as the perennial young lovers, but Fraser, McIver, and the rest are but the merest one-dimensional sketches. In The Treasure Ship this is not a serious fault: the play makes no pretence of depth. More serious are the red-herrings occasioned by numerous extras who seem to be forming sub-plots which are rarely developed, and the frankly boring triviality which comprises most of the last act.

In 1925, Brandane extended his one-act play, The Change House into a full three acts, entitling the new work The Lifting. It is not a success. Where The Change House made an attempt to portray the impassive cruelty of fate, The Lifting descends into romantic Highland adventure, its superficiality only emphasised by the pseudo-tragic climax. Using The Change House as a first act, Brandane goes on to have Callum the condemned man, escape from captivity, and once in hiding with Iain Dubh and the others, falls instantly in love with Seonaid. Attempting to escape from the island, now filled with pursuing soldiers, the party is saved by Iain's self-sacrifice in what is surely one of the most far-fetched scenes ever to be staged, with Iain and the soldiers chasing each other back and forth through the various doors and windows of Donnacha McLean's inn, reminding irresistably of a Whitehall farce. Needless to say, he dies in the arms of his reconciled love, Flora. The Lifting is, in the light of The Glen Is Mine, and The Treasure Ship, to say the least, disappointing in its amateurish romancing.

The same year saw The Inn of Adventure produced by the Scottish National Players, an equally undistinguished work. Set in the inn of a West Highland village in 1829, it concerns the love-affair dawning between Philip Linnel and Mairi McDonald; the restoration of the honour and respectability of Linnel's father; and the public disgrace of the men who shamed him and cheated others, the Laird



of Ardow and his son. The whole tale is childish, its Highland Inn setting providing mere costume-drama colour. The inn is owned by the sisters Belle and Beta Macdonald. Mairi is their sixteen year old niece, infused with the romances of Scott and Byron. The locale is infested with retired officers of one particular regiment, including the good-hearted Captain McColl. Linnel's father also served in this regiment. After quarreling with two wild young lairds, Carsaid and Ardow, junior, over a lady, Linnel and McColl contrive to trick Ardow by feigned cowardice and drunkenness, into revealing a set of loaded dice. There is no depth of any kind in this play; either of intention, characterisation, or construction.

A one-act piece, Rory Aforesaid was performed in 1926, in which Brandane regained some of the vitality felt in The Glen Is Mine.

Rory Aforesaid, a superficial comedy set in a rural Scottish courtroom, is short enough not to overstay its entertainment value. Once more it is with the contemporary Scot that the author finds a sense of life, and the Rory of the title, a shepherd, displays all the depth of simple cunning expected of his type to outwit not only his accuser, but the less than ethical defence lawyer, and so escapes without paying either fine or fee.

The last of Brandane's plays to be performed by the S.N.P. is in the same vein as The Glen is Mine and the Treasure Ship though unfortunately lacking their healthy simplicity. This was Heather Gentry (1927). In the play, the laird of Drimfearn struggles crookedly to maintain his estate by letting it out at exorbitant rents for shooting and fishing, despite its daunting mountain terrain and almost chronic lack of game. The latest tenant, Borden, outraged by the lack of satisfactory sport, has gone beyond complaining to Drimfearn, and proposes to net the estate's salmon river in direct contradiction of the unwritten laws of fishing. Unable to stop him, Drimfearn listens with approval to a plan for his son Murray and the local countryfolk to forestall Borden's scheme by poaching the river in advance. Marsaili McAlpine, Murray's fiance, is violently opposed to such practices, seeing the Highlands losing their honour and sense of values by indulging in such trickery. The words ring uncomfortably true for Drimfearn, confirmed and practised in dishonesty as he is, but do not prevent him from putting soft-soap on the wings of captured game birds that they may not only be "planted" for his irate tenant's

benefit, but also will present easy, slow-moving targets.

The Drimfearn household is at this time plagued by an Irish housemaid, Bridget, who patently does not know "her place". Bridget turns out to be Kate Kelly, daughter of a wealthy war-profiteer, who has come in disguise to the district in pursuit of Dr. Kennedy, with whom she served during the war in Yugoslavia. With everyone guessing as to her identity - she is frequently observed meeting a man in a Rolls Royce - and with Drimfearn erecting a large, publicity seeking gate across the road through the estate, Heather Gentry lapses into a confusion of tenuously connected and trivial confrontations between Marsaili and Drimfearn, Drimfearn and Borden, Bridget and Kennedy; supposedly resolved by the arrival of Bridget's father after colliding with Drimfearn's gate. In the end, Bridget gets her man - though she spends much of the play repelling his advances - Marsaili persuades Murray to turn his back on his father's latter-day banditry, and an unrepentant Drimfearn continues his career of mild chicanery.

After the first act, in which the problems of the contemporary Highlands are to the fore, the play loses its sense of direction, attempting to make up for it by increased tempo, which soon becomes shallow farce. Bridget is poorly drawn and superficial, and no aspect of her involvement in the play carries much conviction. Even her comic disruptive influence is asserted rather than witnessed. The climax of the play, a long awaited verbal battle between her and the wily Drimfearn, is in the outcome uninspired. "Happy endings" are forced on the plot in the crudest fashion, and there is not one character in Heather Gentry with the least spark of life. Taken as a whole, it is a disappointing descendant of The Glen is Mine.

That Brandane was, with James Bridie, one of the Scottish National Players' two most frequently performed dramatists, can only be regarded as an indication of that body's inadequacy. His view of Scotland was strictly limited to portrayals of a falsely heroic Highland past, and a falsely secure Highland present. Nowhere does he attempt to deal with industrial Scotland, despite his adolescent experience of grinding, 12-hour shifts in the Glasgow mills. His attitude to the Highlands and its people is very much that of the urban escapist, and his plays abound with humorous, contented

crofters whose admirable qualities are none the less the products of caricature. In The Glen is Mine he avoids serious and full consideration of the question he poses so effectively about economic development of the Highlands; and in his later plays increasingly employs farce as a reductive medium for this his only topic of importance. David Hutchison has commented :

"It would be wrong to deny the qualities of Brandane's plays. They are entertaining and they have charm. It is not, however, the charm of life, but of a non-existent rural paradise. Brandane's trouble is that, like so many Scottish dramatists, he has technical ability, but nothing to say."

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Though the audiences of the S.N.P. may have found Brandane entertaining, the quality even of his technical ability is not high; his popularity and influence typifying a self-conscious movement in which conservative Nationalism with its emphasis on sentimental chauvinism, was the prime virtue.

#### G.R. MALLOCH

A more hopeful influence than Brandane for the Scottish dramatic movement at this time was George Reston Malloch, a poet and dramatic critic who succeeded in writing plays which sprang direct from deeply-felt Scottish experience in a manner which eluded most of his contemporaries. Though his work is uneven, in at least one play he attained a power of thought and symbol both impressive and profoundly disturbing, and of distinctly Scottish character.

The first of his plays to be presented by the S.N.P. was Thomas the Rhymer, a one-act representation of the legendary Scottish poet's supernatural recall to the underworld. In a clumsy opening sequence, Thomas, in conversation with a knight, a friar, and a neighbour denies his mystical experience as consort to the Queen of Faery, and deliberately stifles his intellectual and imaginative hungerings in preference to a mundane and far less dangerously intense life on earth. The unquenchable curiosity of his active imagination is nevertheless apparent in his appreciative reaction to the poetry of Tannhauser

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1 David Hutchison, Scottish Theatre, September 1969 p.16

and his lively interest in a cabalist heresy. His repetitive assertion that the three years "under the mountain" are only a dream which plagues him, and that in reality he had departed on a vague "journey" is too dogmatic to overcome his continuing disquiet; and he is not assisted by his wife's regret at his transformation from poet and seer to comfortable farmer and doctor.

Disquiet grows to fear as prophetic signs of his recall to the supernatural plane multiply: desperately, he throws himself on the mercy and protection of God and the saints, but is hypnotically drawn to play and sing despite his vows and prayers. He confesses to his wife the nature of his three-year's "dream", a poetic vision of the mystical terrors of a man among immortals: in the land of Faery, there is no protecting God to shield him; and says the poet, "It is a good thing to die at the last." He has sworn to return to the Queen he has forsaken, but cannot face the awesome demands it will involve. Then comes the fateful news that a white hart and a white hind are walking unafraid through the town. Unable to escape his fate, Thomas follows them into the forest, and disappears forever.

Despite a poor beginning, Malloch rapidly captures the starkly simple atmosphere of the ballads, with their unnerving mystique and unassailable predestination. The tension within Thomas, between the turmoil of his imagination and the careful facade of orthodox normality he strives to maintain, is effectively conveyed; and Malloch has characterised the Rhymer's wife as a symbol both of earthly existence and humanity's yearning for a higher beauty. Thomas the Rhymer, though not outstanding, is yet as good as most of the S.N.P.'s historically-based work.

At the Atheneum Theatre in January, 1926, Malloch achieved his greatest success with the premiere of two plays performed in the same programme, The House of the Queen and Soutarness Water.

Of lesser importance is The House of the Queen; even so, this short work of poetic allegory is a striking departure from the common currency of Scottish one-act plays produced by the S.N.P. Three men toil up a hill with stone for the building of the queen's palace. They have been commanded to this work by the queen's Messenger,

and they resent the enforced and difficult labour, for none of them has seen their ruler, knowing of her only by hearsay and exaggerated legend. The harshness of the land is contrasted to the lush meadows of the distant south, where life is easy and the queen, if remembered at all, is mocked as a delusion which chains the northerners to endless and irrelevant slavery. The three men abandon their work, reject the queen as a myth, and decide to travel to the southern land; but are checked by the arrival of the Messenger. The queen, he tells them, already occupies the half-built palace as a spirit. Angrily, the men point out that they cannot see her and the Messenger describes her to them in heroic poetry which invokes images of the stern grandeur of their native land and its glorious history. Entranced, the men's senses are awakened, and they see the queen in the fullness of her beauty, returning joyously to their task. Alone on the mountainside, the Messenger implores the queen to grant him a glimpse of her beauty also.

The allegorical significance to the dream of a resurrected Scottish nationhood is obvious, but the play is couched with sufficient skill to avoid pretension, though not an element of preciousness. The short form is well handled as a vehicle for poetry, the speech of the labourers rhythmic and repetitive, in contrast to the Messenger's careful rhetoric. The physical stasis on the stage is balanced by modulations of speech, as the national visionary who is the Messenger builds with his imagination a dream which becomes concrete for other men.

That Malloch's "nationalism" is of a different order from Brandane's, and indeed, most of the consciously Scottish products of the S.N.P., should already be apparent. Malloch's locations are superficially Scottish - they could in truth be anywhere - the content of his plays may be rooted more deeply in Scottish experience but paradoxically, is more universal in appeal. Parochialism, it seems, is the insistence on tartan or shipbuilding, on creating a Scotland on the stage, rather than Scotsmen writing from their intellect and emotion.

Nowhere does Malloch penetrate more deeply into Scottish consciousness than the three acts of Soutarness Water. One of the

few mature and intensely serious plays performed by the S.N.P. , it took as its subject Predestination, a central and particularly harsh tenet of Scottish Puritan theology. Supreme above the piteous struggles of its literally doomed characters is a terrible old Testament God, never openly recognised, but whose inhuman "mysterious ways" seem to toy sardonically with the lives and hopes of men before cutting them off altogether. With startling effect Malloch identifies this deity by argument and symbol with the Soutarness Water, a murderously changeable river which lurks threateningly behind each scene of the play; and with the mentally defective Daft Jock whose petty vengeance on a local farmer initiates the final tragedy. The bitter irony of this equation of God with capricious inhumanity and malicious insanity is emphasised by Malloch's chorus, the minister of the local kirk and his elders, desperately but ineffectively attempting to reconcile the members of their flock to the inexplicable blows which beset them; and opposing them, the impassioned, blasphemous intellect of Gavin Dochart.

On a stormy night, with the sound of Soutarness Water in rising spate for a background, Hugh Munro quarrels with his mother over the girl he is courting, Jean Dochart. Mrs. Munro, though she will not state her reasons, is utterly opposed to any association with the girl, and when Hugh refuses to heed her objections, spitefully tells him he goes out to see Jean "without her blessing". As Hugh leaves, the minister arrives, and to him Mrs. Munro confesses her anguish concerning Jean Dochart. She feels she has been unjust to the girl, but curiously asserts that Jean's mother "ill-wishes" Hugh's dead father, her sometime lover. The minister is astonished by this belief in pagan powers by a Christian woman, and sternly rebukes her, but Mrs. Munro cannot be entirely persuaded. She tells the minister how the sound of the river seems like a voice endlessly repeating "His mercy endureth forever", and as she is apparently comforted by this, the clergyman takes his leave. Almost immediately, the weird figure of Daft Jock walks unheralded into the house, with another interpretation of the river's voice - the words of the curse supposedly wished on Hugh's father; "Ill or well, trickle of spate, Soutarness Water'll get ye yet". Mrs. Munro, after questioning Jock about the

rhyme, suspects that Jock is an illegitimate son of the Dochart woman and her own late husband; and is then paralysed by the thought that Jean may be the child of adultery and half-sister to Hugh. In turmoil, she prays to God for guidance then forgiveness for such an accusation against her man; but now her head is filled with the sound of the river repeating "Ill or well, trickle or spate, Soutarness Water'll get ye yet". Terrified that by withholding her blessing she may have loosed the curse on her son, she goes out to cross the river and warn him to cross the river in safety by the bridge rather than by the swifter but less secure stepping stones, but is herself drowned while taking this dangerous route.

The second act takes place on the morning of Mrs. Munro's funeral. Hugh and the minister depart from the Munro cottage, and in their absence arrive first Daft Jock, seeking a quiet refuge away from other folk, then Gavin Dochart, Jean's father. Dochart is a finely-drawn, complex character; a man of intelligence and sensibility transformed to bitterness and self-degradation. Threatening Jock continually with violence, he assaults instead Hugh's whisky, and insistently plies Jock with it as well. Prompted by the helplessness and incomprehension of his companion, Dochart gives tongue to his feelings with a consuming rage all the more frightening for its control. Dochart once ceased to believe in the existence of God, under the impact of great suffering. His belief has returned, but he now regards God as a monstrous tyrant, worshipped by the timid who cannot bring themselves to accept the reality of death and pain, who take refuge in pathetic assertions of "God's mercy": thus, says Dochart, the appalling slaughter of the Great War is become "a God's mercy". The reason behind this outburst is made clear after two church elders interrupt his increasingly drunken monologue, and he savagely exposes his problem to them for the judgement of more orthodox opinion.

Dochart, like Mrs. Munro, has come to suspect the identity of Jean's true father - only his evidence is considerably more concrete: he knows that his wife, was unfaithful to him. Hugh Munro now wants Jean for his wife, and though religious scruples hold no sway over him, Dochart is afraid that someone else may know or guess the

truth, and crush his daughter's happiness by whispering it abroad. The elders are dumbfounded, and Dochart drives them away with mockery. Faced by Jean and Hugh, Dochart is driven finally to the point where he must confess his suspicion: and at this point, God seems to intervene positively, though with terrible power – Gavin Dochart suffers a stroke which stills his voice forever before he can utter the fatal words. Blasphemy appears to have received a fearsome reward.

Jean and Hugh proceed with their wedding, at which Dochart is a helpless, wheel-chair ridden guest. The ceremony is disrupted, however, by Daft Jock who out of revenge for a beating once received at Dochart's hands, shouts that Jean is Hugh's sister. While minister and elders attempt first to overcome the objection, then to reconcile the lovers to an abrupt and total separation, Jean throws herself in to the river and Hugh follows her example by shooting himself. The curtain descends on Daft Jock, sitting alone in the Munro kitchen, a meaningless grin on his face.

There are occasions when Soutarness Water becomes melodramatic or attempts effects outwith its author's skill. The deaths are not well handled, and in the last act are distinctly clumsy. However, it should be remembered that Malloch is dealing quite literally with a "deus ex machina", and if this does not excuse his failure, at least it explains his difficulty: how to portray convincingly the unexpected and apparently meaningless manipulations of a God invested principally with motiveless malice. Technically, Malloch is plagued by the necessity of reporting the most crucial events of his play rather than showing them; and by the end of the last act his manner of doing so has become repetitive and wooden. He also takes the risk of a prolonged soliloquy in act one, which though he has contrived to fit it into a formal prayer to God, is yet not wholly satisfactory. The overwhelming impression of Soutarness Water is not of these failures, but of the remarkable power with which the theme of Predestination is pursued throughout the play.

The sound of Soutarness Water is not only continually present, its relevance is emphasised by the conflict of its "voices", the infantile, pagan rhyme overcoming the Christian reassurance. What in other



circumstances would be a symbol of life is here the instrument of death, its power associated not with a higher justice, but with the insane randomness of Daft Jock. The elders who discover Mrs. Munro's death in Act 1 specifically introduce the concept of pre-destination in a nervously snappish argument about the effectiveness of prayers for the dead; and after their departure there comes an oddly disquieting moment when the kitchen door swings open, almost as a deliberate lure for Hugh as he crosses the river. Dochart's terrible raging in Act 2 fully develops Malloch's argument, and in one moment of brilliance finds in a whisky bottle an extended simile for God and his influence. The extreme swings of fortune's pendulum only accentuate human helplessness; and in the end Jean's fatalistic, hopeless resignation is far more terrible than all her father's defiant bitterness and rage. Malloch does not oversimplify: Ines, the kirk-elder who upholds rigidly the necessity of bowing before God's will however harsh, is neither dull-witted nor cruel - he too has suffered, and has found his religious "comfort" barely palatable. Lastly, there is Daft Jock, equal in influence to Soutarness Water and apparently in communication with it. From first to last his is the vital contribution which sets in motion the process of destruction, first by implanting the rhyming curse of the river in Mrs. Munro's ears, then by prompting Dochart to his obsessive defiance of God, and next by interrupting the marriage. It is the imbecilic Jock who, at least figuratively, inherits the stricken household at the end of the play; alone undisturbed by the insanity implicit in the events around him.

Soutarness Water is powerfully written in a form of Scots not difficult to comprehend, but generally undistinguished. On occasion Malloch displays a lively taste for imagery; as when Hugh Munro, speaking of the obstacle to his marriage and its effect on Jean, says: "... a thing like yon wad rub the bloom aff a young saul like a man's fingers taks the bloom aff a plum." There is no trace whatsoever of immature coyness: adultery and sexual jealousy are explicitly dealt with, and on the subject of religion the author admits no false restraints - indeed, the Glasgow Herald critic at the premiere reported that one scene in particular was too frankly imaginative for outraged respectability, when the "blasphemous apotheosis of the whisky-bottle elicited a

hiss from the audience." <sup>1</sup> That was as near as Glasgow came - at least in the twentieth century - to the riots which not infrequently had welcomed O'Casey's plays in Ireland, but it was enough to scare the Scottish National Players, and Soutarness Water was performed by them only half-a-dozen times. In this they abandoned one of the very few plays with which they were presented which found its origins deep within Scottish experience, both emotional and intellectual, and which dealt with its theme exhaustively and skilfully. Soutarness Water deserved much, much more.

The Coasts of India (1928), in three acts, was never published and no text apparently exists. Of it, the Glasgow Herald said the following :

"... the theme is the down fall of a proud Scottish family, and ... it is set in a small Scottish town and in Glasgow.

The play is one of considerable interest. The term "Scottish national drama" has come to mean swatches of the vernacular, tartan plaids, bearded faces, crooked sticks, and balmoral caps. But Mr. Malloch has dispensed with all these gadgets seized upon by the music-hall comedian for the purpose of drawing a libellous picture of the Scot with which to entertain the world. Instead he has dressed his characters according to the fashions of the early nineties, and he makes them speak with good Scottish tongues the English they were taught. The story tells how John Mair and Thomas Mair, flourishing owners of spinning mills, are brought to ruin by the entrance of a competitive industrial concern. John Mair the enigma of Scottish pride, refuses offered assistance and even when he is unable to pay the rent of a small flat in Glasgow he speaks to the collector from the heart of such burning pride that only the timely intervention of his wife averts further disaster. John Mair has an imaginative daughter who holds on to a phrase, 'the Shores of India' as symbolic of all she intends life to give her. Hence the title. The author also deals quite cleverly with the changing customs of the period and for the purpose introduces trade unionism and other social questions." 2

The Grenadier (1929) is by comparison a rather slight piece, depending too much on coincidence though its characterisation is of

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1 Glasgow Herald, 20 Jan. 1926

2 Glasgow Herald 24 Oct. 1928

a high standard. It is a very straightforward tale about a West coast family awaiting the arrival of the ferry-boat "The Grenadier", to carry the daughter to Greenock and her ship-connection for America. Her brother is expected to arrive on "The Grenadier" to take farewell of her, but apparently is not aboard. In fact, he has been accidentally killed on the journey, and the parents and Captain of the ship unite to conceal the death from the girl, thus enabling her to depart in happiness for her hopefilled future. Despite the accute observation of character - the father in particular is excellent - there is not sufficient conflict or physical movement to make the episode truly dramatic; the stage is occupied most of the time by a blind woman sitting almost motionless. As a result, the bitter laughter of the bereaved father which ends the play seems melodramatically exaggerated and The Grenadier, as a whole, is an inferior successor to The Coasts of India and Soutarness Water. Other pieces, such as Prologue to Flodden failed equally to contribute anything approaching the value of these two plays.

#### DONALD CARSWELL

Donald Carswell's Count Albany (1926) is a hard, hard look at the legendary hero, Bonnie Prince Charlie, and the romantic Jacobitism so dear to Scotsmen. The play is set in 1766 - twenty penurious, degrading years after the disastrous Forty-five - not in Scotland, but in Rome; in the private study of Henry, Cardinal of York and brother to Charles Edward. The Old Pretender lies on his deathbed, and Henry has sent to Florence for his long-estranged brother to attend his dying father. When the curtain rises, Mackintosh, Henry's clerical secretary, is discovered taking a sly nip from a whisky bottle carefully concealed in his writing desk. He is almost caught by the unheralded arrival of his master, an intelligent, moderate man, though rather thoughtless about his effect on the feelings of others. Henry, strained and worried by a long vigil at his father's bedside, yet proves himself capable of wry humour and even heartiness in his response to Mackintosh's dourly sarcastic comment about the Stuart family and cold steel - Mackintosh has

little sympathy for Henry's complacent denigration of Scottish lack of sophistication. The secretary is prickly and angular in his pride; deliberately self-righteously, awkward about the Stuarts' debt to Scotsmen: but the tragic tale of his brothers' death for the Jacobite cause proves to be habitual, both obsessive and carefully rehearsed. The two men argue over the non-arrival of Charles Edward, from which are learnt the embarrassing details of the Prince's life in exile - drunkenness, debauchery, crippling extravagance and a degradingly ill-tempered relationship with a certain Clementina Walkinshaw, his companion in disgrace. Mackintosh is goaded by an impassioned outburst from Henry into patriotic violence; but his limitations are apparent in the satisfaction his ponderous imagination derives from an excessively long formula expressing his outrage, and Henry at the end is once more in control of the situation. Together, the two men are Carswell's precise and observant comment on the relationship of Scotland and the Stuart dynasty.

Charles Edward's arrival is announced by the entrance of Clementina Walkinshaw, a long-suffering and desperate woman, who announces that her beloved consort is drunk, and that they cannot pay off the coach which has brought them to Rome. Clementina, long since ruined by life with the Prince, revenges herself on the world - and the Stuarts in particular - by being a constant source of embarrassment. In this, she succeeds magnificently with Henry. Charles Edward himself now enters, drunk, dissolute, and shockingly threadbare, bearing all the marks of his wasted life. Henry is horrified, but Mackinnon the Scotsman is blinded by romantic preconceptions: he is rapidly charmed and shamed into handing over the hidden whisky, and prompted once more to repeat the tragedy of his brothers. In another striking symbol of Jacobite reality, Carswell has the Prince "remember" Mackintosh's family and praise their courage - unlike his brother, Charles has no scruples about pandering to others' illusions especially if they concern himself.

Alone together, the brothers argue over the past: Henry with bitter realism, Charles with inspiring romanticism, despite his increasing drunkenness. Charles fully comprehends the reality behind such

inspiration – but he has nevertheless been powerfully moved by it.

Charles : "Quite right. We were the raggedest, lousiest regiment that ever marched, but we marched to win a kingdom. We had no guns, we had no money, we had no food. But we had what was better – loyalty to the death, love stronger than death – all the things that only fools believe in. It was a fool's game, but it was a great game."

Henry : "A lost game."

Charles : "But a game that was almost won – ay, and will be won yet..."

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He is brutally objective about his political position, disbelieving the principle of inherited Divine Right on which the Stuart cause was based, preferring instead to see himself as one upon whom Grace has fallen as a chosen instrument of destiny. For his charisma was he followed by the clans, not for his name. This magnificent elevation ultimately becomes suspect as he expands his vision till he towers over the rest of mankind and foresees his future triumph over all adversity, with armies rising to his standard from the Moidart caves. The vaunting rhetoric is cut short by Clementina's re-entry – and suddenly it is clear that Charles is extremely drunk. He sings heedlessly and loudly, and then physically assaults Clementina. As Henry drags him away, the confusion is abruptly halted by a sonorous, statuesque messenger who ritualistically announces the death of the king and the accession of Charles. Henry begins desperately to excuse his brother's condition, and Charles, drunkenly stumbling over the ritual reply, reaches a lengthening pause . . . . .

"Harry . . . Help me . . . I've forgotten. I knew it all once, but I've forgotten. Oh, God, I've forgotten how to be king".

He breaks down, weeping, and the play is concluded.

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1 Count Albany, *Seven Short Plays*, Pan, London 1951 p.217

Count Albany is one of the very few outstanding Scottish plays to be written between the wars, and has seldom been equalled since. The dialogue fulfills every demand made upon it to sustain a play so heavily dependent on conversation; the characters are excellent, Henry and Charles especially being studied in considerable depth and subtlety. Carswell's sense of irony is remarkably well developed throughout the play, but its grimness is finely relieved by the sheer flamboyance of the ageing rake Charles. Count Albany is of major importance to Scottish drama not simply by virtue of the author's technical or imaginative skill, excellent though these are. Carswell has boldly seized a theme so frequently adopted and abused by sentimentally inclined writers as to be almost automatically equated with the second-rate, and instead produced an original, brilliantly damning assault on all the second-rate escapism which plagues Scottish drama and literature.

Under the pseudonym of Cormac Simpson, William J. MacDonald, resident in London where he was a schoolteacher, followed the presentation of his one-act domestic comedy The Last Move (1926) - a very frail vessel indeed - with more substantial work: Ayont The Hill (1927) and The Flower In the Vase (1928). Ayont the Hill is a quite astonishingly predictable cautionary tale concerning a Perthshire farmer who becomes so restive at the approach of his "hirplin days" that he sacrifices his marriage, his farm, his son's life, and his daughter's to travel the world and drink in its varied excitements before old age can claim him. With quite staggering lack of surprise, he discovers that London is not Eldorado and returns suitably chastened to a wife and family who forgive him in the end, enabling them all to live happily ever after. Scottish dialect is used extensively. The Flower In The Vase is hardly an improvement. In this play, Irene leaves the falseness and sophistication of middle-class London to follow her friend Mary to Mary's home, a farm near Aberfoyle. After some love complications with Mary's brothers Andy and Alec, she gives her heart to Andy, a rough farmer. After hesitating about whether to join his rural way of life, suspecting that she would be a hindrance to him, the arrival of her ambition-

obsessed mother proves to Irene that the country is preferable to her past existence. There is nothing to recommend Simpson's plays - in fact, it must be suspected that his dogged pursuit of the obvious in tenuously Scottish settings can only have done a disservice to Scotland on the stage.

Similarly, Donald MacLaren, who wrote It Looks Like A Change (1929) and S For Sugar Candy (1938) wrote regretably low-grade plays. The first of these is a curiously protracted and characterless attempt at Scots comedy, in which Robert Scriven "vanishes" to escape his nagging wife Janet and her hypocritical and bigoted Uncle James. Janet remarries cheerful grocer Alexander Ross, keeping him more firmly under her thumb even than Robert, who, supposed dead, returns disguised as a Canadian acquaintance. Janet recognises him, and together they learn of an inheritance which they can only claim as man and wife - and of course, neither can now admit to Robert's continuing existence. MacLaren paints a curious picture of Scottish life, and his play is crowded with eccentrics conceived - one supposes - in the tradition of "Scottish Character Acting", one of the least appetising symptoms of the kailyard school which presents all Scotsmen as infantile oddities. MacLaren's villagers, Bell Bogle, Archie Norrie, the church officer, Dicht MacReady the farmer, and 'Houp-la', all fall into this category; and the play depends so heavily on the distractions of their quaintness that the shifts of the plot are quite undisguisedly contrived and even nonsensical. S. For Sugar Candy is an abysmal comedy in which the young American niece of Peter and David Coggie, manufacturers of confectionary, revitalizes her uncles home and factory, thwarting the wicked Jews Lord Birtleshaw and Isadore Benn. She then marries the butler's son. The humour is anaemic and the antisemitism unpleasant. Where Cormac Simpson is merely dull, MacLaren is distinctly offensive.

### The One-Acts

The general impression of the first "golden" decade of the Scottish National Players is of dull - sometimes infantile - one-act domestic comedies or historical costume-dramas; relieved at intervals by more substantial work which on occasion could display rivetting

skill and imagination. Unfortunately the superficial one-act comedy rapidly became an institution among Scottish amateurs, and continued to recur in S.N.P. programmes right up to 1938.

The embarrassing badness of these plays is typified by Morland Graham's C'est La Guerre (1926), performed no fewer than eighty times by the S.N.P.; John Bone's The Crystal Set (1924), and most agonising of all, J. J. Bell's Exit Mrs. McLeerie (1928).

C'est La Guerre depicts an incident in the great war, in which an uncouth Scottish soldier, taking refuge in a cellar from German gunfire, discovers hiding there an elderly Frenchman and his beautiful daughter. Unable to speak each other's languages, beyond a few words, the trio drink tea together, and the soldier tends a wound on the girl's arm. Each hesitant attempt at conversation inevitably terminates in the repeated phrase, "c'est la guerre", until the soldier packs up his equipment and returns to the war outside. The Jock, struck by the girl's beauty, confesses to wistful pangs of romance before resolutely resuming his duty. The play is boring, undramatic, and heavily sentimentalised. Graham wrote another play for the S.N.P. in 1928, The Hoose wi' the Golden Windies, a heavy-handed child's morality which in its awful couthy homeliness is no improvement on C'est La Guerre. Topical enthusiasm for the infant radio services provided John Bone with material for his slapstick comedy, The Crystal Set. Though its principal appeal, the audiences' familiarity with the farcical aspects of "cat's whisker" wireless receivers, has long since vanished it is plain that there was very little else in the play beyond a judicious use of broad Scots accent. As a brief sketch in a variety programme it would be entirely satisfactory: it is hardly the type of play to receive the attention of a movement dedicated to national dramatic revival.<sup>1</sup> J. J. Bell's piece, Exit Mrs. McLeerie, would not have reached the stage of any self-respecting music hall. Its humour is extremely feeble, relying solely on the most obvious slapstick and caricature. The action is centred round the insistence of the forceful Mrs. Munro that her friend Mrs. McLeerie

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1      42 performances by the S.N.P.



should visit Buggles' photographic studio. Mr. Buggles is at first busy in the dark room, and as the women await his attention, Mrs. Munro succeeds in damaging as much furniture and fittings as are in her clumsy reach. Mr. and Mrs. Bruce, dissatisfied customers, arrive at the studio, only to be discomfited by Mrs. Munro's fishwife humour. The "fun" is derived from the weakest malapropism, ignorance, and stupidity on the part of the characters. Sadly, this was not an early production by a society as yet unsophisticated and with little material. Exit Mrs. McLeerie<sup>1</sup> was performed for the first time in September 1928, in the wake of most of the S.N.P.'s greatest achievements.

Some of these one-act domestic comedies were less tedious. 208 Separate performances attest to the popularity of A Valuable Rival, a one-act comedy by N.F. Grant, which was the choice of the S.N.P. for presentation before the royal family at Balmoral in 1922. Strongly satirical, the play depicts the conflict between two small-town newspaper owners in a north Scottish town, Jameson and Bain, and Jameson's confession when given the power to smash his rival that he finds Bain's competition a necessary part of his pleasure.

At the start of the play Bain, the younger man, is in the ascendant, and Jameson is fast losing advertising and circulation. Maggie Jameson, his grimly vindictive daughter, reveals that she has been to Bain's home town and uncovered an attempt by Bain fifteen years previously to perpetrate a forgery. Despite the fact that the intended victim long since forgave Bain, Maggie has with single-minded cruelty obtained the fatal evidence with which to destroy her father's competitor. Her malicious triumph over Bain prompts Jameson to remark wryly, "Aye, I suppose next Sabbath, Maggie, ye'll hae the kirk-bell itself dinging out, 'Forgery! Forgery!'" Bain is sent for and confronted with the evidence, Jameson deliberately prolonging the tension despite Bain's stoic acceptance of defeat and requests for the terms of the blackmail. Jameson then throws the evidence into the fire, thunderously quelling a hysterically disappointed Maggie, and explains to Bain: "I dinna want to lose sich an incomparable adversary as yersel'... Mester Macnab o' 'The Advertiser' is now in an asylum, and Mr. Bliss o' 'The Record' is in his grave....", and since his victory over them,

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1      26 performances by the S.N.P.

life has been too quiet. Bain is trapped by pride into remaining in the town, and leaves the house to arrange the next round of their contest. Jameson now turns on his tearful daughter, demanding that she remember her Christian upbringing, and for good measure blackmails her into silence over the affair – he knows that her vindictiveness comes from jealousy of Bain's attentions to another woman. Having thus captured his "valuable rival" and humiliated his daughter, the old man turns to his evening meal, solemnly bowing his head for the mumbled grace: "thy mercies – Christ's sake – Amen. . "

The reversal of direction half-way through is well-managed, and as an entertaining light satire it is effective, especially in the magnificently hypocritical display of religious humility with which it ends.

Scotland's two most prolific writers for the amateur stage, Charles Stewart Black and Joe Corrie, began their careers with productions by the S.N.P., developing their talents elsewhere during the huge expansion of amateur drama in Scotland which followed the S.N.P.'s establishment.

Charles Stewart Black gave them Chatelard (1921) in the romantic historical vein, and an attempt at satire The Guinea Stamp (1923), woodenly written and highly predictable in its conclusion, though there are a few pleasing moments. Joe Corrie, a writer of some talent who found for himself a ready market for light comedies in the expanding amateur drama became the uncrowned king of the amateur festivals, having written over seventy plays. Those he presented to the S.N.P. are of interest for their simplicity, vitality, and above all, for their settings; for Corrie, a miner, portrayed the life of the mining village, far removed from the dramatic norms of Highland dream-world, Highland reality, and urban middle-class alike. The Shilling-a-Week Man (1927) for example, has its action in a poverty-stricken miner's house, in which the miner's wife struggles to make ends meet and somehow pay off the packman – the "Shilling a-week man" – who operates a primitive, and for himself lucrative form of hire-purchase, deliberately holding the whole community in grossly inflated debt. The wife, terrified lest her husband finds out about the money she owes, attempts to evade the packman, but is eventually

cornered by him. She tries in vain to borrow the sum, and in the meantime her husband returns home, having lost his job. He soon grasps the situation, despite her attempts to deceive him; but he turns his anger not on her, but on the packman, driving him out without his money and telling him flatly that it won't be paid until the family can afford it. Corrie portrays the hand-to-mouth existence and its pathetic attempts to maintain a respectable front with spare effectiveness, without comment or complaint or falsely heightened emotion.

It is of note that it was in the field of the one-act play that Scots dialect and language was most frequently and confidently employed, and that almost without exception whenever the setting was modern, it was also working-class. This association of class and speech is quite natural: it is however regrettable that both should have become so readily identified with the most reductive and uncouth brand of humour. Scots language in particular found itself unjustly but understandably suspect in the theatre of subsequent years.

## THE SECOND DECADE

After the change of policy in 1928 and the demise of the Scottish National Theatre Society as the principal influence on the Scottish National Players, the number of new Scottish plays performed by them declined noticeably; and in the 1930's there were only two new authors of interest whose work came to the fore - Hal D. Stewart and James Bridie. Bridie ultimately became Scotland's most prominent modern playwright; but no single play appeared to rival the excitement generated by the first performances of Gruach, Soutarness Water or James the First of Scotland. The whole tone of the decade is one of declining initiative and the stultification of the original ideals.

### JAMES BRIDIE

Undoubtedly the greatest single indication of the S.N.P.'s decline during the 1930's was the failure to find in James Bridie a principal dramatist for their movement, as they had done previously with John Brandane and G.R. Malloch. Eight of Bridie's plays were performed by them between 1928 and 1937, but of these, only four were written specially for the S.N.P., and they were far from being his best works.

The first of Bridie's plays to be publically performed was The Sunlight Sonata written in 1928 in close co-operation with John Brandane and Tyrone Guthrie. Described as a "farce-morality" it was the only work Bridie produced with the S.N.P. in mind to which he applied all his energy and skill, and though its intention was frivolous and light to a degree which sometimes drew the author into occasional flights of downright foolery, The Sunlight Sonata nevertheless bore the distinct stamp of both a rare talent for rhetoric and the continuation of Scottish tradition in satire and irony. The play somewhat eccentrically mocks the besetting pettiness of the sins indulged in by Glasgow's middle-classes, by taking a sample of its membership and making them the pawns in a contest between good and evil, in which the Seven Deadly Sins figure very prominently. The conflict is hardly Miltonic, however. A comically despondent and somewhat ineffective Beelzebub, attended by the Seven Deadly Sins as naughty children following a

grim, intellectually superior master, is confronted by the three providential "Aunties" – Faith, Hope and Charity. These three ladies are particularly excellent foils to Beelzebub, complacent, twittering, good-natured members of the Women's Guild, dressed – in Bridie's words – as "handsome but uneventful Pantomime Fairy Queens". By contrast, Beelzebub is a devil in the Auld Nick tradition, eloquent, depressed, given to soliloquies of magnificent rhetorical power, quite attractive in his comic insistence on evil. It is with some point that when Beelzebub is masquerading as a gardener, one of the characters observes him to be a "fine old Scotch type"! Set out with burlesque elaboration in Prologue, Interlude, Demonstration, Apotheosis and Epilogue, The Sunlight Sonata shows humanity plagued by the Seven Sins as a situation far more preferable than the total separation of vice and virtue. When, under the influence of Beelzebub, the accustomed level of trivial self-seeking in the human is aggravated to the point of violence, the three Graces intervene to create an equally untenable atmosphere of prim and hypocritical virtue. Bridie impishly equates the triumph of the "Aunties" with the rice-pudding and rissoles which become the staple diet of the "reformed" Groundwater family. The victory of evil is also made ridiculous in the gross degeneracy of Elsie Carmichael, who falls under the spell of all seven of the Sins. As the wicked Lady, she is emphatically played for laughs, a huge cigarette-holder being indispensable to the role. Bridie finds his satirical solution in a return to the situation with which the play began, with humanity comfortably established midway between the evil and the good. The farcical restoration of the original order is crowned by an "epithalamion" recited by Faith; as the Seven Sins respectfully arrange themselves around the re-deemed Elsie and her newly-won fiance:

"Phoebus is throned and Hymen's Torch is lit  
And we had better make the best of it.  
So to this happy blend of rib and dust  
If evil spirits come (as come they must)  
As reverent servitors let them attend  
Utterly purposed never to offend.  
Let Avarice keep the wolf-pack from the door  
And Envy polish up the parquet floor.  
Let soft Luxuria deck the wanton bride  
And Gula keep the inner man supplied.

Let capable Superbia nurse the kids  
And Ira whack them, as the Bible bids.  
Let Sloth transport the family jars away.  
On these conditions only let them stay -  
To stimulate, to comfort, to sustain,  
Or, at the least, perhaps to entertain.  
And do remember, dears, in the event  
Of fire, flood, families or accident,  
That you can count eternally on me  
And my sweet sisters, Hope and Charity. "

The Sunlight Sonata is entertaining and imaginative, rather than brilliant and witty; but its dry humour and unfettered fantasy marked a strikingly fresh injection of vitality to Scottish comedy, and in Beezlebub's opening speech Bridie indicated the talent which became such a distinctive feature of his plays, rhetorical virtuosity.

In the following year, Bridie approached the S.N.P. with a serious work which he had written in the early 1920's under the lingering influence of Alfred Wareing and the Scottish Repertory Company, The Switchback. This cynical study of medical ethics and popular opinion, with its unconventional conclusion, he showed to John Brandane, who rather surprisingly suggested that Bridie try not the S.N.P., but Barry Jackson at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, where it was readily accepted. When Jackson soon followed the production of The Switchback with another Bridie play, What it is to be Young, any sense of importance which the S.N.P. wielded over Bridie quickly evaporated. After writing The Anatomist (1930) for the Masque Theatre, he "felt very guilty about the Scottish National Theatre Society, so (he) wrote them a play too"<sup>1</sup>

"It was called The Girl Who Did Not Want To Go To Kuala Lumpur ... The Girl Who Did Not want To Go To Kuala Lumpur was not a very good play. It was about a girl who fell in love with a postman and I laughed myself sick when I was writing it. The actors laughed themselves sick at rehearsals, It went on the stage with excellent prospects, but the audience were hardly quite so much amused, and the Glasgow dramatic critics not at all. "

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A trivial attempt at very light, comic-romantic entertainment, the play is boring, heavily padded, and maddeningly elongated. Three friends

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1 The Seven Deadly Sins

2 J. Bridie One Way of Living Constable, London 1939 p. 270

from the bohemian section of the artists' world, Mary, Tom Garscadden, and Harry – an exceptionally weak copy of Wilde's Algernon Moncrieff – attempt chaotically to rescue Margaret Unthank from being carried off against her insipid will to Kuala Lumpur by her guardians, an aunt and uncle who are highly accomplished though largely unsuccessful confidence tricksters. A romantic, poetic Highland postman is discovered, who instantly falls in love with Margaret when shown her portrait. His name is John Sobieski Stuart, and he is really a divinity student: he is also the Amateur Cruiser Weight Champion of Scotland. With such attributes he is irresistible, and after unbelievably protracted nonsense involving Smellie, a victim of the Unthinks, and their landlady, Mrs. Syme; John brushes aside all obstacles in a style which parodies Douglas Fairbanks to win Margaret and escape with her from the babbling crowd of friends, enemies, and passers-by who fill the stage. After a limping start the entrance of the Unthinks in Act 1 marks the beginning of a series of blatant contrivances which are continued through the rest of the play with no attempt either to disguise or wholly burlesque them. The play succeeds in no way as entertainment, leaving only an impression of sustained and superficial facetiousness entirely insufficient to relieve the boredom instilled by the slowly grinding action. There is not even a trace of Bridie's verbal dexterity to brighten the pervading dullness.

His next offering to the S.N.P. was The Dancing Bear (1931) which, though preferable to The Girl Who did not want to go to Kuala Lumpur, is hardly impressive. The play is recognisably written in the Bridie mode of surrounding a lost individual with a confusion of chattering fools who lead him this way and that before he discovers his true direction. The play within the play, St. Eloy and the Bear, provides an unmistakable statement of the central theme, in its tale of the dancing bear who devours its masters when they unthinkingly enable the beast to speak and understand. Colin Kilgour, a young poet from a Scottish seaside town is "discovered" by the pretentious litterateurs who visit during the summer months. They adopt him into their highly superficial society and carry him off to a Glasgow artistic soiree, where, after the performance of St. Eloy and the Bear he is made to recite some of his poetry. Stung by their stupidity and condescension,

he breaks off his reading, and is saved from his humiliation by the sympathetic Kitty Murdoch. They are briefly infatuated, and decide to marry, but in Act 3 Kitty begins to reveal that she too is one of the literati Colin now despises. Neither is happy about the forthcoming wedding, and when they discover their respective true loves in Jean, the housemaid, and Betts, the artist, they elope separately on the eve of the wedding. The theme is never more than rudimentary in its handling and the happy ending is an obvious refusal to take the issue seriously. Winifred Bannister has noted the parallel with Robert Burns and his involvement with "Clarinda" and remarks :

"Bridie probably funk'd dealing with the situation as a tragedy. Indeed, his treatment is deliberately one of apologising for emotion with an immense surround of distorting decoration. "

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This decoration is in itself extremely unsatisfying. The caricatures of the literati are weak, obvious, and frequently tedious. The play of St. Eloy and the Bear is undermined by an infantile descent into slapstick at the end; and though the developing relationships of the two pairs of lovers are neatly woven through the plot, in themselves the characters carry little conviction.

The last contribution made by Bridie to the S.N.P. was Colonel Wotherspoon (1934) a mild satirical comedy about a young man whose first, abysmally clichéd novel becomes, through a quirk of fate, a best-seller. The young man, Archibald Kellock, is dominated by the neatly-drawn figure of his ruthlessly possessive mother, who with his lazy and selfish uncle Tom, lavishes praise upon her son's achievement until his second novel meets a far less enthusiastic response, whereupon she hypocritically warns him of the narrow limitations of his endeavour. Opposed to her is Archie's sweetheart, the intellectual Emily, who from the outset has openly condemned Archie's work for the adolescent escapism which it is. Emily unfortunately has found little success in her own literary efforts, and is thus extremely vulnerable to Mrs. Kellock's unjust accusations of envy and spite. As a result, she withdraws from the affair, and Archie for a

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1 W. Bannister, James Bridie and his Theatre, Rockliff, London 1955, p. 84



little time falls under the spell of Mrs. Kishmul, his American agent. When Mrs. Kellock and Uncle Tom desert Archie on the failure of his second book, Emily returns at last to the combat, and in a burst of startling invective reveals their self-interest and saves Archie from his virtual slavery. Colonel Wotherspoon is used as a symbol for ill-informed fatuousness, a frequently invoked but never-seen friend of Uncle Tom's. The play itself is unexciting, its mildness frequently declining into tedium, and it is saved neither by the weakness of Archie, Uncle Tom, Emily and Mrs. Kishmul as characters, poorly caricatured as they are; nor by lapses into the infantile, as when a book reviewer heard over the radio is made to whistle his sibilants during a lengthy discussion due to a previous dental operation. The only relief in an otherwise flat and trivial piece is the character of Mrs. Kellock, whose blind, determined egotism Bridie captures perfectly.

The Switchback, The Anatomist, The Black Eye and Tobias and the Angel were also eventually performed by the S.N.P., but only after their success had been proved elsewhere. The Anatomist was played for only three successive nights in 1936, fully six years after its first performance by the Masque Theatre, and by and large Bridie's lukewarm relationship with the Players and their declining initiative failed to contribute anything of value to drama in Scotland.

Hal D. Stewart, who after his association with the S.N.P. began a successful theatrical career as a producer, first with the Howard and Wyndham Players, and later in the West End, was a superficial dramatist who occasionally employed his limited talent to successful comic effect, but more frequently wrote the most trivial of pot-boilers. He is at his best in the "historical impertinence",<sup>1</sup> Rizzio's Boots, a farcical parody of the romantic treatment of Mary, Queen of Scots. As the title indicates, the play deals with Mary's conjectured love-affair with her Italian secretary David Rizzio, and the curtain rises on this pair, locked in passionate embrace. They are almost discovered by the untimely return of the Queen's husband, Darnley, and Rizzio takes refuge behind an arras which does not quite conceal his boots. Mary herself flies into an inner chamber, and the situation is

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1 H. D. Stewart, sub-title to play

neatly reversed and undercut by Darnley's entry, for he immediately attempts to seduce the Queen's lady-in-waiting, who proves a not unwilling victim. Thus it is Mary who is outraged by her spouse's infidelity, and the quarrel between Darnley and herself as she out-manoeuvres his suspicions of Rizzio is conducted in a light-hearted manner which smacks of modern suburbia rather than the Reformation. The author does not hesitate to employ the farcical tactics of a review-sketch: in the midst of Darnley's helplessly childish rage, who should enter unannounced but John Knox – portrayed as a boorish, single-minded scandal-monger. In the course of the play, Darnley first draws back the arras to discover that Rizzio's boots are unoccupied – the owner having fled via a secret staircase – and later believing that he has at last trapped his Italian rival, repeats the action, to discover a bewildered John Knox. At no time is the audience called upon to believe in either characters or situation, and as a light and entertaining lampoon, Rizzio's Boots is quite successful, even in its guying of Scots historical obscurantism in the title. However, the verbal wit displayed by Mary and Rizzio is neither sharp enough nor swift enough, the action on which the farce depends is rather sparse and the pivotal feature of the secret stairway rather mechanical in its application. The end, in which Rizzio and Mary laugh at Darnley's confusion, is too low in tone after the uproarious confrontation with Knox to be a wholly satisfying conclusion to the comedy; and Rizzio's Boots is hardly outstanding.

It was followed by Fire Policy (1936), The Home Front (1931), Trade Union (1936) and The Nineteenth Hole (1932), trivial one-act pieces ranging from melodrama to uninspired comedy or insipid tragic effects, none of which contains a spark of interest.

Stewart also wrote two full-length plays for the S.N.P., both somewhat in the Brandane vein, A Month of Sundays (1931) and The Beannachy Bomb (1937). The first of these is a low-key romance with moral overtones, set vaguely in a backward Highland village but involving figures whose only Scottish characteristics are their names. The new minister, Forsyth, turns the village upside down with his enthusiasm for modernity, refusing to wear clerical dress

when "off-duty", and paying little heed to the traditional superstitions of puritan belief. An attractive personality, he soon wins the affections of Molly Carlyle from Bobby Farquhar, and Bobby in jealous anger investigates the minister's past to discover not simply that he already has a wife, but that she is a music-hall actress. The scandal which follows empties the village kirk, but Forsyth convinces the congregation that he genuinely believed his wife to be dead, and that their quarrel should be with him rather than the church. Bobby and Molly are brought together again, and in a rather peculiar ending, Forsyth abandons the ministry to follow a career on the music-hall boards. Clumsily written, A Month of Sundays has little to recommend it beyond the attack on the sheep-like hypocrisy of the "unco-guid" in Act Four, and the satirical flavour of Forsyth's exit from the religious complacency of the Scottish Kirk.

The debt to John Brandane is more obvious in The Beannachy Bomb a light romantic comedy. Reminiscent of Brandane's Heather Gentry, it tells the story of a young Glasgow housemaid – in reality the daughter of a wealthy tea-shop owner – who restores the waning fortunes of the old-fashioned Highland hotel at Beannachy and incidentally wins the heart of the proprietor's son, Colin. The girl, Isa, takes advantage of the hotelier's absence in a distant hospital to force a semblance of modernity, indeed, of reasonable comfort on the establishment, defying traditional rigidity in the cook, Mary, to bully and cajole Colin into accepting two out-of-season guests. The guests, sophisticated city-dwellers Elizabeth Claremont and George Fulton, stun Colin by requesting cocktails, but Isa undaunted, concocts a potent and pleasing brew which she christens the "Beannachy Bomb". The cocktail is an instant – and to Colin, mystifying – success: the guests decide to stay a little longer; but to Isa's chagrin, Colin, on whom her heart is set, falls victim to Elizabeth's charm. Sympathetic to the young girl, Fulton – a journalist – agrees to boost the hotel's reputation with a few laudatory articles to the more influential Scottish newspapers, and soon the building is bursting at the seams with enthusiastic cocktail-drinkers and mountain climbers. Fulton also attempts secretly to restore Isa's prospects with Colin by staging an

accident for her on the mountain side, but the scheme goes awry and Colin is injured as he attempts a rescue. Into the confusion of hotel guests now strides the comically overbearing hotelier, Angus, with the news that Isa's improvements have been in vain, for the mortgage on the Beannachy Hotel is to be foreclosed and neither he nor Colin can raise the money to save it. He is followed closely by a Mrs. McGregor – who turns out to be Isa's mother – who has deliberately bought the hotel's lease in an attempt to take it over. She offers instead to become a partner in the business, and with the collusion of Angus attempts to seal the bargain with a marriage between Isa and Colin. The young couple furiously reject the attempt to manipulate them as pawns in a financial game, but their future is saved by Colin's insistent declaration of a love for Isa which overcomes the reaction of his pride to their parents' machinations. To the rescue of the Beannachy Hotel's fortunes is finally added the engagement of Isa and Colin.

The Beannachy Bomb is lively enough and some of its characters have considerable entertainment value: Isa and the cook, Mary, are successfully opposed as voluble, strong-willed polarities of opinion; and Colin's father, Angus, is drawn direct from the Brandane notion of the ageing, wily Highlander, combining ruthless peasant cunning with a charmingly blatant simplicity as he pursues his goals. Nevertheless, The Beannachy Bomb represents no new development, being merely a restatement of a tried and tested formula embodying a concept of Scotland and the Highlands which consistently refuses to treat real problems seriously. The plays of Hal D. Stewart, popular as they were with the Scottish National Players, are by virtue of the lack of originality and depth which they display, symptomatic of the general decline in the impetus of the Players' contribution to Scottish drama which began in the late 1920's.

Aside from Stewart's output, the number of plays which dealt with Scotland in any form declined noticeably, and there were none which considered any serious problem of contemporary Scotland at all. If setting and at least part of the dialogue was recognisably Scottish, the players seemed to be happy: the vigour of the first decade

dwindled. Experiment ended, and the spirit of indigenous drama passed to other groups, less willing to rest on the achievements of the past.

From 1921 to 1939 the Scottish National Players provided the focus for Scottish dramatic aspirations. The Players' achievements lie in the establishment of a Scottish acting company of no small ability, in their far-ranging tours of a land starved of Theatre, and in the quality of some of the Scottish plays they produced. Yet despite these attainments, the major successes which attended Ireland's Abbey Theatre eluded them. Why this should be so may be seen in their plays. Scottish life, customs and speech were translated admirably to the stage, where they were frequently wedded to theatrical skill and imagination; but only rarely was there any sense of poetry, any suggestion that the restrictions of the narrowest naturalism were transcended. Those writers who employed some form of Scots language seem to have been content with the mere usage: none attempted to find in Scots - as the Irish dramatists had done with their language - a poetic power with which to heighten dramatic effect.

TWENTIETH CENTURY SCOTTISH DRAMA

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## CHAPTER ONE

### JAMES BRIDIE

James Bridie – a nom de plume concealing the identity of a respected Glasgow physician, Osborne Henry Mavor – is the only playwright of the century who combined an unmistakably Scottish identity with a large measure of success beyond the confines of his native land. Like James Barrie before him, his achievements in London's West-End won him a place in the modern English theatre. Starting to write seriously only when middle-aged, he soon established his reputation: in the thirties and forties he "came to the rescue of the English theatre when there was no one left after Shaw who could write the polished and witty conversation pieces which English audiences had grown to admire and demand instead of tragedy".<sup>1</sup>

Like Shaw – with whom he was often compared – argument was a principal feature of his plays.

"Argument is among his prime accomplishments, and an argument is the basic structure of many of his plays. They often resemble an intellectual wrestling match, and his typical characters are agile, brawny and urbane. . . The plays finish when the argument is finished."

2

He proved himself more than able to deal with fantasy, metaphysics, and symbolism; and shared Shaw's concern for morality and satire, his taste for "obvious verbal jokes"<sup>3</sup> and his use of fantasy in the midst of naturalism. . . The vital difference between the two authors which makes Bridie so much more than a mere disciple of Shaw lies in the Scotsman's refusal to assert any specific dogma<sup>4</sup> or to suggest that the arguments he presented could ever find a resolution. Indeed, his mature works suggest that ultimately he was as interested in the human emotions and motivations which lie behind an argument as in the intellectual terms of the argument itself. Any direct influence by another dramatist felt by Bridie stems from Ibsen, from whom he derives the taste for symbolism so marked in all his plays, and which he developed further into his own form of surrealism. Like Ibsen, he is – in terms of settings – a "parochial" writer, although also like the Norwegian he chooses the language of the professional theatre

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1 Lumley, Trends in Twentieth Century Drama, Barrie, Rockliff 1960 p. 222

2 Linklater The Art of Adventure, pp. 38–39 Macmillan, London 1947

3 G. Weales, p. 79, Religion in modern English Drama Pennsylvania/

4 G. Weales, p. 79, Religion in modern English Drama Oxford Univ. 1961

of his day rather than the less-widely-apprehended tongue of his native land. Bridie is quite capable of using Scottish dialects in his plays – as he does in The Anatomist and Doctor Angelus for example – but is no enthusiast for Scots as a medium of expression. The world he depicts is more often than not that of the Scottish professional classes, with their anglicised refinements, confused national perspective, and provincial isolation from metropolitan ideas. This isolation sharpens the author's focus on individuality as character and values are challenged by social values generally hostile to them.

The argumentative structure<sup>1</sup> of his plays is seen in the cyclical movement which returns characters in the last act to their starting-point, and frequently the central acts are in the form of a symbolic journey, or an acknowledged fantasy, or even a supernatural adventure. Thus the dramatist proposes his argument, expands and tests it, then presents the audience with the results of his experiment. As for conclusions which may be drawn from this experimental process, Bridie prefers to leave them to the audience. Supporting this formal structure are a variety of dramatic devices all intended to distance the audience from the action on stage, and thus direct its attention to the intellectual as well as the emotional aspects of a play. The use of a chorus in a large number of Bridie's plays, often without any pretence of naturalism, creates a formal framework of detachment from which the action may be studied.<sup>2</sup> Prologue and epilogue spoken by choric figures abound throughout Bridie's career, from his burlesque The Sunlight Sonata of 1928 to The Baikie Charivari of 1952. Similarly, fantasy, surrealism, and a studied deployment of melodrama heighten awareness of the author's formal purpose; and to these features may be added his use of soliloquy and monologue,<sup>3</sup> and his "developing tendency to experiment with poetic devices like symbol, myth and legend."<sup>4</sup> There is in Bridie's dramatic career a sense of constant fretting against the naturalistic conventions

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1 J. T. Low Introduction to M. Litt thesis, The Major Plays of James Bridie, 1972, Edin. Low emphasises the structural formalism present in Bridie's work.

2 J. T. Low introduction to The Major Plays of James Bridie

3 J. T. Low introduction to The Major Plays of James Bridie

4 J. T. Low introduction to The Major Plays of James Bridie



prevailing in most theatres, an impression of a partially thwarted experimenter frustrated by the pronouncements of critics who complained, for example, that his direct appeal to the audience in the soliloquies of The Black Eye was "a ruinous innovation".<sup>1</sup> The consciousness of the artificiality and artifice of the theatre which underlies Bridie's use of such a variety of alienating techniques - and in this Edwin Morgan places him closer in spirit to Brecht than to Shaw - suggests a curious similarity to the self-conscious fantasies of James Barrie and his Islands. The central Acts of Bridie's plays frequently fulfil a similar function, translating the characters to a situation out-with normal conventions of order.

Much of his popularity stemmed from flamboyant characterisations such as Dr. Knox in The Anatomist (1930), Donald MacAlpin in The Forrigan Reel (1944) and Lady Pitts in Daphne Laureola (1949), all indicative of his enduring fixation for the individual out of step with society. His fascination in the strong-willed and voluble never faded; though as the years passed he displayed an increasing distrust of the "overdedicated"<sup>2</sup> and self-devoted, and the demonic aspects of powerful individualism were never far from his mind. The devil, in fact, is a recurring character throughout Bridie's work. The other principal type for his protagonists - if less startling - was no less theatrically attractive. In Tobias and The Angel (1930), The Black Eye (1935) and Mr. Gillie (1930) Bridie's hero is mild, even meek, for most of the time, and is swept along by events beyond his control. Such characters, like their more active counterparts, display a remarkable sense of life regardless of eccentricities of plot which endeared them to actors and audiences alike. Refusing to paint portraits in black and white, Bridie maintained a sense of identity between audience and character by insisting that the trivial tempers and foibles of everyday existence should be evident in the most exalted.<sup>3</sup> His heroes are as liable to fits of petulance, his villains to spontaneous generosity, as anyone. Even his poorest plays

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1 James Agate in W. Bannister's James Bridie and his Theatre Rockliff, London 1955, p. 124  
2 Edwin Morgan, Scottish International, November 1971  
3 G. Weales, p. 80, Religion in modern English Drama Pennsylvania/Oxford Univ. 1961

maintain a glimmer of interest by virtue of such sympathetic characterisations.

The conflict of duty embodied in the plays was less successful than his characterisations with certain critics. During the nineteen-thirties Bridie wrote a number of second-rate works such as The King of Nowhere and The Last Trump which justly earned complaints about disappointing last acts and half-developed ideas. Bridie's lack of commitment, his jaundiced view of social values which prompted his satirical impulse – and in later years, a deep pessimism – and his refusal to provide a solution or indicate an allegiance at the culmination of his highly argumentative plays; continued to elicit such responses long after their validity had evaporated. To the oft-repeated cry that he could not write a last act the author drily retorted, "only God can write last acts, and he seldom does".<sup>1</sup>

"You should go out of the theatre with your head whirling with speculations. You should be lovingly selecting infinite possibilities for the characters you have seen on the stage. What further interest for you have they, if they are neatly wrapped up or bedded and confined?"<sup>2</sup>

The honesty with which Bridie pursued this end, his "judicial ambiguity"<sup>3</sup> as Helen L. Lyben calls it, succeeded too well in many cases. His evocation of final uncertainty emphasised the desperation behind many apparently positive endings, provoking in the audience a disquiet possibly not untinged with resentment. He must have appreciated this himself, after his unpleasant characterisation in Babes In The Wood of Brewer, whose "Perhaps the answer is that there is no answer?" finds a chilling echo in many a more successful work from the same pen.

It is to be stressed that Bridie's success as a playwright, despite his involvement during the late 1920's in the Scottish National Players venture, depended mostly on the English stage until the formation of The Glasgow Citizens' in 1943. He sought after professionalism in the theatre, and when the S.N.P. failed to graduate beyond its semi-

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- 1 J. Bridie One Way of Living Constable, London 1939, p. 298  
2 J. Bridie One Way of Living p. 298  
3 H. Luyben, James Bridie, p. 10 Pennsylvania 1965

amateur status at the instigation of himself and others, he abandoned hope in their efforts. Thenceforth his better work went south of the border, and the S.N.P. received but scant attention from him. Nevertheless, Bridie's plays are plainly the work of a Scot; not simply in their settings, but also – to a frankly surprisingly degree – in their preoccupation with motifs traditional in Scotland.

"For three hundred years the temper of Scotland was determined and its conduct controlled by Calvinism – or its development as Presbyterianism – and James Bridie is very thoroughly a Lowland Scot."

1

The legacy of Scottish Calvinism is apparent in the frequent use of Biblical sources in his work and the insistence on individual responsibility of Bridie's dramatic moralities, and in his better work in the profound sense of ambiguity denying any assertion of final certainty either by the characters of his plays, or by the playwright himself. A prominent symbol of his moral conflicts is the Doctor with his rigid individualism and equally rigid duty. If the mysterious, vengeful Old Testament God of the Covenanters does not figure explicitly in Bridie's works, then His spirit is present in the incomprehensible, irresistible forces which inspire, delude or coerce so many characters without explanation or heed. John MacGregor's pessimistic assertion "I do because I must" in Marriage Is No Joke is a sentiment repeated with increasing frequency in Bridie's later years, reaching towards tragic proportions of dignity in his most mature plays. Ronald Mavor, Bridie's son, has observed of his father :

"The variety and diversity of the plays has blinded many people to the fact that the majority of them are basically successive workings out of man's place in it ... It is a Calvinist view ...."

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1 Eric Linklater, The Art of Adventure p. 28

2 R. Mavor, Saltire Review, Vol 4, no. 13, 1957, pp. 45–6

and Gerald Weales in Religion In Modern English Drama, elaborates on the dramatist's attitude :

".. only in two of his last plays - The Queen's Comedy and The Baikie Charivari - did he appear to be working toward some specific statement about religion. For the most part, his plays express a faith in and a fondness for the individual, a distrust of institutions.... a distaste for social compulsion, a suspicion of the over-dedicated man, and a feeling for a God who is distant and impersonal, unconcerned with and uninvolved in the activities of man".

1

Many of Bridie's protagonists are tortured by their need for a final judgement of their worth and their morality, but refuse to be assessed by their fellows. They direct their demands instead to God, to posterity - and to the theatre audience. Their lack of certainty - for Bridie at his best denies them judgement - grants to them the humanity, individuality and pathos which make Bridie's plays so arresting.

Similarly in his portrayal of the moral struggle between individuals and a more pragmatic society, Bridie repeatedly portrays his protagonist as "possessed" by the ideal he pursues. In Tobias and the Angel, the ideal is personified as a supernatural being, and the words of Rafael clearly indicate the author's standpoint :

"A daemon, spelt with an 'a' is a creature by whose agency you write immortal verse, go great journeys, leap into bottomless chasms, fight dragons, starve in a garret ... It is perhaps fortunate that daemons are much too occupied to visit, or to concern themselves with the bulk of mankind... When it is necessary to Jahveh's purpose they make contact, often with extremely disturbing results; for daemons are not all equally expert and conscientious, and their material is not invariably well chosen".

Sara in this play is induced by her daemon to strangle seven husbands. Throughout Bridie's dramatic career the daemons continued to haunt and delude, but the positive qualities represented by Rafael as Tobias' good daemon waned steadily through ambiguity to disillusion and the

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1 Weales, p. 80 Religion in Modern English Drama Pennsylvania/Oxford Univ. 1961

exhausted, angry plea of The Queen's Comedy against divine intrusions into the affairs of men. The devil who frequents so much Scottish fiction is no stranger in Bridie's plays, and is last found in The Baikie Charivari manipulating the daemons which quarrel for the right to possess Pounce-Pellot.

Characters inspired by daemon or ideal become fanatical, exercising the fascination of mixed respect and fear for the strong-willed found in Scottish novels like Weir of Hermiston and The House With The Green Shutters. They are often demonic in themselves, like Dr. Knox in The Anatomist or Buchlyvie in The Last Trump. If not, then they are victims to the self-willed characters who surround them like evil spirits, as are Mr. Gillie in the play of that name, Pounce-Pellot in The Baikie Charivari, or Gillet in Babes in the Wood. Frequently, the plays present both types simultaneously, as opponents in Bridie's moral debate. Thus, Dr. Knox is complemented by Anderson, in The Anatomist, Mallaby with Craye in The Switchback.

"Like so many Scottish writers of the past and present, Mavor (Bridie) deliberately assumed a subjective point of view: truth has as many faces as a nightmare..." 1

It was this conscious subjectivity which produced both his particular focus on individual morality and the ambiguity which pervades his work. The stronger the convictions of his characters, the greater is the suspicion that they are deluded: reasoned argument fails before the apparent irrationality of the Universe, and Bridie's eye is sharp for the farcical and ironic aspects of human choice. The Reverend MacCrimmon, in Mr. Bolfry, saves his soul by impulsive violence when his intricate theology aligns him with the devil. The uncommitted receive no praise, however, and are either satirical caricatures of a dull-witted and shallow modernism or the weary victims of a Calvinistic, vindictive fate.

Other Scottish characteristics, perhaps more immediately discernable, abound. Scots writers for many years struggled to reconcile a well-developed intellectual tradition with an emotional growth stunted by puritanism, and the emphasis on argument, the ready sense of

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1 K. Wittig p. 321 The Scottish Tradition in Literature Oliver & Boyd  
Edinburgh 1958

fantasy, and the ever-present satirical impulse to be found in Bridie's plays are common features of their fiction. The less creditable inclinations of the Scots which stem from this dichotomy and which gave rise to the sugary emotional indulgencies of the less discriminating pens of the kailyard authors, are hinted at in Bridie's reductive and somewhat sentimental biblical adaptations. A device he frequently employed to overcome inhibitions in his characters and reveal their feelings, drunkenness, is so much a Scottish characteristic as to be embarrassing - the literary parallels may be found in Stevenson, George Douglas Brown, and Hugh MacDiarmid.

Bridie's early optimism rapidly fades, and his humorous treatment of human foibles gives way to a deepening pessimism hastened by the war which robbed him of a son. It is from this gloom that most of his best plays rose, Daphne Laureola, Mr. Gillie, The Queen's Comedy, and The Baikie Charivari. Helen L. Luyben in her book, James Bridie : Clown and Philosopher describes a philosophical continuity, "traced through three stages of moral awareness, which might be labelled innocence, disillusionment, and resolution, corresponding to three chronological periods, early (1893-1914)".<sup>1</sup> Although "resignation would more accurately describe the playwright's last period than "resolution", the three stages provide a convenient framework within which to approach the plays. The myth of Adam and the fall which she perceives behind the characteristic Bridie heroes is less clear: they and their paradoxical conflicts are more readily comprehended in the light of the well-established Scottish traditions of ambiguity, unsteady protagonists and attractive demonic doppelgangers; and the dual opposition of intellect and emotion, individual and society.

The key to Bridie's plays is discovered, conveniently, in his first serious work, The Switchback, not produced till 1929 though written seven years earlier when the author was thirty-four and had the experience of service in the Great War behind him.<sup>2</sup> As a first play, it is remarkable in its maturity and theatrical skill, fusing metaphysical overtones and naturalistic style with an ease rarely improved upon in later work. The Switchback tells the story of Dr. Mallaby,

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1 H. Luyben James Bridie : Clown and Philosopher, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania U.P. 1965, p. 9

2 H. Luyben James Bridie : Clown and Philosopher, p. 36

a middle-aged rather drab general practitioner in a remote country district, who returns home early one morning from a call to find his pretty young wife playing a rather startled hostess to three very eminent strangers whose car has broken down. They are Burmeister, a Jewish financier, Lord Pascal, popular newspaper owner, and Sir Antony Craye, President of the Royal Academy of Medicine and Surgery. While admiring his well-stocked library, they have stumbled on Mallaby's private research project - a radical cure for tuberculosis - and Burmeister and Pascal, partially spurred by Craye's snobbish lack of enthusiasm, subtly flatter and lure the G.P. with visions of a public campaign to finance his researches. Pascal has seen the opportunity for superficial gimmickry to sell his newspapers: Burmeister, less obvious in his designs, has his eye on Dolly, Mallaby's wife. When Craye crustily points out the professional ruin that threatens association with a newspaper crusade, Mallaby's quick temper hurls unreasoned defiance in his face. The Mallabys are carried off to London by their new protectors, and installed - together with the eccentric Aunt Dinah - in a "moderately good" hotel. There Mallaby first realises that his noble intentions are in service to Pascal's sensationalism, and that he has lost control of his own destiny. There too Burmeister successfully woos Dolly, her resistance weakened by the thrill of the city and its expensive entertainments. Sir Antony Craye, too late, attempts more sympathetically than before to save Mallaby from disaster: instead he provokes another outburst of reckless anger which now verges on hysteria. The last Act finds Mallaby back in his consulting room in the midst of chaos. His tuberculosis cure has been proved incomplete by rigorous testing, he has been struck off the medical register, he has been abandoned by Pascal because his story no longer sells newspapers, and he has been deserted by Dolly for Burmeister. He is rescued from heavy drinking by Aunt Dinah, who in her mad fashion directs his attention to the paradoxical freedom he now has, and encourages him to follow a long forgotten dream of pursuing archaeology in Palmyra. Amidst increasingly surreal stage-effects, Craye returns with a repentant Dolly, offering a research job and eventual reinstatement to Mallaby if he submits to the "discipline" of a "period of probation". His

advocacy of social responsibility fails to win a man society has "smashed", who lyrically defends his vision of freedom to seek the kingdom of heaven within himself. Outraged, the great physician stalks out, and Mallaby sets out to listen to the "ironic tales" of long dead civilisations invoking the closing lines of Milton's Paradise Lost :

"The world was all before them where to choose  
Their place of rest, and, Providence their guide,  
They hand-in-hand with wandering steps and slow  
Through Eden took their solitary way"

It is on this note of mingled grief and hope that The Switchback reaches its profound and ambiguous conclusion.

The theme of the possessing idea or daemon dominates the play, in Mallaby's guiding visions and in the more concrete form of Aunt Dinah and the three great men. Burmeister and Pascal are traditional figures of temptation, powerful, wordly, persuasive, easily gulling the unwary victim into a snare of self-destruction; one to ruin him, the other to cuckold him, playing on his desire for fame and fortune and respect. Craye and Aunt Dinah are more complex; the daemons of self and society who war around Mallaby in the last Act. Each is given supernatural associations; Aunt Dinah is of patriarchal antiquity and displays a disquieting insight thinly disguised by her curious turn of speech. In Act I, she calls Pascal "Lord Rascal", and Burmeister reminds her of the word "Bucket Shop". In Act III she comes into her own, using a pack of cards like a gypsy fortune-teller to hammer home to Mallaby the reality of his misfortunes when he tries to drown memory in alcohol. A strange power over the broken doctor's attention is hinted at :

Mallaby :            Nothing will help.

Aunt Dinah:        Ah, no, no, no, no! Don't say that. I'm  
                         a little bit daft, but I will. I'll help.

Mallaby :            Dear silly old woman, how can you help?  
                         (He stops before a map of the Near East and stares  
                         at it).



The coincidence of her offer of assistance and his pause before the map which is to bring overwhelming inspiration to him is the more striking by what follows: she sends him to shave, and studies the map, muttering like a crazed incantation, "Tyre, Sidon, Damascus, Zoba, Zedad, Palmyra. How far is it to Babylon, to Babylon, to Babylon?" Very soon, the map seems to glow at Mallaby, and he cannot break its fascination. "Mechanically, Aunt Dinah is necessary to the play to give Mallaby an audience in Act III and functionally she encourages his "madness".<sup>1</sup> She serves the further purpose of preparing the reader, during what is otherwise a naturalistic play, for the farce which dominates Act III.

Craye is the dry, insistently sane antithesis of Aunt Dinah; he is also an antithesis of Mallaby, and the human qualities required for such a characterisation reduce the supernatural impositions to a minimum, though they are present. He is referred to in Act I as an "archangel unawares", and throughout the play he champions social duty with the pessimistic conviction of Bridie's presbyterian minister, McGregor, in Marriage is no Joke, whose religion is "we do because we must." His resistance to the schemes of Pascal and Burmeister is not simply motivated, as they accuse him, by snobbery, conservatism, and vanity. He includes the possession of Mallaby's "immortal soul" in the list of their destructive goals. Despite the repeated insults flung at him by Mallaby, he returns twice in an attempt to save him from the fatal course he is pursuing, he brings Dolly back from her affair with Burmeister, and he offers a job and eventual rehabilitation to her husband. He is a figure to command respect, "like Coriolanus or somebody". His speech is always blunt and concise, in contrast to Mallaby's enthused lyricism, and much of his failure hangs on his honesty in not denying that hypocrisy riddles the institutions he strives to maintain.

The supernatural implications in the portrayal of these characters is made explicit in Bridie's use of abnormal weather to suggest forces beyond nature in the play. Craye and his travelling companions

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1 H. Luyben James Bridie : Clown and Philosopher  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania U.P. 1965 p.49

arrive at Mallaby's house in Act I in thick fog, a fog which clears before Mallaby himself as he drives home, so that he arrives accompanied by brilliant sunshine. In the last Act, a thunderstorm heralds Craye's arrival, and reaches a climax during his confrontation with Mallaby. Supporting these manifestations are the repeated quotations from Paradise Lost in The Switchback, all referring to the expulsion from Eden and emphasising the symbolic nature of the play.<sup>1</sup>

The theme of the possessing ideal or daemon dominates The Switchback both in the concrete form as Aunt Dinah, and the three great men, and in Mallaby's guiding visions.

The doctor, immured in forbidding countryside and apparently forgotten, with his young wife fretting for the comforts and distractions of the town, has taken refuge in research, finding in it a focus for professional resentment and a balm for his self-esteem. In Act I, there is truth in Craye's disparaging comment, "O Lord, I might have known! Another tuberculosis cure ... I'm a disappointed man. I was quite carried away for a bit. And it's only another cure. I have seen two thousand and one tuberculosis cures." Questioned about it, Mallaby is comic in his enthusiastically long-winded explanations. Mallaby's self-absorption – indeed, self-aggrandizement – is evident when he unthinkingly insults Burmeister and Pascal, and later implies a divine favour, when he says :

"God rolled up the fog as I came down the valley...  
Pharoah and his chariots behind you, and no hope  
anywhere, and suddenly the sea throws up its arms  
and lets you pass..." Act I, i, p. 10

In Act II as disaster looms, his pursuit of the ideal becomes fanatical and openly self-oriented:

Sir Anthony : "... We must keep the profession clean.  
It is our duty to it and to humanity."

Mallaby: "I too, have a duty to my profession and to  
humanity and to myself."

Sir Anthony: "A duty you delegate to the cheap press."

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1 H. Luyben James Bridie : Clown and Philosopher  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania U.P. 1965 p.41-2

Mallaby : "What have they got to do with it?  
They are nothing. Even humanity isn't so  
much in face of ... I tell you I will not  
have the motions and creations of my mind  
cramped, conditioned and stereotyped by  
you and your damned machine. I tell you..."

This writes Luyben, "argues strongly against the theory that Dr. Mallaby is a selfless student in the cause of humanity..."<sup>1</sup>

The escapist tendency of such egotism leads readily to Mallaby's assumption of a new and overtly personal ideal, retreat to the desert, seeking Irony in the excavation of Palmyra. He greets this new freedom ecstatically, and it is significant that he has been led to it by the mad Aunt Dinah, who throughout the play has symbolised the dubious merits of escape from society's restraints. The world which Craye champions is to Mallaby :

"piled terrace on terrace, gallery on gallery, with  
the dumb, carved figures of the damned writhing round  
its pedestal.. A little more, a little arranging, a  
few more tired men's lives worked into the arabesque  
and the thing will be complete. Oh a tower, a palace,  
a world fit for surgeons and financiers and news-  
paper proprietors to live in! Act III, p. 76

His own role in it is only "to lock a chain round (his) leg and lump up old Craye's treadmill." This is a self-willed, even deluded standpoint, nevertheless compelling in its flashing rhetoric.

The wavering hero, the opposed moralities, the surrealism, and the importance of daemons in The Switchback are found throughout Bridie's work. The most important single aspect of the play, which puzzled some contemporary critics and provoked a vocal opposition which haunted the author for the rest of his career, was the ambiguity with which characters, images and ideas alike were invested.

"The play does not answer whether Mallaby will find self-knowledge in Palmyra, whether his digging will raise truth or Cain...."

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There is a positive side to each of the arguments in the play. Mallaby has been badly treated by social institutions: goaded into recklessness by the indifference of his professional superiors; ruthlessly exploited by the pandars of public opinion; ostracised for not being

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1 H. Luyben, James Bridie : Clown and Philosopher  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania U.P. 1965 p. 46

successful by colleagues who recognise genuine worth in his experiments. It is no surprise that he should turn his back on humanity and seek a personal salvation. Yet his downfall is not unclouded by vanity; and though his reply to Craye in Act III is magnificent in its sweeping imagination and is accompanied by thunder and lightning, it is spoken under the influence of whisky. Craye's plea for social duty is by contrast plain to the point of drabness, yet it is powerful enough to project its solid morality through the humiliations and compromises contained within it. It is also spoken by a man of considerable force of character and stern sobriety. Aunt Dinah's influence might seem unequivocally positive from her role in Acts I and II, when she comments acidly on the betrayal of Mallaby, but in Act III the escape she brings to him is accompanied by a total indifference to others -

Mallaby : "Don't speak, Dolly. I'm trying to get hold of things. You see, there's something ... I don't know why it is, but just at the moment you seem to me so... so damned irrelevant".

and later :

Mrs. Mallaby : "But what about me? For Heaven's sake, George! And what am I to do?"

Mallaby : "How should I know? What does a woman do? Wait, I suppose, and live a little at a time."

There is a deep pessimism underlying Mallaby's new philosophy, a suggestion that all ways to happiness are illusory.

"Mankind has many inventions, but only three ways of happiness - Make-believe, Curiosity and Irony. The first two ways I have travelled hopefully on aching feet. They are finished. I'll see what is in the third".

His use of the last lines of Paradise Lost at the end of the play is qualified by the stage direction which follows, ironic and ambiguous :

(He looks around the wreck of the room, catches (Mrs. Mallaby's) eye, chuckles and repeats "Eden")

His escape from social responsibility is paralleled by an escape from naturalistic stage conventions in the last Act with its surreal

atmosphere and farcical episodes with Aunt Dinah and the Andersons. Unfortunately, the relevance of the farce is not automatically apprehended, for there is no preparation in the previous Acts for such a radical change of style. It is however,

"an integral part of The Switchback because Mallaby's revolt in the play is, in one sense, the revolt of flamboyance and madness against sobriety and conventional responsibility".

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Bridie wants his audience to understand, rather than judge. He offers no verdict, and no false hope. The Switchback in its maturity, honesty and skill, provides the key to the rest of his work, for its themes were always the forefront of his imagination, and its ambiguity was never resolved.

The dramatic talent evident in The Switchback achieved fruition in 1930 in two notable plays which have never lost their wide popularity, The Anatomist and Tobias and the Angel; and their accomplishment was repeated in 1935 in The Black Eye. All three plays involve, in some form, Bridie's notion of daemons guiding men to their destinies; all three are free of the deep pessimism which marks the author's later successes. Together they form the major part of a thematic grouping in which the daemon and its effects tend towards the positive side of ambiguity.

The Anatomist, written for the Masque Theatre Company and premiered in Edinburgh, was the first of Bridie's plays to reach London. It was inspired by a celebrated scandal which broke over Scotland in 1828, concerning the activities of the University Medical Faculty in obtaining suitable corpses for the developing study of anatomy. The superstitions of the age hardly tolerated such research, and a shortage of "subjects" was made up by the clandestine "sack-em-up" men, who robbed fresh graves and sold their occupants to the doctors. Two men, Burke and Hare, went further than body-snatching; they murdered almost a score of people before being brought to justice, and at their trial was implicated the foremost anatomist of the day, Dr. Robert Knox. Bridie's interest in the

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1 H. Luyben James Bridie : Clown and Philosopher  
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story is evident in the preface he wrote to The Anatomist :

"The play does not pretend to be anything but a story with an historical background. If it illustrates anything, it is the shifts to which men of science are driven when they are ahead of their times. "

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The daemon which drives Robert Knox is a scientific devotion which far outpaces the narrow restrictions of his era, and the shifts to which he is driven are desperate indeed. The conflict of duty between science and society is a theme whose importance has not been diminished by the passage of time.

The Anatomist in structure follows the course of an argument between Mary Belle Dishart, a young Edinburgh lady, and her lover Walter Anderson, professional assistant to Dr. Knox. Mary wishes to marry as soon as possible, but Anderson, caught up by enthusiasm for Knox and his research, is reluctant to leave the dissecting room for a financially secure general practice. Their quarrel is brought to a head by Mary's introduction to Knox, who behaves with stunning insensitivity and crassness; an awkward, egotistical bull in the genteel china shop of Georgian delicacy and discretion. She is shocked not only by Anderson's fanatical respect for this man, but also by the great anatomist's evasion of responsibility when questioned about grave-robbing. She breaks off her engagement, and Anderson in nihilistic despair stamps out to drown his sorrows in Edinburgh's gutter ale-shops.

Anderson is now brought face to face with an aspect of anatomical research far more appalling than bodysnatching. While drunk, he meets in a cheap tavern a beautiful young street-girl, Mary Paterson. The girl later falls foul of the evil Burke and Hare, and next day at the University Anderson discovers that it is her body, still warm, that he has taken delivery of. Horrified, he tries to make after the murderers, but is stopped by Knox. Knox is no longer a farcical, bombastic socialite: he is satanic in his relentless overbearing of the shocked young doctor and in his deliberate callousness towards the dead girl. Burke and Hare are not pursued, Anderson is bullied and threatened into silence, and Knox is a dark and brooding master of the situation.

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1 J. Bridie, The Anatomist, Constable, London 1934  
Author's note p. xiii

The last act sets out to redeem Knox in the eyes of morality, to explain his motives, display his true emotions, and show his all-too-human weaknesses. This process is successful. The scene is set once more in the Dishart's home, several months later.

Anderson has recovered from his shock and his violent reaction has dissipated. He has given up his assistantship and taken a post in London; Mary Belle and he are reconciled. Knox, in the aftermath of the Burke and Hare trial, is the most unpopular man in Scotland and hunted by the Edinburgh mob. Now Bridie shows him as defiant and recklessly courageous, relishing the melodrama afforded by the situation. Taking a momentary refuge in the Dishart's house, he displays an unlooked-for tact towards Mary Belle by keeping from her the gory details behind Anderson's resignation. Alone with Mary Belle's elder sister Amelia, his self-control fails him, and he confesses his love for her – a love made hopeless by his unhappy marriage – recovering himself to confess his deep and anguishing sense of guilt for those murdered by the criminals to sell to his classes.

Amelia :            "... I think of you galloping on a crusade with your eyes to the front, fixed on your goal. How could you know that your horse's hoofs were trampling poor crushed human bodies? You don't realise it yet.

Knox :              Good God, ma'am, do you think that of me! Do you think because I strut and rant and put on a bold face that my soul isn't sick within me at the horror of what I have done? What I have done. Do you hear?"

Amelia :            "No, no, you didn't mean to....

Knox :              "Didn't mean to? What a beast's excuse. Do me the justice to believe that I would never make that excuse even to myself. No I carry the deaths of these poor wretches round my neck till I die. And perhaps after that. Perhaps after that.... But I tell you this, that the cause is between Robert Knox and Almighty God. I shall answer

to no one else. As for the world, I shall face it. I shall play out the play to the final curtain. "

And this is exactly what he does. After a moment of heroic defiance to imminent danger as the house is besieged by the mob, Knox, rescued by his intrepid and devoted students, decides to deliver his anatomy lecture there and then, concerning the heart of the rhinoceros . Once more he is behind the mask of bombast and arrogance, but the audience is left with the knowledge of his inner life, as well. Typically, Bridie counterpoints the somewhat farcical scene by reminding the audience also, through the haunted Walter Anderson, of a girl named Mary Paterson.

What in other plays was verbosity was transformed in The Anatomist to an overwhelming whirlpool of rhetoric with which Knox assaults all obstacles to his progress. The delight in verbal grandiloquence and air of self-parody Bridie creates is at its best in the play's closing speech, as Knox addresses his anatomy class in the Dishart's drawing room :

"I shall not profane the sacred gift of human speech by replying to these people in any other language but that of the cudgel. With you I shall take the liberty of discussing a weightier matter . . . "The Heart of the Rhinoceros". This mighty organ, gentlemen weighs full twenty-five pounds, a fitting fountainhead for the tumultuous stream that surges through the arteries of that prodigious monster. Clad in proof, gentlemen, and terribly armed as to his snout, the rhinoceros buffets his way through the tangled verdure engirdling his tropical habitat. Such dreadful vigour, gentlemen, such ineluctable energy requires to be sustained by no ordinary forces of nutrition. . . ."

The structure of the play simply but effectively underpins the argument. The confrontation of ideas and attitudes which occurs in the genteel atmosphere of the Dishart sisters' home gives way in the second act to the physical facts of the case, the coarseness and brutality of the public house, the terrifying portrait of the murderers, and the clinical, heartless bleakness of the dissecting room. The play's language also changes radically, with a sudden eruption of lower class Scots and Irish to contrast with the delicate formalities of Act 1. From there the play returns to the Disharts' home, transformed

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in the opening scenes by the white dust-sheets which have protected the furniture during the sisters' sojourn in Italy - "Sheeted, dead, cold" - its warmth and life apparently blighted by the awful discovery of Act Two. The progress of the last act is matched by the gradual return of colour to the room until Knox transforms it into his rather anarchic temporary lecture-theatre.

Typically, Bridie's magnificent characterisation of Knox does not invite unqualified admiration. In Act 1 his boorishness is comic rather than sinister, and sympathy is engaged for him by the complexity of character which hints at the revelations of Act III. The lengthy farce with the clownish medical student Raby, makes Knox's sarcasm entertaining; and even when he ponderously makes light of the couples' heartbreak, relief comes in the form of his hysterically awful flute-playing. Bridie has created in Knox a complex and intensely alive character, a type which had for long been absent from the stage, and which indeed has rarely been repeated. Knox is recognisably a human being, with a wide range of emotions and foibles, and the author carefully avoids any tendency to transcend the "everyday" world, despite his character's eccentricity. Only the gauche medical students, and to some extent, Anderson, truly idealize Knox. The audience is prevented from joining them by a process of continuous undercutting. The courage and devotion of the anatomist are plain, but his flamboyance is somewhat childish, lending an air of farce and melodrama often consciously encouraged by Knox. Only once is farce absent from him, in the ghastly scene after Mary Paterson's body is discovered, when the satanic element in his composition swells to dominance. Above all, Knox is attractive because he is an actor, unable to resist exaggerated gestures, relishing the ludicrous situations he thereby frequently creates, concealing his inner anguish from the world. Thus when the mask slips and his feelings are displayed naked in Act III, the contrast with his public image grips the imagination. Significantly the only time when he is nonplussed is when Mary Belle treats him like an actor :

Knox :                Ladies, I will not consent to be treated like a  
                             naughty schoolboy. Do you know who I am?

Do you know that I am the apostolic successor of Cuvier, the great naturalist? Do you know that, although I am a comparatively young man, much of my work is already immortal? Do you know that I brush aside that snarling pack of curs, strong in the knowledge that the name of Knox will resound throughout the ages . . . .

Mary : Yes, for bullying and blustering at poor Mary of Scots. Don't be absurd, Dr. Knox.

Knox : Absurd! I congratulate you on your sense of humour.

Mary : Oh, if you prefer to be sinister, you are welcome. . . . .

With his customary defences thus undermined, he is momentarily helpless, but the threats of the mob soon give him fresh opportunity to rant and strut.

Such extravagant extroversion is hardly countered by Anderson, a typical Scottish anti-hero at the centre of the conflict, typically colourless. Despite his vital role as the disciple violently disillusioned by a shock greater than anyone else in the play experiences, he is no match for Knox in rhetoric or self-control. He "screams, rushes about white and shaking, and nearly collapses. . .",<sup>1</sup> and the discovery of murder does not result in a confrontation of arguments in the last Act. Anderson does not represent the way of Order in the play, as Helen Luyben asserts<sup>2</sup> - that role is occupied by Mary Belle. His choice at the end of the play is to accept in part the social vision she embodies, implying that only a man of Knox's stature can pursue Knox's single-minded aim.

Mary Belle does not counter the anatomist's weight, either. Though she is diametrically opposed to him throughout the play, and can argue as fiercely - when he suggests that she jumps to conclusions, she retorts :

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1 The Anatomist Act II ii

2 H. Luyben, James Bridie : Clown and Philosopher p. 24

"Of course I do. Every sensible person does. All women jump to conclusions, just as all men crawl on their hands and knees, looking for them, counting every cobblestone and never arriving, or arriving at the wrong place."

- in the end, having rediscovered Walter's love, she simply loses interest in the impassioned moral arguments of the past. Knox is defeated by her refusal to take him seriously, which assaults his vanity rather than his intellect. Her attitude "is as much a commentary on her own prim conventional little mind as on Knox's pomposity". This may be true to character in *Mary Belle*, but it leaves a gap in the opposition to Knox filled only by Amelia, who provokes Knox to criticise himself by her very forgivingness.

The last Act, therefore, fails to correct an imbalance created by Knox's strongly sympathetic and exciting personality. The Anatomist is not simply a conflict between different individuals although this obviously exists and may indeed distract attention from a deeper scheme within the play, in which Knox embodies the opposing viewpoints, the intellectual and the emotional, the individual and the social. That he does so more intensely than any other character experiences even one aspect of the argument, is all too easily obscured by the necessity of also deploying him as the sole champion of unrestrained enquiry. The unresolved ambiguity of his personality, the main source of the play's tension, is typical of Bridie's method and philosophy - and typical of Scottish literature generally.

The play survives however. The characterisation of Knox, led by his daemon of science to defy ignorance and superstition in the public, and moral scruple in himself, is masterly and vastly entertaining, a classic example of the Scottish fascination for self-willed figures of demonic strength. The conflict of duties is skilfully portrayed, contrasting the arguments of Knox with the highly charged Act II, and the deeply moving portrait of Mary Paterson. Cradling the stupified Anderson in her arms, she sings a simple but bitterly appropriate lullaby, repeating to herself the third last line,

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"Black's the life I lead wi' the hale o' ye - ". Shortly afterwards, she is ensnared by the easy-spoken, frightening Irishmen, Burke and Hare. In the final scene, as Knox prepares to deliver his lecture, Anderson picks out her lullaby on the spinnet, then buries his face in his hands. Bridie in this way insists on a final ambiguity. Mary Belle tells Knox :

"I think you are a vain, hysterical, talented, stupid man. I think that you are wickedly blind and careless when your mind is fixed on something. But all men are like that. There is nothing very uncommon about you, Dr. Knox. "

He says of himself, that he is "the apostolic successor of Cuvier, the great naturalist." <sup>1</sup> Both opinions ring true, and the author will not subscribe to one if he must abandon the other. What he does subscribe to is that the vain, hysterical talented, stupid Dr. Robert Knox is an intensely interesting character; and audiences, in unanimously agreeing with him, have made The Anatomist one of Bridie's most successful plays.

The ambiguity which haunts mankind also informs Bridie's engaging version of an Apocryphal story, Tobias and The Angel, from which the darkness of The Anatomist is wholly absent. In it, the compulsive ideals which drag Bridie's heroes through thick and thin are explicitly recognised as literal daemons, the devil Asmoday and the Archangel Rafael, who clash and war over the destinies of uncomprehending mortals. Tobias and The Angel is first and foremost a lightly entertaining fairy-tale and the clearly formulated philosophy behind it is subordinated to its exotic comedy.

The story is almost pantomimic. The generous hearted, devout Jew Tobit has fallen on hard times, his once-great fortune lost and his eyes darkened by blindness. He lives in a miserable hovel in Nineveh, a city violent in its hostility to Jews, on the diminutive earnings of his wife, Anna, and his timid son, Tobias - though it seems to be on Anna that most of the burden falls. Tobit, despite his tribulations, is possessed of such great faith and love in God

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1 The Anatomist Act III

that he spends his time in mild self-deprecation praising the good fortune "Concealed" within the family's dire poverty. To the house comes a mysterious porter with rich gifts for Tobit, who attributes them to a rich relative. The porter is in fact the Archangel Rafael, who offers to act as guide to Tobias when Tobit announces the necessity of sending him across the desert to collect a long-forgotten loan from a wealthy scent-manufacturer in distant Rages. Thus begins "a journey into fantastic adventure and back again to mundanity", typical of Bridie's method.

In the course of the journey, Rafael's influence over Tobias gradually erodes his timidity, though not his lack of insight. Attacked by a monstrous fish while bathing, Tobias discovers that he can kill it. When the splendidly villainous Kurdish bandit, Mirza Khan threatens to hang him upside down over a fire and cut him slowly to death, Tobias is prompted by Rafael to confound him with a sudden surge of violent rhetoric :

"... what I did to that atrocious, fire-breathing river demon I shall do to you, you hairy-toed polecat, you son of a burnt father, for I am only beginning the carnage I feel I must make before sunset."

Lastly, he falls in love with the beautiful Sara, and marries her despite the knowledge that she is subject to an evil daemon Asmoday, who already has strangled seven of her husbands on their wedding-night. He is saved from the same fate by Rafael, who puts Asmoday to flight, and returns home in splendour with his new wife and her rich dowry having collected his father's loan plus twenty years' interest.

Sara briefly becomes infatuated with Rafael, until he indignantly rebukes and reveals his supernatural identity to her. Reconciled by him to life in the commonplace world of the unimaginative Tobias, she relinquishes her restless dreams, and is welcomed into the house of a rather surprised Tobit. The miraculous restoration of Tobit's sight, and Rafael's revelation of himself as an archangel, bring the play to a happy and hallowed conclusion.

Where much of The Anatomist's appeal lies in the vividness of individual characters, in Tobias and The Angel it is found in the

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deliberately reductive idiom, with which Bridie maintains the air of fantasy and lightness in every scene. Rafael, whose supernatural powers might easily inspire awe, is made emphatically "human"; first by his disguise as the young Jew, Azarias, and secondly by his somewhat priggish smugness. Only twice is his full grandeur permitted to intrude into the childlike innocence of Tobias' adventures - during his confrontation with Asmoday, and at the very end of the play when he reveals his identity - and the first occasion is portrayed as comedy.

Tobias is one of Bridie's wavering heroes, helpless and ineffective, his destiny controlled by a stronger agency which he cannot recognise - and Tobias consistently fails to grasp that Azarias is more than "a superior chap". This failure enables Bridie to maintain comic irony throughout the play: Tobias frequently seems to reach the point where recognition is unavoidable, only to veer off again into the banalities of his simple mind. When he says in Act II, "I'm inspired. I'm inspired. An Angel of the Lord has visited me..." he is referring not to Rafael but to Sara. When the archangel sweeps into an excited account of his catalysmic pursuit of Asmoday, Tobias' reaction is: "Have you been drinking again?" His timidity never decreases, but through the Archangel's guidance he learns to act despite his fears. His panic stricken behaviour when threatened elicits sympathy and humour in the audience, confident in the knowledge that his destiny is safe, and twice his terror is followed by a vaunting, comically outrageous boasting. After overcoming the devil-fish, he adopts a ludicrously casual heroism:

"By gum, he gave me a tough fight. It was a bad day for him when he tried to bite me. I hung on like grim death. I'm slow to take hold, but I never let go. That's the sort of man I am. Look at him. There's been nothing like him since the whale coughed up Jonas. Ho! If Jonas had been half the man I am he would have swallowed the whale...."

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Within a few moments of this speech, Tobias is being terrorised by the bandit, Mirza Khan. Later, pricked by Sara's expressions of admiration for Azarias, he says indignantly, "Of course I'm not a hero, but a man likes a little credit for what he has done",<sup>1</sup> justifiably pointing out that in each dangerous situation, "Azarias sat in perfect safety and gave good advice."<sup>2</sup> His inability to understand what is happening beyond the realm of everyday reality makes Tobias a particularly pleasing, comic, Everyman, suitably rewarded for his repeated scares with marriage to a beautiful girl.

Sara, in truth, "provides half the Arabian Nights spirit of the play",<sup>3</sup> and is the antithesis to Tobias' earnest mundanity. She is first seen in the dreamlike luxury of her walled-garden in the company of her hand-maidens, a dazzling display of colour and refined titillation contrasting sharply with the drabness of the preceding scenes. Where it is an Archangel who leads and inspires Tobias, she is possessed by an evil daemon, Asmoday, who made her "impatient with common men".<sup>4</sup> Gripped by this insatiable madness for unnatural intensity, she has strangled seven husbands, and even when Asmoday is bound in Egypt, her longings linger. Thus she becomes impassioned for Azarias, the strong, aloof servant who dominates her new husband; and when he informs her of his real identity, she is merely further enchanted. In reconciling Sara to the plain face of mortal existence, Bridie, through Rafael, clarifies his vision of man's helplessness in the hands of daemons, and the danger which attends those who are fired to transcend the commonplace.

"You cannot love what you cannot understand. Love what you understand and you will understand more and more till your life is so full that there will be no room for anything else – torturings and itchings and ambitions and shames."

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1 Tobias Act II ii p. 60

2 Tobias Act II ii p. 59

3 Luyben p. 65 James Bridie : Clown and Philosopher

4 Tobias Act III i p. 68

Sara, "a sensible girl", recognises the truth of Rafael's pronouncement, indicating in a short exchange both her return to the world and her swift imagination -

Rafael :            You will some day make a new Tobias all of your own and understand him from the beginning, and that will be easy and pleasant.

Sara :              Until his daemon comes along and takes him away from me.

Rafael :            Until his daemon comes along

Sara :              So be it, then. Good-bye Rafael

Rafael :            You will tell Tobias nothing of all this?

Sara :              You don't know everything after all!

(laughing)        Good-bye Rafael.

To her is given the only emotional and intellectual development in the play, being essentially an adult personality where Tobias and Tobit, in their different ways, are childlike. Tobias is to be told nothing, only to do as he is bid until Jahweh's purpose is fulfilled.

What that purpose is and in what way each event contributes to it, never becomes clear, beyond a generalised triumph of good over ill. Tobit, an obvious symbol of faith and devoutness is rewarded by an ending of his blindness and new-found wealth. Tobias becomes vaguely aware of potential strength within himself and wins a beautiful wife. Sara is rescued from the delusions of Asmoday's possession. All are so closely interwoven that cause and effect are impossible to distinguish and even Asmoday figures in the pattern of God's will.

"Surely Bridie's theme is that all men serve Jahveh's inscrutable purpose, sons who are always with Him, like Tobit, and prodigal sons, like Tobias. The son's role is servitor to the father, but whether the service is selfish or unselfish, conscious or unconscious is, finally, irrelevant."

Ambiguity is inescapable, for there is no way for mortals to distinguish between a Rafael or an Asmoday, unless perhaps they have Faith in the manner of Tobit. Bridie, always sensing predestination in the affairs of men, and their helplessness before it, was usually less



confident in identifying a benevolent force controlling predestination itself. In Tobias and The Angel however, there are no dark shadows; and it is a highly effective essay in gentle beguilement, concealing an irony of considerable sophistication and wit.

Marriage is no Joke (1934) is a light-hearted, flimsy melodrama which attempts to show the daemon of adventure and exotic romance as an idle delusion for the adolescent. Real life is made of sterner stuff, and flamboyance must give way to the less colourful complexities of adult responsibility. Its hero, John MacGregor, is first seen as the Highland student who, well primed with rum, saves the barmaid of a country inn from assault by an alcoholic tinker. The girl, Priscilla, turns out to be the sharp-tongued daughter of the proprietor, and MacGregor's euphoric spirits lead him rather deeper with her than he might have gone, sober. He awakes next day to find himself painfully hungover and married: and Priscilla rapidly makes it clear that a New Order is being established over his formerly easy ways. This dispiriting discovery is revealed on the eve of the First World War, and MacGregor hears a military band passing the window. It is clear that a temporary solution to his problem has suggested itself to his brain. His next appearance is at the end of the war, as a sergeant in the British Forces in North Persia. Meeting there the porter from his honeymoon hotel, also in uniform, he recounts a personal war-history which is nothing more than a catalogue of drunken brawls, only a few of which involved the enemy. His wildness is soon given yet another opportunity, for romantic fantasy bursts upon the lonely outpost in the form of the beautiful Nastasya, mistress to Mirzah Shah of the Jangalistan Cossacks, fleeing from a usurper's ambush. Once more inspired by drink, MacGregor first puts the opposition to flight, then accepts her impassioned invitation to go with her to Jangalistan as King of twenty thousand men, even though it means deserting his post and his friend. As a warrior-king, however, MacGregor disappoints Nastasya. He takes his role too gravely, rejecting her pleas for action, massacre, and careless extravagance. Stung by his laughter when she tries to inflame him, she stabs him and betrays him to an assassin.

His career does not end there; he returns to Britain and Priscilla, becoming a clergyman in a London suburb, though he chafes at the pettiness of his life. Word comes to him that Nastasya, now part of a Cossack dance troupe, is seeking him: he goes to meet her, and she offers him a new and greater adventure – to re-establish the White Russian army against the Bolsheviks, the prize being a Prince's title in Petrograd. MacGregor however, will not go. He realizes that to do so is sheer escapism, and chooses the less glorious but more difficult task of fighting the common-place war of a minister against the canting hypocrisy of slum landlords in London.

Priscilla's unattractive personality becomes eventually the symbol of wordly duty upheld in the play, and the romance of Nastasya shrinks – literally – to play-acting and escapism. MacGregor himself is an ambiguous figure, as a hero continuously "inspired" by alcohol to acts of personal courage not always praiseworthy. The chronicle of brawls related in Act 1, scene iii is a deliberate qualification of Priscilla's rescue earlier in the play. As Shah of Jangalistan he is remarkably sober, organising his dominions with paper-work instead of swords in disappointingly colourless surroundings. When Nastasya demands that he kiss her, he refuses: he has a wife in Britain, and –

"Because till I've done what I've got to do I must ride my soul on the curb. It's a sane man you want to rule this country, and fighting's a madness and drink's a madness, but love's the wildest madness of the m all."

His return to Britain at first belies such seriousness of purpose. His campaign against slum conditions opens him to blackmail from his chief elder and donor of £10,000 to his Unemployed Mission Hall, who is also the owner of a prominent slum property. Priscilla advocates defiance, but MacGregor is doubtful :

"It's not so easy as that. I'm not a practical man, you see; and there's complications and wheels within wheels..."

The temptations of escape dance once more before his eyes :

"I'm sick to death of this. War's an abomination, but I was a man, in the war. And here I am like a

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hemmed bullock easing my soul with bellowing and roaring I know not what. I'll throw it all up and be a man again."

- and almost on the instant comes word, from Nastasya. Act II, scene III, in which MacGregor goes to meet his Russian enchantress, and which brings her face to face also with Priscilla, proves to him finally that wild adventurism is only an excuse to run away from the real challenge of life. His attempts to justify romanticism as duty to a higher ideal break asunder on the rocks of Priscilla's determined realism.

Priscilla : But you surely wouldn't think for a moment of going off on a mad jaunt with the like of that?

MacGregor : I wouldn't think it for a moment, but there's something more than thinking in it all. We do because we must.

Priscilla : Well, I'll tell you what you "must", my mannie. You must come straight away home with me.

Nastasya represents nothing more than an adolescent pursuit of never-ending motiveless excitement, and MacGregor finally realises it.

MacGregor : "I'll be a wee king, but I'll be king of my own castle and my own kirk henceforth ... Mrs. MacGregor, are you coming home?... Home! A strong word that.

Nastasya : Coward! You run away from me. You are afraid. You are afraid of life.

MacGregor : (putting his arm round Priscilla's shoulders) What do you know about life? Here is life.

The ambiguity of MacGregor's life is thus in the end transformed by allegiance to an unheroic realism which requires all his efforts.

Marriage is No Joke is not a success, hovering awkwardly between a serious theme and a treatment verging on farcical comedy. Perhaps the formality of the structure and the clarity of the theme are even

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too obvious. MacGregor is rarely more than a Boys Own Paper figure, swinging into action with impossible Highland war-cries. "He has the fists and the head for adventure, but emotionally he is a case of arrested development . . . surrounded by fierce tribesmen we never see and bowled over by a fiery Russian adventuress he scarcely even kisses, (MacGregor) needs madder music to turn . . . into the comic opera that is theatre"<sup>1</sup>. The ambiguity with which he is treated robs the play of colour when he is Shah; and Bridie recognised the fault when he provided an alternative scene of musical comedy swashbuckling. As a successor to The Anatomist and The Switchback, Marriage Is No Joke, like so many of Bridie's plays in the thirties, is a disappointment.

1934 also produced Mary Read, written in collaboration with Claude Gurney. It is the story of a girl in the eighteenth century who masqueraded as a boy as part of a confidence trick, discovered that she felt more at home in trousers than in petticoats, joined the army and eventually became a pirate. With a tortuous love-affair added to the difficulties of her deception, the play is a pleasant, if undistinguished, swashbuckling adventure with a dash of pathos for good measure.

The success of Tobias and the Angel encouraged Bridie to continue in a similar vein, and two further essays on biblical themes during the thirties were Jonah and the Whale (1932), and Susannah and the Elders (1937). The first play portrays, in a lightly comic style similar to Tobias and the Angel, the self-satisfied, rather pompous prophet, Jonah, and the lesson he is taught about presuming to a knowledge which it is beyond him. Marching against Nineveh out of pride for his reputation, and losing his faith en route, he is first brought back to God through his terrifying experience with the Whale, and then humbled by the failure of his prophecy when Nineveh is spared its promised destruction. It is a moral tale of charm and simplicity somewhat hampered by the undramatic nature of the moral pointed in it. The play was revised more than once in later years, but though always benign, was never a major work.

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1 W. Bannister James Bridie and his Theatre Rockliff, London 1955, pp. 107-8

Where Jonah and the Whale depicted the helplessness of Man before a God whose will is beyond comprehension, Susannah and the Elders turns its attention to the terrible ambiguities which dog all action, however pure the motive. The play relates the Apocryphal tale of Susannah, a virtuous Jewess, whose trust is betrayed by two elderly Babylonians who take a cruel advantage of their friendship with her husband. The elderly judges who first spy on, then falsely accuse Susannah are depicted as indulgent, urbane, good-natured souls, dishonoured by a sensual instinct they had long forgotten, and driven to the vilest hypocrisy by their guilty shame. In the end, with their crime discovered, they plead for a slow and painful death that they might alleviate their spiritual anguish through the agony of their flesh. Daniel, the young Jew who champions the truth, is a complex figure; a prominent and vitriolic opponent of the subjugated Jews' rather lenient masters, bitterly misogynistic yet curiously sympathetic towards the old men whose sins he uncovers. When his companions hail his triumph with the cruel relish of zealots, he turns from them, unable to rejoice in the righteousness of his cause. The treatment of the main theme is admirable, but the play moves too slowly towards its climax, while Susannah, an awkwardly "modern" woman, is but superficially drawn.

The Black Eye (1935) is in many ways similar to Tobias and the Angel. Its protagonist, George Windlestraw, has as little control over his fate as Tobias – indeed, his surname indicates an absence of purpose. He finds himself forced to fulfil an unattractive obligation to his father, and hitherto considered to be the black sheep of the family and a failure, he ultimately triumphs and restores his father's fortune. And just as Tobias was guided by Raphael, George also is provided with a daemon in the shape of Sammy Samuels, the ex-criminal who persuades him to rely on Luck. There is no Sara in The Black Eye, however: Sammy Samuels is a representative of Disorder, rather than Order, and though there is a beautiful girl possessed of another daemon to complement him, Bridie's aim is not this time a synthesis. The girl, Elspeth, is the slave of Social Order, and tries throughout the play to make George share her captivity. Bridie was never

greatly enamoured of society, and shows her way to be, in the end, less reasonable than George's - she patently fails to allow for emotion.

The play has none of the endearing charm or romantic exoticism of Tobias and The Angel; instead, it is - in Ivor Brown's words - "an immoral fairy tale which nobody will believe and everybody will enjoy".<sup>1</sup> It is eccentric rather than quaint, and the irony which underpins the action is unequivocally sophisticated. Bridie deliberately "falsifies" the action by placing it within the framework of George's direct address to the audience, so that a tension is maintained between the naturalism of each scene and the knowledge that it is an illustration of an argument. The play ends with a joke at the expense of the "straight" Morality - George decides that he will not make the beautiful girl his wife, and his brother asks, "I wonder if people who get married do live happy ever after?"<sup>2</sup>

George, attempting in vain to interest an eccentric inebriate in the story of his black eye, turns disarmingly to the audience, introduces himself, and commences to tell them the following tale. Having failed consistently to pass his Chartered Accountancy examinations, he decides to make his own way in the world. Cutting adrift from his family is complicated first by meeting his brother Johnny's girlfriend, Elspeth, and falling in love with her, and then by an accident which injures his father, obliging George to work in the family firm. After only one afternoon in the firm's offices, he discovers that it is on the verge of bankruptcy, but trying to explain to Johnny leads to a quarrel over Elspeth, which ends in George walking out to make "a roaring great fortune" on his own with which to save the Windlestraws - and marry Elspeth.

At first, his boldness seems to have led him to disaster: he is found in a particularly dismal rented room trying to earn his living as a "freelance journalist", a trade in which :

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1 Ivor Brown, quoted by Bannister, James Bridie and his Theatre p. 123

2 The Black Eye Act II, iv, p. 96

"You cut out jokes and paragraphs about the habits of the termite ant. And then you type them out and send them to other papers. You get five bob a time."

From this unhopeful if determined pursuit he is rescued by his roommate, Sammy Samuels. Mr. Samuels, a gentlemanly law-breaker, takes an instant interest in George's plans, but is unimpressed by the methods employed. Instead, he suggests roulette, and presses George to join him at his miniature wheel. The end result is a fortune of £8,250, with which George returns home. He does not marry Elspeth, though, because she wants him to be "duly and firmly tied up by the back leg".<sup>1</sup> Instead, he goes out into the garden with Johnny where they fight in order to clear the "bad blood" between them. Her sense of propriety and order thus finally outraged, Elspeth stamps angrily out, to be almost immediately forgotten. It is here that the play ends, with the Windlestraws saved and George once more in the mainstream of day-to-day life, sporting a prominent black eye.

In a letter to T. J. Honeyman, Bridie stated that The Black Eye was not a farce, and spoke instead of "the irony of the realisation of the hypothetical universe he (George) so cautiously and reasonably builds up..."<sup>2</sup> The essence of the comedy is that George "creates" the play as his vision of existence, which despite its incongruous internal logic, is unchallengeably convincing. "The world of the play is as carefully as it is ingeniously constructed:"<sup>3</sup> and the concept embodied in it is the acceptance of ambiguity and recognition that the forces of Destiny are beyond human control.

Elspeth imagines that one's duty is obvious, and that only by planning can one's life be securely stabilized. Her error is plain in the way infatuation for George sends her rushing from pillar to post and telephone. Though she never recants her allegiance to this flawed

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1 The Black Eye Act II, iii, p.82

2 W. Bannister, James Bridie and his Theatre Rockliff, London 1955, p126

3 H. Luyben, James Bridie, Clown and Philosopher, University of Pennsylvania, 1965, p95

order, she confesses to the audience in Act II, scene 3 :

"I've had too much money and too many satellites and too few friends. This has given me the illusion that I know what I'm after. And I don't."

George has become for her a symbol of all that will not fit her hypothetical pattern, and she is stung by a sense of injustice, as well as helpless attraction :

"There's that little worm, George. I've only met him three times, and he's been absolutely sozzled two of them. He's behaved like a pig. He's got no character. And yet I can't keep off the telephone. I don't know what's the matter with me. I'm taking him home, now, and I am going to see that he's duly and firmly tied up by the hind leg. And really and truly I believe it's because I'll be able to see him sometimes...."

George is never able to accept such a rigid view of life. In Act I he says "you can't plan things out beforehand."

"I mean, you can, but it's no use. You can't be prepared for every event - eventuality. And if you could be prepared - I mean really thoroughly - you'd only be cutting out the good luck. You can't cut out bad.... Most things work out themselves if you leave them to do it. Nearly every kind of thing. You shouldn't interfere with the workings of things you don't understand."

Mrs. Windlestraw, as Helen Luyben points out, is the expression of this principle, alternately charming by her refusal to pass harsh judgements and maddening by her complacent optimism. Nothing, it appears, can surprise her; and the nature of her wisdom is emphasised by repeated clashes with the impetuous, "normal", Connie, her youngest daughter :

"My dearest, you are really hardly old enough to form a really valuable opinion as to what the mother of a grown-up family or an intelligent young man of twenty-two ought to think or say or do. Anyhow, if you like being worried to death, I don't, and I've had some experience of it".

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The prospect of George and Johnny going off to punch each other in the garden leaves her unruffled: in such a manner are taut emotions to be released, however childish or even insane it may seem. It is this which drives Elspeth to distraction, flinging over her shoulder as she makes her exit; "You can't act or feel or think like ordinary people. . . . You're the most pestilential family I ever met in my life." <sup>1</sup>

George aspires to such wisdom, but at first can only guess at its existence. Locked into the systems of "ordinary people" as represented by Elspeth, he frets at the complexity of responsibilities they thrust upon him which seem ultimately futile. Three times he is caged by varying duties – to society as a chartered accountant; to Elspeth as a candidate for a post in her father's firm; and to his family, when his father is injured. The gross oversimplification of life involved in each reaches its climax in Johnny's suspicious accusations in Act II, Sc. 1. Johnny is all too ready to accept the obvious, rather than search for the truth:

Johnny:            Oh, you damned young swine! I wouldn't let myself believe it. I thought . . . . .

George :           Hi! Stop a minute. You haven't heard the whole story. . . . "

Johnny :           I don't want to hear the whole story. . . . "

and it is this which finally pushes his brother to the point of no return.

The daemon of irrational good fortune which hitherto danced vaguely before George's eyes now finds embodiment in Samuels, who with pedantic dignity, persuades the younger man to win £250 from him. Bridie's eye for farce is implicit in the central point in his argument, when George breaks the bank by staking all his earlier winnings on seventeen because it is the seventeenth of the month.

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1        The Black Eye, Act II, iv, p. 94

It is in fact, the eighteenth. As Luyben comments, "if it were not for human ignorance Providence would not stand a chance".<sup>1</sup> From there, Samuels offers him another gamble: when it successfully provides George with the fortune he requires the urbane ex-convict vanishes in drunken splendour. Like Tobias, George returns to normal life once his daemon has left him: "Living one's own life is all very well when one knows exactly the sort of life one would like. But who does?",<sup>2</sup> he remarks as he returns to his family; and he sums up finally :

"Of course it could never happen again. It was sheer impossibility as it was. But, all the same, I've got a sort of two-sparrows-for-a-farthing feeling that if you chance your arm and let yourself go blind into the future, you've got a sort of sixth sense or something that sees you through."

The ambiguity which permeates The Black Eye, even though its conclusion is positive, is supported by three features. The first, obviously, is in George himself, as the play is supposedly his "story"; from the outset, he asks the audience to judge him, and despite his sympathetic nature, he seems for much of the play to be heading blindly for disaster. The second is in the prologue, with its middle-aged reveller locked out by his Auntie for not being home at eleven o'clock. As he follows the lines of railings in the street, he sings :

"I care not for the leaping stars,  
I clutch the cold, triumphant bars,  
For one by one in regular row,  
They lead me where I want to go."

On his return his Auntie will scold him, then feed him ham and eggs. His acceptance of the eccentricities of his aged relative is attractive, but ambivalent: either he is imprisoned in the "cold, triumphant bars" of social restriction, or he has learned not to question the peculiarities of a Fate which ultimately takes him where he wants to go. Lastly, there is the comedy which bubbles ironically behind every scene, even undermining the seriousness of Mr. Windlestraw's accident; so successful that Bridie's most implacably hostile critic, James Agate felt bound to acknowledge it.<sup>3</sup>

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1 H. Luyben, James Bridie, Clown and Philosopher p. 89

2 The Black Eye Act II, iii, p. 81

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Bridie's career as a playwright is, however, a chequered one. The thirties which began with The Anatomist and Tobias and the Angel placed The Black Eye amidst his embarrassingly poor contributions to the Scottish National Players. What it is to be Young, produced at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 1929, proves that the S.N.P. were not the sole recipients of uninspired work. Supposedly contrasting the innocent forcefulness of Youth against the corruption and compromise of Experience, the play instead presents a tomboyish hockey-captain, Virginia Dix, falling into the evil clutches of a handsome but villainous ex-army officer, Cochrane. Having embezzled the funds of the village ex-serviceman's club, Cochrane defies the clumsy attempts of Virginia's father, General Dix, to expose his crime; and plans to crown his criminal achievements by burgling the hotel in which they are all guests. The hotelier's complicity in the embezzlement and Virginia's adolescent infatuation for the attractive Cochrane provide the drawn-out plot with the statutory complications; and of course another, far more honourable young man champions Virginia in the end and Cochrane receives the thrashing he so richly deserves. Humour is at a very low pitch as the play creeps along an old, familiar road which brings no surprises. As with the S.N.P. comedies, What it is to be Young loses itself in verbosity, with the meagre plot sacrificed to apparently endless chatter from the inevitable Bridie caricatures of academics and lady artists. The conclusion is staggeringly ill-contrived. After deciding to ignore the entire incident, the Dix family talk themselves off the stage. Cochrane, thus apparently escaped, is promptly set upon by the hotel waiter and the young chauffeur who truly loves Virginia. As Winifred Bannister observes about the play :  
". . . . there is no dramatic value, not even much fun . . . ." <sup>1</sup>

It is offerings of this low quality and type which provoke the annoyance expressed by Christopher Small in the following complaint :

"The real Bridie hero . . . the the lad o' pairts, or local boy who makes good, and he is generally exhibited kickabout over the traces and behaving

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1 W. Bannister James Bridie and his Theatre, Rockliff, London 1955 p. 59

in a most impudent manner to his elders and betters. It would be interesting to speculate on the dunts received by Bridie's spirit in youth. . . In the introduction to Colonel Wotherspoon he speaks of the method, "a cautious mixture of offensiveness and truckling" to be adopted with the aim of crippling or disarming criticism in advance. It is an excellent description (allowing nothing for wit, grace or invention), of his own way of going to work. It is the basic formula of youth too spirited to take authority lying down, but not driven far enough (or too dependent, finally, on authority's approval) to become "youth in revolt". . . finally conformity, and the last defence always ready, "I only did it for fun". 1

Fortunately Bridie grew out of such adolescent indulgences which so ill became a man of his age and experience.

A Sleeping Clergyman (1933) in which Bridie briefly abandoned the judicial attitude which marks all his best work, was at the time mistakenly regarded by him as a masterpiece. Inspired by the involvement of the author's other self, Dr. Mavor, in a contemporary debate on eugenics, the play traces the spark of genius through three generations, showing that no matter what evil forms it could assume in the first two, it would ultimately find the conditions in which the world would be served. The play takes its name from the curious and clumsy device used by Bridie in the prologue, "a huge, white-bearded clergyman" asleep in a clubroom in which two doctors introduce the play proper. He remains asleep for the duration of the action, "looking too like the church" to suggest the God he symbolises.

The first Act, set in 1867, depicts the poverty stricken medical student, Cameron, developing a theory of infection in advance of his time, but dying of tuberculosis before he can conclude his work. He has succeeded before his death in fathering an illegitimate child with the sister of his best friend and guardian angel, Marshall. The child, Wilhelmina, survives her mother's death and is adopted by Marshall, and in her the force which drove Cameron to ruthless scientific devotion is twisted into boundless curiosity and a fatal urge for passionate extremes. She becomes involved with a deter-

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1 C. Small, "No Father in Bridie" Saltire Review Vol. 4 no. 12, 1957, p. 19

mined social climber, John Hannah, with whom she has an affair. His threat to expose their liaison if she will not further his career by marrying him prompts her to poison him. Shortly after his death she gives birth to twins, and then kills herself. Once more Marshall assumes responsibility for the offspring, and though at first the children, Hope and Charles, seem bent on destroying his faith, Charlie literally saves the world in the end, as a brilliant medical scientist, while Hope shares in his triumph by maintaining the League of Nations. "The grandchildren of vice are now the servants of humanity" writes Winifred Bannister, ". . . . Genius has found a soul."<sup>1</sup>

Admirable though the author's intention might be, A Sleeping Clergyman is clumsy and over-emphatic. Act I is perfectly acceptable, with its well-drawn vignettes of Victorian squalor and respectability, and a code of manners which tends towards the melodramatic in any case; but Act II is embarrassing in the thinness of its characterisation, poor construction and ponderous pursuit of an obvious conclusion. Young Charlie is so obviously a "black-sheep" from the outset that it is no surprise to find him courageous and resourceful in the end.

His youthful excesses amount to nothing more than undergraduate pranks and truculence, very weak dilutions of his forebears' violent extremes. A short scene in War-time when he is depicted throwing his newly acquired D. S. O. to a prostitute as a souvenir, has all the familiarity of a cliché, especially at the lines :

"I realise what it means all right. I won the damned thing. But I've bigger things to do than that. . ."

Left on his tunic are the Military Cross, the Croix de Guerre, and the Medaille Militaire. He progresses from cynical heroism to triumphing over "the Great Sickness" which threatens the destruction of the human race: Bridie seems to have felt it necessary for him to

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1 W. Bannister James Bridie and his Theatre, Rockliff, London 1955, p. 96

save the entire world in order to justify his existence.

Despite its fair measure of contemporary popularity – there was topical interest in the "Great Pandemic" which was identified with the post-war influenza epidemic – A Sleeping Clergyman is far from being one of Bridie's best plays: Winifred Bannister, a staunch admirer of the author, asks "is it really necessary for that sleeping clergyman to be there at all? I think not."<sup>1</sup> The clumsiness of this symbol and the abandonment of ambiguity after Act 1 for an affirmative bias of less than inspired quality mark a curious lapse in the author's skill and judgement when working with a theme of considerable interest and potential power.

The turning point in Bridie's attitude to life and destiny came in 1938, when in three minor plays, Babes In The Wood, The King of Nowhere, and The Last Trump, a dark vision occasionally lurking in the background of earlier work abruptly surged across the whole stage. The outbreak of war and the death of his fighter-pilot son soon confirmed its position in the forefront of his imagination. These plays are concerned with demonic figures rather than the earlier ambiguous daemons. The forces of Good which oppose them are now seen to constitute merely an empty gesture.

Babes In The Wood, a "quiet farce", is recognisably in the early grouping of ambiguous plays with positive conclusions. Gillet, headmaster of an undistinguished preparatory school – a forerunner, probably, of Bridie's more celebrated schoolteacher, Mr. Gillie – finds himself overnight a celebrity through the unexpected success of his book, The Rhythmic Universe, a popular explanation of Higher Mathematics. Joyfully seizing the chance to escape "the refinement of torture" which teaching is to him, he rushes off with his wife to visit Brewer, his publisher, at his eccentric residence in Sussex, Miching Mallecow. This house has all the traditional attributes of Hell, a thick heat haze, bizarre decoration, a naturalistic garden, and the inhabitants quite plainly demonic. Brewer is

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1 Bannister p. 102 James Bridie and his Theatre Rockliff, London 1955

"a tall thin diabolic-looking man . . . . terribly like Mephistopheles"<sup>1</sup> and his first appearance, direct from the swimming pool, emphasises the effect, for his wet hair is twisted into two horns. His mother, the startling Mrs. Hangingshaw, is of immense age, spending her time drinking furiously, cursing everyone, and knitting an enormous multi-coloured scarf in the manner of a tricoteuse. There are other guests besides the Gillets: Gerald Strutt, nervous and weak-willed, and Susan Copernicus, a beautiful decadent. Gillet rapidly falls under Susan's spell, and for a while it looks as if his wife is being attracted to Gerald, to the delight of their unpleasant hosts. A victory for cynical sophistication seems assured when Margaret Gillet applies to Mrs. Hangingshaw for advice about her husband's infatuation with Susan: but an alternative example is provided for her when Susan's estranged husband, Papageno Copernicus, returns and takes Susan away by force. Copernicus once obeyed Mrs. Hangingshaw, sympathised with his wife's infidelity, and lost her. One swift punch now restores him in Susan's estimation, and she happily leaves with him for America. An astounded Gillet plans vaguely to follow her there, but his wife, following Copernicus' example, concludes her objections by using her fist, thus bringing him to his senses. Pursued by Brewer's mockery, the couple flee for home and safety, and virtue prevails in the end.

As a lighthearted excursion into the surreal, the play succeeds admirably, "though Act 1 Scene 2 unnecessarily protracts the image of Gillet as the emotionally inhibited, pedantic schoolteacher."<sup>2</sup> The first scene establishes his character quite adequately, contrasting his facile condemnation of sexual reticence with his embarrassed inability to escape such tabus when introducing a schoolboy to the facts of "natural physiological processes."<sup>3</sup> Gillet's subsequent surrender to the charms of Susan Copernicus is all too readily understood, as

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1 Babes In The Wood Act I, iii, p. 28

2 H. Luyben, James Bridie : Clown and Philosopher

3 Act I, i, p. 7, Babes in The Wood

is his insistence to the end that "it was all . . . quite . . . innocent". "Too damned innocent,"<sup>1</sup> retorts his wife, with remarkable penetration. Gillet is naive enough to imagine that dalliance with Susan is free from guilt, unlike her other affairs, which he chooses to ignore. He is deeply offended by the possibility that Margaret is attracted to Strutt, unable to regard it in the same light as his own entanglement.

The entire episode at Miching Mallecow is a witty caricature of temptation. Bridie's attitude is suggested by the play's half-mocking dedication to William Roughead, "who knows the human species to be deceitful and desperately wicked":<sup>2</sup> Brewer and his household represent a fantasy of vice as dreamed by innocent respectability, but nightmarishly close to reality – an ambiguity Bridie exploits to the full.<sup>3</sup> Brewer and Mrs. Hangingshaw are both comic and sinister, for despite their exaggerated characteristics their corrupting effect is genuine, their malicious deceit all too efficient. The Black-and-Silver Bedroom, complete with spider and devilmoth, is both ridiculous and disturbing, as indeed, is Brewer's cold blooded satire of Margaret Gillet's restoration of her husband's senses.

Bridie is careful not to sentimentalize the respectable common-place life under diabolic assault. In Act 1, Gillet is clearly inadequate, living in isolation from adult reality. Margaret, though she triumphs, has shown at times a maddeningly dull insensitivity.<sup>4</sup> As the after dinner conversation of Act II scene 2 deepens, her contributions involve the opinions of "Aunt Ethel", and her attitude to the Faust legend is confined to memories of . . . "a very noisy man in scarlet

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1 Babes In the Wood Act II, ii, p. 71

2 Babes In the Wood dedication

3 H. Luyben James Bridie : Clown and Philosopher

4 H. Luyben James Bridie : Clown and Philosopher



tights who got a fat little man mixed up somehow with a stout lady with golden hair." <sup>1</sup> Brewer gives up his pursuit of Gillet, bowing ironically to her "superior expertise in Hell-making". <sup>2</sup> The final assertion of Good over Evil is deliberately placed in the realm of childhood "happy endings" by her order to Rupture, the butler.

"Get the car. Or a taxi. Or a train.  
Or a bus . . . . Unless you'd like to be  
a robin and cover us with leaves. . . ."

There is a hollow ring to this optimistic, evasive conclusion. Bridie's lightness is by now distinctly strained in its optimism; his satirical impulse more pronounced.

There is little optimism in The King of Nowhere, an attempt to deal with a topic of considerable interest in 1938, the psychology of dictatorship.

The central character, Vivaldi, is an actor who in the first scene is obviously insane and is removed to an asylum run by the humane Dr. McGilp. Recovering, he loses patience with the frustrations of the institution and leaves it a few days before his official date of release. Pursued, he takes refuge in an isolated country house, where he is sheltered by Miss Rimmer, whose cantankerously selfish uncle has recently died, bequeathing to her a fortune. Miss Rimmer has been enslaved for years as the old man's companion, and in that time has devoted herself to politics and economics, removed as she is from their day-to-day effects. Now she has a plan for a Scottish Nationalist Dictatorship as the perfect solution to all social ills, and the imposing figure of Vivaldi fires her imagination as well as her heart. Offering him the role of Dictator, she conceals him from pursuit, and in the months that follow builds up the nucleus of a political army with which to transform the nation. Vivaldi accepts the proposition with relish, much as he would the title-role in Hamlet,

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1 Babes in the Wood Act II, ii, p. 56

2 Babes in the Wood Act II, ii, p. 70

putting himself heart and soul into the creation of a personality fitted to Miss Rimmers's ideal. Unfortunately, their scheme demands that they must enter the real world, and Miss Rimmer alone is dedicated to this aspect of their mission. Their supporters are a mixture of opportunists, thugs and dreamers, and the first gathering of their "army" proves Vivaldi to be nothing more than an actor, revelling in his ability to control the emotional responses of a faceless crowd: yet even when Miss Rimmer challenges him about his self-indulgence, he can so express his confession as to inspire once more the sense of his greatness. The last Act opens with Vivaldi apparently in power, and issuing awe-inspiring ultimatums to an august but cowed international assembly: the image of power collapses however – it is McGilp's sanatorium, and the assembly is of his fellowpatients. Discussing his madness with McGilp when the others have gone, Vivaldi is told that his artistic gift is dangerous and irresponsible, that he likes to move people because he enjoys "the smell of fear" thus produced. Confronted by a Miss Rimmer trying to obtain his release by fair means or foul, the actor tests McGilp's theory, and finds it true. The doctor has to check his patient's impulsive violence towards the old woman; but curiously, once Vivaldi has been removed, she re-affirms her faith in him, promising to return when he is well. Dreams are necessary, suggests Bridie, even when they are recognised as fantasy.

Ashley Dukes, in "the English Scene", commented of The King of Nowhere :

"A mental patient as prospective dictator – There is no help for it, the dramatist must justify this not very subtle epigram on life and politics by carrying it off in brilliant satirical style... (Bridie) remains almost in Calvinistic earnest where his main theme is concerned"

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What humour and satire there is in the play – mostly at the expense of the prospective dictator's followers – is swamped by the characters of Vivaldi and Miss Rimmer. Yet Vivaldi's "madness" is not convincing: indeed it is melodramatic in the extreme for him to fear Bolshevik assassination by a "big electrical machine on the moor".<sup>2</sup>

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1 Quoted by Luyben p. 100 James Bridie : Clown and Philosopher

2 Epilogue p. 93 The King of Nowhere

Bridie twice suggests that Vivaldi has deliberately feigned insanity in order to escape from the responsibilities of life, which may be madness, but is vastly more credible in its complexity than the exaggerated persecution-mania. As he is removed by attendants in the prologue, apparently raving, he suddenly but calmly quotes Hamlet to McGilp:

"I am but mad nor<sup>1</sup>-nor<sup>1</sup>-west. When the wind is easterly I know a hawk from a handsaw"

The horror of the professional actor at being ignored drives him to escape :

"have you ever lived in a circle where nobody believed what you said, or paid any attention to what you said? Where they smiled politely and thought of something else? It was worse than the theatre. It was a bad dream. . . ."

and there is a hint that his return is a welcome one: only once he hears of a possible release does he begin to talk again of Bolsheviks.

The rest of the time, Vivaldi is all too plainly a self-indulgent actor, surrounded by rather colourless caricatures. The arrival of his wife, and the consequent revelation of his inability to resist playing up to an audience, provides the most convincing impression of his character. In the words of Dr. McGilp, Vivaldi likes "stirring people into activity".

"So does a dog who sees a cat sleeping in the sun. It is only because you are a human being, and therefore a hypocrite, that you pretend that your prey likes being stirred. You like the smell of fear".

He plays the part of prospective dictator exactly as he did "Othello and Romeo and Sir Peter Teazle and Cyrano de Bergerac and Captain Hook. . ." <sup>1</sup> Bridie has created a figure with two conflicting personalities rather than one personality of ambiguous meaning. The King of Nowhere is neither satire nor gripping drama, though perhaps it is a more interesting failure by virtue of its ideas than is A Sleeping Clergyman.

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In The Last Trump, Bridie's pessimism is plain. The play's demonic central figure, the financier Buchlyvie, is domineering, callous and self-willed, and is ultimately proved to be beyond hope of redemption to humanity.

When the play opens, he is in a nursing home fearfully awaiting a diagnosis from Dr. Gristwood and specialist Sir Gregory Butt, but continuing to work and bully like a man possessed. The diagnosis is in fact quite favourable, but both doctors warn him that his mania for high pressure work cannot continue, and he promises to take things more easily in the future. They are not convinced, and Butt confides to his colleague that Buchlyvie needs to be frightened into full realisation of his peril, relating a confusing and somewhat contradictory anecdote which supposedly indicates that the financier is driven to his killing exertions by the fear of imminent death. Two sub-plots have meantime been introduced: a strikingly unoriginal love-match between Buchlyvie's son Tom and the self-possessed Jean MacRae, thwarted by parental disapproval; and Buchlyvie's attempt to obtain land for development from the MacPhater, an impoverished Highland chieftain, which he presses while in full knowledge that MacPhater's wife is dying in childbirth. The first Act ends with MacPhater's brother-in-law, an eminent American physicist and astronomer, threatening to kill Buchlyvie for seizing on "MacPhater's darkest hour to haggle with him and bully him." <sup>1</sup>

Having heard that a shock might kill the financier, the brother-in-law, Shreiner, descends on the Buchlyvie Highland retreat - once MacPhater's ancestral home - with the appalling news that the world is about to be destroyed by a celestial catastrophe; but not before there has been much business about Tom and Jean and the other caricatures of Buchlyvie's family and friends. With the sun due to explode at five minutes past five the following morning, the Buchlyvie

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1 Act I, ii, p. 65 The Last Trump

household breaks down, some going to the old chapel to spend the night in prayer, the rest – including Jean, who alone does not believe Shreiner's well-documented tale – are drawn by Buchlyvie into a desperate poker game. This is as far as the financier can persuade them to go: his exhortations to spend their remaining time in orgy and riot fail to move them. Jean is remarkably successful with the card-game, and when finally Buchlyvie stakes £10,000 against her own body, she accepts the challenge, and wins. The household then discovers that the clock has stopped, and that they are well beyond the supposed hour of destruction. Buchlyvie instantly accuses Jean of being party to the trick, and Tom goes off to horse-whip Shreiner. Though Tom is in fact beaten by the American, and Jean is now wealthy enough to marry him without his father's approval, the ending of the play strikes a dubious note. Buchlyvie is in no way chastened by his experience, threatening Schreiner with a monstrous suit for assault and making of the whole business a monstrous solipsistic blasphemy:

"I believe all this happened for a purpose.... suppose Providence, or whatever it is, really had decided to destroy the Universe this morning and then changed its mind... If I have been spared to get on with my work. Hey?... I'm the one who moves human beings about. I buy the best of their work and the best of their minds. I'm getting the world ready for the Day of Judgement when it does come....."

- Characterisation in the Last Trump is undistinguished apart from Sir Gregory Butt: even Buchlyvie is not strongly convincing. The plot is strained and at times too obviously coincidental, as when Shreiner stumbles on the two doctors and learns from them of his enemy's weakness. Lastly, Bridie's intention is obscure. If Butt is correct, then Buchlyvie is haunted by fear, yet he shows no sign of it, despite a late assertion that he has been in "a continual, niggling little gnawing panic".<sup>1</sup> Though the threat of catastrophe apparently

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1 Act II, iii, p. 78 The Last Trump

destroys his supposed panic and leaves him rejuvenated, Buchlyvie's response to it is hardly gratifying, for it is not accompanied by moral redemption. The Last Trump concludes with a monster where it began with a ruthless but ailing man.

His new more sombre mood did not deter Bridie from further ventures into light comedy, though only occasionally could he now sustain an optimism untinged by the cynical echoes of satire. The war-years of 1939 to 1945 were certainly not his best, with only Mr. Bolfry and perhaps the Forrigan Reel to relieve an otherwise dull record. Significantly, a demon is prominent in Mr. Bolfry.

What Say They? (1939) is a none too serious account of a conflict in a Scottish University between the unco' guid, represented by Professor Hayman and his family of hypocrites; and the spirit of life and free imagination, championed by an Irish poet working incognito as a University porter and his fiery niece, Ada. The action is too far-fetched to capture the imagination, but is never sufficiently burlesque to attain the bite of successful satire. Ada is mistaken on her arrival as a new private secretary to the Principal, and in this role she thwarts immediately Hayman's vindictive persecution of the student Sheltie. Her triumph is short-lived, for Hayman, manoeuvring to win a research post for his utterly worthless son, demands that the police raid a shady dance-hall secretly owned by the Irish poet-porter in which Sheltie, Hayman junior's brilliant rival, is arrested. The tables are turned when the poet reveals his true identity and is elected Lord Rector of the University by enthusiastic students, whereupon he destroys Hayman's plot. To complete the tableau of happiness with which the play ends, the Principal proposes marriage to the delighted Ada. The play's only chance is as farce, and instead expends its energy "on the alter of over-sentimentalised memories".<sup>1</sup>

A more worthy failure in the same year as What Say They? was The Golden Legend of Shults. This begins with a highly theatrical and

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1 Bannister, p. 148 James Bridie and his Theatre Rockliff, London 1955

pointed satire on the legal system, then turns less happily to deal with the sterility and cruelty of a Scottish seaside community to terminate in an awkward fantasy of farcical destruction. The protagonist is a gentle little safe-cracker, Davie Cooper, struggling against the ugliness of the world he finds himself in. At first there is considerable dramatic effect as Bridie takes the rare step of rejecting naturalism entirely, in a first Act which traces Davie's days as a criminal, his capture and conviction by a virtually senile judge. Despite the efforts of a criminally irresponsible psychologist and his own desire to remain within the security of prison, Davie earns a year's remission, and is thrust once more into the dismal world of poverty and crime. At this point the play begins to lose cohesion, as Bridie crams in too many extraneous flashes of social criticism, some of it distinctly unoriginal.

The second Act, in which Davie, now a commercial traveller, travels to the seaside town of Shults where he is outrageously abused and insulted, stumbles through thickets of verbosity; and the last Act is transported to the realm of pure wish-fulfilment as Davie and his criminal associates buy up the town with counterfeit money to demolish vast areas of it under the pretence of redevelopment. The pace achieved in the first Act, with the imaginative simplicity of its staging – a large box becomes in turn a safe, a judge's formal robes, and the angel of death – has long been forgotten by the time the play reaches its half-hearted conclusion. Bridie seems to have early lost confidence in the "revue-sketch" method which alone could sustain this curious work which tentatively foreshadows The Baikie Charivari. Like the later and much greater play, The Golden Legend of Shults is haunted by a dark vision of evil and hopelessness.

The biblical plays of the thirties were succeeded in the forties by two comedies which carefully turned their backs on the grimness of wartime, Holy Isle and The Dragon and the Dove, both appearing in 1942. In The Dragon and the Dove the Christian hermit, Abraham, adopts the colours of an ancient foul-mouthed army colonel to save his niece from the brothel she has fled to after falling victim to the devil. The play's gentle sentimentality make a surprising contrast with the frequently brutal realism of the author's better-known work.

In Holy Isle, medieval "civilisation" threatens to drag the strange inhabitants of Ultima Thule into its own degradation when a young adventurer brings to their shores the tigerish Queen of Orkney, a self-righteous friar bent on conversion, and a businessman. Ultima Thule, they discover, exists in a state of placid, pastoral anarchy, its only approach to recognisable government being the moral authority of "ponderers" headed by "She". Though at first the future of the island seems bleak indeed, it is ultimately the invaders who are changed: Queen Margaret rediscovers a life free from the frets of self-seeking, Father Innocence abandons his attempt to enforce his dogma and instead seeks God through the islanders' simplicity, and Grettin Flatface, the businessman, declines from feverish materialism into a rosy placidity induced by alcohol. Ironically, when the King of Orkney arrives to reclaim his wife, it is the young and liberally-minded adventurer, Torquil, who expresses disgust with the lack of spirit and order on the island. The play ends on a rather flat note as the would-be rulers sail off for Orkney with the king, and the "Holy Isle" continues its charmed existence.

Mr. Bolfry (1943) is a better play by far than any other written by Bridie during the war, but is so completely permeated by ambiguity that despite the vastly enjoyable personalities of the Reverend McCrimmon and his adversary, the devil known as Bolfry, the arguments which Bridie normally plies with skilled lucidity are confused and disappointingly incomplete. He also offers a solution to the play's theological debate which, if sound in doctrine and attractively simple, is somehow misplaced in the rather sentimentalized character of Mrs. McCrimmon.

Set in the West Highlands during the war, Mr. Bolfry concerns McCrimmon, a puritan, Free Kirk Minister, and his defence of narrow morality against three agnostic "moderns": his niece Jean, convalescing in his manse; and two soldiers billeted there, the intellectual Cully and the easy-going Cockney Cohen. The soldiers, experiencing their first taste of a Free Kirk Sunday, chafe under its ban on cigarettes and "unseemly levity". They find in Jean a fellow sufferer,



and one whose longer acquaintance with such restrictions has driven her to the point of open rebellion against her uncle. She defies his rule by drinking tea with the soldiers on the Sabbath, suitably outraging McCrimmon's sensibilities; but once provoked he proves himself master of all the arguments the trio can think of. Thwarted by McCrimmon's overbearing rhetoric and intellect, they half-humorously decide to conjure up the devil as a worthy opponent of the minister, employing for the purpose one of McCrimmon's own books, The Discoverie of Witchcraft by Reginald Scott. The attempt succeeds all too well: after drawing a chalk circle, inscribing the suitable symbols on Cully's knife and chanting the invocation, a peal of thunder heralds the arrival of Mr. Bolfry - dressed, to everyone's amazement, in exactly the same manner as McCrimmon. Bolfry, the devil in clergyman's clothing, is an unmistakably Scottish figure. The minister and his wife having been drawn to the scene, there follows a splendid debate in which McCrimmon increasingly finds himself aligned with Bolfry against Jean, Cully and Cohen: they both believe in God and the central creed of the Church. Cohen's scepticism horrifies the minister as much as it vexes Bolfry, who exclaims :

"Mr. McCrimmon, it seems to me we cannot begin our battle for the souls of these persons until they realise that they have souls to battle for"

.... and McCrimmon agrees that they should together "admonish and exhort them," and goes to dress himself properly for the fray. Until he returns in his clergyman's attire the play is sorely strained by a weak and rather precious passage of theatrical philosophizing by Bolfry,<sup>1</sup> merely revealing the caricatures which are Jean, Cully and Cohen; but this is followed by Bolfry's magnificent sermon on the text "Now is the dominion of Edom and the return of Adam to Paradise". In it Bolfry preaches the dualistic heresy of the Manichees that evil is as much a part of God's Creation as good is, and adds :

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Bannister p. 153 James Bridie and his Theatre Rockliff, London 1955

"You are better than your neighbours, Mr. McCrimmon. They would say that because a truth was sorrowful or distasteful, or inconvenient, it was therefore not a truth. That is why they will not believe what I have come to tell you... that the Gates of Hell may prevail against the armies of Cherubim. That Disorder may win the day. If that were not possible, why do you wrestle and pray?"

Bolfry then depicts all Christian duty as a miserable, rock-strewn road, travelled under the lash of curses and punishment, and the flattery of Hope. All else is evil, but also pleasureable. Bolfry offers "the Pride of the Eye and the Lust of the Flesh. Their other names are Art and Poetry."<sup>1</sup> McCrimmon realises that his own secret beliefs are being voiced, and in a surge of wild, unreasoning Faith, attacks Bolfry with Cully's knife, pursuing him outside and across the clifftop till the demon plunges into the sea. Next day none of the household are very sure whether or not the whole affair has been a dream – until Bolfry's umbrella, lying unnoticed by the fire, gets up and walks out of its own accord. As everyone gapes in stupified silence, Mrs. McCrimmon, totally unruffled, makes a cup of tea, invulnerable in her boundless, child-like faith.

Not since The Anatomist had Bridie created such an immediately gripping protagonist as he did with the Reverend MacCrimmon: what is more, he provided him with what Knox in The Anatomist had lacked, a worthy opponent, an intellectual equal, in the shape of Mr. Bolfry. Moreover, the supernatural allows him to shift from hypothesis to verification without a break, thus minimising possible distractions. As might be expected in a Scotsman, Bridie is said to have become so preoccupied with the intricate theology of his theme that he had to be reminded – principally by the actor Alastair Sim – that he was writing for the theatre, and this possibly explains some of the more hesitant moments of the play, as when Bolfry

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1 Mr. Bolfry Act 1 iii

lengthily foreshadows his debate with MacCrimmon. It seems that Sim's reminders also gave rise to at least one of the most brilliant effects of the play, the unaided exit of Bolfry's umbrella. Such imaginative surprises are finely judged to maintain interest in a play which depends very heavily on sustained rhetoric: after the staggering simplicity of Bolfry's entrance and the discovery of his clergyman's dress, the apparently endless argument is concluded in the least expected fashion by MacCrimmon's abrupt assault on the Devil's emissary. It is therefore all the more disappointing to consider the marked loss of impetus in Act 3 when Bolfry exposes the "superficiality" of the moderns with tedious and paternalistic condescension.

The central question about Puritanism which inevitably is raised is not unequivocally answered. Plainly, the criticisms of the "moderns" are valid, even if they themselves are blindly complacent in their ignorance. The area has "the best record for church attendance and the highest illegitimacy rate in the kingdom".<sup>1</sup>

There is a ring of truth in Jean's complaint:

"they don't worship God. They worship the Devil.  
They call him God, but he's really the Devil.  
All this holiness and censoriousness is to save  
their skins from boils and leprosy and their souls  
from damnation. . . ."

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Bolfry's sermon brilliantly projects the guilt and longing inherent in overscrupulous morality, perverting all joy and beauty into agencies of Sin. It is this that McCrimmon recognises when against his reason he attacks Bolfry. The positive vision offered at the end of the play, for all its wisdom, has not the weight to overbear McCrimmon's Calvinism, even in retreat. Mrs. McCrimmon, "a stock Bridie part",<sup>3</sup> though no Pharisee, yet wishes to preserve an appearance of decorum, apparently for its own sake. She is

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1 Mr. Bolfry Act 1 i

2 Mr. Bolfry Act 1 i

3 Bannister, p. 155, James Bridie and his Theatre Rockliff, London 1955

too like her near relation, Mrs. Windlestraw in The Black Eye, to avoid an air of well-intentioned vagueness. After the voluble intellects of Bolfry and McCrimmon, vagueness is not enough.

The "Backstage-area" of wartime Britain also provides the location for the farcical comedy It Depends What You Mean (1944) in which George and Angela Prout, artists exiled to the remoteness of rural Britain, join the panel of a hastily-organised Brain's Trust for the entertainment of a local army camp. With them is Professor Mutch who lives with them and who has fallen in love with Angela, whom George treats with a familiarity indistinguishable from contempt. With the theatre audience representing the play's soldiery, the Brains' Trust begins to answer questions of varying intelligence and slight interest, when suddenly a Private Killigrew of the A. T. S. demands to know the answer to a question of universal importance - whether or not marriage is a good idea. After some embarrassment, the Prouts are persuaded to act out the circumstances in which they first fell in love. Mutch, outraged by the apparent parody of love embodied in their present condition, offers to rescue Angela from George's egoism, but when pressed, prefers his bachelorhood to the compromises of a shared love. The Prouts resume their less than idyllic life together, though now there is just a hint of improvement, and Private Killigrew, whose question caused all the upset, announces that she has decided to marry her boyfriend, anyway, despite what she has seen. The main theme is adequate entertainment, but the supporting characters are fairly trivial and at times long-winded, and the play deserves no special applause.

The Forrigan Reel (1944) by its consistent uncomplicated levity proves more successful. A tongue-in-cheek Highland comedy, it shows how the wit and cunning of the ne'er-do-weel MacAlpins work a "miraculous" cure on the strange afflictions of Mrs. Grant, wife to the local laird, and Clarinda, a young lady of refined upbringing. Both women in reality suffer from an excess of genteel boredom, and the treatment of the MacAlpins consists in the exhilaration of Highland dancing. The play was subsequently altered into a new - somewhat disastrous - form as ballad-opera. A light-

hearted parody of Gaelic mystique, The Forrigan Reel is excellent entertainment, especially in its portrayal of Old MacAlpin and his dancing son.

The last of the wartime plays, Lancelot (1945) to quote Winifred Bannister is :

"a three and a half hour's analysis of Lancelot's tragedy in leisurely prose dialogue which only occasionally strikes tension...." 1

and is, as she observes, most uncharacteristic. The play slowly traces the Arthurian legend of Lancelot's love for Guinevere, his entrapment by Elaine and subsequent disillusion and madness, his reconciliation with the Queen and the disaster which follows their discovery together. The legend itself imbues the play with an "uplifted mood" and a "culminating grief";<sup>2</sup> the dramatist has given it little.

The end of the war marked the beginning of a third phase in Bridie's dramas, one of deep seriousness of purpose which gave rise to his greatest work. Yet, even then, his pen still occasionally turned to flimsier tasks: his love for the eccentric resulted in Gog and Magog a tragi-comic portrayal of a McGonagall-esque rhymer which declines disappointingly into farce; and in a surprising turn to West-End comedy, he began the unpretentious, "well-made" Meeting at Night, completed after the author's death by Archibald Batty.

The first act of Gog and Magog is reasonably entertaining, with the bizarre figure of Harry MacGog contrasted with the supercilious visitor, English drama-critic Briskett, whose cruel humour prompts him to make sport of the "poet". Bridie's whimsy then overcomes his better judgement, and the situation is steadily exaggerated to the point where civil war rages through the Highland village of the setting, supposedly prompted by a spurious but fanatically-supported philosophical argument. Wholly inadequate to support the over-inflated theme, the play collapses, a curious throw-back to Bridie's earlier "undergraduate" extravagances.

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1 Bannister 162 James Bridie and his Theatre, Rockliff, London 1955

2 Bannister quotes Robbins Millar, p. 164 James Bridie and his Theatre Rockliff, London 1955

Sophisticated and witty, if hardly striking, Meeting at Night (1954) centres round the character of George Triple, late descendant of Bridie's supremely self-confident, eccentric heroes, a confidence trickster of considerable ability - and a love of antiques. Pursued by a detective to a remote Highland hotel run by bizarre bolshevist Mrs. MacLachlan, he is trapped there with the policeman by a snow-fall. As romance blossoms between Triple's daughter and MacLachlan's son - and indeed between Triple and MacLachlan - the detective at last collects the evidence which damns the trickster. His triumph is thwarted however, by the discovery that he, too, has played Triple's game, cheating Mrs. MacLachlan over an antique writing-desk. He is thus blackmailed into abandoning his case, and Triple wins Mrs. MacLachlan and a half-share in the inn. Without serious intent, Meeting at Night is unremarkable but pleasant.

Before turning to the major plays of the last phase, something must be said concerning a failure, John Knox.

John Knox was written specially for the first Edinburgh Festival in 1947, though in fact it received its first performance at the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre in the same year. Bridie himself was dissatisfied, that :

"he could not, after all, be the one to awaken "The Sleeping Beauty" (Bridie's apt name for Edinburgh) from her long, prim sleep, the one to beckon Knox from old haunts and recreate the stirring times, the bitter religious feuds and political wrangles, the warm, human contrast in the flash of French elegance and the vivid colour of Mary Queen of Scots..." 1

The historical matter of the play - of which there is too much confusing detail - is framed, in typical Bridie fashion, by a prologue and chorus whose function is to provide supporting information and to establish a judicial attitude in the audience. On this occasion the device lacks bite, merely protracting the verbosity which for the rest of the play stifles the dramatic potentiality of Knox and Mary in conflict.

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1 Bannister, p. 167 James Bridie and his Theatre Rockliff, London 1955

The story of John Knox is traced from the siege of St. Andrews in 1547, through the religious intrigues of Reformation Scotland to the accession of Mary, and then through the violent disorders following on the Darnley marriage to the Queen's flight to England. Incident and argument crowd onto the stage, and for all Bridie's noted skill in characterisation, neither Knox nor Mary – or indeed any of the secondary figures – comes to life. There is too much special pleading for both of them, too great a concern that human frailty should not detract from their symbolic stance each at the head of an argument, Mary for romance and colour, Knox for stern devotion to principle. Much has been done to reduce history to the bare bones, but unfortunately there remains confusing interjections, such as the scene in Act 1 with the young boys mimicking the Israelites; and Knox quite plainly talks too much, often with historical accuracy, but seldom with dramatic intensity: his is the rhetoric of the four-hour Presbyterian sermon, not of the theatre. The chorus of divinity student, slut and mulatto provide opinions about Knox and Mary which maintain an equal balance throughout the play, but are an unhappily eccentric group for a presentation of near-chaotic Scots history, and Bridie on occasion augments their efforts by intruding a Reformation chorus, as well.

All in all, John Knox is a curious failure, for its topic has fascinated a very large number of Scotsmen and others, and Knox would seem to be the ideal figure for Bridie's rhetorical virtuosity. Winifred Bannister notes that "he seemed to be so obsessed with the real-life character that he made it blaze historically rather than dramatically".<sup>1</sup>

The play's conclusion brings together the ghosts of Mary and her dour tormentor, long since reconciled in eternity, and Bridie maintains his ambiguous view to the last: united in a higher wisdom, the spirits look back on their past lives with a detachment suggesting that both the "swaddled Queen with a hundredweight of metal on her head" and the "bawling doctrinaire in a high pulpit" were cogs of the same

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1 Bannister, p. 167 James Bridie and his Theatre Rockliff London 1955

machine, working towards the same end. That end, their final harmony implies, is a hopeful one, a conclusion which all too obviously evades the bitterness of their earthly conflict and offers false comfort to their tragedy.

The plays written after the war include Bridie's most accomplished work, and also his most sombre. What hope he finds has an undeniable air of desperation, and even his comedy Meeting At Night is a study in manners of the cynical years of post-war austerity. As always, he was haunted by the ambiguity of human actions and the relativity of moral values, but now he seldom discovered the comfort of a higher purpose: in Dr. Angelus, Daphne Laureola, Mr. Gillie, The Queen's Comedy, and The Baikie Charivari the enigma of human existence leads Bridie only to a profound melancholy. Immediate reference to the conditions of contemporary life is also present, for the first time in his work.<sup>1</sup>

Of these five plays – the better part of Bridie's post-war output – Dr. Angelus (1947) is the most straightforward.

"A perfect type of 'popular' play, Dr. Angelus holds absorbing entertainment for the multitudes, and brilliant composition of character for those who might scorn a 'Murder play' with leanings to melodrama...." 2

Like his early success, The Anatomist, it is dominated by a doctor of demonic rhetorical fascination, and is based on a historical incident. Instead of a Dr. Knox refusing to give way to a tortured conscience in his devotion to science, however, it depicts Angelus devoted only to himself, lost in a fantasy of grandeur which results in depravity and multiple murder. Bridie provides depth to the series of poisonings and ultimate arrest of the unbalanced doctor by creating two contrasts, the young partner in Angelus' medical practice, Johnson, and the specialist, Sir Gregory Butt. Both are excellently drawn characters, Sir Gregory a crusty and apparently respectable figure who is discovered as a hypocrite and moral coward; Johnson

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1 E. Morgan, Scottish International November 1971

2 W. Bannister, James Bridie and his Theatre Rockliff, London 1955 pp. 164-5



gauche and earnest, struggling to maintain his image of a fatherly Angelus against a swelling tide of contradictions.

Johnson's regard for his superior is understandable: in Act I, Angelus seems urbane, paternal and filled with a sense of duty to family and profession which by far outweighs his lack of orthodoxy. Sweeping along in a rich torrent of words, he is a personality magnetically attractive, flattering the younger man with indulgent good-humour. Johnson is invited to provide a second opinion on the case of Angelus' aged mother-in-law, who is apparently developing a serious gastric condition. An amorous female patient, Mrs. Corcoran, arrives to see Johnson. In the course of the consultation she attempts to ensnare him, and when this fails, to warn him of Angelus' "funny reputation". A late gambit for the young doctor's affection is interrupted by Mrs. Angelus: her mother's illness has taken a serious turn. Sir Gregory Butt is sent for, and as they await the specialist's arrival, Angelus expresses grave concern and impatience. He refuses however to answer the doorbell, insisting that it is the task of the lazy young housemaid, Jeanie. The old woman dies before Butt can examine her, and to an indignant Johnson he confides serious doubts about Angelus' stability, warning him not to sign the death certificate. He leaves, and almost immediately Angelus produces a death certificate for Johnson to sign. The young man's hesitation is overborne by embarrassment and Angelus' bullying insinuations about Mrs. Corcoran. Act I closes with Angelus opening a large envelope to reveal an insurance policy.

A quarrel which flares up between Mrs. Angelus and Jeanie at the beginning of Act 2 shows that the doctor's devotion to his wife is less perfect than he pretends, and it later transpires that the girl is pregnant by her employer. Furthermore, Mrs. Angelus suspects that she is being poisoned, though she is as helpless before her husband's commanding presence as a rabbit hypnotised before a snake. When Mrs. Angelus, like her mother, abruptly develops alarming symptoms, Johnson struggles desperately against the dawning conviction that Angelus is a murderer. His inner conflict is mirrored in a dream sequence wherein he finds himself called

as a witness at Angelus' trial.

Mrs. Angelus dies, at last driving the young doctor to guilt-stricken certainty. Having failed to enlist the aid of Sir Gregory Butt, he decides to go alone to the police, only to be forcibly stopped by a desperate and obviously insane Angelus. The suspicions of the police have already been aroused by Mrs. Corcoran, and Johnson is released when they burst into the house to arrest the murderer. Johnson, grief-stricken by his failure to save Mrs. Angelus, finds reassurance from Inspector MacIvor, his rescuer :

"... if the Procurator Fiscal and the Criminal Investigation Department couldna get off the mark quick enough to save Mrs. Angelus there's nobody going to blame you, and you little better than a bairn... You did your best and it wasna very good and that's a fair epitaph for most of us."

This ending unfortunately detracts heavily from the serious impact of the play, seeming as it does contrived and over-melodramatic, as much in the character of MacIvor as in its dependance on Mrs. Corcoran, a most unconvincing figure. Another fault is the unnecessary protraction of Act 2 during which there is much talk and little activity, and a dream-sequence wholly unnecessary however brilliant its insertion. Yet Angelus himself, for all his melodrama or perhaps because of it, is a compelling figure. His confusing assumption of various roles indicates that, like Vivaldi in The King of Nowhere, he has lost his humanity to an endless series of masks, becoming a victim of Bacon's "Idols of the Theatre" which he professes to fear above all other temptations.

"... the Idols of the Theatre are those systems of philosophy that create for their devotees an unreal world in which people act artificially according to a predetermined book of words, as they do in Stage Plays."

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When in the last Act he attempts to explain his actions to the helpless Johnson, he claims that "the realisation of oneself is the aim and object of existence", his murders are justified by asserting the value of the free spirit, which "must rise and crush his would-be masters with as little compunction as if he were stepping on a disgusting beetle".<sup>1</sup> Angelus can think of himself only as an "idealist – sometimes a ruthless idealist", but he serves no concept higher than his own pleasure, ignoring everything which contradicts his grandiose fantasies. By Act 2 the apparent richness of his personality is revealed as an amalgam of false sentiment and cliché, enabling him to dwell on his piety after silencing his gullible mistress with the most brazenly hollow reassurances:

"A correspondence fixed with Heaven is sure a noble anchor . But there it is. It is an Age of Unbelief. You young fellows never experience the sublime satisfaction of becoming, even for an hour or two, as a little child." 2

Even as Angelus lives for fantasy, so Sir Gregory Butt lives for social position, preferring to shirk his professional and moral obligations rather than have his good name associated with "police court dirt". He proposes to blot the day of his involvement in the case out of his calendar, a mental exercise which differs only in degree from Angelus' monomania. Johnson alone breaks the bonds of his illusions, and the achievement brings him little happiness. A rather naive enthusiast of the Hippocratic oath, the young doctor who talks in terms of "a holy quest"<sup>3</sup> in medicine clearly elevates Angelus to an unreal esteem. Disillusion in this image of fatherly teacher is inevitable but nevertheless bitter, and though Johnson cuts himself free of entangling duties and delusions, no moral certitude brings him comfort.

Illusion and its consequences dominate a much more profound and skilful play, Daphne Laureola (1949), which attempts – not wholly successfully – to employ the legend of Daphne's metamorphosis into a laurel tree to escape Apollo as a consciously poetic metaphor for

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1 Act III p. 71, 73 Dr. Angelus

2 Act II, p. 50 Dr. Angelus

3 Luyben p. 122 James Bridie : Clown and Philosopher

the despairing drabness of post-war Britain.

In a partially redecorated restaurant Lady Katherine Pitts drinks incessant double brandies, arousing curiosity, indignation and insolence respectively from her fellow-diners. Among them is a young Polish refugee, Ernest Piaste, who seems fascinated by her inebriated but fragile graciousness. Ernest is a serious young man - Bridie drily accounts for this by making him a Presbyterian. Their conversation is interrupted by Vincent, Lady Pitts' chauffeur, who arrives to take her home. His method of so doing is to thrust a napkin into her mouth and remove her forcibly: Ernest gallantly intervenes, and is greeted with an uppercut which knocks him out. His failure does nothing to cool his ardour, and he resents himself at Lady Pitts' home the following Sunday, only to discover that everyone else in the restaurant that night has been invited and that Lady Pitts' husband is still alive. He tells her of his infatuation, that she is "the glorious lady" of his mind: he is intense and highly romantic. A week passes and Ernest returns once more to the Pitts': this time, he meets Sir Joseph, Lady Katherine's crippled husband, who talks to Ernest about his feelings with surprising candour. Lady Pitts he explains, has had a difficult life, and requires occasionally to have "outbreaks"... Unfortunately she is a "dyed-in-the-wool-Puritan". For her sake, and indeed, for the young Pole's, he asks Ernest not to see her again. Ernest agrees, for his instincts are chivalrous, but will not forgo his dream.

"She will be to me as Beatrice was to Dante Alighieri when she had gone to Heaven. That will be to me all my happiness....."

He recounts the legend of Apollo and Daphne, and how

"... the laurel, Daphne, still eternally spreads her leaves, and the Sun-God, from ninety two million eight hundred and thirty thousand miles away, still warms and comforts her and endows her with life".

He takes his leave, and shortly after Sir Joseph dies in the poignant company of his wife.

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Six months later, in the restaurant which featured in Act 1, the group who witnessed Lady Pitts' drunken flamboyance find themselves once more together. As they comment on the coincidence, Ernest walks in, to collapse at the news of Sir Joseph's death – of which he has been unaware. He has just recovered when the object of his admiration herself arrives, stunning him completely by being married to Vincent, the chauffeur. He demands an explanation for her "betrayal", and receives one. Lady Pitts informs him that she is not the ideal figure he has invented for himself, and that she is too old to join in his fantasies – she has settled for reality, accepting its colourless bleakness as a necessity. She leaves, and Ernest discovers that he is not Dante; but his romanticism is not dead: he now repeats his declaration to Sir Joseph, that he is Apollo, and she Daphne. Enigmatically, he orders a double brandy, and the curtain descends.

Again the customary Bridie technique is in evidence : the choric figures of the customers at the restaurant, the cyclical movement of the play, the shift of setting in the central scenes to a different world where ideals are tested by reality – in this case the isolated, frozen world of Sir Joseph's garden. The typical Bridie humour is also present throughout the play, deflating Ernest's pretensions and reducing tension from apparent climax to farce,<sup>1</sup> as when Ernest's gentlemanly intervention in Act 1 is knocked away by Vincent's casual pugilistic expertise, or when Sir Joseph interrupts the violent quarrel brewing in his garden between Ernest and the young revellers from the restaurant. The dramatist's eye and ear for banal commonplaces produces some piquantly amusing moments as he evokes the mixture of embarrassment and crassness in his chorus when confronted by the eccentricities of Lady Pitts and her young admirer, particularly in the absurdities of Mr. Gooch's insistently "jolly" welcome to the newly-wedded couple in Act 4. The most striking feature of the play is, however, a hitherto unseen feature in Bridie's work; a deliberate employment of poetic devices and mythic allusions to emphasize the major theme.

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1 J. T. Low p. 143 The Major Plays of James Bridie

The myth of Daphne is not paralleled exactly, for the world of Lady Pitts is a civilization in decline :

"Again and again and again and again we have covered the face of the earth with order and loveliness and a little justice. But only the face of it. Deep down below the subterranean brutes have bided their time to shake down our churches and palaces and let loose the little rats to sport among the ruins." 1

Its tawdriness is symbolised by the restaurant with its walls "half painted with a playful design and half new plaster" and its dangerous patch of flooring, and by the motley assortment of customers, products of the war and its aftermath whether spiv, gross businessmen, or vacuous youth. Lady Pitts, who contrasts so sharply with their brashness despite her inebriation, is herself "a symbol of disillusioned innocence, a symbol of England after the Second World War",<sup>2</sup> therefore where Daphne was the daughter of the aged Ge pursued by the God Apollo until saved by transformation into a tree, Lady Pitts is married to the aged Sir Joseph, is pursued by the fantasy-stricken idealist Ernest, and is saved from his illusions by marriage to the unimaginative Vincent. The distorted reflection of the myth is sufficiently comprehensible to make Bridie's introduction of a new laurel bush to the Pitts garden in Act III both unnecessary and clumsy. The careful use of metaphor and symbol, and deliberate artifice in the speeches of Lady Pitts, Ernest and Sir Joseph create a conscious allusiveness akin to poetry, a technique which Bridie was to use in the last play of his lifetime, The Baikie Charivari.<sup>3</sup>

As in that play, and Dr. Angelus, possession by aemons has been transformed to purely human delusion, and in Daphne Laureola there is no suggestion of a supernatural or even moral judgement to relieve the gloom thus created. Like young Dr. Johnson, Ernest Piaste builds himself an image to worship: unlike Johnson, he refuses to relinquish his faith in it. Bridie indicates his folly by repeatedly undercutting his romantic gestures. His attraction to Lady Pitts is understandable. Surrounded by the inconsequential babble of the

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1 Act 1, p. 23 Daphne Laureola

2 Luyben p. 132 James Bridie : Clown and Philosopher

3 Luyben p. 132 James Bridie : Clown and Philosopher

world represented in the restaurant, she is an arresting figure, a descendant of a long line of loquacious Bridie characters. She reminisces introspectively and with penetration, glides gracefully over the weakened portion of the floor, and speaks to him in fluent Polish. His dismal playing of the heroic champion's role does not prompt her disdain. Though she does not encourage his passion, she is not displeased by his attentions at first. He soon reveals the nature of his infatuation by quoting Dante, and accusing the people who interrupt his tete-a-tete with her of desecrating "the moonlit temple of Artemis with your simian chatterings". He is only further inspired by her when she tells him :

"You think I'm your poor damned Presbyterian mother, or something. You come bleating to me because you've lost your way. I'm not a Presbyterian and I'm not your mother. And I've lost my way too....."

Sir Joseph reveals to him that she drinks to escape the pain of disillusion. Her life has been a series of crippled dreams, from which she has been removed by marriage to him, though this has meant retreat from life behind the glass case of his protection. Still Ernest quotes Dante and romanticises about Apollo and Daphne, though his posture is undercut by Sir Joseph's deafness, robbing his lengthy protestation of effect. When she marries Vincent, Ernest's rebuke is ornate and high-flown:

"Al ciel, ch'è pura luce;  
Luce intellectual piena d'amore....  
The pure light, the heaven, the light of the mind,  
the light filled with love. I asked you for nothing  
more; I desired nothing more. You have plunged my  
light in darkness to enjoy the embraces of that evil dog".

He reaches indiscriminately for metaphors to convey his disillusion, comparing himself at one moment to a poor peasant, the next to a god. He rails at her with such vociferousness that a suspicion of emotional indulgence creeps in thereby making his final position ambiguous, when after having his delusion detailed and rejected by its image, Lady Pitts, he identifies himself once more with Apollo.

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"I am Apollo. She is Daphne. Apollo wanted Daphne so much that the old man changed her into a laurel tree. But Apollo still rode on his predestined course, day and night, day and night."

Whether this represents a total immersion in dream or an ironic expression of his sorrow is unsure: when he orders a double brandy all that is certain is that a sorrowful cycle has been completed.

His fantasy is fully exposed by Lady Pitts when she angrily defends herself against his accusations.

"He wouldn't have noticed me at all, if I hadn't got tight and made a fool of myself. I burst in on his meditations and he said, 'Hello, here's a woman. She'll do for Beatrice' - or whatever cloudy tart he was dreaming about. It never occurred to him that I was a human being. They're all the same - unless they're pigs. And the pigs are at least honest with themselves....."

She makes her exit from the restaurant, and this time she is careful to avoid the dangerous part of the floor. In choosing "a nice clean pigsty" and commonplace reality, she has declined in stature, and is capable no longer of the miraculous feat or the hypnotic incantation of her memories. Lady Pitts is undoubtedly the best female part which Bridie wrote, and is almost offered as a proof of his capability after years of creating women who are little more than ciphers.

A highly unusual play, which as J. T. Low observes "does seem to be expressing a characteristically Scottish obsession with the contradictions of life",<sup>1</sup> Daphne Laureola suffers slightly from the stasis of the central characters and more from the complications of the mythic parallels.<sup>2</sup> At the end, there is a hint once more of predestination in the affairs of men, though it is as bleak a prospect as might be offered by a despairing Presbyterian. The dying fall of Ernest's speech, "Apollo still rode on his predestined course,

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1 J. T. Low, p. 150 The Major Plays of James Bridie

2 J. T. Low, p. 133 The Major Plays of James Bridie



day and night, day and night", is foreshadowed by Lady Pitts in a comment which looks beyond this play to the dark vision of The Queen's Comedy:

"These things are as old as the moon. The white goddess swings the tides idly to and fro and the little coloured wriggling things in the swaying seas know her. They know that she is higher and more terrible than their simple round of eating and fighting and copulation and death ... The moon is a silly, cold goddess. Find another God, Ernest ..."

Mankind is at the mercy of such gods, who do not even have the interest to kill us for their sport.

For Winifred Bannister, Mr. Gillie (1950) is "probably Mr. Bridie's best play. . ." <sup>1</sup> his characteristic brilliance is perfectly mated with humanity.

"For once he has gone as deep with emotion as he ever went high with wit. The action mounts with a fine sense of form; character here is not to be so replete with cleverness that some sympathy must be sacrificed. As a story, a parable and an example of how a naturalistic, domestic drama should be written, Mr. Gillie succeeds abundantly. It is the only one of its kind in his entire collection, it is also the simplest of all his plays. "

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Undoubtedly, it is Bridie at his most skilful maturity, a tour de force of restraint and subtlety; but its very lack of character "replete with cleverness" robs it of the author's distinctive and challenging argumentativeness. Mr. Gillie for all its elegant construction, and concluding triumph over pessimism, embodies a style and vision long familiar to the world. Deep as its emotional content may be, it instils no fresh intensity, and though Tyrone Guthrie's remark "a nice little play, not a big play" <sup>3</sup> is too dismissive, it is in essence true.

Like Daphne Laureola, the sordid atmosphere of the immediately post-war years permeates the play, which is said to have been written in response to P.V. Carroll's distorted vision of a Scottish school-master, Weep For Tomorrow. <sup>4</sup>

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1 Bannister, p. 179 James Bridie and his Theatre, Rockliff, London 1955

2 Bannister, pp. 179-180 James Bridie and his Theatre, Rockliff, London 1955

3 Bannister p. 181 James Bridie and his Theatre, Rockliff, London 1955

4 Bannister p. 230, James Bridie and his Theatre, Rockliff, London 1955

As in The Black Eye and John Knox, a prologue and epilogue frame the play, emphasizing the author's judicial attitude. A ghostly judge and procurator introduce "tonight's candidate for immortality," William Gillie, a village schoolteacher killed by the furniture van removing his possessions to an auction room where he was in the process of being "sold up". Gillie's story, says the procurator, will illustrate the ambiguous nature of Success.

Gillie is discovered in far from luxurious surroundings reading Carlyle to a young protege, Tom Donnelly. Tom is a miner's son, and the window affords a view over a nearby coal-bing. He is asleep when the curtain rises, though Gillie fails to notice as he expounds Carlyle and "enthousiasmos"

"It means that a god of some nature or other has taken charge. It's a better description of genius, I take leave to think, than "an infinite capacity for taking pains"...  
Possession by a god . . . . ."

The schoolteacher has been nurturing in Tom a love of literature and thought, hoping that the boy will be thus enabled to break away from the drudgery of the mines by developing his talent as a writer. Such encouragement is seen by Gillie as his chief purpose in life, and though in the past his young disciples have failed miserably to establish themselves as artists of one kind or another, he refuses to abandon what he regards as a sacred duty. When later in Act I, Tom presents himself to Gillie with Nelly Watson, the local doctor's daughter, asking his blessing on their plan to marry and seek their destiny in London, he is pleased by their adventurousness though doubtful of their wisdom:

"Of course I approve of the principle of the thing.  
But there was no need for them to be so precipitate. . . "

Despite the fact that the young couple were secretly married a week previously, and that they merely sought reassurance from the sympathetic Gillie, he is censured and abused for irresponsibility by the

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alcoholic Dr. Watson, by Mrs. Gillie, and by Gibb, the chairman of the local Education Committee. Gillie's anger at Watson's self-centred hypocrisy and Gibb's prim self-righteousness hardly helps the situation, and their unresolved argument hangs heavily over the announcement that Gillie's school is to be closed and his contract reviewed. The very best that the Education Committee can offer is a subordinate post under a strict disciplinarian in another town. Gillie refuses, and with more faith than hope, commences writing the first chapter of a new novel – his only other having realised the sum of seven pounds, five and eight pence halfpenny.

In the second Act, Tom and Nelly return briefly from London, not in poverty and bitterness as was predicted for them, but fashionably dressed and driving an expensive car. They have, in Tom's words, "made good", and are now generally feted: Watson, "never a man to bear a grudge" forgives his imagined injuries, and Gibb confesses:

"I admit I had my doubts, at one time, of the wisdom of your step. But it is very gratifying that it has all turned out so well. Mr. Gillie must be proud of you"

The nature of their success, so handsomely praised by the once hostile community, is less than edifying, however. Having discovered that the introductions supplied to him by Gillie were long outdated in the metropolis, he has by lies and sycophancy become a film critic and script writer, with interests of doubtful legality in "the dogs and slot-machines and television and real estate and roadhouses and night-clubs". Nelly has furthered his career by becoming his employer's mistress. Gillie, refusing to add his congratulations to the others, is once more made victim to conformist vindictiveness. Watson and his fellows have arranged that Gillie's house should be given to a new Health Inspector, and he is faced with total disaster. Even in this hour of despair, however, the schoolteacher's ironic humour protects him, and news of yet another youthful talent being stifled inspires him yet again with the idea of launching creative genius into

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the world of art.

In the epilogue the procurator reveals that Gillie was killed within a week of Tom's return, and asks for a judgement to be passed.

"The whole picture, I submit, is one of misdirected effort. Work, I think you will agree, must be judged by the results it produces. I find little palpable result from all Mr. Gillie's work. In fine, this man has done nothing and whatever influence he has exercised has been dissipated into absurdity or worse...."

The judge's view is more sympathetic; and once more Bridie's concept of a mysterious predestination finds expression :

"... this man devoted his life to opening cages and letting prisoners fly free. It was not his fault if the cat got the prisoners in the end... Whether this man's endeavours were useful or not is a matter for whoever gave him his instructions. Victory or defeat have nothing to do with the case."

Gillie, as a reward for his devotion to the ideas in the teeth of disappointment and frustration, is placed in immortality between Lincoln and John Wesley.

Winifred Bannister's view that Mr. Gillie is "probably Mr. Bridie's best play" is easy to appreciate. The play's simplicity and subtlety, and the total command of subject, character, and form displayed in it cannot fail to impress. It sustains throughout a deep emotional power which Bridie achieved elsewhere only once in the short Mary Paterson scene of The Anatomist.

Gillie is a unique figure in the Bridie canon, in that as a protagonist in conflict with social morality and buffeted by a heedless fate, he is neither a vacillating innocent nor an egotistical rhetorician. His response to the vicious and the stupid is not an overwhelming broadside of verbal fireworks, in the style of Dr. Knox, but a combination of reckless stubbornness and self-deprecating irony. His status as a village schoolmaster is hardly an exalted one, and Bridie at no time suggests that Gillie, like Mallaby in The Switchback, might be an obscure genius. Indeed, there is a great deal to indicate that Gillie is a self-indulgent dreamer incapable of personal

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creativity, seeking fulfilment through other people's talents. His total achievement in the world of literature has been a novel of which four hundred and forty copies were sold, and irregular contributions to "Scots Magazine".

This might be the final assessment of his character were it not for skilful emphasis of his possession by an ideal far beyond self-congratulation,<sup>1</sup> the service, however humble, of Art. Challenged by Gibb about his responsibility to the community, Gillie replies :

"There's only one kind of man who isn't ordered about from the cradle to the grave, and that's the artist. He's bullied like the rest, but he's under nobody's orders. He's responsible to God and, perhaps to his neighbours. But not to what you call the Community. I'd be an artist myself if I could. If I can't, I'll help others to be that. And you and the rest of you can do what you like about it."

That Gillie is wholly in the grip of this ideal is directly averred in the discussion of "enthousiasmos" – possession by a god – with which the play opens, and by recurring evidence of his single-minded devotion throughout the play. Tom and Nelly are not his first disciples, or his first disappointments either. Several times he is rebuked by the others for creating a succession of ruinously aspiring ex-pupils, and at the very end his imagination is once more fired to "raise the Devil" in a talented young girl. The comments on enthousiasmos are immediately followed by a passage from Carlyle:

"Nay, many so spend their whole term, and in ever-new disappointment, shift from enterprise to enterprise, and from side to side: till at length, as exasperated striplings of three-score and ten, they shift into their last enterprise, that of getting buried."

and it is just such a judgement which the world passes on Mr. Gillie, a judgement voiced even by his wife, who is otherwise a positive and sympathetic figure in the tradition of Mrs. Windlestraw. Yet however true the observation of "ever-new expectation, ever-new disappointment" may be of Gillie, he does not "shift from enterprise

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1 H. Luyben, James Bridie: Clown and Philosopher p. 143

to enterprise" : on the contrary, his allegiance is steadfast.

He is, nevertheless, a highly ambiguous figure, redeemed only by the supernatural judgement accorded to him in the epilogue. Like Dr. Mallaby, there is a hint of instability in his outbursts of anger, for he strikes out wildly at everything offensive to him, regardless of effect. Hence the confusion which results from Watson's evil slanders about Gillie's role in the secret marriage, for the school-teacher reacts as much to the sanctimonious Gibb as he does to the doctor, and inescapably his refusal to be judged appears to them evasive. His wife, who is consistently level-headed, turns on him more than once, sometimes with surprising bitterness:

"Conscience? You never had a conscience, guilty or otherwise. Self, self, self, all through. That's you. You were the fine fellow at the University. I remember. I've cause to remember. All the snotty wee geniuses with baggy trousers and their fingernails in mourning thought you were Jesus. You only got third class honours; but that was because the professors were so blooming ignorant. They couldn't understand you, let alone a poor household drudge like me. But it did no damage to your opinion of yourself...."

She seems quite justified when in the course of the play Gillie meets with nothing to alleviate failure even in his own terms of morality. Tom and Nelly alone among his long line of proteges save themselves from the gutter, and only by abandoning Art for the most degrading of figurative and literal prostitution. Society rejects him by first terminating his contract as a teacher, then by evicting him.

On the other hand, society is represented in the play by Watson, an appallingly self-centred, maudlin alcoholic, and Gibb, "an ideal humane killer.". It damns itself first by perverting Tom and Nelly, then by its inhuman treatment of Gillie, its defeated opponent. The dependence on order at any cost is, as before, opposed by Bridie in his use of chance to suggest supernatural favour. In Act I, Tom beats Gillie at chess with a Fool's Mate: in Act II, playing cribbage with Watson, a game of chance rather than skill,

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Gillie is the victor.<sup>1</sup> As his disasters multiply in Act II, he gains in stature, clinging tenaciously to an ideal which becomes more necessary the more often it is trampled upon. When even Gibb, a clergyman, has expressed his delight at Tom's material success, Gillie reverses the judgement by declaring that "Literature and Art are God Almighty thinking aloud."

"the artists are listening. Listening to the very Mind of God. You don't see them sitting in the back room with the vicarious murderers. You don't see them sitting cheek by jowl with our Trumans and our Bevins and our Vyshinskis muddling us into destruction. They listen. And sometimes they hear a thing or two."

Gillie's devotion to this concept clearly outweighs his faults, though it does not remove them; the counterpoint which thus runs through Mr. Gillie creates an irony perfectly mirrored by Gillie himself, who takes refuge in irony from the frustrations and insults of his life. Helen Luyben notes his refusal to convict Watson, Gibb or Tom, even after he loses the house,<sup>2</sup> and Winifred Bannister observes the self-effacing subtlety of "Gillie's rapier to Tom's toy sword"<sup>3</sup> when the young man advises his mentor on how to add "sort of oomph" to his unfashionable novel. His is an irony which never becomes cynical or sarcastic, insisting to the end,

"I've done no harm, if I've done no good.  
I was only wrong. There's nothing final  
about making mistakes - if there's no real  
harm done..."

His intentions, quite plainly, are not simply to support a personal escapism prompted by failure, but they are based on faith alone and remain enigmatic until subjected to a more than human judgement which soothes the underlying pessimism of Gillie's struggle by honouring "the forlorn hope."

Mr. Gillie represents Bridie's most mature statement of Hope revived after despair. The characterisation of Gillie, his wife, and

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1 H. Luyben James Bridie : Clown and Philosopher p. 148

2 H. Luyben James Bridie : Clown and Philosopher p. 146

3 W. Bannister James Bridie and his Theatre p. 180

Dr. Watson are unsurpassed, and the structural counterpointing superb. But the author's features, normally set in challenge at times grim, are replaced finally by a mask of benignity which detracts from his achievement. The epilogue is a mistake. Bridie's distinction in the theatre was to provoke thought as much as to hypnotize with flamboyant characters. No such character storms through Mr. Gillie, and the real depth of feeling is obscured by the sudden shift from ambiguity to positive affirmation – an act of Faith similar to Gillie's, but wholly lacking the abrasive doubts which alone protect the teacher from wilful naivety. The final judgement which Bridie elsewhere avoided like the plague contradicts the irony which is the heart of Mr. Gillie.

In The Queen's Comedy (1950) Bridie stripped bare the illusion which blinds humanity to the true nature of the gods.

Set during the Trojan War, the play contrasts the bleak fortunes of the struggling soldiery with the sophisticated irresponsibility of the deities which control their destiny. The stage-setting demands that the disparity should be visual as well as thematic: the two principle scenes, heaven and a Greek Dressing Station, are always simultaneously in view, and the dim outline of either comments on events in the other. The action takes place during Achilles' withdrawal from action, tracing on one hand the fortunes of Machaon, an army doctor; Sister Hecamede, a nurse; a hospital orderly and some of the Greek Generals; and on the other, the intrigues of Juno as she defies Jupiter's ban on divine intervention in the war to aid the Greeks and spite Thetis, whose favour in Jupiter's eyes she resents.

At first, the play has the lightness of deliberate quaintness, in the style of Tobias and The Angel and the other biblical adaptations. The everyday gravity with which the most extravagant characters take themselves has an appealing comic charm. The introduction to the play discovers Thetis, imprisoned by Neptune at the bottom of the sea, "knitting a seaweed jumper", and when she is accosted by a passing octopus, their exchange has all the insistent seriousness of a fairy-tale:



Thetis : Oh, go away, you horrible octopus!  
Octopus: (affectionately) Little Miss Muffet!  
Thetis : A talking octopus! How revolting!  
Octopus : There's nothing essentially revolting about a talking  
Octopus. It is all in the eyes and ears of the beholder  
auditor....  
Thetis : Well, at any rate, you have no business to talk in  
such boring and sententious fashion..

The octopus is Jupiter, in one of his many disguises, who allows himself to be blackmailed by his infatuation for Thetis into punishing the Greeks for insulting her son, Achilles.

The scene gives way to the harsh reality of the Dardanelles, in a Dressing Station where an infantryman is having his wounds tended. The Greek situation is desperate, for the Trojans have carried their defensive wall and their trenches, and are advancing almost unhindered on the vulnerable ships drawn up on the beach. Captain Machaon, Sister Hecamede's sweetheart and a descendant of Apollo the sun-god, is brought in wounded from the front by a Blimpish Nestor, and together they give an excellent impression of the aristocratic military virtues and mannerisms of British tradition. Less admirable are the participants in the Staff Conference which follows, in which Agamemnon is seen as an indecisive pessimist, Diomed as courageous but dull-witted and verbose, and Ulysees as an angry though subtle advocate of bold action. Though it is Ulysees who prevails, the lack of enthusiasm shown by Agamemnon, the overall commander, is less than reassuring. The intervention of Neptune alone brings success to what would otherwise have been a forlorn hope on their part.

Above the battle, the gods are found in Olympus, and once more the whimsical note is struck. Olympus suggests "the lounge of an expensive hotel", and Juno, somewhat out of countenance, polishes

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her fingernails. After the gods and their various relationships have been established - Jupiter's ban on intervention is related with some awkwardness - Juno is quite plainly hatching a scheme. A little later she persuades Venus to part with a magical girdle invested with all the amorous gifts, under the pretext of reuniting an estranged couple among the immortals. She then engages Sleep to wield his powers over Jupiter, and so gains twelve hours of free action in the Trojan War with which Neptune can restore the fortunes of the Greeks whom Juno favours as representatives of civilisation. Venus' magic girdle quells the wrath of Jupiter when he wakes, and rather than wreak some terrible vengeance on his wife, he merely demands that Apollo be sent to drive the Greeks once more to their ships. By playing on his weaknesses, Juno also extracts from him the promise that he will persuade Thetis to send Achilles once more into the fray, and perhaps even give the Greeks total victory - after this necessary setback. Inter-woven through these scenes of divine decadence are returns to the Dressing Station which slowly trace the speculations of the mortals concerning the gods and their purposes. Machaon, as a descendant of Apollo, is-not-surprisingly-orthodox, but Hecamede verges on atheism in her contempt for the god's conduct towards mankind :

"This war is only a pleasant sort of thrill for them.  
I don't believe they really give a damn. "

Nestor is unimaginatively dogmatic in his attitude, which is comically parodied by Ulysses in a "prayer of thanksgiving" :

"O Father Jupiter, O all ye Immortal Gods, how good  
of you to remember the fat thighs of the oxen we burned  
to you in sacrifice long ago in happy Greece. We thank  
you, Immortal Gods, for this small payment in advance  
on our investment. "

The orderly, for long a sceptic and understandably so, from the harshness of his lot, has had his faith restored by a dream in which Juno tells him "I got it all wrapped up. I won't see you and the boys take the knock. "

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The closing scene of the play draws together both strands, and whatever quaintness remains abruptly vanishes, as the gods in astonishment hear Juno's announcement that Apollo has been sent to drive back the Greeks, and an increasing number of shadows begins to cross the stage. These represent "a convoy of Shades on their way to the Styx and Avernus." Venus persuades Mercury to catch some, as she would "so like to talk to them". Mercury returns with Machaon, Hecamede, the Orderly and an Infantryman.

"They are battered, torn and bloody.

Hecamede is almost naked. There is silence."

Machaon has lost half of his face, and Hecamede has been raped before her death. Juno turns in boredom from the Orderly's attempt to remind her of the dream she sent to him. Angered by her attitude the Orderly seats himself in Jupiter's throne and harangues the assembled gods about their stupidity and irresponsibility, ending with a demand for their withdrawal from human affairs.

"You great, stupid, lazy, good-looking sacks of barley sugar! They say you send us the rain and the sunshine and the wheat in the fields. Well, get on with it and leave us alone!"

The immortals are speechless, except for Jupiter, the father of the gods, and his answer takes the form of a statement explaining his role as creator of the universe, revealing his slightly mystified detachment from the results of his work.

"Were you asking questions? I am afraid I shall have to refer you to somebody who understands such matters. I don't pretend to understand them myself... I have not nearly completed my Universe. There is plenty of time. Plenty of time. You must have patience..."

Like Agamemnon, the Greek Commander-in-Chief, the attitude of the father of the gods, is not reassuring. Mankind, totally at his mercy, struggle to discover the purpose of which their lives and sorrows are part; yet there is no purpose, only the whimsy of an infinitely remote Jupiter.

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The Queen's Comedy despite its ready use of a very free theatrical form, is hampered by its lack of genuine action. The intricacies of Juno's plan are protracted to no significant purpose, and the play quickly assumes a flatness of tone disturbed only superficially by the extravagances of the Immortals. The true climax of the play occurs when the Orderly makes his indictment of Heaven: the lengthy explanation which follows from Jupiter may encapsulate Bridie's deepest feelings, theatrically it dulls the effect of the Orderly's speech without answering it in emotional terms, dragging The Queen's Comedy to anti-climacteric verbosity.<sup>1</sup>

Characterisation in the play is good without being outstanding, and Bridie's use of contemporary slang is a confusing but hardly irremediable feature of the Orderly; who in all other respects is a highly satisfactory "John the Commonweal"; down-to-earth, undistinguished, but capable of irreverent stubbornness when convinced. His judgement of the gods is foreshadowed in an earlier scene when he is led by Machaon to repeat his faith in Juno's benevolence to the crusty Nestor.

Orderly : I said they could take it from me.

+++++ +++++ +++++ +++++

Nestor : You don't happen to operate a private line to Olympus?

Orderly : No, Sir.

Nestor : And you had the impudence to tell an Officer and a Nursing Sister that they could take it from you, hey?

Orderly : Yes, Sir.

Nestor : Then perhaps, Private What ever you call yourself, you will be good enough to tell me why you took it on yourself to tell your superior officers that they could take this communication from you?

Orderly : Because they bloody well can!

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1 E. Morgan Scottish International November 1971

The other mortals are swift sketches, holding no surprises – though Ulysses hints at a deeper vitality. As representatives rather than individuals no more is required of them by the play. The gods are similarly dealt with, though their superhuman qualities lend them an eccentricity more individually entertaining than their earthly victims. Their confident sense of normality offsets their more startling attributes, and allows Bridie to indulge his comic fantasy by setting in the midst of this refined, decorously effete group a heavy-witted Scottish engineer as Vulcan, trundling out jokes about the Barrhead Brass Band and spreading his incomprehensible blueprints throughout luxurious, elegant Olympus. Juno and Jupiter provide the serious comment on divinity.

Juno is very much the epitome of courtly demeanour and ruthless self-interest, a figure all-too-human in her devious plotting, deliberate falsehood, and callous manipulation of emotion. She obtains the magic girdle from the gullible Venus by deceit, and recruits Sleep to her cause by promising him the favours of one of the Graces. Her approach to Jupiter, from whom she has been estranged by his dalliance with Thetis, is both masterly and unashamed trickery.

"... a sudden, compelling pain at my heart made me pause. I felt I should have died if I had passed without seeing you."

Her method is a direct assault upon his baser nature, which, as she admits herself, "is a very wide target." Having achieved her ends with Byzantine circumvention, and unknown loss of life to Greek and Trojan, she characteristically conceals Jupiter's promise from the other Gods. Yet she is capable of saying and apparently believing :

"I have a very responsible position and feel my responsibilities – intensely".

Remote from the misery consequent upon her schemes, her utter lack of concern for any but herself is typical of the gods' ambiguous

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superhumanity. Even Jupiter is depicted for most of the play as the slave of his sensual appetite, jovially reminiscing to his wife an incredible history of multiple rape and seduction in heaven and on earth.

Bridie for the only time in his career, successfully breaks away entirely from naturalism. The representational setting, with its double-image of earth and heaven symbolizes his theme visually. The costumes he stipulates, "are to belong to no particular period or place."

"Those of the Soldiers are to be drab and hairy.  
Those of the Gods are to be gay to the limits of  
imagination."

1

That The Queen's Comedy has more than historical or mythological content is brutally obvious. A chorus of sceneshifters occasionally raises its voice as the audience moves its attention between heaven and earth. The first of these, before the introduction under the sea, emphasises the play as a symbol of humanity's acquiescence in its misery.

We are the scene shifters  
Ages after ages,  
Centenary after centenary.  
We ha've shifted the scenery.  
We heaved up the Pyramids;  
We dinged doon Persepolis;  
We hung the Hanging Gardens;  
We made Atahualpha's palace,  
And here one for Soloman,  
And there one for Semiramis.  
Hamburg and Hiroshima  
We blasted into shards.  
All contracts promptly and efficiently  
Executed.  
At the behest of the Immortal Gods  
Or of anyone else who likes giving orders....

The Queen's Comedy is Bridie's final statement about gods and daemons. In The Baikie Charivari there is only the devil, and a god even more remote than Jupiter; the lesser agencies which inspire and delude

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1 Author's note to The Queen's Comedy

mankind are by then in human form as ideologies. A long and embittering journey has been followed since Rafael led Tobias through the desert in Tobias and the Angel. The Orderly in The Queen's Comedy has been taught from birth to obey without question for the sake of a divine order: the revelation of divine disorder prompts his indignant cry of "leave us alone," which for all its rage, is hardly likely to be obeyed. When Machaon asks the disgusted soldier if he thinks men are any better than the gods, the reply is :

"Course we're better than the gods. We would need to be." 1

Bridie's Jupiter is the god of predestination, the theme which haunts so many of his plays; who made the universe as a childish toy, and whose interest in humanity is completely detached.

"... long ago I put a little swelling at the end of the primitive spinal cord of a sort of fish. I am happy to observe that in some of the higher apes, this lump has taken on extensive and peculiar functions. One of these functions appears to consist in explaining me and my little Universe. I have no doubt at all that these explanations are very interesting and stimulating. Perhaps in time, these little objects will attain to the properties and activities of the Immortal Gods themselves...."

There is something disquietingly human about Jupiter's inhumanity.

In the preface to Bridie's last completed play, The Baikie Charivari (1952), Walter Elliot writes that Bridie had consciously reached the limit of his accomplishments.<sup>2</sup> The Baikie Charivari was intended to be the summation of his art and thought, and is certainly a remarkable work, combining the depth of the author's emotional experience and philosophy with a technical adventurousness seldom equalled in all his earlier output. All the principal concerns of his career are congregated in this play: the sense of ambiguity, the focus on the individual, the distrust of society, daemonic possession, and the seeming helplessness of man in a universe where God is so remote as to be undiscernable while the Devil is all too plainly present. Freely mingling naturalism with fantasy, Bridie seeks to travel beyond the refuge of irony he found in Mr. Gillie and The Switchback

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1 Act II, vi. p. 78 The Queen's Comedy

2 W. Elliot, preface to The Queen's Comedy p. v.

towards a personal expression of faith. The protagonist of The Baikie Charivari, Pounce-Pellot, possesses "a self-knowledge complete enough to recognize his own part in the evil of mankind",<sup>1</sup> and enjoys the same ironic humour as Gillie; the play, however, follows his choice to suspend irony and once more seek for faith in a traumatically altered world.

Pounce-Pellot is a retired District Commissioner of the abruptly ended Indian Empire, who has returned to the Scottish West-Coast town of Baikie "to learn the new life" of post-war Europe. He is introduced in a typical Bridie prologue by the devil - strikingly similar to the Scots-speaking devil in The Sunlight Sonata of twenty years before,<sup>2</sup> if rather more sinister - as

"A wyse, independent, sel'saining carle,  
Wha gangs his gate and lippens to nane,  
And spiers at his hert when the lift is smooored."

For his very independence and mature introspection, Pounce-Pellot is to be chased and caught and pulled down by the devil and his hellhounds. The proposed victim then appears, and describes himself in the terms which encapsulate the themes of the play, as

"James MacArthur Pounce-Pellot, Knight Commander of the Indian Empire, King of Ghosts and Shadows, sometime District Commissioner of Junglipore and other places.

I am the son of Major Hamish Pounce-Pellot, late of the Dandy Ninth and of his wife, Grizel MacArthur. They have both been a long time dead.

I was born in Fortingall in Perthshire like my ancestor, Pontius Pilate, Procurator of Judea, Samaria and Idumea.

My predestinate fate has been not unlike his. But they did not allow me to wait for a reply. I did not wash my hands of the Mahatma. He washed his hands of me. . ."

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1 H. Luyben James Bridie : Clown and Philosopher p. 154

2 W. Elliot, preface to The Baikie Charivari p. v.



Here is the representative of an old order, the world of the "dandy Ninth" and the British Empire, and also the man whose job it has been to judge, abruptly made redundant by the movement of history: he is also the eternal rebel, Punch – the "Charivari" of the play's title.<sup>1</sup> Bridie in a note to the play specifically elucidates a traditional connection between the folk-myth of Punch and the Roman Procurator, Pontius Pilate, observing that they "are both regarded as important and symbolic murderers." Pounce-Pellot embodies the characteristics of both.

The play proper begins with a brief exchange between Judy, Pounce-Pellot's wife, and electrician Joe Ketch, local communist town-councillor; which is intended to demonstrate the disruption of the Imperial life-style. Judy, as Luyben points out, "stands solidly and unwaveringly for the old life"<sup>2</sup> Ketch and his apprentice, Toby Messan, having repaired faulty wiring in the Pounce-Pellot's house, leave without repairing a gaping hole in the wall, because "that's a plasterer's job". Judy expresses prim disapproval, and falls foul of Ketch's dogmatic vindictiveness, summed up by his grimly convincing assertion, "you'll get nae sycophancy from me". This scene is followed by the introduction to the house of an increasing number of representative figures – Dr. Beadle, a minister; Joe Mascare, an artist; Dr. Potheary a psycho-analyst; Lady Maggie Revenant, an ageing aristocrat; Jemima Lee Crow, American publisher; and Copper, a Civil Servant from the "Ministry of Interference" – each all too willing to offer advice to Pounce-Pellot on how to conduct himself. Ketch the communist returns, is recognised as the man who once rescued Pounce-Pellot's daughter Baby from drowning when she was a child, and is invited to join the strangely united band of conflicting advocates. In Act 1, these figures – seven contemporary versions of the Seven Deadly Sins<sup>3</sup> – appear singly before the ex-

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1 W. Elliot, preface to The Baikie Charivari p. vii

2 H. Luyben James Bridie : Clown and Philosopher p. 159

3 J. T. Low The Major Plays of James Bridie p. 151

judge to propose their theories, which he welcomes with enthusiastic open-mindedness. After the traditional moral conflict between the order represented by religion and the disorder counselled by art, comes the modern paradox of the vagueness and ineffectiveness of the old social order embodied – disembodied? – by Lady Maggie, and the rigid formulae of the rebellious Ketch. Communism, dogmatic religion, sociology, hedonism and materialism are advanced alternately from "a milling crowd shouting doctrines out of a whirlpool". Bridie's attitude is emphatically clarified when, at the close of the Act, the devil reappears in Pounce-Pellot's dream, and Dr. Potheary, Lady Maggie, Jemima and Mascara are seen as his earthly servants, proposing the recruitment to their ranks of the restless adolescent Baby. Just as surely as her mother represents the old life, Baby represents the future. Their scheme is thwarted by Pounce-Pellot's desperate cry to end the nightmare in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

The warning of this dream seems at first to go unheeded: the second Act discovers the retired District Commissioner entertaining first Copper, then the spectacular Jemima Lee Crow, who offers two hundred thousand dollars to publish Pounce-Pellot's memoirs of the fading years of the Indian Empire. Eventually, everyone is gathered together at a dinner-party, the purpose of which is to incorporate Pounce-Pellot into modern society through one of the various philosophies represented by his guests. Their arguments whirl and clash in a confusion of talk round their host's head, until he interrupts to save his family<sup>1</sup> with a ritualistic dismissal of each standpoint which reaches a hysterical climax of symbolic destruction when he spurns Pilate's allegiance to order<sup>2</sup> to lay about him with Punch's stick, killing all the false prophets save Lady Maggie, who confesses that she is a ghost. Into the weird tableau which follows steps Toby Messan, Ketch's apprentice, to ask for the hand of Baby. Pounce-Pellot accepts him, then resigns himself to the devil who has suddenly appeared on stage. Though he is ready to accept his fate, to his surprise the devil will not take him :

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1 Luyben p. 157 James Bridie : Clown and Philosopher

2 Luyben p. 160-161 James Bridie : Clown and Philosopher

"I'm thinking you've jouked me for the moment. It may be you've jouked me a'thegither. Time will tell us."

And when he asks if he will have enough time in which to escape from his limbo of doubt, either to positive damnation or salvation, the devil cannot give an answer. The play ends with Pounce-Pellot's anguished acceptance of continuing uncertainty :

"If you don't know, who knows? Nobody knows.  
Nobody knows.  
I've killed all those fools who pretended to know  
And so... and so ...  
With the soothsayers littered about the stage  
That I slew in my rage,  
Who did not know.... and no more do I....  
I must jest again and await my reply.....  
Good-bye".

As Walter Elliot writes in the preface to the play, "the denouement leaves a vast, empty stage....." <sup>1</sup>

The most striking single feature of the play is the obvious and almost continuous use of the surreal

"... it represents an attempt to go back to simple primitive aspects of drama, to medieval forms, to folklore and legend, and the biblical sources behind these. Bridie called it a Miracle play..." <sup>2</sup>

The use of Scots by the Devil and by his agents in the dream sequence with its ballad-echoes <sup>3</sup> suggests a conscious attempt by the author to tap a half-forgotten Scottish language of the emotions, more immediate than English to Scottish minds; and is matched by similar employment of "... its half-parodies of Eliot, its revue-sketch patter, its rhymed verses..." <sup>4</sup> Not only the scenes featuring the devil leap away from naturalism; the placid familiar surface of conversation is repeatedly broken by sudden and distinct shifts into formal poetry.

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1 W. Elliot preface to The Baikie Charivari

2 J. T. Low The Major Plays of James Bridie p. 150

3 J. T. Low The Major Plays of James Bridie p. 150

4 S. Mulrine, Studies in Scottish Literature 1969-70 pp. 132-4

In Act 1 Beadle and Mascara conclude their argument by bursting into verse :

Mascara :        Never heed him, Sir James, never heed him.  
                      You don't need him, Sir James, you don't need him.  
                      Throw yourself on the wind, it will carry you high.  
                      Jump against the wind and you'll fall or you'll fly.  
                      We should trust to our ears and our eyes and our  
                              hands like men.

                      If we fall, what then?

                      It's better to die in a flash than be eaten by moths,  
                      Stifled by incense and smothered in alter cloths.

Beadle :        Break Commandment Number One,  
                      And your ruin has begun.  
                      Break Commandment Number Two  
                      And the sky will lose its blue.  
                      Break Commandment Number Three  
                      And you dry the eternal sea.  
                      Break Commandment Number Four....."

(Throughout this rigmarole Joey chimes in with :

"Jump into the wind, Sir James," at regular intervals).

Pounce-Pellot in Act II introduces his search for truth to his guests with a similar device.

                      "Once upon a time,  
                      Or once upon many times,  
                      The East fell to pieces.  
                      The jungle vines tore her water tanks;  
                      The desert sand covered her canals;  
                      The wild pig rooted in her palaces.

                      ::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::

                      So Pilate is home again, his occupation gone  
                      Bewildered by change and frightened by the lingering  
                              sharp smell of ashes  
                      Be kind to him and take him by the hand.  
                      Guide him through the Millenium. "

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The climax of the play combines an incantatory dismissal and a symbolic ritual slaying of the seven prophets. The intensity achieved by this use of verse "is not so much the result of verbal ingenuity as it is of the emotional and intellectual investment of the hero in his search for knowledge."<sup>1</sup>

Such use of poetic formality and imagery strongly supports Pounce-Pellot's role as a symbolic Everyman: almost the only other character with a personality which goes beyond the merely representational is the devil. If Pounce-Pellot is Everyman, he is also Pontius Pilate, the judge and victim of his own judgement; and Punch, the champion of disorder. The theme of the play is announced by the retired judge to Dr. Beadle :

"I've decided to throw overboard everything I  
ever learned or knew. It's the only way...."

and his quest is to escape the conclusion of the Wisdom of the East against which he preached as the representative of the West, where "the sun sets later".

"The Wisdom of the East is that it is all no good.  
Mankind are thieves and liars and murderers and oppressors,  
And disease and famine we have always with us  
And we must shift as we can till Death comes to take us.  
Who knows what the Gods have in mind?"

The devil attempts to delude and entrap him by visiting upon him the servants of illusory philosophies, each wholly convinced that the answer to the riddle of life is entrusted to them alone. Mascara, the devil's principle disciple in the dream-sequence and, significantly, the champion of individual freedom, wryly remarks as these prophets gather around Pounce-Pellot :

"Pilate, wi' his hinging lip and sweet urbanity,  
Has come a second time to judge humanity.

Dod, and he'll mak a bonny moagger o't as he  
Done afore.... But whit was he to dae?

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1 G. Weales Religion in Modern English Drama p. 88

For the things that were done in the green tree  
They are daeing again in the dry;  
And what can he say but "See ye to it"?  
And wash. And let them die. "

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But Pounce-Pellot, though he cannot find the truth which could save humanity, – represented in the play as Judy and Baby, the latter dangerously attracted to evil<sup>2</sup> – recognises the lies which would destroy them. His act of self-sacrifice in defying the order to which he sold his life and murdering the false prophets not only saves his wife and child, but also himself, for unlike his ancestor Pilate, he does not evade his human responsibility.<sup>3</sup>

The Baikie Charivari, for all its noble intention and adventurous spirit, is a failure. Characterisation is surprisingly unsatisfactory considering the author's previous creations, and are neither human personalities nor representational figures, but awkward imbalanced creations somewhere in between. The abstract idea of the play is not realised in theatrical, let alone dramatic terms. Even at the level of caricature, some – like Beadle, Potheary, and Copper – are undistinguished and unoriginal. Pounce-Pellot himself remains curiously weak, especially in the prose passages – at one point he declares :

"It's no good trying to fit round pegs into square holes.  
I've gone all malleable. I've gone all plastic.  
I'm wonderful material for a spiritual adviser. Would  
you like to be my spiritual adviser?"

which hardly convinces from the man who on another occasion can say :

"I knew Rabindranath Tagore. A decent fellow :  
Nehru's a decent fellow too.  
A bit Oxford and inclined to fiddle  
While Bombay burns, like the ghats on the hill.  
Smouldering fire. Lord Curzon said to me. . . . ."

Although the figures who surround Pounce-Pellot are intended to be representatives rather than individuals, it was a fatal error on the

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1 The Baikie Charivari Act II

2 H. Luyben James Bridie : Clown and Philosopher p. 157

3 H. Luyben James Bridie : Clown and Philosopher p. 154

part of Bridie to caricature their arguments in similar style. Not exaggerated sufficiently to give them the bite required of satire, they are too shallow to be taken seriously. As they are, they lack the subtlety which might reasonably be expected of the devil's work, especially when there are so many elaborate hints which identify their malignant origin. Equally, their refutation totally lacks intensity, for they are dismissed almost casually – indeed, to Mrs. Crow Pounce-Pellot admits that he does not know why she should be rejected. Even the imagery which sees Communism and Religion as dehumanised, mechanical entities – "the upper and nether millstones" – which can only crush life, is commonplace and lacks the vitality required of the argument. In Act II the slogans of Act I are repeated and multiplied : reason is not carried deeper.

"The first transitions (in Act I) from fantasy to naturalism and to theatrical formalism in the Prologue are smooth enough ... the Deil's initiation-ceremony also ... Beadle's switch to verse ... the fantasy is well-prepared for. Act 2 is more difficult – too episodic, too sudden in its transitions from naturalism, too slack in its control to impress its dramatic design" 1

This curious failure of Bridie to revel in intellectual combat – as might well have been expected – is laid bare by the awkwardness of his major symbolic parallels for Pounce-Pellot, Punch and Pontius Pilate. The tale of Punch and his varied persecutors has for too long appeared only in fragmentary versions for its full correspondence to The Baikie Charivari to be readily appreciated; and Pontius Pilate as protagonist, no matter how brilliant in conception, requires far more explanation than Bridie allows for such a controversial figure.

The resulting obscurity justifies the complaints of critics who regarded the play as "brilliant and exasperating",<sup>2</sup> a "swan-song" with "occasional high music"<sup>3</sup> one of the author's "intellectual fantasies,

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1 J. T. Low p. 157 The Major Plays of James Bridie

2 Quoted by W. Bannister, James Bridie and his Theatre p. 184

3 Quoted by W. Bannister, James Bridie and his Theatre pp. 183-4

a form which he very much fancied, though, truth to tell, he never managed to get control of it".<sup>1</sup> The conflict of order and disorder in the reincarnation of Pontius Pilate and his equivocal triumph is clouded: the surface details are too strong, and it seems in the end that Pounce-Pellot is little more than a reflection of his author, by then over sixty, despairing at his own inability to accept the criteria of contemporary society, and aware that the judgements of his own, older order are no longer valid. This unfortunate, incomplete impression is powerful enough to rob of conviction the engagement of Baby and Toby Messan, and leave only a sense of profound despair at the play's end.

The importance of James Bridie to Scottish Drama could hardly be overstated – indeed to many people there is no such thing as Scottish Drama, only Bridie. His combination of large-scale commercial success, considerable artistic achievement, and inescapably Scottish identity is virtually unique: Barrie concealed his national origins to the best of his ability. His "Scottishness" is not simply a matter of setting or superficial detail, and it is most emphatically unromantic; it lies in his preoccupation with the innermost being of a professional man in a provincial situation, himself. His upbringing, his environment, and his experience are obvious in his plays; and if he is found to have written within a recognised Scottish tradition then it is not through a conscious striving on his part to adopt certain characteristics. Those traditional elements so prevalent in his work – the Calvinist philosophy, the satire, the fantasy, the ambiguity, the attitude to drink and drunkenness, the delight in argument, the ironic humour, demonism – are deeply rooted in the author's personality.

If he was a modern Scot to the core of his being, and wholeheartedly committed to the idea of a Scottish professional theatre, he was less positive how distinctly native such an entity should be.

"He couldn't go along with those like Robert MacLellan in later years who wanted a Scottish-language drama at all costs. He couldn't go along with those like Unity Theatre Group who wanted a committed 'people's theatre'... But it would be quite wrong to

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1 H. Luyben James Bridie : Clown and Philosopher p. 151



suggest... that Bridie sold out to the London West End and passed up his birthright. All dramatists are limited by something... Bridie has the obvious limitations imposed by his middle-class background and his lack of interest in political change....." 1

Yet Scotland owes him an enormous debt, not only for his plays, but for his successful single-handed championing of the cause of native theatre from which sprang the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre in 1943 - an unofficial Scottish National Theatre for many years - and a Scottish Drama College.

An unfortunate tendency towards facetiousness in his theoretical observations and prefaces to plays prolongs the impression of adolescent self-indulgence which marred some of his early works.

A tragedy, he writes is derived from the Greek "goat-song".

"as plain a piece of description as a 'swan-song'. It is a song, delivered with a kind of bleating intonation, about a certain human quality shared by mankind with the goat - that of butting furiously and hopelessly against the facts of life" 2

and later :

"A play is a method of passing an interval of time by putting an actor or actors on a platform and causing them to say or do certain things. If it is amusing, that is to say if it succeeds in making the spectators unconscious of the passage of time, it fulfils its function and merit..... other qualities of a play - its educative, its thought-provoking, its exciting, its poetic qualities - are not basic." 3

With such comments, notes Edwin Morgan, "Bridie was his own worst enemy".<sup>4</sup> They direct attention however, to his awareness of the artificiality and artifice of the theatre - already noted with regard to his use of alienating devices - a self-consciousness distinctly similar to James Barrie's, whose Islands and fantasies fulfil the same function. If the superb grotesquerie of Scotland's most celebrated actor, Duncan Macrae, is also taken in to account,

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1 Edwin Morgan, Scottish International, November 1971

2 'The Theatre' in Tedious and Brief, Constable 1949, p. 14

3 'The Theatre' in Tedious, Brief, Constable 1949, p. 14

4 Edwin Morgan, Scottish International, November 1971

then perhaps a tentative conclusion may be drawn indicating an almost self-destructive degree of detached self-awareness in the Scottish imagination. This may help to explain the paradox that whereas Scottish fiction has been repeatedly praised for its vividly dramatic qualities, few Scots have taken readily to the drama as a means of expression.

## CHAPTER TWO

James Bridie's career as a playwright, particularly before the establishment of the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre in 1943, was conducted as much in England as it was in Scotland: Bridie always insisted on professionalism, and in the years when his native land lacked this quality he directed his best efforts to English Repertory Companies, and he was not ashamed to measure his success by his reception in the West End. Before him, Barrie had of course been one of the giants of the West End commercial theatre, and it is worth noting some of the other Scots who wrote outwith the conscious Scottish Drama movement.

Robbins Millar achieved some fame in 1928 with Thunder In The Air, after which he never quite reached the same pitch of conviction in his work. Several of his later plays were produced at the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre, and will be considered later, in the study of that theatre's career.

First of all, however, note should be taken of The Shawlie published in 1924 but ignored by the professional theatre - and indeed, by the Scottish National Players. This was a very early attempt to depict the appalling living conditions in the Glasgow slums, which despite mechanical characterisation and plotting, and an over-moralistic, censorious attitude to the poor, nevertheless documents the ghastly details of their plight. Scottish writers of various talents better and worse than Millar are still trying to come to grips with this widespread and continuing feature of contemporary life.

Thunder In The Air is set in an entirely different social world, one much more acceptable to comfortable theatre audiences, the middle-class country-house. The play proves just as disquieting, if in a different manner, as The Shawlie. Beginning with a nerve-jarring

seance, it relates the haunting of Major Vexted's home by the malignant spirit of his son Ronnie killed in the Great War. Harding, once Ronnie's friend and now his rival for the mind and affections of Ronnie's sorrowing sweetheart Pamela, declares the theme when he says that the dead live on in the memory of others. Ronnie now appears to each of the household in turn in the guise of their favourite recollection: to Pamela, he is a young man in tennis-flannels; to his mother, a child with a toy trumpet.

Gradually, the visitation takes on a sinister aspect. The Reverend Stanes learns that his wife has committed adultery with the dead man, who had previously duped him out a large sum of money. The Major, proud of his son's "heroic" death at the front, discovers that Ronnie in fact shot himself. Mrs. Vexted is forced to recall the agonies of recrimination she felt when she left Ronnie at school in England to go with her husband to India. Shared misery reconciles the various parties, however, and they find a refuge in their affection for each other. With these disturbing memories apparently expiated at last, the ghost departs.

The seriously considered theme is ruthlessly pursued, and provokes some fine writing from Millar, as in the following passage when Pamela identifies the complex significance to herself of Ronnie's ghost:

Pamela (in low fiercely passionate tones) Yes, just the same. Nice Ronnie, clean Ronnie. Clean white Ronnie. I love you. You are my husband and my children. You are the best years of my life. You are my thoughts and my dreams and my memories. You are the lonely hours and the empty nights and the darkness. You are the fire in my heart. You are the arms about me that crush me. You are my baby's hands that might have been. You are longing and frustration and despair and nights of tears. You are my empty body and my broken heart.

The pressure behind such expression largely overcomes the more contrived effects which occasionally mar the play.

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Colossus (1928) is, by contrast, a very superficial sketch of a monolithic businessman who fails to conceal his insanity from the world.

Murray McLymont wrote a competent middle-class "problem" play concerning a rigidly respectable mother who deploys selected passages from the Bible to reinforce her solipsistic possessiveness for her adult children, in The Mannoeh Family (1927). The characters are well-conceived, though conventional and the action is conducted with adequate dramatic skill.

He followed this with a tediously long, pretentious drawing-room comedy, The Good Die Young (1929), a trivial one-act farce Mixed Doubles (1934) and The Clod And The Pebble (1930), a stereotyped study of two varieties of love, the self-effacing and the assertive.

In this last play, Joan the Scottish aristocrat loves Dick the middle-class playwright. Dick is fated to become blind, although he does not know it, and the action springs from Joan's concealment of the truth from him. Melodramatic effects and complicated plotting are substituted for real feeling; and Joan, after heroically cohabiting with Dick in London, wins the reward of his unqualified love once he has squarely faced up to his sightless future.

A greater talent seemed to be indicated in Norman MacOwan's play Jacob's Ladder (1934). Poet and journalist Maxton has three months to live, a fact which he keeps from his wife and her lover Blazeby. Supernatural intervention in Act 2 provides him with ghostly racing tips which earn him £22,000, which he places in his wife's name. He then turns to the finishing of his great epic poem, and completes it on the day of his death. It might reasonably be thought that there is little enough in this to impress, but in the early acts especially, MacOwan offers economic and vigorous dialogue together with a fine sense of individuality in his characters. Latterly the play tails off into conventionalised posturing, sentimentality and portentous mystification.

The New Tenant (1935) follows a similar pattern as it traces a murder mystery in Perthshire, beginning with a robust sense of life and ending in blatant contrivance as the true criminal appears out of nowhere to confess and save the altruistic hero. The Scottish setting is mere background: the characters are all as English as the Country House thriller.

1939 brought Glorious Morning, an attack on bolshevism in a Ruritanian setting. Anna, the daughter of an old landowning family, disrupts government-sponsored atheism by proclaiming that she has experienced an evangelistic religious vision. For this, she and her intransigently anti-communist father are shot. After beginning to suggest that Anna's vision is being distorted into a political tool by her father, MacOwan reverts to a propagandist exercise which culminates in a "heroic" scene of pure-hearted martyrdom before the firing-squad. Even for this purpose there is some heavy and obvious padding in the play, mostly in tedious confrontations between victim and persecutor at the trial.

For a short time in the 1930's the West End hailed the ascent of Ronald Mackenzie, who unfortunately died before he could prove himself unequivocally. "The plays he has left us hardly justify the high praise once given to them",<sup>1</sup> writes Allardyce Nicoll. Musical Chairs (1931) is a sophisticated comedy set against an unusual background of Polish oil-fields, which turns towards tragedy in the last act. The main character is Joseph, an ennuï-ridden cynic who is killed saving a scatter-brained girl from suicide. As a whole the play is not as good as the excellent characterisations of Joseph, his father, and the American Irene seem to indicate.

The Maitlands (1934) is a limpid and obvious exercise in fashionable histrionics – in this particular case, pessimistic ironies. The plot consists of middle-class love confusions as Roger attempts to conceal his wife's desertion and Phyllis tries to escape from the boredom of a seaside backwater. The end is abruptly melodramatic, the motivation pretentious.

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1 A. Nicoll, British Drama, Harrap, London. 5th edition, revised p. 280.

One of the more successful of the Scots who wrote for the English theatre was Gordon Daviot, whose plays enjoyed much favour in the thirties and forties when they were associated with the rising stars of Olivier and Gielgud. Daviot was at her best with historical pieces, her work in a contemporary mould being unexceptional and on occasion dull. Her most well-known play is Richard of Bordeaux first produced publicly in 1933, featuring a John Gielgud fresh from Shakespearian triumph in Richard II. Daviot's Richard is a clear-eyed, idealistic, youthful hero; ultimately brought low by crabbed, middle-aged self-seeking and ruthlessness – a fashionable contemporary champion gradually submerged in barbarism and power-politics. Contemporary fashion in 1933 found him attractive and the conscious challenge to Shakespearian precedent refreshingly bold; and bold it remains; but the comparison with Richard II is inevitably destructive. Richard of Bordeaux suffers very heavily from sentimentality, from over-simplification and caricature, and sheer predictability in its characterisation. The youthful zest which is the chief virtue of Richard and his young queen, is also the chief vice of the play as a whole. It was followed in 1934 by Queen of Scots, a portrait of Mary Stewart over the course of her disastrous reign. This is rather more successful than Richard of Bordeaux in its more mature understanding of motivation and behaviour. The confusing mass of historical detail which so frequently defeat dramatists who venture to deal with this topic, is, in Daviot's hands, carefully controlled; but it is noticeable that the earlier part of the play, in which Mary is graced by a youthfulness later lost in the bitterness of conflict, is more convincing than subsequent passages. As with Richard of Bordeaux, a feeling persists about the play that its appeal is, if not exactly superficial, then hardly profound. Superior characterisation, particularly in the role of Mary, lends to the play a stronger tragic note than is found in its predecessor. The Laughing Woman (1934) is a competent study of a woman platonically but possessively entangled with a French artist, though its ironies are predictable. The Little Dry Thorn (1946) makes an interesting comparison with Bridie's biblical and apocryphal plays, in that it eschews quaintness, whimsy or fantasy in its portrayal of the story of Abraham's wife

Sara, instead attempting to capture a naturalistic impression of past lives. In the end, insistent naturalism robs the play of those elements which alone could save it from becoming an unsurprising Sunday-school illustration. Later plays such as Valerius and Dickon (1953) continue in this historical costume-drama vein. Dickon makes an attempt to restore the reputation of Richard III, so maligned by Shakespeare, resulting in a Richard of Bordeaux-like honest, well-balanced hero far less compelling than Shakespeare's melodramatic villain. Valerius is set in Britain during the Roman occupation but after a promising discussion of attitudes to the Roman "ideal", declines into adventure strikingly similar to those of Hollywood's U. S. Cavalry. Other plays, published posthumously in the 1950's, are straightforward West-End exercises of little interest. They include The Pomp of Mr. Pomfret, Cornelia, and Patria - the last-mentioned a curious propaganda-tract directed against nationalist movements, which strongly suggests the author's dislike of Scottish nationalism in particular. It is unlikely that the enthusiasm which once attended Gordon Daviot's plays will be revived. Her Queen of Scots remains one of the best attempts at the subject, but the other plays seem now without distinction.

A Scottish flavour is discovered in Aimee Stuart's Jeannie (1940), in many ways the descendant of Graham Moffat's highly successful Scottish plays which ran in London some thirty years previously. It is certainly unmistakably Caledonian. After drudging for her ageing father for most of her life, Jeannie is released by his decease and decides to see the world on the strength of her rather meagre inheritance, before returning to work in "service". On the channel ferry, and later on the train to Vienna she meets worldly-wise Yorkshire businessman Stanley. After the mildest of flirtations in the Austrian capitol they quarrel and separate, and the apparently wealthy Jeannie becomes the target of an amorous but impoverished Austrian nobleman. With his expert assistance she spends all her inheritance in a matter of days, and is forced prematurely to return to domestic serfdom in a miserly Glasgow household. Miraculously, Stanley searches her out, and the play ends with his proposal of marriage. Flimsy, jolly, and sentimental, Jeannie was immensely

popular and became one of the recurrent features of the Scottish tours of the Wilson Barrett Company.

Different but equally distinct in its Scottish flavour is Roger MacDougal's MacAdam and Eve (1951), written with considerable polish and displaying much originality in its theme. Adam, doomed to eternal, lust-plagued life, returns in his guise of MacAdam to the scene of one of his myriad marriages, a Clyde coast boarding house. The deserted wife of this thirty-year-old union, Eve Adamson, is the landlady, embittered and vindictive. She has discovered that two unseasonal guests, Jimmy and Evelyn, are not – as they claim to be – married, and forced them into miserable chastity. MacAdam sees in Evelyn the spirit of his partner in Eden re-incarnated, and begins to pursue her, much to Jimmy's outrage. Eventually the young couple succeed in extricating themselves from the comical nightmare which follows, but only once MacAdam's lecherous eye has been distracted by Genevieve, Evelyn's equally desirable sister.

MacDougal makes good use of extravagant theology to lend depth and melodramatic grandeur to his comedy, and produces some entertaining characterisations in Jimmy, the bumptious Scottish student completely out of his indignant depth, and the Reverend Caldecot who suffers the trauma of engaging the man without a navel in religious disputation.

### DOUGLAS-HOME

The most successful of all the Scottish authors who took to London's commercial theatres was William Douglas Home, who answered with some skill the West-End's demand for "smart" witty comedies of upper-class manners. The son of the Earl of Home and brother of a Prime Minister, this playwright was intimately acquainted with the life of the contemporary aristocracy, and after some early plays, the most notable of which is Now Barabbas, a serious study of prison life presented at the Glasgow Citizen's Theatre in 1947, he turned to lighter, more popular themes.

Now Barabbas is set in a prison using the different levels of cells to create a surprising flexibility. Two main themes are pursued: the



anguished human realities which follow a sentence of death; and the distorting effects of imprisonment on various of the inmates. Douglas-Home has not shied away from homosexuality in this study, presenting it in an effeminate but sympathetic character, Richards. The tensions of the condemned cell in which the young murderer Tufnell awaits execution are predictable and frequently histrionically portrayed; but the impression of life in the other cell-blocks is both colourful and convincing. (It should be noted that the play was drawn from the author's own experiences of prison). There is a broad range of characters - old lags well-skilled in evading irksome regulations, first offenders slowly realising the full meaning of incarceration, a pathetic petty-criminal who romanticises his crimes for the benefit of his cell-mates, a friendless ex-schoolmaster repressing his own homosexual urge by virulent crusading against sexual deviation, an Irishman reaching violent breaking-point as the pressure of a long sentence becomes too much for him. The play has obvious affinities with Behan's The Quare Fellow, and in the main successfully penetrates to the complex humanity of imprisoned men, if in its treatment of authority - and indeed, of the prisoners themselves - it is distinctly sentimentalised in its evasion of ill-nature.

1947 also saw Douglas-Home's first major success with his comedy on the intricacies of British politics, The Chiltern Hundreds. The British aristocracy in the shape of Lord Lister and his Lady muddle amiably through life in the Scottish Borders concealing their apparently innate wisdom under a screen of eccentricity, while their son Tony crosses electoral swords with the rigidly faithful family butler, Beecham. Tony, feeling time weighing on his mostly empty hands, and badgered by his American fiance to do something, stands in a local election - as the Labour candidate. Beecham, a staunch Conservative, is sufficiently horrified to contest the seat, and a confused battle commences, with Tony's fiance supporting Beecham and quaint Scottish servantgirl Bessie becoming infatuated with Tony. There is some broad - and, it must be said, rather obvious - satire: Cleghorn the Labour M.P. elevated to the Lords is the chief, unwitting protagonist of Conservatism and class-distinction, Lord

Lister a natural egalitarian. Beecham, a masterly servant in the style of Barrie's Crichton, drops pearls of political philosophy whenever required, and wins the election. The original love-relationships are restored, and Bessy becomes Beecham's sweetheart – on condition that he resigns from Parliament. This he does, by applying for the Chancellorship of the Chiltern Hundreds, one of the quaintly absurd traditional mechanisms by which an M.P. retires.

Structurally competent and lightly amusing, the Chiltern Hundreds is almost a definitive type of West-End comedy. Its satire is complacent and stereo-typed, the issues it toys with never treated with more than a pretence of profundity. Beecham's superiority is created by reducing the intelligence of those around him, a device acceptable only when the author is honest enough to admit it openly. Beecham's original is, of course, Barrie's Crichton; a fact tacitly admitted by Douglas-Home in the symbolic return to butler's uniform which marks his decision to resign, echoing Crichton's poignant shift in posture and servile gesture in the earlier play. Comparison with The Admirable Crichton isolates the major flaw of The Chiltern Hundreds, its basis in complacency. It makes pleasant entertainment, and if it appears initially to be more sophisticated than one of Brandane's Highland comedies, or Hal D. Stewart's, this is due only to the attitudes which cling to the West-End.

Plays in this vein make up the bulk of Douglas-Home's output, but in 1949 he was tempted to come to grips with Scottish history. The result, The Thistle and The Rose, is an account of Scotland's romantic, tragic king, James the Fourth, which struggles in vain to escape from the trap of pageantry and strained heroic sentiment.

The Thistle and The Rose opens hopefully enough, with a minimum of pseudo-Shakespearian trappings – although these are present – but despite the dramatist's well-advised restriction of focus to one major, life-long conflict between King James and his most powerful noble, principal advisor and potential jailor, Angus Bell-the-Cat, characterisation remains rudimentary while historical periods of considerable length are traced.

A scene in which James decides on war with England for the sake of a beautiful woman is wholly unprepared for, and thereafter the play fades into enfeeblement. A careful exposition of the disastrous battle of Flodden reaches a curtain tableau of embarrassing sentimentality with King James dying at one side of the stage, the victorious Earl of Surrey at the other, and in between, the Flodden Memorial, erected "to the brave of both nations". The stage directions indicate the author's intentions and his failure to achieve them when they indicate that James' strategic error is "the decision which decreed that Scotland never more should be a first-class power", invoking a depth of feeling and significance entirely absent from the play.

The playwright does not even provide a convincing reason why a noble like Angus Bell-the-Cat can retain his political position although hated by a king who appears both powerful and astute.

Much more interesting is The Bad Samaritan (1952), a well-constructed fluent play with outstandingly good dialogue, which pursues a theme oddly reminiscent of a very different work indeed, George Munro's Vineyard Street.<sup>1</sup> As in Munro's play, The Bad Samaritan has at its heart distorted religious zeal. Veronica, a Roman Catholic, attempts to end a disturbing, romantic deification of herself by an over-intense young Anglican, Alan, by proving to him that she is a creature of flesh and blood and baser passions like everyone else. The plan goes awry, for her deliberate seduction provokes in him revulsion and reaction – he rejects her image and instead embraces her church, becoming a celibate Catholic priest. The crisis occurs in Alan's parental home, which to add piquancy to the situation, Douglas-Home makes an Anglican Deanery, with Alan's father radically opposed to Catholicism. Further complications are created by the presence of Alan's brother Brian, a cheerful agnostic concealing the bitterness of his wartime experiences, and Jane a rather "stagey" lover-who-refuses-to-marry. When Brian is true to his stiff-upper-lip back-

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1 See chapter on the Glasgow Citizens Theatre and its playwrights.

ground and marries the pregnant and desolated Veronica, The Bad Samaritan takes an unfortunate dip into sentimentality, and an epilogue set seven years later descends even further into superficial emotionalism and wistfulness. On holiday in Italy, Veronica and her son visit a remote church, and she – after a seven year's estrangement from religious observance – goes to confession hoping to find a release from the torture of Alan's misunderstanding and lack of forgiveness. The priest is revealed, not too surprisingly, as Alan and they are at last reconciled in a chaste Kiss of Peace. Were it not for this reassuring conclusion, with its gestures towards a mysterious non-denominational English providence, The Bad Samaritan would be a better play. It is not at all difficult to see why it would be popular in the commercial theatre, but it is obviously part of a dated concept of drama and a far cry from the tentative experimentalism and frankness of Now Barabbas.

The Reluctant Debutante (1955) returned to light satire and romantic comedy in an upper-class setting. In a farcical style which at times becomes tediously determined is told the tale of Jane, obliged against her inclinations to take part in the ritual marriage-market of London "coming-out" balls and parties by her socially ambitious mother. Despite her mother's enthusiasm for virtually any eligible male as a prospective son-in-law, true love triumphs in the end when she meets and falls for David Hoylake-Johnston, whose reputation as a rake – false, or course – provides excuse for most of the complications in the plot. Lighter than a champagne bubble The Reluctant Debutante is predictable, contrived and escapist, in fact, a successful West-End entertainment.

A shaky sequel to The Chiltern Hundreds, The Manor of Northstead (1954) similarly took its title from a Constitutional oddity in British political arrangements and restored Lord Lister, Tony and Beecham to the stage, this time in a West Highland setting. Tony wins the election contested in this play, and briefly holds the balance of power between the two major parties before being elevated to the peerage. The play has all too plainly been written according to a formula, and where The Chiltern Hundreds was graced by a certain

wit, The Manor of Northstead frequently wallows in sheer silliness. Thus Lord Lister rambles with chillingly artificial inconsequential quaintness :

"... What you mean is this Mad Hatter fellow came along and bit through Bishop Hatto's teacup while he was being eaten by rats. Now it's beginning to make sense. Obviously this Hatter fellow - being mad - wanted to take a bite out of the old bishop, but with those dashed rats milling about with the same idea in their heads he couldn't get his teeth in anywhere - so he had to fall back on the tea-cup. Is that it?"  
Act I, ii.

The Hebrides provide occasional rather pallid colour to such nonsense.

Rather more wordly sensibilities appear in The Secretary Bird (1963), when middle-aged husband Hugh prompts his wife Liz into revealing the affair she is having, and proposes in a very "civilized" fashion not only to agree to separation, but to provide her with grounds for a divorce. The lover, John is invited to spend the weekend, and Hugh also invites his delectable secretary, Miss Forsyth. An awkward, embarrassed house-party follows, with Hugh's crassness providing most of the slightly macabre comedy. Liz becomes increasingly jealous of "the secretary bird", and John is unnerved by Hugh's reminders of the less attractive mundane intimacies of married life. Finally John's lack of humour proves to Liz that she prefers her husband after all, and she stays "to save him from Molly Forsyth". To everyone's intense satisfaction, if hardly surprise, John goes off with Miss Forsyth, and presumably they all live happily ever after.

Never once touching on real emotion and reassuringly escapist in its basic assumption that everything is for the best, The Secretary Bird continues to be a great success, a demonstration of how tenaciously commercial debasement of art clings to British theatrical taste.

The last play of Douglas-Home's which falls within the scope of this study is The Queen's Highland Servant (1967), an unusual if dramatically unremarkable portrait of Queen Victoria and her curious relationship with John Brown the Highland ghillie. Most of its impact is created by the oddity of the tale itself, and the rather startling

informality and modernity of the dialogue; but there is little to carry the play beyond a specific and openly superficial sketch. It is competent, however, with Brown, Disraeli, Victoria, "young" Bertie and various others well conceived, if rudimentary characterisations.

William Douglas-Home has proved himself commercially time and time again. Now Barabbas indicated in 1947 that he might have something to say as well; but if he has, then in 1970 it was still to be spoken, and most of the signs suggest that he will continue to channel his energies into the flimsiest entertainments.

### EWAN MACCOLL

"Though we have dramatists today of the calibre of 'James Bridie', Paul Vincent Carrol, Gordon Daviot, William Douglas Home, and best of all, Robert MacLellan, none of them are dealing with 'dynamite' - the Authorities are not liable to fall foul of them, or their audiences to riot in protest against them; in so far as they deal with live issues, these are of a minor order. This applies to all of them, except . . . . Ewan MacColl."<sup>1</sup>

Ewan MacColl, the son of an iron-moulder from Falkirk, is by far the most remarkable of the "anglicised" playwrights, and possibly of all the Scottish dramatists together. Now a celebrated collector and performer of British folk-music, MacColl was, from a very early age, involved in theatre of the most radical and experimental kind; and after meeting Joan Littlewood in the late nineteen-thirties, founded with her the famous Theatre Workshop, which rapidly rose to the forefront of British Theatre. For many years MacColl was Theatre Workshop's personal dramatist, in which capacity he wrote a number of plays, some of outstanding value. In the 'thirties' he had worked with the German expressionist Toller, and had been strongly influenced by him, and by Wedekind: by 1934 he had come into contact with Bertolt Brecht, later serving with him on an international

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1 H. MacDiarmid, introduction to Uranium 235, MacLellan, Glasgow 1946

theatre committee<sup>1</sup>. He had already an enormous practical knowledge of peoples' theatre gathered during the nineteen-twenties when he had devoted himself, at the age of sixteen, to semi-professional political theatre groups touring the strike-bound mills of Lancashire.<sup>2</sup> At one stage he regularly swapped scripts with a similarly motivated American group, the Laboratory Theatre of New York.

The result of such rich and varied experience was electrifying. Theatre Workshop's commitment to the common people and its ready versatility provoked from MacColl plays of rivetting immediacy utilising techniques virtually unknown in Britain at the time - back-projection, for example, or the use of sound and light as decor, rather than relying on physical scenery. In his play Johnny Noble, first performed in the early 'forties, there were one hundred and eighteen lighting cues and one hundred and ninety-two sound cues, in the course of only one hour. His plays touch only once on Scotland, and to claim him for a nation purely on the strength of his heredity would be entirely unjustified - unlike Gordon Bottomley, Ewan MacColl has not committed himself as an outsider, or part-outsider, to Scottish Drama - but it seems after all that his early years in Falkirk and elsewhere in Scotland made their mark upon him, sufficiently so for no less a personage than Hugh Mac Diarmid to regard him as falling, at least in part, into the realm of Scottish artistry.

It must be stated here that because of the nature of Theatre Workshop's productions, conducted against a background of far-flung tours and lack of finance, the texts of Ewan MacColl's plays, where texts still exist, can only be regarded as models, for the actual performances that may have taken place, which were subject to considerable alteration and frequent updating. Johnny Noble, his earliest success, seems to have been lost completely; suffice to say that it was a ballad opera which portrayed the trials and tribulations of

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1 Folk Review, May 1973

2 Folk Review, May 1973

a young working class couple struggling to find work, a house and a future; that originally it was conceived in terms of the Pre-War Depression; and that it was revived as late as 1956, presumably having been tailored to the topicalities of Post-War Austerity and later still to the Cold War. It played in Sweden, Czechoslovakia, France and Norway; as well as the length and breadth of Britain, and used folk-songs to link its various scenes. The next play was The Long Winter (1942), very much a creation of wartime and deeply pessimistic. Although characterisation and plot are in naturalistic terms, it is obvious from the start of the Long Winter that the language has been heightened – in the opening sequence, Connie, an ageing prostitute, hears a voice but cannot see its owner in the blackout and remarks "A ghost that calls a woman's name; some unburied lust let loose from hell or some hot spirit, haunting the flesh that haunted his flesh when he still had flesh to haunt". Such deliberately colourful rhetoric is heard throughout the play, highlighting its strengths and weaknesses: at its best, it stimulates the mind as well as the ear, gives precise expression to the often intense emotions of the characters, and reflects the author's acute ear and willingness to experiment with colloquial working-class speech; at its worst it translates his working-folk into Oxbridge intellectuals self-consciously forging epigrams and shifts from precision to inflation. The Long Winter is a claustrophobic domestic tragedy, in which Alec and Marion, attracted to each other despite their respective marriages – Alec to a slowly dying woman, Marion to Chris, Alec's best friend and a wartime soldier – quarrel over their right to sacrifice the interests of others for the sake of their own happiness. Conservatively moralistic Alec refuses to part with his wife and will not countenance Marion leaving Chris. Tortured beyond endurance by the apparently never-ending terrors and privations of war, she flies to extremes; and to Alec's horror hysterically proposes to murder her husband. Sanity superficially restored, Chris returns home on leave, only to reveal to the others a morbid cynicism and an increasingly suicidal desperation. To the

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audience he also reveals his love for Marion's younger sister, Clare. During an increasingly dark, portentous party to celebrate his return home, Chris refutes every moral argument from Alec about a hopeful future and responsibility to others – only to reap an ironic harvest when Marion sees in his words the answer to her own problem and shoots him. The play could quite easily end here, or shortly afterwards in Alec's revulsion from Marion. Unfortunately MacColl continues beyond the impetus of his characterisation to reach a carefully – reasoned moral conclusion which necessitates Marion being strangled by Alec, so that eye for eye justice is seen to be done. It is here that the play comes to grief, the characters quite plainly overarticulate at moments of emotional crisis: as Alec seizes Marion by the throat, he says : "What kind of love is it that kills between kisses? No, Marion, your words have failed you. This is the last time we will lie together, so make the most of this embrace. Marion... Marion...", and the Long Winter ends as Alec is made to invoke necessity to explain and excuse the shift to melodrama :

"You were right, Marion, I can't leave you now  
(sirens begin to sound)

You see, nothing is changed. We couldn't have  
escaped. No one can escape alone. We are part  
of things.

(he crosses and sits beside her)

Sleep, Marion. We'll wait for them together. "

Despite the last act, the play does make some powerful impressions. The atmosphere of squalid misery, insecurity and thwarted dreams is remarkably pervasive – almost oppressively so, in fact, threatening to overwhelm dramatic action with its monotony. Some of the symbolic devices, as when three children are watched by Chris and Clare as they play a bizarre variation of "soldiers" in which death figures as the desired goal, are extremely successful, based as they are on recognisable commonplaces. Lastly, when MacColl escapes from his tendency to floridity and an element of preciousness his dialogue is excellent – Chris home on leave and acutely depressed says : "Marion, we'll stop the clocks, they talk too much. Their tongues are parasites that suck the hours, they'll bleed my week to death" – and the more so for the risks the author is willing to take

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by using "poetic" formality.

Hell is What You Make It (1943) is in freer form than The Long Winter, and shows the direction in which MacColl was later to discover his best work, but nevertheless little more than a good idea elongated to the point of banality. The title of the play indicates exactly the theme : after an amusing and imaginative introduction which shows that the nether regions are plagued with industrial strife in much the same way as earth is – Charon temporarily breaks a seamen's strike by persuading his reluctant cargo of shades to work their passage, the new-arrivals discover Lucifer to be a rather ineffective aristocrat unable to grasp the economic problems of his industrialised and socially anarchic Kingdom. MacColl comments sardonically on capitalism and contemporary values :

Todt :                   So there is no eternal punishment?

Faustus :               · We have the conveyor belt system. Of course, in medieval times, we had a medieval Hell where scientists and philosophers were burned alive. But this is the twentieth century. We have progressed.  
Hell no longer burns its thinkers, it ignores them and starves them into silence. So my friends, you see that we too are civilised.

The delighted response of some of the newcomers – the capitalists – gives way to horror when they learn that they must start their social climbing from the very bottom of the ladder.

One man, Adamson, a miner in his earthly existence, is discovered to be in Hell by mistake; but before he can be transferred to Paradise he disappears to assist the striking workers of Hell in their bid to transform it from a place of torture into a rival to Heaven. The fascists and capitalists, under pretence of helping to capture him, oust Lucifer from his throne and establish a repressive regime, but the forces of good triumph, Prometheus is symbolically released, and Lucifer renounces his title amid proletarian rejoicing.

The pursuit of Adamson is inexplicably and pointlessly elongated, and there is a persistently humourless quality in the writing which under-

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cuts the farcical levels on which the play has its only chance of success. It declines rapidly from wit into dullness, trite sentiment, and obvious conclusions.

Rogue's Gallery (1945) saw a return to naturalism similar in style to The Long Winter, though without that play's pessimism. Here, a group of professional crooks team up with a group of left-wing actors to rob a crooked but legally invulnerable millionaire - Amos Swingler. The actors need money to establish a theatre, and are easily persuaded to assist their friends by presenting themselves at the victim's temporary home as employees of a service agency. Instead of a £30,000 diamond necklace however, they discover a lesson in corruption and immorality. Appalled by the duplicity and self-interest of the millionaire and his family as they bribe and blackmail their way to a new contract, the actors and housebreakers find a new commitment in themselves to battle against the social system which protects such as they have seen.

The naturalistic framework is ill-suited to MacColl's talents, and the play is distinctly verbose, losing its way almost completely in the later acts with over-elaborate mechanisms which confuse where they are supposed to elucidate. The playwright's gift for language, remarkable as it sometimes can be, is not enough to save the play, but it does provide interesting moments. In Act III, Allan, the actors' leader, is granted a "Queen Mab" tirade :

"Would you call Swingler a man? I wouldn't. He's a refrigerator for preserving frozen assets. He sits there in his wheel chair, an absentee landlord of the whole earth, outside of life and yet controlling life. He goes everywhere and yet he is invisible in his cloak of darkness. When he travels, he travels in a coach drawn by four apocalyptic horsemen. Let Amos give the signal and General Want will lead a column of fat noughts against the world."

MacColl's prevailing commitment to deal with the immediate concerns of the world as directly as possible, together with the developing abilities of Theatre Workshop - particularly on the technical side of

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theatre – resulted in 1946 in his finest play, Uranium 235. For the first time he escaped completely from naturalistic conventions, and the effect was electrifying: song, dance and mime were intricately interwoven into dialogue to create a didactic, almost medieval Morality based on the Atomic Bomb and the choice it offered to the world, but reaching back to trace from ancient Athens onwards the history of mankind, and the history of mankind's relationship to science. For all the weight of its subject, Uranium 235 is wholly without the ponderous quality which lies behind, and often upon, the fiery language of his earlier plays.

"..... 'play' is hardly the right description (for Uranium 235). Rather it is an absorbing experience to watch and listen to (MacColl's) ideas on the state..."

"A noble conception, the work of a man with something to say, Uranium 235 has never a hint of pretentiousness or preciousness, a trap waiting for so many who use mime and dance in a work of this kind. There is too, real poetry in the dialogues and monologues." 1

The play unfolds in eleven scenes. An introduction to contemporary Europe, exhausted by war, empty and fatalistic, depicts its people weighed down by loneliness, tedium, and the fear of death in the simple formality of a poetic soliloquy from a firewatcher. A man in the audience asks about mankind's future, but the answer he receives from the Scientist about Uranium 235 is lost in a series of vignettes displaying modern banality and distraction – pop-music, pop-idols, Sunday-paper scandals, sport, and "love". Undeterred, the man climbs on to the stage beside the Scientist; and with the audience suitably impressed about the need for their serious attention, he – and they – are started on a journey "through the corridors of your mind" to learn about Man and Science.

The following seven scenes relate historical incidents on the road to atomic fission: Democritus despised in ancient Athens by entrenched

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1 Glasgow Herald, October 22, 1946

religion; a brilliantly economic encapsulation of the Middle Ages in a masque of the Dance of Death, a whole social order evoked in its most mean as well as its most gorgeous forms, ending in a witch-hunt; Alchemists confusing science, philosophy, mysticism and mumbo-jumbo in their own dance-like ritual; the "voices in the wilderness" - Paracelsus and Bruno - crying against the religious enforcement of ignorance; the industrial revolution with science at last breaking out of the darkness to a background of nightmare in mill and pit; to the "Big Show" of the Puppet-Master in 1914 - looking forward perhaps to a celebrated Theatre Workshop production - and finally the great discovery itself. In each succeeding situation the dramatist varies the style and tempo of the presentation, and now, to illustrate atomic fission to the audience he presents a comic ballet featuring Lola Neutron, Energy and a gang of Protons. Such light-hearted theatricality gives way on the instant to the terrifying implications of atomic power. German physicists are depicted fleeing from Hitler with scientific secrets, while the Gestapo torture and kill a "red" opponent of the regime. The play appears to come full circle at this point, with a song - "the man of our time" - about the waste of life in war which echoes the sentiments of the Firewatcher in scene I.

However, MacColl has not quite finished. In a brilliantly argumentative concluding sequence the Scientist first finds himself isolated as a scapegoat by a public scared out of its wits by modern weaponry and resentful of the death and suffering they have undergone in war. Gradually they realise that the Puppet-Master is their true enemy, and discover their own share in the collective guilt for war. Finally they are faced with a choice of two roads along which to walk with their new power - personified as Energy - a choice which is offered to the audience as well; between the road of the Scientist, "the road out of night", or of the Puppet-Master, "the familiar one. You can walk it blindfold."

Although dated by now, Uranium 235 remains a very impressive work. As one reviewer remarked of a mid-fifties revival, "it might be said that the playwright is driving home the obvious, but often the

obvious is less clear than it should be, and the lesson of Uranium 235 cannot be overstated".<sup>1</sup> The use of choric effects, ritual, bare stages, music, light and obvious artificiality at such an early date at least in the British Theatre - is quite astonishing and wholly effective, breaking down reserves of convention in the audience's attitude to what they experience with intentions similar to Becht's theories of didacticism, but also closely associated with folk-theatre and perhaps the British music-hall tradition. The pace and variety generated largely overcomes the problem of ringing the changes on the historical aspects of the play, and lends to those scenes a timeless vitality and immediate relevance which checks any tendency towards mere pageantry. As many observers at the time noted, Uranium 235 assumed the features of a contemporary Morality, directly descended from the great medieval religious plays, and it is this quality of timelessness which makes the play unique amidst MacColl's other work. Uranium 235, using all the devices associated so frequently with propaganda Theatre, and written by an author openly propagandistic and politically motivated, is "concerned" theatre, rather than "committed" theatre. Political references exist in the text, but are unimportant compared to the broad humanity of its theme and its final unanswered question.

The Puppet-Master remains unspecified, a great symbolic figure of evil who may be God, or Necessity, or the Institutional blindness of mankind, not simply a caricature in a political pamphlet. It is because of this generality of intention that Winifred Bannister can say of the play "a passionate protest uttered in the emotions of everyman", and Hugh MacDiarmid can compare it to Sir David Lindsay's A Satire of the Three Estates : "That coupling is the accurate measure of the distance Ewan McColl and his colleagues had to travel back to reconnect with the true tradition of theatre."

MacColl never quite achieved the same success again, unless with his Festival of Fools productions in the late nineteen-sixties, which although blatantly biased in their political satire, were held in the

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1 Glasgow Herald 25 March 1952.

framework of a major folk-tradition. His next play, Operation Olive Branch (1948), adapts – radically – Aristophanes' comedy Lysistrata. To the original has been added first naturalistic and tragic scenes from the battlefield, and second, a conclusion openly political in emphasis, blaming the Peloponnesian War on the ruling class and the manufacturers. The peace declared at the end is idealistic rather than comically lustful, and to it is appended a scene between Lysistrata and a soldier, an ex-slave who is the dedicated revolutionary of the play who will carry the war against oppression to the world beyond Athens.

Although the battlefield scenes perfectly capture boredom, danger and tension in the soldiers and there is excellent use of British regional dialects to convey the homogeneity of the Greek peoples in a most immediate manner – the Scots dialect, used for one of the more prominent minor parts, is particularly striking – Aristophanes, it must be said, is the better writer. MacColl's scenes lack variety, brevity and all too often, subtlety. Aristophanes had the wisdom to make his plea against war of the lightest and most farcical nature: MacColl unwisely makes Lysistrata appeal not to sensual instinct, but democratic instinct, begs several obvious questions, and ends with awkwardly inflated sentiments. As Athens and Sparta embrace each other in peace, Lysistrata talks to her revolutionary comrade :

Soldier : . . . . While there is a slave anywhere, peace is only a dream.

Lysistrata : What will you do then?

Soldier : Fight for a dream. There is a girl in Thrace.

Lysistrata : You love her?

Soldier : A slave is not supposed to love, only to work and breed.

Lysistrata : But you do love her.

Soldier : Yes.

Lysistrata : The road to Thrace is a long one.

Soldier : The road to freedom is longer but there is love at the end of it. Well I must be on my way.

Lysistrata : Won't you wait until the dawn?

Soldier : Lady, I am the dawn.

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The documentary of working-class conditions which MacColl had responded to so successfully in Johnny Noble drew his attention again in 1949, with Paradise Street – also known as Landscape with Chimneys. This piece has clear similarities to the plays fostered, for instance, by Glasgow Unity Theatre. Like them Paradise Street deals in the common currency of working-class experience, seeking to create a montage within which an individual may be related to a much broader social horizon, like them it seeks much of its effect in a question implied throughout the play – "why are such conditions tolerated?"

With a stage-manager to act as chorus-leader, deliberately stylised effects distancing the audience from the action, and a rudimentary set, the lives of the people who live in one street of an industrial city are sketched. Soldiers returning from the war face housing shortages, unemployment and poverty with cheerfulness and hope at first, and begin a long decline into cynicism and despair. A swift impression of differing attitudes, hopes and dreams all imprisoned in the drab brickwork of the crumbling tenements gives way to particularised details – the young girl who lives only for the personal fulfilment she finds in dancing, an adolescent poet struggling to express his feelings, a man desperately waiting for a great pool's win, a young couple beginning to find their lives intolerable. The first hopes of a new and better future fade and die with the passing seasons. A girl kills herself and her baby when her dream of love becomes a nightmare of penury and recrimination, and the darkness seems to have triumphed. Striving for a way out of the gloom, with its frequent moments of poignant beauty, the author brings the folk of the street together in a demonstration of solidarity when a couple "squatting" in an empty house are threatened with eviction, using their action as a platform from which to launch an assault on capitalists, bureaucrats and warmongers, whose inhumanity he perceives to be at the heart of such a soul-destroying environment. The note of anger heard at this point is the author's, however, rather than the characters': the episode jars woodenly against the abundant sense of life which



precedes it. Perhaps this can be justified within the terms of didactic- or propagandist- theatre, and has as its true function a spur to further argument: nevertheless, it seems to invite only wholehearted agreement or total rejection, a sudden shift from sympathy to chauvinism, which disrupts the unity of the play. MacColl is certainly aware of the difficulties, for he has one of the characters object to the suicide in the play, on the grounds that it is in "bad taste" :

"... the difference in the public's reaction to observing the past and observing the present is the same difference that lies in looking at tubercle bacillus through a microscope and knowing that your own lungs are infected".

This, it may be assumed, is precisely the playwright's point, concerned as he is with the political function of such a play as much as with its artistic unity.

A similar sensation that the author has given way in the end to the demands of politics rather than of art mars another, much greater play than Paradise Street. This is The Other Animals (1949), which ranks almost as highly as Uranium 235. In the centre of a bare stage is perceived a circular steel cage, and the action begins with a microphone voice quietly and intimately creating a scene in the audience's imagination.

Announcer : "The word 'cage' is a noun: Old French from Latin 'Cavea' - a cavity, from 'Cavus' - hollow. A box or enclosure wholly or partly of open work for confining birds or other animals."

First Voice : Thus in our dictionary  
Simply but precisely  
is defined  
The penultimate abode  
Of those marked down for death  
By history's enemies.

(somewhere in the night a man screams, a sound of shrill, sustained, shockingness)

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Here in this purgatory  
Set between two Hells  
The hell of blindness  
And the hell of seeing,  
The species wages war  
Upon the genus.

(phrase of music : High pitched violins)

Second Voice : Both are 'the other animals'  
Alike in external features as two peas,  
Two spirochetes or two baboons,  
And yet dissimilar as a thing  
And its reflection in a mirror;  
                  difference measured  
In the terms of dreams .

The cage is for Hanau, communist prisoner of a fascist regime, at present the subject of a psychological experiment conducted after extended torture by Dr. Graubard, who rebukes a sadistic guard for threatening the prisoner: "Hanau is my masterpiece, and I want no psychopathic scribblings on the canvas. This place is not an abattoir, remember that; it is a laboratory where I carry on research.." Hanau is in a delirium, and it is in this fantasy-world that Graubard hopes his spirit will finally be broken by the spectres released through his own patient ministry. It is this mental struggle, expressed in the surreal imagery of dreams, which forms the body of the play. As imagined accusations of treachery ring in his ears, Hanau discovers another person in the shadows, Robert. Robert is Hanau's own projection of himself as he might have been, or might yet become, for Robert wishes to live, and to enjoy individual freedom unshackled to any faith: he is to be the antagonist Hanau must conquer, not Graubard. Robert's demonstration of the potentialities of the free individual rapidly changes to a distracted and increasingly vain attempt to discover a final, personal absolute: love founders either on impossible idealisation or on lust and ugliness, and is at last discerned as incompatible with Robert's much vaunted freedom; rejection of the physical leads to a quest

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for knowledge which ends in lunatic delusions enslaved by none other than Graubard himself. Robert now shifts to a symbolic train journey on which he meets two sets of passengers – first, history's rebels, who assure him that he has a duty beyond himself, that he lives in a time of crisis which must be resolved, otherwise the train which is the world will crash; then with careful, complacent contemporaries who refuse to share his concern, and are not to be disturbed even when Graubard shoots Robert as a dangerous lunatic.

The dream ends. Hanau, strengthened in his resolve, faces a puzzled and enraged tormentor, and amidst increasing signs of fast approaching victory, proudly and unhesitatingly accepts death at the hands of a desperate enemy who realises that it is he, and not Hanau, who is really held within a cage.

The freedom of form and the variety which marked Uranium 235 are both present in The Other Animals. Robert confronts love in a symbolic dance with partners in white, green, crimson and silver who represent incorporeal fantasy, obsessive maternity, sensuality and barren chastity. Pursuing absolute knowledge he finds himself in an asylum, surrounded by patient-figures whose ailments are representative of an unhealthy society, euphoria, pathological random violence, delusions of grandeur, and unnatural passivity. Graubard in this scene ends a revolt by declaring Robert insane in a highly disturbing mock trial, in which language distorts with demonic insistence into a wild parody of legality, Richard III, and gibberish. With only four sequences to hold within the framework of prologue and conclusion, MacColl is able to elaborate his ideas and at the same time to avoid the dangers of repetitiveness which must have plagued him when writing Uranium 235. The result is a much stronger sense of form to support the argumentative theme, and a greater opportunity to deploy dramatic poetry in a manner unsurpassed elsewhere in MacColl's work, and noteworthy by any standards. In the opening scene, the voices of the prison speak of torture, physical and mental :

"Where there were eyes  
Of suns and stars  
Gouging batrachian thumbs  
Left only cavities,  
Hollows of darkness,  
Where life festers  
And cries out with iron voice,  
In words of rust,  
Inflicting ferrous wounds  
Upon the silence.  
That they can still be heard  
Above the twittering bat-voices of the dead,  
Is a tribute  
To the light behind the eyes,  
The dream behind the fact, . . . "

Such lines occur throughout the play, giving form to the almost unbearable pressures and agonies Hanau is subjected to. "Mr. MacColl owes much all over the place – to the early Auden, to Joyce," wrote one reviewer, "but he has a style of his own, and a gift of the gab for rich and gaudy language, rare in British dramatic literature since the Jacobean".<sup>1</sup> Like them he is not afraid to risk tactlessness or downright silliness for the sake of richness and immediate impact, and invariably the risks pay off.

Unfortunately, while The Other Animals – though explicitly centred on a political battle – takes most of its effect from its intense subjectivity; its conclusion applies the same theatrical symbolism to the objective experience of Hanau in confrontation with Graubard, and as with other plays by MacColl, there is an inescapable sensation of overstatement, of rhetoric without sufficient matter. The ceremonial trumpets, the figure of Death and the Morning as a girl in gold with red suns seem grossly out of place in this conflict of ideologies, creating confusion and uncertainty at a crucial point.

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1 Glasgow Herald, 21 Feb. 1955.

After this MacColl wrote little of interest to the theatre. The symbol of the train used so concisely in The Other Animals was elaborated lengthily in The Travellers (1952), an outraged attack on the West's employment of ex-Nazis in its Cold War against Russia somewhat weakened by the author's clearly identifiable political allegiance and a lack of decision between symbolism and naturalism in the treatment of the sealed train theme. MacColl's association with Theatre Workshop came to an end and he directed all his energies to folk-music thereafter, but it is worth mentioning that since 1965 he has organised an annual Festival of Fools in a London pub which is as much folk theatre as it is music, a colourful and uproarious satire of each year's main events based on a simple but rigid form.

Apparently far removed from London's West-End but sharing its commercial and artistic attitudes, what could be described as Scotland's "parochial" theatre, gradually developed out of the activities of the Scottish National Players. This remained for the most part associated with amateur ventures but occasionally achieved professional status as at the Rutherglen Repertory Company or the Edinburgh Gateway Theatre after the war. The "parochial" theatre is dominated by domestic comedies and historical romances, normally in one-act form, it aims in general to entertain rather than edify or instruct, but occasionally it has produced work of merit. It was here that Scottish dialect employed naturally and unselfconsciously in stereotyped working-class kitchen settings, first gained acceptability, leading in time to the use of Scots language in plays of much bolder and broader scope.

### JOE CORRIE

One of the best-known names in Scottish Drama to this day is that of Joe Corrie, an ex-miner from Lanarkshire who began to write short plays for the amateur theatre during the Depression, and who became the most prolific writer of one-act plays in Scotland and the central support of the Scottish Community Drama Association. Corrie is at his best dealing with subjects directly observed from personal experience. He appears to know it, for he seldom strays beyond the rural or semi-

rural working-folk whom he understands so well: indeed, much of his work, while being of poor quality, suggests a living folk-tradition, and if such a tradition exists it is largely of his own making. Scottish dialect, fluent and unselfconscious, is the language of most of his plays: his dialogue tends towards the wooden in English. To a very large extent he became the champion of the one-act play in Scotland, and it is in this form that his best work was done, mostly between 1930 and 1940. Thereafter demand for Corrie plays seems to have outstripped creativity, although the supply did not dwindle; his work becomes more and more lightweight and unadventurous with each succeeding year, pot-boiling entertainments rather than artistic expressions.

The range Corrie displays in his one-act plays is remarkable. Though two-thirds of some sixty-odd examples are the lightest of comedies making no demands either on actor or audience, the rest demand some attention. In the thirties, most were informed by a humanitarian plea for an end to the harsh, hopeless squalor of working-class life.

The Shillin'-a-Week Man – actually first produced by the Scottish National Players in 1927 – is surprisingly good, if extremely short, depicting hand-to-mouth life in a Scottish mining village where nearly all the womenfolk are in debt to the packman – The Shillin'-a-Week Man of the title – who persuades them to buy goods on instalments which they can ill afford. Corrie creates excellent tension out of one woman's fear that her husband will find out, and her pathetic attempts to maintain a respectable front despite extreme poverty. Her miner husband does discover, but is quite unperturbed. He has lost his job, but not his levelheadedness. The packman is told to whistle for his money until it is there for him, and faced by this uncompromising attitude his threatening demeanour crumbles to nothing.

Mining also forms the background to The Darkness (1932), a small grim masterpiece in which a blinded ex-miner, tortured by the bleakness of his future no less than the constant pounding of pit-machinery a few hundred yards from his miserable cottage, is driven

to curse the incessant din and to wish it silent. The silence comes all too soon, meaning only one thing to the little community - an accident underground. The miner's son is among the dead. The Darkness, relieved from moment to moment by lively, well-observed characterisations, has disaster hanging over it like a dark, foreboding cloud, and the play is ruled by a vindictive destiny which transforms its direct simplicity into a cry of anguish and despair.

Horoscope (1937) and Glensheugh (1932) are proverb-like folk-comedies at once homely and sardonic, with an eye for the amoral realities of life rather than glib pomposities; and the Speed Up, by depicting a conflict between workers on a factory floor and a foreman recently elevated from their ranks, gets much closer to the economic pressures which govern individual behaviour than most avowedly Communist portrayals of worker versus wicked capitalist manager.

In Martha (1935) Corrie creates a deceptively simple elegy for the hopes destroyed in the First World War when the ghost of Martha's fourth and last son to die in Flanders comforts her before she dies by pretending to have returned hale and hearty from the front. The ending is rather confused, but the play quite escapes Barrie-esque emotional indulgence and is genuinely moving rather than maudlin.

1936 brought forth The Dreamer, a bitter assault on the accurately and concisely etched features of the dole and despair.

"Frae the school to the factory, frae the factory to somebody's room, mairrit and happy for nine months, then the start o' rearin' mair for the dole. Ay, it's a machine age right enough."

says Mary, turning down the chance of marriage to a solid, steady miner because of the Depression's hopelessness. Family life struggles on, though Corrie calls its future sharply into question when Mary's sister-in-law dies in childbirth because no-one has money to give or lend for the easing of her poverty. The Dreamer is an angry play, and the anger is human, not institutionalised in the service of any dogma. It seems all the more honest and powerful for that.

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The seventeenth century removes Corrie from immediate concerns in the Hoose o' the Hill (1932), but not from the grimness of some of his contemporary visions. Here the topic is the persecution of the Galloway Covenanters, and the tale brings a party of Government dragoons to their deaths at the hand of one of their victims' widows, driven mad by their depredations. The play has some obvious affinities with J. A. Ferguson's Highland tragedies, and if it has an original setting far removed from the traditional areas of Scottish historical fiction, it is sketchy and contrived by comparison with the other writer's work.

A radical change of style occurred in 1936 with Bread and Roses, when Corrie was tempted into expressionism to show how the inhabitants of a slum are held in thrall by Dole, a pleasant paternal soul, until Beauty leads them off to music and laughter, after Freedom and Love have striven in vain to break their chains. It is a rather stilted piece, if more optimistic than other studies of the working-class.

Taken together, these plays represent the best of Corrie's output in the thirties, and from them can be created a composite impression of working life, its interests and concerns, an impression rooted in Scottish experience. From them, it appears that the author has no pretensions whatever, apart from dramatising the particulars of life as he knows it, and is chiefly engaged in writing for an unsophisticated audience. Improving living standards after nineteen-forty alleviated the anguish in Corrie's work, and he tended more to the folk morality than the social document thereafter.

A good example of this trend is The Failure (1946), in which a fisherman's ambition that all his sons should reach greater heights than himself brings bitterness when David, the youngest, fails to achieve a University degree. The moral which Corrie points is that such obsessive planning and sacrificing to realise a personal dream vicariously is selfish rather than altruistic.

A Storm On Parnassus (1948) smacks of similarly homely wisdom, if it is a surprising departure from Corrie's customary haunts.



The play offers an interestingly un-romantic portrait of the young, rebellious poet, Shelley and of Robert Southey and his family - which includes Coleridge's deserted wife. An admirably controlled series of gradually intensifying moments of excitement leads up to an uncompromising outburst from Shelley about Southey's "compromise" in literary criticism. Grossly insulted but blessed with a remarkable self-control, Southey points out that living to write, as the well-endowed young poet does, is rather different from writing to live, as Southey must if he is to support his family. His point is made - somewhat simplistically - when Shelley forgoes his feud for the sake of food, but generally A Storm On Parnassus is a pleasing minor play with an eye for quick but well-observed characterisation.

One exception to Corrie's tendency to eschew social themes in the latter part of his career is Our Tommy (1948), a remarkable attempt, marred by pedestrian technique, to protest against the unchanged degradation to which many working-class soldiers returned after the war against Hitler. It was a theme popular with contemporary left-wing theatre groups - Ewan MacColl of Theatre Workshop tackled it in similar terms in Paradise Street. Predictability robs the play of much impact.

The remainder of Corrie's one-act plays include as topics race prejudice, adultery, border-reiving, witch-hunting, the corruption of war - and the churches' hypocritical attitude to it - and class-prejudice. More and more they are theatrical distractions, though occasionally they strike notes of genuine emotion and power.

Corrie's full-length plays include Tulleycainn (1934), Cobbler's Luck (1937), The Tinkers' Road (1938), Robert Burns (1943), Green Grow the Rashes (1945), and Burnieknowe (1955). These are almost without exception rural domestic comedies of unstartling value, rudimentary form and lively dialogue. Cobbler's Luck, for example, concerns an ill-natured village cobbler promised a sea-cruise by a local gentlewoman if he can be civil to everyone and increase his takings for three months. The humour stems from his ultimately successful attempt to fulfil these conditions in the face of almost insurmountable

temptation. Burnieknowe, written almost two decades later, is almost identical in tone. Occasionally, hints of a rather more serious view of life add a sense of life to these works. In The Tinkers' Road a tentative approach to class-antagonisms is made as a miller defies his landlord over a right-of-way the latter seeks to close and the play has a tang of stubborn independence in its central character; but its conclusion reconciles the conflict in conventional deus ex machina style. Characterisation in all these plays is unsurprising and stereotyped, interest being maintained by the author's observation of rural manners and attitudes, which he seldom either caricatures or catalogues, instead creating quick but effective sketches. The exception to the general mood of these plays is Robert Burns, an unsuccessful attempt to create a living portrait of Scotland's best-known poet. Having elected to isolate his efforts to the period of Burns' life which he might be expected to sympathise with most, the poet's early life in Mauchline amidst the farms and country-people of Ayrshire, Corrie betrays his own shortcomings by losing touch with the sardonic realism which marks his more lively impressions of rural life. Robert Burns becomes a sentimentalised essay in which the poet's battle with William Armour and the kirk is softened into a temporary misunderstanding created by a melodramatically spiteful hypocrite in the shape of Holy Willie. Burns' less admirable characteristics are glossed over in favour of the traditional Scottish romantic legend of the ploughman-poet.

Retrospectively, Joe Corrie appears almost as much a social phenomenon as a theatrical one. His copious output over the course of several decades, and his enormous popularity with amateur dramatic clubs in Scotland have ensured that he cannot be ignored. His natural use of Scottish dialect and his admirable efforts in the nineteen-thirties to create a theatre of the common man represent his greatest achievements: to a large extent he showed that a Scot could write about contemporary life in his own land and not confine himself either to "the big hoose", History or the Highlands. In this respect he was a Scottish counterpart to Ireland's Lady Gregory, who also produced a widely-varied drama of rural life; although he lacked her range, richness, and skill - and, indeed,

her clear-sighted fixity of purpose. Unfortunately the foundation laid in that first decade was not built upon, and his work since then has been increasingly repetitive, outdated and without significance – unless in the sense that it symptomises the declining aims of Scottish amateur drama.

### T.M. WATSON

Like Corrie, T.M. Watson was associated primarily with the amateur dramatic movement in Scotland, though his later plays have been performed widely in the professional theatre. Watson began to write one-act plays for the Glasgow Labour College Players in the late nineteen-twenties; short lively domestic comedies, such as Diplomacy And The Draughtsman (1928) and Jinin' the Kirk (1928) rooted firmly in working-class life, if hardly profound or even noticeably original. The best of his short comedies is Gibbie Proposes, a rollicking though simple affair about the romantic endeavours of an undertaker to win the hand of his friend's servant. The contrast between such a joyful intention and Gibbie's funereal manner is a well-judged source of humour.

The popularity of Gibbie Proposes prompted Watson to elaborate the tale into a three-act comedy, entitled for no apparent reason Beneath The Wee Red Lums, and then to follow it with a sequel, Bachelors Are Bold. Neither is very impressive, seeming in comparison with their original stilted, mechanical, devoid of vitality, and hopelessly contrived. The keynotes for both are sentimentality and "traditional Scots wisdom" – the lovable quaint Scottish peasantry mysteriously turn out to be smarter than appears at first. Both plays have been exceptionally popular in Scotland.

Rather more interesting are two more seriously intended pieces, We Travel Alone, and The Wilderness (1932). The first is an attack on soulless hypocrisy as embodied in a marriage based on ambition and social convenience, the melodramatic bitterness of which is the grim obverse of the over-sentimental coin. With a fair measure of theatrical talent, Watson depicts the disastrous marriage of Liz

and John Beith, sacrificed to John's petty desire to become Provost of the town, which ironically is named "Middenheid". Their daughter Cathleen returns home after only one year of an equally unsuccessful marriage, greeted at first by the vituperative outrage of Liz. Then Cathleen confesses that she was afraid she would become like Liz, warped by resentment against her fate. Her mother at last discards the desperate cloak of respectability, reveals that Cathleen is the child of an adulterous love affair, and sends her off to a new life with her real father in Glasgow. John's only reaction to the revelation concerns its possible effect on his election, but Liz remains with him in Middenheid, explaining to her aged father that Cathleen must be the woman she might herself have become: the years of bitterness have altered her beyond repair.

Heavy-handed coincidence and symbolism, combined with distinct over-simplicity in characterisation and theme reveal the author's poverty of imagination in handling a potentially powerful subject.

The Wilderness, though not outstanding, is more successful in surviving its shortcomings than We Travel Alone. To a large extent a documentary of working-class life during the Depression it unfolds a story of developing disillusion and compromise with an unsympathetic fate similar in many respects to Greenwood's Love On The Dole. Crushed by years of unemployment, poverty and the attending ills of crime and drunkenness, Meg Carson seeks escape in adultery. Her young sister Jean, in love with unemployed Alick, becomes pregnant, but before they can marry he is killed in an accident. She suffers a miscarriage and eventually agrees to marry Dan McFarlane, a local contractor, exchanging love and dreams for security amidst the congratulations of her well-meaning family. Meg's discovery that her husband is also having an affair, and their agreement to preserve the convenient facade of their marriage, indicates the kind of future Jean can look forward to with Dan.

The baldness with which the story is developed, and a refusal to intrude authorial comment lend the play a pleasing austerity and

the carefully understated irony of the play is impressive, as when Meg's drunken father extols the virtues of the nation :

(sings) "There's nae place in a' the world, like my ain wee hoose, like ma ain wee hoose." Eh, that's the Scotsman a' the world ower. It disna maitter though we live in a pigstye, tae the Scot it's aye his ain wee hoose ... (holds bottle aloft) Scotland yet! Here's tae us; wha's like us? Baggpipes, whisky, and Robbie Burns. God, we're a great nation - a great nation.

For once, Watson escapes from Scottish sentimentality and turns a scathing eye on it from the outside.

For his best-known play, however, he returned to the comic mode, this time in the historical style of Robert MacLellan. Johnnie Jouk The Gibbet (1953) is a romp in period costume concerning the reprieve of a handsome rascal Johnnie from hanging when he is himself offered the job of hangman to the city of Glasgow. Having incurred the wrath of the civic authorities by jocularly robbing a Baillie of his clothes in broad daylight, Johnnie is eventually committed to prison on a trumped-up charge, there to await execution until the Town Council can find someone to accept the post of hangman. One unfortunate who seems ready to fill the vacancy is found with a knife between his ribs before he can begin. The provost's wife, who sympathises with the unfortunate Johnnie - like him, she is one of the proscribed MacGregor clan - suggests that the prisoner might be pardoned if he became the hangman, which Johnnie eventually agrees to, in part to prevent a repetition of the murder conducted on his behalf by Morag, the servant-girl who dotes upon him. Nothing more need be said about Johnnie Jouk The Gibbet but that it is a particularly enjoyable example of Scottish light comedy with the additional attraction of period setting.

Watson's widespread popularity in Scotland is an indication of the poverty of theatre in the country, and his plays in many ways represent the dilution of serious efforts to build a native drama. Apart from The Wilderness he offers only escapism or melodrama of the

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most obvious and immature variety. Johnnie Jouk The Gibbet is one of Scotland's best-known plays, yet compared even with the period-farces of James Scotland, who follows in Watson's footsteps, it has little to distinguish it. Presumably the presence of Duncan MacRae, the celebrated comic actor, in early productions, provided theatrical qualities not present in the script. The continuation of kailyard sentiments as represented by Watson and his successors – and, indeed, the later work of Corrie – resulted in the unfortunately pervasive opinion that all Scottish playwrights worked in the same hackneyed vein.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### ROBERT MACLELLAN

The first playwright to develop a distinctly Scottish drama after the decline of the Scottish National Players was Robert MacLellan who since he first began to write in the early nineteen-thirties has steadfastly refused to abandon the Scots language in favour of more commercially valuable English or even "Stage Scots". Born near Lanark in Ayrshire in 1907<sup>1</sup> he has lived on the island of Arran since 1938<sup>2</sup>, from where he continues to write plays in which Scots is always the most prominent feature and which have frequently met an enthusiastic welcome.

The confidence and vigour of his early plays was the first solid achievement to stem from the S.N.P.'s brave efforts in the twenties; somewhat paradoxically, it might seem: for though one of his pieces was accepted by them under John Brandane's sponsorship, none were ever performed by them – whereas Bridie, despite his close association with the S.N.P. found no positive influence there. It was the Glasgow Curtain Theatre, an amateur company to whom the initiative in Scotland's drama largely passed after 1930, which gave MacLellan an outlet for his work. Most of his plays before then were performed by them.

MacLellan's earliest work, though superficial, displays the basis

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1 Alexander Reid, Robert MacLellan, Scotland's Magazine, Jan. 1959, Vol. 55, No. 1, pp. 49-50

2 Allan Leach, Robert MacLellan and his Work, Library Review, Vol. 23

of his talents. Jeddart Justice, a one act play first performed in 1934, is a short, lively adaptation of a border-tale subsequently featured in Alexander Reid's The Lass wi' the Muckle Mou'. It is a comic earthy portrayal of border reiving and rough justice, in which young Will Scott, captured by Sir Gideon Murray in the act of stealing cattle, is given a choice between the gallows and Murray's ugly eldest daughter, Meg. At first he prefers the rope, but at the eleventh hour changes his mind only to discover that the outraged Meg refuses to grant him a second chance to win her hand. Dismayed, he offers to marry her prettier younger sister, at which suggestion Meg jealously claims him for her own and drives him to the minister with a candlestick as a goad. The dialogue of Jeddart Justice is swift, natural and gripping, lightly but firmly sketching in thoroughly believable characters. The use of Scots is completely unself-conscious and the brief plot handled with theatrical verve. The following year brought another one act piece, The Changeling, also set in the Borders, but among the common folk. To the brisk dialogue and swift pace of Jeddart Justice is now added the spice of superstition as Archie Armstrong desperately strives to conceal a stolen sheep from suspicious pursuers. At first he hides the carcass in a baby's cradle, feigning innocence of the theft, but as his questioners in their search draw ever nearer to discovering the truth, he clutches at the straw of witchcraft to explain away incriminating evidence. The men's increasing disquiet during the discussion of the uncanny which follows is matched by their physical movement towards the cradle, until the climax is reached by the uncovering of a horned head where the baby's should be. Imagining it to be a demon, the laird's men flee in confusion, and Archie is saved. Simple and direct though it is, The Changeling indicates the author's careful construction of increasing tensions, and shares with Jeddart Justice a spirit of natural vigour and earthiness.

### TOOM BYRES

Toom Byres (1936), a three-act comedy, was Maclellan's earliest

success, sufficiently popular to achieve publication. Set in the near anarchy of the Scottish Borders in the early years of James VI's reign, it traces a stormy love affair between Wat Scott of Hanginshaw and Peggy Ker of Kinnelknock, whose families continue to pursue a feud of almost antique origin. Wat, his formal approach to Peggy's father having been met with gunfire, resorts to methods more traditional in the Borders, and having driven off Kinnelknock's cattle as a diversion, kidnaps Peggy and carries her to his own peel tower, where he prepares to withstand a Ker siege. Peggy, however, is less than content with this rough wooing: her self-respect is damaged by the implication that she would marry any man who abducted her. Aided and abetted by Wat's sisters, Elspeth and Mary, the young couple bicker irresolutely over his plan to buy Kinnelknock's consent by offering to return the stolen cattle, until they are interrupted by the arrival of Sir Robert Scott of Drumford, Keeper of Threepdale, official enforcer of the King's Peace for the area. Having concealed Peggy's presence, Wat pretends that the vengeful Kers who appear before the tower shortly after are lawless cattle-reivers, and arranges that in the ensuing skirmish Sir Robert is conveniently knocked unconscious. As the Kers drive off his own cattle, he then releases Peggy on the grounds that he has been beaten in his attempt, a capitulation which does nothing to appease the mounting contempt of his disappointed sweetheart. Rejecting a last-minute plea to marry him even then, Peggy declares :

"And last nicht I thocht ye wad hae daured the Deil.  
Man, ye haena the spunk o a rabbit! "

Unfortunately, the plan goes astray when Kinnelknock returns and meets Sir Robert while Wat is escorting Peggy home again. Sir Robert learns the truth, though he remains ignorant of the attraction between the young couple, and thinking to end a highly inconvenient feud and also to take revenge on Wat, he has his secretary draw up

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a document, as Wat has all along hoped, obliging resolution by marriage in the Kinnelknock–Hanginshaw dispute. Elspeth and Mary find hesitant but congenial husbands in Peggy's two brothers, but Peggy remains intractable towards Wat, her pride hurt even more by the secrecy with which he implemented his scheme. Only after he is driven to an outburst of violent rage is the air cleared and their quarrel finally made up.

Light as it is, and flawed by a last act devoid of tension – "the final resolution of the plot is obvious to the characters of the play, no less than to the audience, some ten minutes earlier than seems desirable" – <sup>1</sup> Toom Byres yet displays the vitality and convincing grasp of period setting which distinguishes so many of MacLellan's plays.

By the addition of conventional comic plotting and recognisable stock characters – in this case, the "romantic" young couple, Wat with his measure of swashbuckling appeal, and Sir Robert, the much-put-upon rough-and-ready administrator – to his convincing grasp of Scottish period setting and command of the Scots tongue, MacLellan created with Toom Byres a new popular form in Scottish Drama. Up to this time, such period pieces had been generally dealt with in a strain of highly superficial romanticism, the roots of which clearly lay in an outsider's vision of Scotland and smacked indeed of the excesses of Scotland. MacLellan's portrayals, as typified by Toom Byres, were not necessarily less lightweight, but were gifted by an obvious Scottish identity in language and sympathy, a wealth of rich and hearty humour, and a ready recognition of the coarser realities of living conditions and human foibles. The success of Toom Byres led to the development over the years of a minor genre of such plays in Scotland as MacLellan found his imitators, in T.M. Watson, for example, and more particularly, in James Scotland. MacLellan himself soon turned away from such straightforward entertainment.

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1 Allan Leach Robert MacLellan and his Work

## JAMIE THE SAXT

Generally recognised as MacLellan's most accomplished work, Jamie the Saxt came relatively early in his career as a dramatist, receiving its first performance in 1937, in the hands of the Glasgow Curtain Theatre. Written during this earliest and most productive period of his connection with the stage, the play combined the robust energy of his earlier comedies in Scots with a new seriousness of purpose. The skills of period setting learnt in writing Toom Byres, and Jeddart Justice found a fresh purpose in Jamie the Saxt, for its subject-matter is the personality of King James the Sixth of Scotland: creation of historical flavour giving way to recreation of historical fact. Rather than blunt the edge of the author's wit, narrower restrictions enhanced its incisiveness, for Jamie Stewart proves incongruously devoid of the sober majesty which his social role seems to demand, while his triumph is the result of an attractively cunning intelligence utterly unsupported by physical strength such as his opponents possess.

The play is a battle of wits between the King and his unruly subjects, most prominent and implacably hostile being the rebellious Earl of Bothwell. It begins with Jamie in a very precarious situation indeed, his court riddled with intrigue and disaffection, his Queen estranged by his open suspicion of her fidelity, and Bothwell a popular champion supported by the arrogantly assertive Scottish Kirk. The setting of the first Act is the house of an Edinburgh Baillie, Nicoll Edward, in which the king has taken up residence after Bothwell has raided and looted Holyroodhouse itself. The King's attempts to control the situation go awry: Lord Huntly despatched to arrest the "Bonny Earl" of Moray whom the King suspects of adultery with the Queen, murders him instead; the appalled nobility then allow Bothwell to seize control of the Palace of Holyroodhouse, and Jamie finds himself in the hands of his bitterest enemy. Bothwell's triumph is short-lived, however, for he proves too avaricious for power and insufficiently diplomatic to retain the support of the other nobles at court. An attempt by the King to escape from the prison his own palace has become provokes a confrontation which Jamie astutely exacerbates until Bothwell finds himself at bay, and

forced to withdraw. The closing Act brings Bothwell down completely when it is discovered that, having lost the support of the English exchequer for his political ambitions, he has rashly sought new allies among his longstanding rivals, the Roman Catholic faction under Huntly. This unites against him the King, the nobility, the jealously anti-papist English monarch and an acutely embarrassed Presbyterian Kirk, rejecting with unseemly haste its erstwhile popular champion. The play concludes with King Jamie, at last relieved of the forces which have kept his kingdom in turmoil for years, turning his attention to the contemplation of the English Crown which dangles so tantalisingly before him in the immediate future.

In the introduction to the 1970 edition of the play, Ian Campbell observes that Jamie the Saxt "is essentially... a portrait of a remarkable King under stress. The success of the play depends on this stress, and its continuing dramatic importance until the safety of the king and government are assured".<sup>1</sup> Most of the other characters exist only insofar as they contribute to that tension, and by contrast James seems all the more human and sympathetic as he struggles to maintain himself amidst the fluctuating forces which oppose him. It is easy to identify oneself with the desperate opportunism of this man who makes up in volubility what he lacks in physical strength; driving to distraction fully armed, triumphant enemies with his unquenchable invective and insistent trivial pedantry. When Bothwell thwarts his attempt to escape and confronts him with the damning letters to Hume and Huntly, James twists the conversation into a petty but intricate argument about Bothwell's acquittal by the Court of Session.

The Prosecution wasna free to speak oot, or Craig wad hae been flummoxed on ilka peynt he raised.<sup>1</sup>  
The gowk havert the maist illogical nonsense I eir heard in aa my life! Him and his Uvierus! Wha was Uvierus to be coontit an authority? A doctor wha maintained the auld error o the Sadducees in denying the existance of speerits! Uvierus, forsooth! I could hae quotit some authorities! What about the Daemonomanie o Bodinus, that's fou o witches confessions? What about the fowerth book of Cornelius Agrippa...?

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<sup>1</sup> Introduction pp. 10-11 Jamie the Saxt

The King's indignation is directed as much at the shameful ignorance of his favourite interest as it is at Bothwell's victory. Against the ranting fanaticism of Bruce, the representative of the militant Kirk, he deploys a scornful, sharp-witted intellect which first stings the preacher to injudicious fury and then trips him with the brutally simple logic that if the Kirk holds itself above the Law, it can hardly demand legal sanction for its decrees. The pleasure derived by James from intellectual vanity finds its comic aspect in his exasperation with the equally pedantic Melville, who alone is unimpressed by learned argument.

The other major factor in his character eliciting a favourable response is the total lack of dignity which makes him so strikingly human. In Act 1, the tension of intrigue and the threat of impending violence is momentarily relieved by the arrival of the king, who responds to his courtiers' elaborately formal greeting with startling homeliness :

"Ay, weill, here we are" (Falling into his chair)

"God, I'm wabbit".

The rest of the court struggle to maintain the outward show of self-possession and formality demanded by their position: the Queen, deeply wounded by James' cutting references to her supposed infidelity, "hurries out" rather than show her tears; Bothwell and Colville act out the rigmarole of surrender to the king as they strip him of real power; and the English Ambassador is greeted in Act III with an orderly calm which everyone including himself knows to be utterly false. James on the other hand hardly troubles to maintain his innocence in the entrapment of the Bonny Earl, and has little time for the standard courtesies of diplomacy; referring to Queen Elizabeth as "an auld miser" in front of her Ambassador. On every occasion he speaks with a frankness at times breathtaking, revealing a curious mixture of perceptiveness, intelligence and almost childish simplicity. Crowing over his shamed nobles about their manipulation by the English and boasting his single-handed triumph over the

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intrigue, he is reminded by Melville of its purely chance nature. Momentarily crestfallen, he exclaims, "God, I forgot". When in Act 2 he awakens to find Bothwell standing by his bed with a drawn sword, his acquiescence in his opponent's victory is ensured not so much by the thought of imminent death as by a threat to display him at the window without his breeks. It is moments like this which bestow most of the comic effect which popularised the play.

The streak of brutal insensitivity, even cruelty, apparent in James' fascination for "confessions" of witchcraft wrung from old women by torture, provides the vital relish without which MacLellan's portrait would loosen its grip. This glimmer of vindictiveness, witnessed early in the play in the quarrel with the Queen, prevents any suggestion of reductive sentimentality from distorting the picture, just as Nicoll Edward's educational remarks on a public execution indicate the commonplace brutality of the age, and prevent the king's predilection for witch trials from appearing outstandingly vicious. The play ends with the king shifting his attention from Scotland to the English throne.

The detailed knowledge of history revealed in Jamie the Saxt is an impressive though hardly theatrical accomplishment: what is much more important to the play is the fine sense of the dramatic displayed throughout its four Acts. Careful structuring and MacLellan's noted ability for swift but precise characterisation reduce the apparent confusions of labyrinthine politics and a cast-list of twenty-two to a simple movement through four clear-cut stages in King James' security. The return to Nicoll Edwards house in the final Act lends an air of cyclical completion and provides a yardstick of national prosperity against which to measure the real increase of the King's power over the strifetorn kingdom: the fight which breaks the peace – Bothwell's supporters are still capable of armed attempts to rescue their imprisoned friends – indicates the limitations of that power but is not the threat to James personally that the rumour of insurrection was in Act 1; and there is a steady progress away from the apparently universal disloyalty witnessed in the first Act. Nicoll Edward and his wife are indeed the epitome

of solid, middle-class normality by which a modern audience can gauge the tenor of the age, and without them the struggle for power among the nobles would occur in a vacuum of exaggerated importance. As it is, the contest is much more personal: sympathy is for Jamie, not for the sanctity or justice of his cause. Their presence provides an almost choric commentary on the action, and their more mundane accents and interests contribute largely to the bustling vitality which pervades Jamie the Saxt.

Outstanding is MacLellan's use of Scots in Jamie the Saxt - "the most consistent Scots the stage in Scotland has ever known" - unhesitatingly plunging into a vast range of styles and accents, from the king's pedantically-flavoured articulacy to the direct simplicities of Nicoll Edward's household, embracing in between Sir Robert Bowes' Elizabethan English the barely comprehensible Cockney of his servant, and most remarkably the Queen's Danish-accented Scots. Such variety contributes largely to the constantly-changing tempo of the play and to its effervescent vitality, and could only stem from a total familiarity with, and a remarkable sympathy for, Scots as dramatic expression.

King : "Oho, but fortune's favoured me the day!  
There's naething in my way! Aa that I hae wished  
for is promised at last! Bothwell on the Scaffold,  
the Papists houndit doun, the Kirk in my power,  
English ahint me, and then, in the end, the dream  
o my life come true! It gars my pulse quicken!  
It gars my hairt loup! It gars my een fill wi  
tears! To think hou the twa pair countries hae  
focht and struggled. To think o the bluid they  
hae shed atween them, the touns they hae blackent  
wi fire, the bonny green howes they hae laid  
waste. And then to think, as ae day it sall come  
to pass, that I, Jamie Stewart will ride to London,  
and the twa countries sall become ane! "  
(Mistress Edward can be heard calling "Nicoll!  
Nicoll! Come for yer supper).

Maitland : (coming out of his trance and reaching for the bottle)

"Aye yer Grace its a solemn thocht. But the auld bitch isna deid yet. "

(He places the bottle before the King. The King fills his glass)

King : (Raising his glass high)

"Jock here's to the day. May the mowdies sune tickle her taes. "

The brutal frankness of this drily humorous post-script is typical of the anti-heroic treatment of the play, and a skilfully comic reversion from sentimentalised prophecy to a baser but more honest normality.

It is a measure of the author's skill that within the narrow focus of the play pervasive comedy does not upset naturalistic conviction. MacLellan's achievement is in convincing his audience that Jamie Stewart is "the wisest fool in Christendom" – both a shrewd monarch, and a natural clown.

The nineteen-forties saw the playwright return to the one-act form in The Smuggler, The Cailleach and The Carlin Moth. The first two of these are historical essays more distinguished by their unusual settings than by their dramatic power. The Smuggler is set in early nineteenth century Arran and relates an adventure between local smugglers and the excisemen. The action of The Cailleach occurs during the Cromwellian occupation, adding the weight of superstitious foreboding to the tragedy of a local girl whose lover, an English soldier, is killed in an ambush by her own family.

In 1946 came The Carlin Moth, a verse play which turned the author's attention towards a new medium, radio. The Carlin Moth is a fantasy in which a young fisherman is enchanted by a strange moth-woman who appears to him as a beautiful young girl, warning him "I am as ye wad hae me" when he accepts her as a lover, and

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that he must keep her presence a secret from all others. When a mortal rival for his affection arrives, the moth-woman takes on a hideous aspect which conforms to the mortal girl's jealous preconception, and the meaning of the cryptic warning becomes clear when the girl's mother accuses the fisherman of witchcraft. His confidence faltering, he confesses all, at which the moth-woman vanishes. Yet her memory continues to haunt the mortals, frightening the girl and holding the man from the less perfect forms of the physical world. The play ends with the girl chasing him as in vain he stumbles after a fluttering moth; and the voice of the Carlin, the moth-woman, as she distinguishes from all the other animals, man :

"(The salmon) canna set against the bliss they fin  
A lang held dream o ecstasy sae sweet  
That aa their blis is dule, their journey vain.  
The pouer to bigg a braw world in his brain  
Maks man the only craitur that can greit."

The simplicity of the allegory and the delicacy with which MacLellan handles it is an interesting departure from the earthy naturalism of his more usual style.

### TORWATTLETIE

First performed in 1946, Torwatletie, a three-act light comedy, struck a notable blow for the recognition of a native Scots drama when it was produced in Edinburgh during the 1947 Edinburgh Festival by Glasgow Unity Theatre, though not as part of the official programme. The production also, incidentally, inaugurated the Festival "Fringe".<sup>1</sup>

Set in the Laird of Torwatletie's house in Galloway in 1716, the play has as background the 1715 Jacobite rebellion and the smuggling rife on the South-West Coast. Torwatletie, an inactive sympathiser towards the former, is up to the ears in the latter, employing a long-

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1 Alexander Reid, Robert MacLellan, Scotland's Magazine, Jan. 1959, p. 50



forgotten secret passage which connects his bedroom with the dovecot to collect his contraband. This passage becomes a central feature when news is brought to him by Wanert Willie, a deposed Episcopalian curate, of a fleeing Highland Jacobite seeking concealment while some means of escaping the country is found. Torwatletie agrees that the escapee, Glenspittal, should stay with Willie in the dovecot and be fed via the secret passage until an escape can be organised by the shady Doctor Dan, the smuggler's principal contact ashore. Unfortunately Torwatletie's sister Mirren, having embraced the reformed Kirk with spinsterly passion, zealously watches his every action for signs of ungodly behaviour and one of her prying kirk friends overhears the plotters in a hilarious sequence of concealments during Act 1. As Doctor Dan prepares Glenspittal's escape, Mirren's friend reports her story to the government, which employs the devious method of forcing a Presbyterian chaplain on the household as a spy to ensure the fugitive's capture. Torwatletie finds himself in the unpleasant shadow of the Reverend Joshua MacDowell, whose presence, even if he fails to trap Glenspittal, promises a tortuous dose of unsought dogmatism:

"On the Saubbath we'll hae prayers efter breakfast, afore ye set off for the forenune service at Kirkronald. Syne we'll hae prayers efter denner, afore ye set off for the service in the efternune. Efter the fower hours I'll examine ye aa in the carritches, and efter supper we'll read a chapter or twa and sing a when psalms, and hae a guid lang warstle wi the Lord in prayer afore we gang to bed."

The interloper very quickly finds the entrance to the tunnel from the press in Torwatletie's bedroom, and when in the early hours of the morning of the escape the laird makes for the dovecot the minister, who has been hiding below the bed, quietly follows.

After various farcical complications, Glenspittal makes a successful escape, MacDowell being silenced by marriage to the zealous Mirren and a handsome dowry from Torwatletie's estate permitting him to

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establish himself in a new church: to betray the laird's secret would be to lose the source of this wealth to Government confiscation. The play ends as MacDowell adroitly gives theological sanction to the Episcopalian Willie's officiation at a hurried marriage service. Similar in style to Toom Byres, Torwatletie suffers from the same anti-climatic weakness in that the marriage-solution is known to all some time before the last Act finishes, though there is a greater display of skill in handling the convolutions of the plot. The stock-figures employed are less obvious, and permit a good measure of satirical caricature. It is, in Allan Leach's words, "an unpretentious but lively comedy".<sup>1</sup>

### THE FLOUERS O' EDINBURGH

In The Flouers o' Edinburgh (1947) MacLellan's adroit use of vigorous character and Scots language finds a new task. His earlier work was focussed wholly on character and historical reconstruction - Toom Byres, Torwatletie and the one-act plays being nothing more than light adventure-stories; Jamie the Saxt alone moving into deeper waters, and even then, only in terms of character. The Flouers o' Edinburgh, set in the self-conscious "Athens of the North" of the eighteenth century Scottish capital, deals directly with the central problem of Scottish nationality - the dichotomy of values and sympathies created by political union with England. Scottish language and customs are now the protagonists in the play's argument, and MacLellan's handling of this theme places him far in advance of the hollow idealisation of more romantically inclined writers: his view of Scotland is hard-headed and his arguments rooted in common-sense. The most obvious aspect of this realism is his refusal in the play to make England a scapegoat which absolves all Scotsmen from guilt in the decline of the nation.

The play is a contrast of the old, pre-eighteenth century Scotland, backward but independent, and the new Hanoverian "North-Britain" looking to London as the seat of power, and aping its manners. The redoubtable Lady Athelstane is the principal champion of the Old. Dispossessed of her estates at Craigengelt by her family's

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1 Allan Leach Robert MacLellan and his Work

involvement in the 'Forty-Five', she lives in a flat in an Edinburgh "laund" or tenement with her niece Kate Mair and servant Jock, entertaining a devoted circle of ageing male admirers, including Lord Stanebyres, whose estate borders Craigengelt, and who proposes marriage to her "fower times a year". His son Charles, recently returned from an educational Grand Tour of Europe, has been singled out by Lady Athelstane as a prospective suitor for young Kate, who has for long admired him, and the play commences as they prepare to receive his first visit.

Young Charles proves to be a bitter disappointment, for his experience of London society has taught him to despise the speech and manners of his home, which he regards as "provincial", "coarse" and even "savage". The superiority conferred upon him by his ability to enunciate a carefully formal Augustan English apparently permits him to dispense with normal politeness towards his fellow-countrymen: he returns to Edinburgh after a three years absence without informing his father: he openly disparages the "inadequacies" of speech in Scottish authors; he criticises severely the outmoded fashions and Scots language of the young women; and he plans to further his way in politics by assisting in the sale of Lady Athelstane's estate to "improvers". All in all, he is a thoroughly unpleasant, self-centred and high-handed young prig, whose concept of a Parliamentary career is the lining of his own pockets. By contrast, the English Army Officer, Simkin, though a part of the society so venerated by Charles, is well-mannered and full of praise for the attractive features of Scotland, though he finds the language incomprehensible and the conditions of life sometimes primitive. His pleasing remarks on the Edinburgh lassies win the heart of Kate, aggrieved and offended by Charles.

Others are less pained by Charles' attitude. Though Kate, Lady Athelstane and his father react violently to his championing of English speech and manner, Sandy Lindsay, Doctor Dowie - both poets - and the Advocate Baldernock, who by necessity must deal with London's values, welcome his suggestion that the Irish actor Sheridan, visiting Edinburgh, should be invited to lecture

on the eradication of "Scotticisms" before the Select Society of the University. Against this comic background is played Charles' bid for an opening in Hanoverian politics, and attempt to win election to parliament by bribery and nepotism, though he pretends to others - and indeed to himself - that it is possible to "advance one's own interests and those of the community at the same time". He has won the seemingly invincible support of the Duke of Argyll, and his faction; and readily accepts the conditions attached by his father when the necessary finance for the election is forwarded: that if he fails he is to return to a study of Law; and if he succeeds, there are to be no "improvements" or enclosures near his father's estate. Unlooked-for opposition appears in the person of a retired Nabob, a servant of the East India Company returned to his homeland with fabulous wealth to seek election as a representative of Indian princes. Before the Nabob's casual expertise in graft Charles fails miserably.

Lady Athelstane, meanwhile, has been saved from poverty when her exiled Jacobite brother-now a General in the army of Brunswick and consequently an ally of Britain against France - is pardoned for services in the field and restored to his family estate. His return proves something of a mixed blessing, however, for he is an impossible bully and boor. Lady Athelstane, her long-cherished dream of idyllic retirement as a sisterly companion thus rudely shattered, soon sends for Lord Stanebyres and at last takes him as a husband. Charles, nothing daunted by his failure as a politician and mollified by an estate won by genteel blackmail of the Nabob, returns to court Kate. He attempts to make his proposal conditional on her learning to speak English which she has in fact secretly done, though she rejects his terms; he wins her promise only after she has forced from him a formal declaration in Scots. This happy conclusion is somewhat marred by the young couple's inability to conclude their quarrel about Scots, and the play ends with little promise for the nation's future.

As always, MacLellan's Scots is accurate without seeming contrived or stilted – indeed, it is colourful and racy by comparison with the formal English of Charles or Simkin – and his historical sense is detailed yet lively, without a hint of preciousness or pedantic cataloguing. The various levels on which the main theme is considered are simple, direct and well-knit, with language and custom as its principal mirrors; and the author's approach free from obvious facile prejudice. He is not recommending a "return" to some misty heather-clad Scottish never-never land; he asks only that Scots should recognise the dangers and follies which await them in an attempt to become more English than the English themselves. There is a tacit understanding in the play that Charles, however unattractive his self-seeking brusqueness, is yet well-suited to the Hanoverian deviousness which has supplanted the old order. The collapse of his private schemes is a rebuff rather than the moral triumph of the play, and he proves himself well able to secure compensation from his victorious opponent, who despite attractive qualities also represents the new order. Lady Athelstane's brother is a further embodiment of the rising spirit of political and moral pragmatism. Once a Jacobite exile in a sympathetic France, he now fights on England's side against the French, having deserted to Brunswick out of personal pique. Now, he argues, "the French are oor naitural faes", and his attitude to the 'Forty-Five is that "They (the English) bate us and we took their tairms and settled doun and made the best o' it". The figure who for two Acts of the play is regarded as the noble ideal of romantic Jacobitism turns out instead to have "made the best o' it" in a style far less than edifying.

The problem of English manners and language is purely Scottish. It is Charles, a Scotsman with Anglophile aspirations, who insists on a "British" identity of which Scotland is but a part. Simkin, the English officer who first brings news of Lady Athelstane's brother, regards himself and the army he serves in as English; and hearing Charles refer to "the British Army" says started "Oh yes. Of course, you're Scotch. Quite. . . ." Simkin,

regarding Scotland as a country in most respects foreign, praises many of its national features: it is Charles the Scotsman who roundly condemns all that is native. It is not England which is under attack, but the false and snobbish Anglicism of the "modern" Scot, and it is for this reason that the author insists in a note to the play that Charles "must on no account be played by an English actor." In the hands or rather, mouths of Doctor Dowie and Sandy Lindsay, the mania for southern mannerisms becomes purely ridiculous, and MacLellan's point is obvious. It should not be forgotten, however, what prompts such farcical efforts. To succeed as authors beyond the narrow confines of Edinburgh society, Dowie and Lindsay must win the approval of London, and London will make no concessions to any variant on its own standards - even in the House of Lords, as Baldernock discovers the Scots tongue is churlishly derided. Though Simkin expresses admiration for song and poetry in Scots and history has proved him right, the literati of the time refused to recognise their value.

"Oor ain dialect, Captain, is aa richt for a bit sentimental song, but for the high purposes of literature, it is inadequate... there are subtleties of thought and feeling impossible to express in a crude dialect restricted in its use to the needs of a provincial people..."

Disastrous though this attitude, as expressed by Dowie, might have been, it was nevertheless the received opinion of the recognised authorities of the day.

The dramatic structure within which the argument is carried holds no surprises. Always naturalistic, the conventions of love story, threatened happiness, reasserted justice, and matrimonial conclusion are firmly obeyed, save for the deviation in the last scene which emphasises the reality of the problem represented by Charles. Though in less serious works MacLellan had already proved his competence in handling complex entrances and exits demanded by tangled plots, The Flouers o' Edinburgh has doubtful

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moments, especially in Act II, when coincidence must be strained to bring first Lord Stanebyres, then Lady Athelstane and company to the very inn where Charles is negotiating the bribery of burgh officials. Compared with the well-developed argument and comedy, the vitality of the historical setting and the convincing characterisation, such faults are not serious and The Flouers o' Edinburgh is an intelligent and entertaining work.

Curiously, the imperfect stagecraft prompted the play's rejection by the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre on the unlikely grounds that it was "a beautiful piece of literature but not theatre". The result was an estrangement between MacLellan and Scotland's principal professional theatre which for some time kept the leading dramatic exponent of the Scots tongue from the stage which seemed most suited to his purpose.

### MARY STEWART

The 1951 Festival of Britain production of the Glasgow Citizens Theatre was MacLellan's Mary Stewart, a companion piece to Jamie the Saxt. Where the earlier play is comic, Mary Stewart is tragic, grimly encapsulating the crucial events which marked the beginning of the Scottish Queen's downfall. The labyrinthine complexity of the period's politics are marshalled with impressive dexterity and confidence into a stark yet convincing pattern. Astutely avoiding the more obvious clichés of romantic legend, MacLellan concentrates attention on the power-struggle between Mary and her unruly nobles, commencing the play on the morning after the murder of David Riccio in 1566, and ending with the betrayal of the broken queen's confidence which consigns her to Lochleven Castle as a prisoner. Far less sure are the dramatic qualities of the play.

Five Acts trace the progress of the Queen to ruin, from her recovery of power after the murder by her nobles of her Italian Secretary, the appearance of Bothwell as her self-appointed and over-ambitious protector, the fateful night of Darnley's death in the Kirk o' Fields explosion with Bothwell inextricably

enfolded in a web of suspicion, his subsequent bid for power by abducting the Queen and forcing marriage upon her, to the ghastly conclusion in which she is a mere pawn of the inhuman politics of the Scottish nobility while the Edinburgh mob howls for her execution.

As living creations, Mary, Bothwell, Maitland and the rest are never without conviction, though they lack a certain depth and complexity, their personalities defined by their political function. Mary, who is never far from exhaustion, is explained in terms of a fixation for the English Succession, with a consequent passion for a stable realm and a selflessness and responsibility wholly lacking in her less far-seeing nobles. The need for stability in the chaos of self-interest around the Scottish crown makes a bulwark of Bothwell's loyalty, and her spirit is finally broken by Maitland's heartless revelation of Bothwell's adultery after their forced marriage. Bothwell himself is just as Maitland depicts him in **Act II**: at the mercy of inflamed ambition, ultimately untouched by Mary's tragic dignity when she appeals to a delicate honour he utterly lacks. At the end of the compelling but delicate scene at Dunbar, in which the Queen finally consents to marriage, Bothwell at the first opportunity crows with delight in his supposed hour of triumph.

The political force in the play is personified in Maitland, quietly and dexterously gathering power and weaving intricate webs of deceit. An opportunist, his turn against the Queen is prompted by the dictates of the situation rather than by personal malice; yet like Lindsay and Morton, men of far less ability or refinement, he is driven by a petty spite against Bothwell over a disputed Abbey at Haddington. For this reason he singles out Bothwell as a scape-goat for the rebel lords, and Mary shares Bothwell's fate by clinging to an abstract morality irrelevant to the secretary's schemes. Moray, for whose restoration to power Maitland so assiduously works, is a mere shadow in the play, a device in the first two Acts for providing background information, absent from the last three acts. Darnley, who also vanishes with the end of Act II, makes a much stronger impression with his unstable emotions and complete



lack of judgement. His gunpowder plot at Kirk o' Fields – for MacLellan depicts him as the victim of his own attempt to kill Mary and her Protestant Lords – is accepted without hesitation as true to his character. The narrow range of emotions resulting from the preoccupation with politics, while satisfying the needs of intrigue and conflict, fails ultimately to allow for an adequate sense of humanity in the characters, particularly in the Queen.

As always, MacLellan's command of Lallans is superb, never faltering in its dramatic terseness, and history plays into his hands by permitting Darnley's to be the only English voice in the play, setting him apart from his fellow-conspirators and emphasising his lack of a secure foundation amid them. However, in Mary Stewart there is no evidence of the range and theatrical exploitation of the language featured in Jamie the Saxt, when characterisation found a correspondence in speech. There are no surprises, and no variations from an unadorned court style.

Structurally, the play is very simple, five set-pieces with a cyclical movement implied by the last Act's return to the Queen once more in rebel hands. While effectively underlining the changes wrought upon the unfortunate woman in the course of events, and the process by which she is divested of her crown with almost mechanical precision, this pattern demands a very careful selection of incidents indeed. MacLellan accurately grasps five vital movements in Mary's downfall, but fails to imbue them with dramatic rather than historical conviction.

Striking dramatic moments are few: the first and last Acts display a measure of irony with the Queen a neglected prisoner of her brutal aristocracy, and the mob's incomprehension of her true situation; there is, in Act 2 an effectively economic symbol in the Queen's vacant chair, occupied first by a drily humorous Moray while Maitland proposes the ensnarement of Bothwell, later by Bothwell himself who is angry and embarrassed at being discovered there; and the whole of the third Act counterpoints the quiet gentility of the Queen's relaxation with the mounting tension of intrigue which culminates in the vast explosion of Kirk o' Fields. The play as a

whole is marked rather by the absence of theatrical sense and the author's apparent inability to vary tone or mood.

There is altogether too much talk in Mary Stewart, too much emphasis on clarifying the threads of intrigue, on explaining political motives. What little physical action exists tends to be superfluous like the searching of the Queen's chamber for assassins in Act III, or the interrupted fight between Maitland and Huntly in Act IV. Most of the play consists of arguments, plots and explanations which soon become tedious and which in Acts III and V descend for lengthy periods to quite trivial details, like the extraction of evidence from Bothwell's servants or the cross-examination of the King's men at Holyrood. Only once does the insistent delving into factual confusion truly have value: in the account of the conflicting plots afoot at Kirk o' Fields MacLellan provides the motive for Mary's continued trust in the suspected Bothwell, and the opportunity by which Maitland encompasses Darnley's death, and springing directly from it, the destruction of Bothwell and Mary. Worst of all is the anti-climactic ending, with the Queen, who has been off-stage during most of the last Act, taking her final exit sometime before the curtain falls. The cheers of the crowd may convey her ironically belated popularity, and Maitland's servants certainly increase that irony by revealing Mary's future hopelessness, but of her own reactions – and she is, after all, the principal focus of attention – there can be no knowledge.

No glimmer of humour relieves the tension in Mary Stewart, and the narrow range of characters admits no momentary diversion from Mary's fate: unlike Jamie the Saxe the world of burgess and baillie has no connection with the intensity of the power-struggle round the monarch. MacLellan succeeds in portraying Maitland and his fellows as agents of an irresistible historical force in the face of which human suffering is meaningless, and in making that force recognisable and tangible in the theatre. Unfortunately, he fails to discover an emotional response to it, for Mary remains a curiously wooden personality. The result is tedious drama.

## THE ROAD TO THE ISLES

Mary Stewart was followed in 1954 by The Road To The Isles a departure from MacLellan's historical preoccupations which sought to come to grips with the problems of contemporary rural Scotland. While seriousness of purpose and depth of argument distinguish this play from most theatrical excursions into the West Highlands – for example, John Brandane's The Glen Is Mine the theme of which is in many ways similar – it is like Mary Stewart, sadly lacking in dramatic impact.

The Road to the Isles concerns an attempt by a group of Scottish Nationalist idealists to re-establish a farming community in a remote glen deserted since the Clearances. Their efforts are related through their contacts with a local farm and boarding house, where live the Howies, whose son is a prominent zoologist currently experimenting with bees and their effect on agriculture. The arguments which occur between the settlers, Howie senior and Dr. Howie give MacLellan an opportunity to deal with the Highland problem at considerable length, relieved at intervals by the antics of Hawthorn, an English actor on vacation who eventually marries the widow of the local laird, and a rather woodenly-purused love affair between Sandy Colquhoun, the most able of the settlers, and Mary, Dr. Howie's assistant. The reclamation project gradually distintegrates through the personal weaknesses of its members and the sheer magnitude of the task they have taken on, but although the isolated glen is eventually abandoned MacLellan suggests a less idealistic, more practicable possible future when some of the settlers remain in the area to work a less remote farm.

MacLellan's view of the idealists is for the most part satirical, although their central belief in the necessity of revitalising Scotland's depressed rural areas is treated with respect. Some well-observed types are paraded on the stage: MacLaren the propagandist of the pioneers' organisation, "dreamy-eyed", persuasive, but careful to exclude himself from participating in the experiment; Wilkie the journalist opposed to all unnatural aids to farming, who in the end deserts the project to stand for Parliament as a Rural Fundamentalist

in a Glasgow constituency; MacLeod, an actor rejected by the "Glasgow Civic Theatre"<sup>1</sup> for his lack of an English accent; and Fyvie, an alcoholic poet and broadcaster recruited to the cause by a dotting female admirer. Through these personalities are exposed the forces which disrupt the implementation of nationalist dreams and draw discredit on them – the over-indulgence in quarrels about racial purity and fragmentary opposition of Lallans and Gaelic as the "true" language of Scotland. Lest anyone imagine that MacLellan is a true-blue Unionist, however, he hammers home the justice of the idealists' central claims by presenting their ludicrous antithesis in Hawthorne, the English actor imported by the same company which spurned MacLeod. At first Hawthorne tries to learn Lallans in an attempt to mollify the criticisms of "a noisy gang of Scottish Nationalists" who desire more Scottish plays in the Scottish theatre, but having become the local laird by marriage, he throws himself wholeheartedly into this romantic role, sporting the approved Highland dress of the Scottish landowning class and changing his name to the impressively antique form Othran-MacEachran. This combination of kilt and English upbringing wins him first the directorship of the Glasgow Theatre, then of the Edinburgh Festival. The other characters form a yardstick of practicality against which the various excesses of the pioneers and the Othran-MacEachrans can be measured but are unexciting and obvious creations.

As argument, The Road to the Isles is erudite, objective and provocative. As theatre it is dull. The confident deployment of characters like Dr. Howie, Wilkie and MacLeod in lengthy arguments about land-development for a future Scotland attest to the author's firm and detailed grasp of agriculture, but not to his awareness of an audience. Dr. Howie's bee-keeping offers but meagre comedy in return for the awkward and distracting explanations it necessitates, and the play rambles to a soporific close with Howie senior dilating upon the nature of Scottishness to a drowsing Mary. Yet again is seen the author's old fault of prolonging his last act long after all

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1 A veiled reference to the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre whose hesitancy to present Scots-language plays, and rejection of The Flowers o Edinburgh had incurred MacLellan's wrath.

tension has evaporated from the play. Characterisation is less sure than in earlier works, and the convention of the love story which has been tacked on to the body of The Road to the Isles forces the weakest figures, Mary and Sandy, into undue prominence.

The major satiric balance apparent in the play, the rising fortune of Hawthorn/Othran-MacEachran and the decline of the resettlement project, make a bitter comment on the distorted values of the Scottish nation, but is so obscured by debates and sub-plots that it frequently appears to be an intrusion poorly linked to the major theme. This is a pity indeed, for the Othran-MacEachran's are living symbols of the ills which take so long to elucidate in economic, sociological and agricultural terms. The result is an unsatisfying and wasteful design, with poorly-integrated characters and an excessive dependence on verbose debate.

### YOUNG AUCHINLECK

James Boswell, the biographer of Samuel Johnson, provides the subject for Young Auchinleck (1962) tracing his life through the two years prior to his marriage to his cousin Peggy. As historical reconstruction, the play demonstrates the author's customary accuracy - "readers of 'Boswell in Search of a Wife' will recognise the rich and fascinating material . . . the most devoted Boswellian will acknowledge (MacLellan's) skill and sympathy";<sup>1</sup> although he ignores the subsequent collapse of the marriage. Recognising the dramatic limitations of Boswell's career as a biographer, MacLellan allows only the briefest reference to The Life of Samuel Johnson; but in it he encapsulates the intention of the play. Explaining to Peggy why he intends to include in his account of Johnson's genius the great man's capability for downright foolishness, Boswell announces :

"I will show the whole man, and his better qualities shall shine all the brighter by contrast with his absurdities. A partial portrait, conceived in flattery,

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<sup>1</sup> Glasgow Herald, August 21 1962

cannot be a likeness, for it is a mere record of virtues, divorced from the man behind them. And while we may respect virtues, we love only people..."

And so Boswell is seen in lust and love, arrogant and considerate, brought low by venereal disease and elated by childish naivety. In his progress towards the taking of a wife, the mainspring of the action is his embittered relationship with his father, which drives him to wild excesses of rebellion and brings him to the verge of madness. It is an interesting recurrence of a common theme in Scottish literature, and can hardly fail to recall the father-son conflict in Weir of Hermiston, especially when Lord Auchinleck resorts to deliberate coarseness in a brutal assault on his son's more refined sensibilities. This conflict should provide a depth of motive to Boswell's otherwise erratic behaviour; but the connection is not realised in dramatic terms.

The opening scene discovers Boswell with his mistress Mrs. Dodds, towards whom his manner fluctuates unpredictably between high passion and almost callous indifference. This understandably provokes her exasperated anger, and he confesses the truth: that he has, through drunken exploits, contracted venereal disease, and rather than shame her by his inconstancy has been trying to provoke a breach between them. His earnestness brings about a reconciliation, in which the injudicious extravagance of Boswell suddenly manifests itself when he begins to kiss his mistress's feet. Delighted by the first kiss, Mrs. Dodds, like the audience, finds its repetition somewhat embarrassing in its excess, and "her nose wrinkles ever so slightly."<sup>1</sup>

Having thus indicated some measure of Boswell's character, the author now launches forth on the story proper, the pursuit of matrimony. Driven by his father to consider the pretty Kate Blair, his initial ardour is cooled by her pecuniary ambitions—she regards him merely as a stepping stone to the Auchinleck estates. He soon proposes instead to a less indifferent heart, that of his cousin and close friend, Peggy Montgomerie, who – though clearly affected – refuses to take him seriously. Instead she draws his attention to the more youthful attractions of Mary Anne Body; and despite his

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1 Young Auchinleck

father's violent opposition Boswell travels to Dublin to ask her parents' permission to wed. Once there he discovers that Peggy means more to him than the young Irish beauty, and he clumsily extricates himself from his engagement – so clumsily indeed, that the outraged Peggy drives him from her :

Boswell :                Now you know I am serious.

Peggy :                 You serious. Ye're juist irresponsible. Naebody kens whaur they are wi ye. Whan they ettle ye to dae ae thing, ye dae anither juist to draw attention to yourself. Ye're like a spey't bairn. Aabody's to be conscious o ye, or ye stert pouin the hoose doun. Ye dinna ken what herm ye dae, as lang as ye're no ignored. Ye upset folk everywhaur ye gang, and disgrace aa connectit wi ye. Nae woner yer faither canna thole ye. I canna aither.

Stunned and resentful, Boswell returns home to discover that his father is remarrying an ageing relative, Betty Boswell, apparently from the sole motive that a new heir will threaten Boswell's inheritance – though the audience knows of true affection between the Lord Auchinleck and his new consort. Boswell's intention to marry a now mollified Peggy provokes a violent argument with his father which drives Boswell to a murderous distraction. The very climax of his hatred brings with it a sudden understanding of its destructively obsessive nature, and he resolves to repudiate his father and if necessary his inheritance.

The last scene shows Boswell on his wedding-day, once more with the lighter, even sillier, aspects of his nature in the ascendant. Attempting to repeat the gesture made to Mrs. Dodds in the first scene, he tries to kiss Peggy's feet, only to be greeted by her insistent common-sense :

"Jamie, I dinna want my shune lickit. I want a man. Someone I can look up to and respect. Staun up straucht. Haud up yer heid." (She puts her arms round his neck and kisses him)

No longer haunted by hatred for his father, he has no need of such romantic extravagances. However, she can only laugh delightedly at his "wee absurdities" when he displays their wedding garments – a beautiful white dress for Peggy, and an equally pure white suit for himself – which startling mode for men, he assures Peggy earnestly, is "not unknown at royal weddings on the Continent".

The structure of Young Auchinleck counterpoints light and darkness, fluctuating between the grim acrimonious interviews between Lord Auchinleck and Boswell, and the bubbling comedy in the vignettes of eighteenth century middle-class life in which the young lawyer pursues his successive love-affairs. Unfortunately, the episodic nature of the play – so marked when contrasted with the rest of MacLellan's work – fails to penetrate beyond the flamboyant surface of the characters. After the opening scene with Mrs. Dodds little more is learned of Boswell's personality other than that he quarrels with his father.

"He is the one person in the world I should like to think well of me, and he treats me like an idiot. Where men like Dr. Johnson, men of acknowledged genius in literature, find a word of praise for me, he has nothing but censure. . . ."

Lord Auchinleck has no time, however, for a son whom he sees squandering his talents as a lawyer on artistic 'nonsense' and literary self-indulgence.

Driven close to insanity by his father's monstrous contempt, Boswell comes to understand his obsession :

"I used to see him (Lord Auchinleck) as God. Or rather I saw God in his image. It was the effect of St. Giles, where God was the God of the Catechisms. A jealous God. A stern, reproving Father. He took me there every Sunday – Week after week, I was told by a sinister black creature with a terrifying voice that if I was not God's elect I would be damned. I would endure the tortures of the damned throughout eternity. I knew I could never be one of the elect. My father made it clear every day. Whatever I did, I was damned. . . ."

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If I cannot renounce my father I cannot be myself, and I have never been able to be what he wants me to be. It is not in my nature. When I act from his motives, and not my own, I feel the falsity of my situation so strongly that I despise myself and in my loss of self-respect I commit the grossest follies of self-abasement. And I burn always with hatred of the cause, my servile dependence on my father...."

The importance of that quarrel is asserted in lengthy monologues supposedly prompted by a distracted mind: whether the distraction convinces is less important than the failure to depict Boswell's obsession dramatically. Boswell explains that his life has been haunted by hatred and guilt, yet they are not apparent in most of the play's scenes – indeed, they are noticeably absent in his frolics with Kate, Mary Anne and Peggy. His greatest extremes of filial resentment in the play are to head a riotous mob celebrating the defeat of corruption in the courts, and to publicly mock the avarice of the flirtatious Kate Blair. In neither instance is the incident depicted, or its relevance to his father's feelings isolated.

Thus robbed of the weight of Boswell's psychological burden, MacLellan's attempt to portray "the whole man" never escapes from the superficiality of mannerisms and foibles. These are doubtless entertaining: Boswell's naivety about his impact on others is for the most part laughable, though occasionally cruel in its egotism; and his utter blindness towards his numerous follies has an undeniably attractive aspect. Similarly, Lord Auchinleck, the villain of the piece, is made human by his brief revelation of affection for Betty Boswell – and cousin Peggy is a pleasing portrait of maturity, humour and directness; but they lack the depth of characterisation so notable in MacLellan's earlier work.

The emphasis of Young Auchinleck becomes plot rather than theme, with the progress towards marriage the unsurprising source of irony in the play. The large number of short scenes in which the plot develops results in broad effects ill-suited to the author's precise and witty talents, and the humour is disappointingly weak. There is an undeniable feeling that Boswell's autobiography is merely being read aloud rather than being embodied on the stage.

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## THE HYPOCRITE

Angered by an incident during an Edinburgh Festival when a production was threatened by the professed outrage of self-appointed moral dictators, MacLellan turned his skill in period setting to satirical ends with The Hypocrite (1967), attacking the destructive bigotry which has distorted art in Scotland since the Reformation.

Set in the eighteenth-century Edinburgh of Young Auchinleck The Flowers o Edinburgh, it traces the triumph of a particular bigot, Samuel Skinner, minister of the Tolbooth Kirk, in his vindictive campaign against art in general and the works of a visiting Italian engraver in particular. His criticism of the engravings, which include copies of originals by Titian, Raphael and Tintoretto are partly because of religion – the artists and the engraver, Barocci, are Roman Catholics – ; and more significantly, because of their portrayal of the naked body, the sexual details of which exercise a remarkable and unhealthy fascination for Skinner. This prurient fixation betrays his hypocrisy, for Skinner in fact is an unrestrained lecher, "widely believed to be assiduous in his duties towards the lonely of his parish, particularly the unattached ladies. He is known as the Widow's Friend". Interrupted in a calculated assault on the affections of the attractive Mrs. Lucy Lindsay by the arrival of young Simon Adair, the master of Allander, and his friend Barocci, Skinner spitefully seizes the opportunity to boost his reputation as a strict puritan minister by condemning a proposed exhibition of Barocci's engravings and promising to raise the militant bigotry of the Kirk to support him. Lucy comforts the worried Simon with the suggestion that she may be able to distract Skinner's attention by encouraging his designs in her direction, but in vain. Skinner, having forced the exhibition in Edinburgh to close, forestalls Simon's plan to take it to Perth by rousing the unco' guid to the defence of "decency" before the engravings even reach the town. Saved from a threatening crowd outside Perth by the timely arrival of his father's baillie with his men, Simon takes Barocci on to Dundee by ship, but there they cannot even land owing to the

ferocity of the mob, who by now demand the burning of the pictures and the death of the artist. Shocked and afraid for his safety, Barocci abandons Scotland to its ignorance and returns to Italy. The last hope of Simon is that Skinner will be disgraced and take the wind out of the militants' sails; and when the minister is seen stealing from the bedroom of his son's mother-in-law and is named in a divorce suit by her crippled husband, it seems that if Barocci cannot receive a fair hearing, then at least he can be revenged. Skinner dexterously persuades one of his elders who is also an undertaker into arranging a disappearance before the trial can take place; but at the last moment the crippled husband dies and the divorce proceedings are halted before they reach open court. Skinner victoriously buys the elder's silence with judicious use of blackmail.

The play which began with a towncrier announcing the arrival of Signor Barocci's exhibition comes to an ironic close with his advertisement of Signor Emilio Bellini and his son Guido, tight-rope artistes who –

"will on Friday neist at three in the efternune,  
afore ony that care to assemble, walk a raip streitchit  
atween the hauf mune buttery in the Castle, and a lum  
heid in Brodie's Loan on the sooth side o the  
Grassmercat, firin a pistol, baitin a drum, and  
performin a variety o ither antics on the way."

"We are left to reflect that they are welcome where the works of Raphael and Michelangelo were not, in the 'Athens of the North'".

Despite the author's accustomed mastery over the period setting and the vastly enjoyable portrayal of Skinner, The Hypocrite is less satisfying than earlier plays. Allan Leach correctly identifies a "new feeling", by which the central character "is a man with no evident saving graces, a man clean contrary to . . . . MacLellan's habit of presenting us with both the good and the bad in his men and women". It is written in a "mood of anger". Leach then goes on, however, to speak of "disparate elements . . . . developed into a complex whole with real mastery"; and this is precisely what the author has failed to do. Where there is considerable enjoyment to be derived from Skinner's antithetical pronouncements of puritan rigidity and his salacious lingering on the most intricate detail of

the painted nude figure – indeed from the obviously well-practised skill of his lecherous advances – the "lack of evident saving graces" places him finally in a situation so twisted by hypocrisy as to destroy the credibility of the character. The subtle play with the undertaker in the last Act, in which Skinner employs a full confession of his adultery as the trump card which persuades his dubious ally to accede to his demands, is as fine a comment as could be wished for on the nature of "religious respectability". The suggestion which follows, that the undertaker is himself guilty of a like crime to his minister's, is an unnecessary extreme which upsets the delicate balance between satire and clumsy partisanship.

Furthermore, Skinner's otherwise convincing depiction – especially in the skill of his debate with Lucy Lindsay in Act 1 – is in marked contrast to most of the other characters: Simon Adair in particular is so lacking in depth as to be transparent; and where Lucy and her uncle, Lord Kilmardinny, very satisfactorily represent the upper end of MacLellan's social scale in the play, they begin an apparent subplot which is never developed, involving Lucy's own divorce proceedings against her estranged husband. The impression in Jamie the Saxe and other plays is of characters the depth of whose portrayal perfectly matches their dramatic function: The Hypocrite has too many characters whose purpose is remarkably slight considering the fullness of their treatment. It is noticeable that these are without exception on the "artistic" side of the conflict, with a resulting impression that MacLellan's argument depends too heavily on a denigration of puritanical narrowness and lacks an acceptable "justification" of Art. Defending the employment of nude models in Art Colleges, Lucy Lindsay is challenged by Skinner whether she would be willing to appear naked herself, to which she can only reply hesitantly, "It can't be wrong to pose in the genuine interest of art". Though Skinner's question is unfair, it points to a weakness in his opponents perhaps too well-observed to have a place within the rather more straightforward scheme of The Hypocrite. MacLellan convinces his audience that ill-natured bigotry can all too easily triumph: the importance of what has been defeated is left considerably more vague.

"Vigorous" and "lively" are the words which seem most suited to describe MacLellan's better plays, but it is noticeable that these are all, but for The Flowers o Edinburgh, fairly light entertainments rather than drama seeking a higher purpose. Jamie the Saxt, for all its skill, does not purport to be more than a comic exploitation of a fascinating theatrical portrait. Credit must be given to the author for pursuing further-reaching aims in his later plays when he could so easily have continued to write commercially appealing historical comedies in this vein, but his failure to develop an adequate dramatic style for his serious work is obvious. His ability to create absorbing individual characters is evident in most of the later plays - Skinner in The Hypocrite is an excellent example - but the gulf between their appeal and the attraction of the author's openly didactic arguments is only the more striking. In The Road to the Isles, The Hypocrite, and Young Auchinleck, this didacticism forces one-dimensional stock-characters into an unacceptable prominence, and the plays become fragmented through sub-plots of greater theatrical vitality than the main theme. The "seriousness of intention that gives dignity to all his works"<sup>1</sup> escapes any sense of pretension in the intricate knowledge which so obviously underpins MacLellan's writing; yet the maturity and depth of his convictions are, in the later plays, frequently obscured by the weight of factual evidence with which he overloads his audiences.

It is as a champion of the Scots tongue in the theatre, who never once gives the impression of strain, falsification, or even special pleading in its use, that MacLellan has his most obvious virtue.

His use of Scots is confident, varied, strikingly theatrical and always wholly natural in the mouths of his characters. Alan Leach comments on the flexibility MacLellan finds in Scots, of the wide range encompassed unhampered by nations of a dominant "received pronunciation" - "There is room here for as many shades of accent and modes of speech as is available to, say a writer in Standard English who also uses regional dialect."<sup>2</sup> In Jamie the Saxt

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1 Alexander Reid, p. 50 Robert MacLellan

2 Allan Leach p. 4. Robert MacLellan and his Work

he accepts the challenge of the Danish-born Queen's heavily accented Scots unhesitatingly and faultlessly, and successfully accommodates the full range of Scottish society from servant-lad to scholar-king without a single moment of doubt. In The Flowers of Edinburgh the Scots tongue takes on major thematic importance as the symbol of a healthy Scottish nation, and it could not be more satisfactory. Young Auchinleck, and The Hypocrite contain strong but less central echoes of this, and it is used briefly but to good effect in The Road to the Isles.

"The possibility that simplified versions of his plays and stories might have a wider market has never tempted him into the use of 'Stage-Scots' and he has knowingly payed the price for this. He describes his language as 'parish of Lesmahagow - more or less', and it is based securely on that spoken around him in Lanark-shire when he was a boy".

1

The spontaneous quality of his language - he cannot be charged with using "synthetic Scots" - marks him as the first author to make a truly solid achievement in the realm of a totally distinct Scottish Drama.

The ends to which he deployed his skills and the style in which he almost invariably worked are of some importance in the context of Scots language as a medium of expression. MacLellan seldom attempted to leave the naturalistic convention in which he worked so well, and with few exceptions his attention is focussed exclusively on the past, and on individual personalities. Even The Hypocrite, which of his historical plays is the only one with a direct comment on the present, finds most of its success in the fascinating hypocrisy of Skinner, rather than parallels with contemporary philistinism. Undoubtedly MacLellan brings the past to life with a rigorous frankness long required to dispel the saccharine mythology which all too often clouds Scotland's notion of its heritage; but the possibility of finding there a focus for contemporary problems, he has largely ignored. Christopher Small's observation that MacLellan

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1 Allan Leach p. 4. Robert MacLellan and his Work

is imprisoned in historical portrayals "because the true purity of the Scots tongue is only to be found in the past"<sup>1</sup> may be open to question: but his assessment of the author's final estimation is not.

"I am sure they will remain in the permanent body of whatever 'Scottish Drama' turns out to be. But the fact remains that they occupy a rather small space of whatever is meant by the consciousness of ourselves which drama speaks about and enlarges - what we look for from literature or the stage, if we look for anything real at all."

2

At his best, Robert MacLellan is a capable entertainer who engages the intellect as well as the senses. On the other hand, his imagination seldom escapes the limitations of the immediate world, and the promise of Jamie the Saxt and The Flouers o' Edinburgh has not been fulfilled in subsequent plays.

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1 Christopher Small Scottish Writing Today : Drama, A. S. L. S. Occasional papers 1. Sept. '72. p.27

2 Christopher Small Scottish Writing Today : p.27

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SCOTTISH THEATRES PRIOR TO THE CITIZENS'

For many years Scotland was served by a succession of professional touring companies, bringing a taste of the West End north of the Tweed, though contributing little to the development of native talent. In the twenties, the MacDonna Players performed in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen – a standard touring circuit – with a repertoire of Shaw's plays; and it was they who gave the first public performance of Mrs. Warren's Profession after the censor's ban was lifted, in Glasgow. Their example was followed for a short time by the Oxford Players in 1926 and 1927, and then in 1928 by the more tenacious Masque Theatre Company. From tentative beginnings in a two month season at the Theatre Royal Glasgow, the Masque Theatre was, by 1931, playing almost all the year, mainly in Glasgow and Edinburgh, with more than six months at the Edinburgh Lyceum. Their success in Edinburgh was so great that at the close of the 1932 summer season plans had been laid to build their own theatre in the capital as a permanent home, though Glasgow's response to their efforts was extremely disappointing.

The Brandon-Thomas Company succeeded them in the role of professional touring theatre, and continued to perform a diet of tried and tested successes in Scotland's major cities until 1937. A nucleus of this group survived to form the Wilson Barrett Company, which followed the policy of its predecessor until 1955, in Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow, when the impact of television on the public crippled theatre audience figures. They were not above inserting the occasional new Scottish work into their otherwise "safe" repertoire – Alexander Reid, George Scott-Moncrieff and Guy McCrone had new plays produced by Wilson Barrett, but the effect was negligible compared to the efforts of native-born concerns.

The ability of the touring companies to survive and frequently to flourish must in itself have had some influence on the establishment of permanent repertory companies in Scotland. The high professional standards they maintained were certainly of vital importance: without them the indulgent attitude which welcomed the early stirrings of a Scottish dramatic movement might have been disastrously prolonged and the infantile kitchen-comedy might have grown to

dominance. If they did little to foster new Scottish talent, at least they carried a solid body of respectable drama to a nation for too long starved of a serious theatrical tradition. The Perth Repertory Theatre was opened in 1935 by Marjorie Dence and David Steuart, and was for a time the only native theatre in Scotland. Drawing its inspiration from the West-End, this theatre did little to create a distinctive Scottish drama, but conducted invaluable summer tours on an impressively large scale bringing a taste of the stage to the most far-flung areas. Throughout the war it was run on a communal basis in order to stay open, later finding a reward when the Arts Council assisted Perth Repertory to form a second company in Kirkcaldy. A few Scottish dramatists had their work premiered at Perth including R. J. B. Sellars' Brief Glory, and Moray MacLaren's One Traveller Returns. A similar venture was established in Dundee in 1939 by a group of local businessmen who soon passed it on to A. R. Whatmore, an actor and playwright. As with Perth, the West-End provided most of the company's material, although it was at Dundee that one of Scotland's best-known dramatists, Robert Kemp, received his first professional production.

With the decline of the Scottish National Players in the thirties, the initiative in encouraging the growth of Scottish drama passed to another amateur organisation, the Curtain Theatre, of Glasgow. Founded in 1932, it first of all attacked the problem which the SNP had never solved, the need for a permanent home. The aims of the Curtain Theatre are an indication of how much had been learned from the SNP's troubles: the physical factor of a stage of its own is constantly to the fore -

" a stage where the practising playwright might see his work being rehearsed and performed, where the actor by constant contact would become familiarised with the stage, and where the various craftsmen would have the opportunity to work under proper stage conditions. . . ."

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<sup>1</sup> Glasgow Herald, 17 Jan. 1936 The Curtain Theatre

"The founders, believing that little could be achieved towards bringing a Scottish drama into being until a stage was available all the year round, began by setting up what might be called a bijou theatre".<sup>1</sup> By 1936 a score of new plays by local playwrights had been produced in a tiny, 70 seat theatre in a converted terrace-house. Most of these were undistinguished, and the authors soon forgotten; but Robbins Millar and Robert MacLellan found in the Curtain Theatre an encouraging outlet for their work and went on to success on the professional stage; Duncan Macrae, who later became one of Scotland's most prominent actors, also found his feet there.

In 1941 the Curtain was succeeded by the Park Theatre, a privately owned Little Theatre founded by local businessman John Stewart in what had been the Curtain's premises; his devotion to the drama was great enough for him to commence his venture in the gloomy uncertainty of a World War. "A non-commercial theatre, devoted to the cultural and artistic values of the stage and to give good entertainment",<sup>2</sup> the Park was a remarkable success. With the Curtain Theatre initially providing the acting company, John Stewart brought to Glasgow a variety of plays of startling sophistication and boundless range, mingling Gide and Oscar Wilde with a few untested local works. It was at the Park that The Playboy of the Western World received its first performance in Scotland.<sup>3</sup> In 1944 he proposed to build a new 1000-seat theatre in the city when the war ended, with "cultural and artistic values" in the forefront of his mind - 1000 seats was at that time about half the standard number for a theatre-building, and it was hoped that "a more intimate atmosphere could be secured for specialised productions". This dream was voiced again in 1945, but had to be revised in the stringent conditions of post-war austerity: the existing property was instead extended to 500 seats, and continued to present a stimulating international

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1 Glasgow Herald, 17 Jan. 1936 The Curtain Theatre

2 Scottish Drama Year Book 1948, Albyn Press, Edinburgh pp. 43-44

3 Bannister, unpublished notes.(copyright)

selection to Glasgow audiences until 1948 when the Park closed after its proposed expansion was vetoed by planning authorities. As Winifred Bannister observes, it is doubtful if the theatre could have survived in a larger building: Glasgow already had a resident theatre by that time, the Citizens', and it is doubtful if the city could have supported another; furthermore, when the Park had decided to turn fully professional, the interest of some amateurs was lost and even as a little theatre, audiences were in decline by 1948. Edward MacRoberts, Robert Gaston, Grace McChlery and Brown Darby worked at the Park and Andrew Leigh of the Old Vic came as a guest producer on occasion. The venture was transformed in 1951 into the Pitlochry Festival Theatre, which continues to cater for a less adventurous taste in drama with impeccably professional productions during a long summer season each year.

#### JAMES SHAW GRANT

One Scot whose plays were produced at The Park Theatre was the Highland writer, James Shaw Grant. The plays of James Shaw Grant are, without exception, concerned with the social, economic and cultural problems of the depopulated Highlands. As the editor of the Stornoway Gazette, Grant's knowledge of the conditions of life in the region checked the more obvious romantic falsehoods about Gaeldom from distorting his work, the better examples of which are gifted with vivid impressions of crofting communities. Determined from the outset to produce serious drama about the Highlands, Grant deals not with the wise old crofters and penurious aristocrats of Brandane but with central issues: the collapse of traditional industries, chronic unemployment, the ambiguous value of puritanical religious and social beliefs, the dubious benefits of new industries and modernisation schemes.

In Tarravore (1944) he finds an optimistic conclusion to the problem which besets a not untypical Hebridean Island, the overfishing by foreign trawlers of local waters which once supported a whole community - in this case, the most prominent offender as far as the islanders are concerned is Englishman Joe Birtles. Disillusioned

and disgusted by the lack of opportunity on Tarravore, Alasdair, a young crofter, turns his back on the island when war breaks out in 1939, seeing in the Royal Navy a chance to use and develop his abilities. Intending not to return to the futureless island, he deliberately cuts out of his life his heart-broken sweetheart, Cathie. The war ends, and he does come back, matured and capable, determined to live according to the Chinese maxim "it is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness". It is hardly a surprise when his marriage to Cathie brings the play to a close, and even Joe Birtles, recently saved from a watery grave by the victims of his trawling, is invited to the wedding. With a stout heart and hard work, it seems, the island community can yet save itself from decline. The play depends rather more on local atmosphere and character than on plot or action, and although indeed there is close observation of Hebridean customs and personalities, the effect is rather more of documentary than drama. The curiously unnerving sound of a gaelic psalm sung spontaneously by the islanders as their young men sail off to the war is extremely moving: the painstaking development of a straightforward plot, the conventionalised behaviour of the main characters, and the frequent splashes of maudlin sentiment are considerably less gripping.

Sentimentality completely overpowers the more serious aspects of Grant's next play, The Magic Rowan (1946) a moralistic comedy in which Pyrus, the spirit of the rowan-tree, romps into the lives of Alex and Maggie-Ann, a pair of newly-weds on the island of Carravultan. Maggie-Ann has persuaded Alex to dig a garden for her, a thing undreamt of in the puritanical, unimaginative community, and an action which releases Pyrus to restore joy and colour to the island. His magical influence transforms the gossipping, nagging cailleachs who plague Maggie-Ann in Act 1 to gaily singing and dancing rebels against black-clad conformity, as they regain the spirit of their long-forgotten youth. Similarly, he exchanges the trousers of the unco' guid church-elder Neil for a magic kilt which sends him on a mad clandestine career as a superhuman dancer at ceilidhs all over Carravultan. Inevitably the magic

influence is met in battle by the representatives of the forces which are stifling life in the Highlands, the puritanical Calvinist minister MacDougall, and the dogmatic rationalist schoolteacher MacVinish, who set aside their long-standing rivalry to meet the common foe. Bursting in upon a supernaturally-assisted 'Waulking' – a communal finishing of a length of freshly-dyed tweed – they find themselves made ridiculous by the magical powers of Pyrus; and the schoolteacher, at least, is chastened by the experience.

In essence, as related above, The Magic Rowan has considerable potential: furthermore, the author avoids Ossianism, refusing to paint Highland life, either past or present, as unequivocally excellent – there are avaricious characters like Pederan, vicious-tongued old women like Chirsty to redress the balance; and the mysterious old women who come from ages past to the waulking tell of the grinding misery and poverty which once was the lot of the crofter. Unfortunately, though Grant avoids Ossian, he embraces Barrie, and the play is fatally reduced and confused by the introduction of fairy dancers in a masque of the seasons, and by the unshakeable twee-ness of Pyrus, part Lob from Dear Brutus, part Peter Pan. Whimsicality in presentation is echoed by lack of clear direction in the play: the apparently simple theme is lost under a multiplication of unnecessary side-effects – much time is wasted in a tiresome confrontation between Pyrus and MacVinish which adds nothing to the story – and the last Act seems to be at odds with much of what has gone before, frequently gloomy, and confusingly vague. Pyrus simply removes the wonderful length of tartan he has inspired the women to make, without answering any of the challenges made by the minister, an act of whimsical magic which fails to achieve any real symbolic stature. The overall impression of The Magic Rowan is of a play fragmented, tedious, and maudlin.

Far more successful is Grant's third contribution to the Park Theatre, Legend Is Born (1948). Here at last he comes fully to grips with the impact of modern industrialised society on the Highlands, though admittedly his portrayal of the conflict is

strongly melodramatic. As in the earlier plays, his portrayal of Highland life and characters is excellent, and here he successfully uses characterisations for true dramatic effect, rather than merely to create an atmosphere.

Tarmod, a drunkard and wastrel, returns to his home on the island of Berisay after a three-year absence in high hopes of reforming his life and settling down in marriage to his childhood sweetheart, Mary. Before his departure he had already begun to build the house which is to be their home. Berisay has changed, however. A government scheme to improve living conditions and farming techniques has established a party of civil servants on the island, and one of them George, has fallen in love with Mary, who has not rejected his advances. To make matters worse, George rents a room from Tarmod's parents - Tarmod's room, in fact. George is a sympathetic, tolerant and thoughtful figure, who tries to avoid bitterness with Tarmod, but when the islander learns that his half-built house is to be demolished to make way for a new road, a violent confrontation is inevitable. A village meeting called to discuss the problem results in a mob advancing on the offending building to clear it piecemeal from the new road's path, but Tarmod stops them with the infectious familiarity of his rhetoric - he is, after all, a well-known and well-liked personality - and they turn from righteous indignation at the non-conformist to rebellion themselves. Tragically, this storm in a teacup with its fairly light-hearted opposition to authority becomes a full-blown tempest when an overzealous bureaucrat attempts to dynamite Tarmod's house without first checking that it is unoccupied. The incensed islander kills one of the demolition party, and Berisay is flooded with police and troops bent on bringing the murderer to justice. Moved by the effect of all this on Mary, caught despairingly between two irreconcilable forces, George arranges an escape for Tarmod, only for Tarmod's father to disrupt it unwittingly by moving the small boat upon which it depends. The play ends with Tarmod driven over a cliff by his pursuers, possibly wounded by them, and with George, gun in hand, attempting to check further pursuit. As the curtain falls, it seems certain that he will be forced to shoot.

Deeply pessimistic, Legend is Born resounds with the irony that Tarmod, translated into a legend of rebellion by his people, achieves this status in half-drunken and spiteful defence of a house not simply half-built, but jerry-built – and for a young woman whose love he has forfeited by his long absence and dissolute ways. The islanders' revolt against authority is based on sentimentality and false romanticism, supported by outdated, puritanical, and narrowly conservative religion. Respectability for Tarmod's defiance is provided by his father's carefully selected biblical quotations, which illustrate an argument that Berisay, which has always depended on sheep, and survived without proper roads, has no need for either cattle or communications which are foreign and therefore heathen innovations. Tarmod's speech to the mob reaches its climax in a cry of "To the hills!" and his short-lived triumph is accompanied by a piper. Lest anyone think that the author's sympathies lie with the "rebels" he maintains before the audience the fixed reference-point of Mary, always shrewd, intelligent and reasonable, who is utterly horrified by the turn events take at the half-built house. In the last Act, she turns on Dan, Tarmod's uncle :

"You and Neil and Seonaid and Tarmod, with your greedy little minds, fighting for what's not worth having, just to keep it from someone else."

Helpless, she watches both her old love and her new drawn inexorably into the vortex of disaster, becoming an effective symbol for an island and a way of life.

James Shaw Grant has continued to write untroubled by the lack of interest displayed by professional theatres since the closure of the Park. He has no illusions concerning the greatness of his works, but continues his preoccupation with Highland problems in the hopes that his plays, however lightweight – and most are lighter even than The Magic Rowan – will contribute to local awareness and judgement when performed by amateurs in the Highlands and Islands.

John Stewart purchased Knockendaroch House in Pitlochry in 1944, and after his failure to find a new theatre in Glasgow, it was to the

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grounds of Knockendarroch that he shifted his ambition. As new building was severely restricted during the years of post-war austerity, the Pitlochry Festival Theatre first opened in a tent; but in 1953 a less transient dwelling was constructed, seating 500 people, and the annual Summer Festival of Drama rapidly established itself. Over twenty years since 1951 the Pitlochry theatre has produced an extremely solid - and commercially successful - programme of six plays annually, combining foreign classics like Moliere, Pirandello, Chekov, and Ibsen with Shakespeare, Jonson, Sheridan, Shaw, Wilde, and Eliot; recalling attention to neglected works like Macklin's or Garrick's and maintaining a Scottish interest mainly with a succession of regular revivals of Barrie, and more especially Bridie. The artistic value of this programme places Pitlochry amidst the best of traditional provincial Repertory Theatre rather than the West-End, though it must be observed that experiment is far from being Pitlochry's forte, and the "New Wave" of Beckett, Ionesco, Pinter and Osborne has virtually been ignored. Instead, a measure of light, untaxing "popular" material is included in each season. John Stewart died in 1957, to be succeeded by his friend and close associate Kenneth Ireland, whose efforts to continue Stewart's dream won from the Daily Telegraph the observation :

"(Pitlochry Festival Theatre's) repertoire is wide-ranging enough to make the National Theatre's look parochial . . . It is obvious that trying to please all the people all the time is what the people want." 1

The Byre Theatre which was founded in 1933 still thrives under the indomitable A. B. Paterson, employing its stringently limited resources with breathtaking panache to maintain a wholly unpretentious but stouthearted contribution to theatre in Scotland. Molly S. Urquhart with a determination no less remarkable for the frequent eccentricities of her endeavour, created in 1939 what was known as the M. S. U. Theatre in Rutherglen near Glasgow. There she mounted

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1 Daily Telegraph quoted by Pitlochry Festival Theatre

amateur productions in chaotic conditions until 1944 when it became the Rutherglen Civic Theatre, recruiting in her cause with comic ruthlessness the dramatist Paul Vincent Carroll, whose Irish plays were being acclaimed in New York; actors of considerable ability like Eileen Herlie and Duncan Macrae; and others who were virtually passers-by trapped into "walk-on" parts. In 1944 Molly Urquhart was given the choice either to quit the building, or buy it outright, and with an opportunity of a place in the Citizens' Theatre Company, she took the former course. After her departure, a band of enthusiasts in Rutherglen raised enough money to purchase the theatre, which became the Rutherglen Repertory Company in 1945; latterly a home for the homespun, the domestic comedies of T.M. Watson, and the kailyard sentiments of Graham Moffat. The company's repertoire is an interesting, if rarely exciting combination of West-End successes - Emyln Williams, Rattigan and Priestly recur in the programmes, along with St. John Ervine, Shaw, Daphne du Maurier and John van Druten - and the less edifying variety of native authors - Moffat, Donald MacLaren, and W.D. Cocker. The distinct lack of any work likely to arouse serious consideration indicates the Rutherglen company's attitude to drama: whatever entertainment value they may have provided, its contribution to the arts in Scotland was, at best, nil.

In the early 1940's came what must be regarded as one of the most important steps in the evolution of Scottish drama: the creation of Glasgow's Unity Theatre. The Unity Theatre movement in Britain attempted to create a theatre for the common man who was largely ignored by sophisticated middle-class West-End standards. By drawing on amateur companies in working-class areas, it was hoped that styles of acting and production would be evolved, and plays written, which would make the theatre once more a force in the lives of the great mass of the working people; and that organisation on a national scale would make best use of numerous clubs with limited finances by pooling resources and experience, and facilitating tours. The ultimate goal was to establish a professional company; and this was accomplished at the two largest branches of the Unity organisation, Goldington Street in London,

and Glasgow. Theatre Workshop, which under Joan Littlewood's direction became a major force in British Drama, was also a child of Unity.

The Glasgow branch was formed in 1941 by an amalgamation of four amateur clubs - the Transport, The Clarion, the Jewish Institute, and the Workers' Theatre - starting its career with Clifford Odet's Awake and Sing in the winter of 1940 at Glasgow's Lyric Theatre. Later, they moved to the Atheneum, a focal point for amateur activity in the city; and then, when this was lost to them by the birth of the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre, to the Queen's. No permanent home of their own was found, a disadvantage hardly felt in the years of success. When adversity followed, the lack was fatal. From the beginning, Glasgow Unity was committed to the development of Scottish Drama, displaying in pursuit of this an acute and mature insight into the conditions governing its growth. Robert Mitchell, one of the group's producers wrote:

"Unity believes that a Scottish National Theatre - or what might be more accurately described as a Scottish native theatre - can only be built from the flesh and blood of Scottish authors, actors and producers. That is why we are always on the look-out for new Scottish plays, and that is why our producers and players are chosen almost exclusively from the ordinary people of Scotland. It is this alone which gives them a native vitality, as opposed to West End tricks; (it is our proposal to ally to this basic quality the necessary theatre education and training).

Our aims for the immediate future are simple; to present as many new and virile Scottish plays as we can; with the best local actors and actresses we can find; to tour these plays to towns in Scotland that have not as yet theatres of their own, and by constant training improve our technique so that we are able to give the very best productions possible to the fine new works that, we feel confident, will arise from our Scottish writers." 1

By the end of the war, Glasgow Unity had become a company of considerable merit, with a powerful collective spirit and a distinctive

1 Robert Mitchell, in Scottish Drama Year Book ed. J. House, Albyn Press. Edinburgh 1948. pp 45-6.

style of acting derived in part from Stanislavsky and the "method" employed by the Group Theatre in America; in part from techniques inherited from the Scottish National Players whose verse-plays were greatly admired by Masefield, and from Jewish theatrical traditions via the Jewish Institute Players; and in part from "native vitality", embodied in actors like Roddy MacMillan, finding fresh and powerful expression on the stage. Individual talent was in abundance; many members of the group later made very successful careers in professional theatre - Edith Ruddick, Russell Hunter, Brenda Cooper and Peter Donaldson, for example. By 1946, in accordance with a plan for the gradual establishment of a self-sufficient professional company, a dozen of the group were working full-time in the theatre: a refusal to distinguish between "amateur" and "professional" actors became a hallmark of Unity which maintained very close bonds with the world outwith the stage. The standard of production was frequently very high indeed, with superb set-designing by Tom MacDonald under the imaginative direction of Avrom Greenbaum and Robert Mitchell. Strongly, though not slavishly influenced by the Abbey Theatre, Glasgow Unity was very much at home in the plays of Sean O'Casey - Purple Dust received its premiere there -; their productions also included Heartbreak House, Ghosts, Of Mice and Men, Vishnevsky's Optimistic Tragedy, Afinogenov's Distant Point and plays by contemporary Dutch and Brazilian writers. Their treatment of Gorki's Lower Depths caused a stir and won much popular favour by its use of Scottish accents. "Audiences only appreciate what they recognise and understand", wrote Robert Mitchell, the play's producer. "... striving for foreignness only succeeds in blurring the theme and stultifying the dialogue." <sup>1</sup>

"In their production of Lower Depths ... Unity found the perfect vehicle for their peculiar talents ... The flow between audience and stage in this production was very sure and strong; it was as if a psychological tuning fork had found the common key for author, company, and audience".

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1 "New Theatre", Vol 3, No. 4

2 Bannister, Unity Theatre

Avrom Greenbaum's production of Fuente Ovejuna by Lope de Vega won equal praise by the intricacy of its characterisation and direction, and Tom MacDonald's setting - "the first experience of functional decor (on) the Scottish Stage".<sup>1</sup> Their choice of contemporary plays had a marked tendency towards social criticism and the life of the working class, creating a left-wing aura about the company which was exaggerated by those who found it distasteful. James Bridie, while paying tribute to Glasgow Unity's boldness, talent and repeated success, nevertheless spoke of audiences "rather prone to cheer when an actor advanced to the floats and invited the workers of the world to unite. . . ." <sup>2</sup> Others of less balanced judgement allowed their prejudice to carry much further, forcing upon the company a misleading reputation for overt political bias.

The "fine new works" that Robert Mitchell had felt would arise from Scottish authors failed in the main to appear. James Barke, a novelist with dogmatic Marxist views, provided Glasgow Unity with a number of plays during the war; one of which, a documentary piece entitled The Night of the Big Blitz achieved temporary popularity through its topicality. His propagandistic Major Operation provided the theatre's political critics with all the ammunition they required. More important were the essays in documentary style, Starched Aprons and Men Should Weep by Ena Lamont Stewart, and The Gorbals Story by Robert MacLeish. Though these plays are far from outstanding they do represent direct and honest attempts to deal with areas of everyday life distinctly unfashionable in the established theatre, and were indisputably sprung from native soil, without being aggressively "Scottish".

More startling was the premiere of Benedick Scott's The Lambs of God, an uncompromising but sensitive study of homosexuality which unfortunately proved meat too strong for the company as well as the audience, and the author's courage and talent were smothered by the

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1 Bannister, unpublished

2 Bannister,

James Bridie and his Theatre p 194

weight of their embarrassment.<sup>1</sup> The popularity of Gorbals Story, Starched Aprons, and Men Should Weep with Unity's audiences in Glasgow was echoed by the London critics when the company carried them to the metropolis in 1948. The only other Scottish works of significance to come into Unity's hands were Robert MacLellan's comedy Torwattletie which they produced in 1846; and The Flouers o' Edinburgh - by the same author - produced by them in the following year: unfortunately though by far the better play, it received rough treatment in their hands. Middle-class mannerisms and polish eluded them, and there was scant indication of the vitality which inspired their portrayals of working-class life.

In the years after the war Glasgow Unity gradually fell victim to the superior attractions of its chief rival, the more prestigious Glasgow Citizens' Theatre. The more accomplished actors were lost, and the supply of fresh Scottish writing dried up after only a trickle had been seen. With box-office returns waning, the company's finances became increasingly slipshod: the company was taken to court for failing to pay royalties to one of its "own" native dramatists, and in 1949 the Scottish Arts Council withdrew its support.

The loss of the Arts Council grant in the midst of their other troubles was recognised by all as a death-blow to Unity. James Barke, who maintained single-handed a guerrilla war against the Glasgow Citizens Theatre, attempted to blame James Bridie, the Citizens chairman who had also been prominent in the Arts Council prior to the fatal event. As a smokescreen behind which to hide Unity's shortcomings, this accusation was crude indeed. Though Bridie had never entertained much sympathy for the style of the group, he had always granted it the credit due, and had indeed undertaken the difficult task of bearing to Unity the evil tidings from the Arts Council. Without the subsidy, decline was rapid. In the autumn

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1 Bannister, unpublished notes

of 1949 the remnants of the professional company took the road for London with hopes of a new home at London's Embassy Theatre, and within a few years had dwindled to little more than a memory.

"They tried to storm the citadel and failed, courageously and with some brilliance. What they did, they did without the help of dramatic schools or patrons. Their attack was fearless, lively and intelligent. They had a feeling for fundamentals, achieving vivid if sometimes rough impressions. . . ."

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One great achievement of the venture was the distinctively Scottish acting style which developed under Unity's auspices. This was the legacy to which Scotland in general, and the youthful Glasgow Citizens Theatre in particular, fell heir.

### UNITY PLAYS

Ena Lamont Stewart wrote two plays for Glasgow Unity Theatre, each a simple attempt to recreate the atmosphere of a particular way of life, each strikingly successful in this aim, Starched Aprons and Men Should Weep. Neither play has polish or wit or even complexity – sometimes, indeed, they display a startling naivety – yet the depth of their sincerity is both obvious and compelling.

The first, Starched Aprons, which was the major hit of Unity's 1945 season, is a well-observed depiction of hospital life from the nurses' viewpoint. After a painstakingly accurate but lengthy introduction to nursing through the scene in a staff sitting-room at a General Hospital, the main characters are introduced: Sister Barton, a dried-up martinet, Sister Gately, rather too sweet-and-reasonable to be true, Nurse Hunter and Probationer Nurse King, the latter on vacation from middle-class boredom. Sister Gately is engaged to the surgeon, Manson, the idol of the hospital, but ultimately loses him to the scheming, shallow charms of King. Barton, known to her subordinates as "Teenie", exaggerates trivial incidents and conflicts to the level of major infringements of regulations, bullies a timid young

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<sup>1</sup> Bannister, notes

nurse, Hogarth, into working when she is ill, and ruthlessly demands that a porter is fired for being found tipsy, though otherwise his record is excellent. When Hogarth dies after concealing her illness, Hunter announces that she is leaving and in a scene of considerable power confronts Barton with bitter home truths, finally damning the older woman not with rage but with pity. Hunter's speculations about what the future promises for the lonely disciplinarian reduce Barton's defences completely and she is only saved from nervous collapse by Sister Gately and Doctor MacArthur, who not only arrange a long-overdue holiday for her, but offer her the balm of their friendship as well.

The conclusion of the play is shamelessly sentimental, but Starched Aprons nevertheless has admirable features. The atmosphere could not be better, with its catalogue of trivia and boredom and hard work relieved by gossip, light-hearted flirtation, and therapeutic grumbling; but there are also moments of unexpected depth, as when "Teenie" confesses privately to Gately that she is aware of her injustice and harshness, hating herself for her petty cruelties but finding in the abuse of authority, her only pleasure: "its like a cancer", she says, "... it gets a hold and grows". This awareness of the unpopular woman's human identity adds ironic piquancy to the final argument with the disgusted Nurse Hunter, checking any tendency to oversimplify the characterisation. By comparison, the betrayed love of Sister Gately is handled with embarrassing woodenness. Starched Aprons was widely praised when taken to London by Unity Theatre, and the critic for The Times found the core of the play's appeal when he wrote: "(the author) knows her subject and takes it for granted we shall find it as interesting as she does, with the result that we do."<sup>1</sup> Inescapably, this play was written from the heart.

Men Should Weep, which followed in 1948, also won critical acclaim when taken to London by Unity. A harrowing impression of slum-life

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1 The Times April 12th 1948



in Glasgow recalling Gorbals Story though avoiding some of its melodrama, Men Should Weep like Starched Aprons views the world through a woman's eyes.

In the chaos of a tiny flat, Maggie Morrison struggles unceasingly to bring up her brood of children while her husband John seeks desperately for a job in the midst of economic depression. Like many men at that time, his prejudices will not permit him to do "woman's work" at home, and the brunt of poverty falls upon Maggie, who can hardly dare to plan meals a day in advance. The stress is exacerbated by the visits of her spinster sister, Lily, who though generous and well-intentioned, cannot refrain from acid comment on the shortcomings of the male of the species and what she regards as the inevitable hardships which follow marriage. Moreover, Jenny, the Morrison's eldest daughter, bitterly resentful of the drabness of her life, has begun to seek temporary escape in the company of unsavoury but free-spending men-friends to the horror of her parents. When her brother Alec, a semi-criminal, and his unscrupulous young wife Isa are forced by circumstances to seek shelter in the already overcrowded household, Jenny - encouraged by Isa - decides to move out, swiftly descending to prostitution in her search for glamour. With the news that one of her younger children has tuberculosis, ringing in her ears, Maggie is driven by Jenny's action and Isa's insolence to hysterical collapse. Up to this point in the play, Ena Lamont Stewart writes with conviction and vigour, particularly in the relationship between Maggie and Lily, mercilessly attacking each other on the subject of marriage but bound together by a deep common sympathy which sustains them throughout their quarrels. Then, as in Starched Aprons, comes the hollow happy ending, not without its measure of pathos. Christmas Day finds John in employment with enough money for christmas presents and a tiny christmas tree. A note from the hospital informs the Morrisons that their tubercular child has died, but in the midst of their distress, Jenny, the lost daughter, returns to her family "lit from within" by a miraculous spiritual conversion, bringing the play to a close with her plea for hope and faith.

The Dickensian sentimentality of this conclusion prompted the Telegraph to label the play "a sentimental version of slum life, while the author occasionally pulls out some favourite emotional stop",<sup>1</sup> an understandable response which, however, ignores the strength of the first Acts.

James Barke, a Glaswegian novelist, wrote several plays for Unity, none of them particularly worthy. The best known is Major Operation (1941) an early Unity production and one which, more than any other, gave the group a reputation for "red propaganda", for red propaganda of the most mechanical and unimaginative variety Major Operation indubitably is. On a divided stage simultaneously showing George Anderson's suburban villa and Harry McKelvie's tenement flat two life-styles are contrasted. The McKelvies are poor but happy in each other and Harry displays strength of character, far-ranging intellect, a fast-developing espousal of Marxism and what passes in this play for rhetorical power. George Anderson is wealthy, introspective, unhappy; and his brittle, shallow wife betrays him for another more fashionably exciting man. McKelvie and Anderson find themselves in the same hospital ward, where Anderson, whose business has collapsed, is converted to the working-class cause by the examples of solidarity and heroism he sees in ordinary men like Duff and Thomson, and McKelvie's overwhelming intellect. Discharged from hospital, Anderson tries in vain to identify with the working-class struggle, and in despair decides on suicide, changes his mind at the last moment at the sound of a worker's march, only to be killed heroically when the mounted police attack the demonstration.

The plot is followed with paralysing slowness, and the entire tone of the play is summed up in the ponderously inflated dialogue as Anderson sees the light :

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1 The Telegraph, June 1948

Anderson : " . . . if you're a Red then I'm a Red. Not such a good Red as , you, McKelvie: I can never hope to be that. But with all my strength, mental and physical, I'm with you. All night I have been thinking of the speech I would make to you in the morning . . . It's gone now, the form of it. But I know what I want to say. You must believe me that I mean this, McKelvie. If you will have me in the ranks I promise I will never let you down, never let the movement down until I fall down. MacKelvie : You have this much faith in me?

MacKelvie : Comrade: there's a place in the ranks for you and I'll be proud to lead you to it.

MacKelvie stretches out his hand. Anderson grasps it firmly.

Anderson : Forgive me, MacKelvie. I am a bit overwrought. Now that you've called me comrade, I feel I have achieved something.

Falsified emotion and indigestible lumps of dogma make this play considerably less than inspiring. All that can be said in its favour is that it was concerned with the modern political world, an area most Scottish writers have scrupulously avoided.

Of Scott's The Lambs of God, The Times had this to say :

"Neither sincerity nor courage is lacking in this realistic study of a Scottish slum. The author discovers a life there which fills him with Hardy-esque despair, and he does not hesitate to use his chorus of gossiping crones to arraign the order of the universe. . . . his justification is his success in persuading us that he has drawn his pessimistic philosophy from the observed facts and not twisted the facts to fit a ready made philosophy. It is dangerous to grow to adolescence in Mercer's Vennel. Young girls are seduced by married men, and they are usually astute enough to pin any consequent responsibility on to the shoulders of young boys. The boys are also in danger from a prowling pervert, and it is the twisted nature of this man that spins the plot of Mr. Scott's relentless drama. He has been thwarted and also wantonly injured by a woman who is now desperately attempting to father an expected baby

on to an innocent young man. The pervert is not cheated of his revenge, and this much good comes of it – that the boy, a little scared, is released to piece together his dreams of a pure and happy love, and the designing woman is made to realize herself as a selfish, vicious creature, rotten with fear, and to face the facts with an honest hope of reform. It is a happy ending; but the impression left is that no ending in life can be altogether happy. These things should not happen, but they have happened and they will go on happening.

The play would be stronger in its emotional effect if it were not so often in danger of getting lost in a profusion of local colour. Whenever the theme emerges clearly it is skilfully handled, but the Greek chorus of gossips needs a richer humour than is given it to justify the space it occupies. Mr. Scott has Hardy's imagination and something of his compassion, but no very deep enjoyment of the way that illiterate minds work and express themselves. "

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McLeish's play Gorbals Story, documenting slum-life in Glasgow, elicited these responses from the press :

"This play about a Glasgow tenement house strikes a new and original note. Better, it seems, to live in a slum than to have no roof for one's head. With even this slight ground for self-congratulation the inhabitants of the tenements cannot logically be quite so sorry for themselves as playwrights would like to believe. True, Mr. McLeish begins by sounding the improving note as well, and rather loudly, but long before the piece ends he has forgotten his duty to the community in the playwright's other satisfactions.

On the whole, it is a cheerful affair, going nowhere in particular but fishing up for us sketches of character and an odd episode or two -- how an old bickering couple were once young and can still be tender, how the newspaper-boy would like to marry the Irish labourer's daughter upstairs, how this one died and that one forgot to post a prize-winning entry for a football-pool. If there is not a great deal of invention, there is little falsification either. In the

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1 The Times June 30 1949. (the play was performed at The Playhouse Theatre, London, in 1949, apparently with the original Scottish cast, including Isobel Campbell, Archie Duncan and Roddie McMillan).

glow of benevolence that surrounds the piece the people are apt to relapse into types, but that this is the author's deliberate choice may be guessed from the skill, subtlety, and delicate feeling with which, when he is fired, he writes the difficult scene between the tipsy youth and the woman who does not attract men."

... .. (TIMES, Feb. 20, 1948)

"What impresses most about this play is its authenticity; there is no false note."

(GLASGOW HERALD)

(Aug. 6, 1946)

When a film version of The Gorbals Story was made in 1950, the original had been so "bowdlerised and vulgarised, its truth . . . . so obscured and its pungency cheapened" that a reviewer in Scots Review felt obliged to reaffirm the virtues of the original stage-play:

On the stage, though it was always three playlets rather than a three act play, Robert McLeish's piece about the tribulations of Glasgow's slum-dwellers had a veracity. Its picture of Gorbals life may have been highly coloured, but the main outlines of the drawing were accurate. Frequently comic, and sometimes moving it held the interest throughout, and its technical deficiencies were more than compensated for by the pungent verisimilitude of action and dialogue.

Although it would be unwise to claim much for the Scottish plays produced by Glasgow Unity Theatre -- in terms either of quality or number -- the importance of the group's contribution to Scottish drama is considerable. The tenor of the plays associated with Unity's predecessors, the Scottish National Players, was parochial, staid and socially respectable. In subject matter or attitude they could hardly be regarded as provocative or controversial -- to the extent that contemporary issues were virtually ignored -- , and the Players' artistic policy was with very few exceptions similarly unadventurous. Unity's commitment to encouraging native drama was associated by contrast with a readiness to experiment boldly and a vigorous awareness, not only of contemporary social problems but of avant-garde international theatre.

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- 1 The Times Feb. 20 1948
  - 2 Glasgow Herald Aug. 6 1946
  - 3 Scots Review 1950

When Unity's actors spoke in Scots their language was neither the product of reminiscence nor of pedantry, as it had been all too often with the S.N.P. , but the living language of modern working-class Scotland, and it was received with enthusiasm by Scottish audiences. Such demonstration that Scots could be used for essentially modern drama eventually resulted, after Unity's decline, in plays of high quality in Scots by Reid, Scott and others who wrote for Glasgow Citizens' Theatre.

The immediacy of Unity's work and its popularity with a large working-class audience hitherto mostly ignored by serious theatre reawakened interest in Scottish drama. The Glasgow Citizens' Theatre, opening four years later than Unity, became the principal heir to its achievements and added to them the vital ingredients of a permanent theatre-building, professional standing, and a broad, inclusive policy beyond the range of Unity's actors and interests.

## CHAPTER TWO

### FORMATION OF GLASGOW CITIZENS' THEATRE

James Bridie's contribution to Scottish Drama was not exhausted in his achievement as a playwright: as well as being one of the two major Scottish dramatists he also was the principal force in the establishment of what for many years was the de facto National Theatre Company for Scotland, the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre. It was in this theatre that Scottish Drama first received the professional attention vital to its maturity and which it had for so long been denied.

Ever since his connection with the Scottish National Players, Bridie had been an advocate of a professional venture, impatiently spurning the continued cautious amateurism of the Players' directorate in the 1930's. Yet the few professional companies operating in Scotland in this period, including indigenous growths like Perth and Dundee Repertories, displayed no interest in native playwrights, and national awareness was confined to the non-professional theatre, in particular the Glasgow Curtain Theatre.

The early forties brought world war and paradoxically a re-vitalisation of Scottish Drama. The Curtain Theatre, which had fostered the talents of Robert MacLellan and others during the previous decade, grew into the semi-professional Park Theatre Club, and 1941 saw the establishment of Unity Theatre in Glasgow. The Park Theatre, if it had little interest in the sparse Scottish talent available to it, brought the stimulus of the best in contemporary World Drama to the city; and Unity, rooted squarely in the present realities of the working classes and untouched by the Ossianic variety of nationalism, consciously committed itself to the ideal of "a native theatre, something which is essentially reflecting the lives of the ordinary people of Scotland".

The manner in which Unity pursued this commitment was hardly what Bridie had long visualised, however, and he commenced a determined search for fellow-enthusiasts, backers, and a theatre with which to form a company conforming to his understanding of professionalism. There was now in existence a factor hitherto absent from cultural life in Scotland, a factor which in the view of one director of Citizens', Bridie's friend, T. J. Honeyman, was crucial in the creation of the new theatre - the Council for Encouragement of Music and the Arts, now the Arts Council.<sup>1</sup> In December 1942 Bridie joined the council of C. E. M. A. , where he successfully championed the cause of a Scottish national theatre in the hope that he would be able to satisfy, in a company of his own creation, the council's requirements for financial assistance. The two main conditions to be met were that the theatre had to be established, with a building to perform in, before help could be offered.

A board of directors was formed, with Paul Vincent Carroll, a Glasgow-Irish dramatist with his eyes on the traditions and achievements of the Abbey Theatre; George Singleton, enterprising owner of Glasgow's most sophisticated cinema; T. J. Honeyman, director of the city's Art Galleries; Guy McCrone, novelist and Bridie's

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1 T. J. Honeyman, in The Story of the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre 1943 - J. Gourlay and R. C. Saunders. Stage and Screen Press, Glasgow, p. 41.

cousin; R. W. Greig, chairman of the Scottish Orchestra; Norman Duthie, a leading accountant; and as chairman, Bridie himself. C.E.M.A. found the Atheneum theatre, the hub of amateur drama in Glasgow, satisfactory as a location; and Bridie accordingly overcame his objections to it, unsatisfactory though the building was. Having gathered the hardly enormous total of £1,500 from various contributors, the board then engaged a producer – Jennifer Sounes, "who frankly admitted her inexperience"<sup>1</sup> – and assembled a company of actors.

The objectives of the new theatre – known as the Citizens' Theatre, with conscious reference to Alfred Wareing's venture before the first world war – were announced: "to present plays of didactic and artistic merit, to establish a stage for Scottish dramatists and actors, to found a Scottish drama school."<sup>2</sup> This was followed, in Winifred Bannister's words, by "a fanfare of publicity" and amid great local excitement, the first season opened in 1943 with Bridie's play, The Holy Isle. After a few weeks of indecision came unexpected success, and to the astonishment of all concerned no money was lost. A further season with Eric Capon as producer brought a four-figure profit,<sup>3</sup> with Carroll's The Wise Have Not Spoken and Bridie's Forrigan Reel drawing large audiences. Already, observers were "beginning to see a company of Scots actors developing into matured skillful artists...."<sup>4</sup> The plays produced represent a modest but solid and widely varied achievement, ranging through Goldsmith, Massinger, Shaw, Ibsen and Gogol to Andre Obey, J. B. Priestley and Lennox Robinson. Two of Bridie's existing plays were performed, and John Brandane's The Treasure Ship was revived; but new Scottish work was confined to Joe Corrie's a Master of Men and Bridie's Forrigan Reel.

"Thanks to Paul Vincent Carroll's rude determination to create a stiff challenge to the budding Scottish playwright, Bridie's equally stiff determination to outlaw amateurism, George Singleton's experience of raising the level of entertainment without sinking the box office, and Dr. Honeyman's gift for telling the world through the press and on platforms..."

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- 1 Bannister p. 208 James Bridie and his Theatre  
 2 Bannister p. 209 James Bridie and his Theatre  
 3 Bannister p. 214 James Bridie and his Theatre  
 4 Bannister p. 2 James Bridie and his Theatre  
 5 Bannister p. 207 James Bridie and his Theatre



the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre, even at this early stage in its career, was proving a fulfilment of Bridie's vision of a theatre both Scottish and professional.

The Atheneum, in which they performed, was less satisfactory, however. Though the audience was sufficiently comfortable, the backstage facilities were cramped in the extreme, with doorways so small that set-designing was greatly hampered by the difficulty of moving scenery on and off the stage. Rats, a hazard braved by the apparently more stoic previous tenants, Unity Theatre, provided a recurrent source of terror for the actresses, who on one occasion at least threatened to walk out en masse.<sup>1</sup> Therefore when Harry McKelvie, the "Pantomime King" who owned the Princess Theatre in Glasgow's notorious Gorbals slum, offered the Citizens' Theatre the lease of his theatre on very generous terms, Bridie leapt at the chance. It was, as Winifred Bannister observes, a considerable risk. McKelvie was a showman born and bred in the music-hall variety tradition, and although his admiration for the work of the Citizens' prompted him to ask for only £1,000 a year for a ten-year lease – reasonable enough at that time – he insisted that the sum must be guaranteed in advance. Gorbals was hardly the most salubrious spot in which to open a serious theatre venture, with a reputation for violence and crime which might easily deter a middle-class audience; but when a gift of £10,000 was received from Sir Frederick Stewart, caution was abandoned. The Citizens' Theatre opened its third season in their new, permanent home on September 11th, 1945, with Johnson Over Jordan by J. B. Priestley. A long struggle then began to reconcile work of artistic merit, an adventurous policy, and financial stability; and the latter has proved over the years a most elusive goal, even in the years after 1955 when Glasgow Corporation obtained the theatre building as a Civic Theatre for Citizens' use. The Citizens' at this time was very much Bridie's theatre: some accused him of virtual dictatorship,

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1 Bannister p. 211 James Bridie and his Theatre

particularly in the choice of plays, and even his sympathisers were aware that "he liked his advice to be taken".<sup>1</sup> Conscious of the need for strong attractions to draw a "respectable" audience to the Princess's Bridie turned a large measure of attention in the 1945-46 season to satisfying popular demand for Scottish plays.

Johnson Over Jordan was followed by Robert MacLellan's comedy of border-reiving, Toom Byres; and plays by Robert Kemp, Gordon Daviot, Robins Millar, Gordon Bottomley and Moray MacLaren contributed largely to the rest of the programme. This policy was sufficiently successful to overcome much of the resistance towards Scottish plays maintained in the Citizens' as well as elsewhere. Bridie at this time was unwilling to risk his relatively inexperienced Scots actors, and indeed, their English colleagues, amidst the pitfalls of Scottish dialect and accent and the dangers of nationalist sentiment. Happily, his fears were exaggerated, and the policy of Scottish plays was continued, with an increasing emphasis on untried work. Out of almost 200 plays performed at the Citizens' Theatre between 1945 and 1959, over 80 were by Scottish authors: of these, 15 were by Bridie, 6 by Barrie and 8 were collectively contrived pantomimes which became a tradition in the Company. Of the remaining number, 35 were new works; and prominent among them were plays by Robert MacLellan, Alexander Reid, Robert Kemp, Eric Linklater, George Munro and Alexander Scott.

Comedy prevailed as the dominant type in this revival of Scottish dramatic enthusiasm, and although the conservative superficial styles which had grown to prominence in the amateur movement before the war continued to exert an influence on some playwrights, more adventurous and sophisticated writing appeared to overshadow them. Eric Linklater brought the wit and polish of the West End to the Citizens; Reid and Scott provided a more indigenous growth of poetry, fantasy and Scots language at its most vital; satire lurked always beneath the surface of Kemp and Scott.

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1 Bannister, p. 223, 200, 210; and Christopher Small, "Bridie", the unfinished business". Scottish Theatre Vol. 2, no. 11 p. 19

Less light-hearted works by Kemp, Robbins Millar, George Munro and others are an indication of a willingness to deal seriously with the contemporary world hitherto absent in Scottish drama; and a similar commitment is apparent in the use of fantasy in Kemp, Scott and Reid to introduce sober thought under the guise of frivolity. However, Scottish audiences preferred comedy, and were less than discriminating in their tastes: not just at Glasgow Citizens' but also at another consciously "Scottish" theatre, the Gateway in Edinburgh, they applauded Bachelors Are Bold, throughout the fifties and even into the sixties. All the better-known native dramatists tended towards lightness in form if not always in content, and when in the mid-fifties Osborne's Look Back in Anger ushered in a harsher era of stark and raw emotions, such lack of weight was abruptly made redundant.

To perform these plays it was necessary to find a company of Scottish actors, who alone would be able to handle Scots dialect, and who could be expected to sympathise readily with native themes and preoccupations. The Citizens' not only created such a company - the first on the professional stage - but to the Theatre's lasting glory, discovered a wealth of individual talent and a distinct, native acting style. Whether this style was created at Citizens' or was inherited by them from other groups, particularly Glasgow Unity Theatre, is an open question: Glasgow Unity was certainly working towards a conscious style, and many of their best actors, like Archie Duncan and Roddy MacMillan, later joined the Citizens'. A quite astonishing number of Scotland's best-known faces have appeared on the Citizens' stage: Archie Duncan, Lennox Milne, Molly Urquhart, Stanley Baxter, Bryden Murdoch, James Gibson, Gudrun Ure, Fulton Mackay, Roddy MacMillan, Andrew Keir, Moultrie Kelsall, John Cairney, James Copeland, John Grieve, and many, many others. One name in particular dominates these years in the Citizens', that of Scotland's great comic actor, Duncan Macrae; whose flair for irony and grotesquerie found expression for the curiously detached, satiric - even bizarre - humour to be found north of the Tweed. The first all-Scottish company to appear before the international audience at the Edinburgh Festival, in the memorable 1948 production of A

Satyre of the Thrie Estatics, was composed largely of Citizens' actors, with Macrae in particular singled out for commendation.

Because Scottish producers had been few and far between in the forties, Bridie had engaged Englishmen, many of them of considerable talent, like Eric Capon and John Casson. In the early years, when many of the company were English and many of the Scots yet finding their feet, this policy could not be seriously faulted. Unfortunately the compromise was continued long after the Scottish actors matured into a highly skilled company and native-born and native-trained producers became available.

The English producers, accustomed to the more cosmopolitan attitude of their own long-established theatrical tradition, had little sympathy with the encouragement of native Scottish writing. After 1955 the number of Scottish plays reaching the stage began to dwindle, and the 1960's saw the Citizens' turn its back on indigenous work. Whatever the Citizens' achieved in that decade, it indisputably forfeited its title as Scotland's national theatre.

#### ROBBINS MILLAR

Robbins Millar had established a name for himself as a playwright before the war, and his contribution to the Citizens' was small: he cannot be regarded as a "new" author under encouragement. The three plays he gave are nevertheless of interest.

The first, Day In, Day Out presented in the adventurous 1945-46 season, is a study of a spinster secretary threatened with entombment in a solicitor's office haunted by her memories of lost opportunity. The first two Acts, in which her past is woven skilfully into her present by the ghostly projections of her mind, are notable for well-observed character and a pervading tone of regret and longing. Janet Dougle, the secretary, is contrasted in her self-possession and control to the young, vital, scatterbrained typists, Peggy and Nora. Her probable future is summed up in the character of Crabbie, an elderly senior clerk solaced in his loneliness by whisky, mournful but dignified. Robertson, one of the partners in the firm, is told by his friend Petrie :

"All of us are haunted quite sufficiently by our memories. Not only memories of the dead. Memories of the living. Of all the people we've met and known. When you're young, you look forward and imagine. As you get older, you look back and remember. You live the different dramas of your life over and over again, as though you went back a score of times to the same play. It's the greater part of life, remembering."

The other partner, Robertson's nephew John Wilcox, is reported missing in action at sea – he is a wartime naval officer – and it is memory of him which haunts Janet Dogle. When Crabbie and she remain in the office at night, fire-watching, John Wilcox comes to her like a ghost, the bright young man he was a dozen years previously, whose preoccupation with yachting and the sea was the despair of his uncle and the barrier between his affections and Janet's unspoken love. Remembering, Janet loosens her strictly pinned hair and lets it fall "like a mane" about her shoulders, provoking another "ghost" to rise – that of John Wilcox's friend, Lionel Aldersea, loose-living and sophisticated. Alderson is the only man ever to kiss Janet, for lacking John's naivety he recognised in the secretary a carefully concealed wildness. Invited by Lionel to dinner, and presumably, an affair of fiery intensity, she hesitates: the invitation is not repeated. Later in the night, she is tormented by the result of her hesitation, Lionel's marriage to another woman, the images of which taunt her to distraction.

The last Act in which memory is banished and present reality asserted, brings these personalities into the lawyer's office on the following morning. Lionel Aldersea and his wife Violet are now finalising their divorce, discovering in the process that a letter from Violet which might have halted the proceedings has been deliberately "lost" by Janet before it reached Robertson. Not understanding Janet's feelings towards himself, Lionel accuses John of engineering the divorce, and of adultery; only to be confronted by John, rescued from the sea. Seeing him again, Janet realises that he was the cause for her hesitation with Lionel twelve years earlier, and he mercifully has lost the naivety which blinded him towards her. The play ends with Janet at last escaping from the narrowing confines of her drab employment with her true love.

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Millar displays considerable ability in his handling of the "ghosts" of memory; creating a subtle juxtaposition of past and present by their simultaneous appearance in the deserted office, inducing a strongly felt impression of Janet's inner grief. The last Act rather destroys this however, for the conclusion of Day In, Day Out rings false, as the author neatly and happily ties up all the threads; and there is some crassly inappropriate jingoism in the confrontation between Lionel and John Wilcox which smacks more of the Boys' Own Paper than of mature drama. A device used in Act 1 to introduce the different characters, Robertson's inquiry into a waste-paper basket repeatedly and mysteriously upset in his room proves awkward in the last Act when the crime is laid unconvincingly at Janet's feet. The redeeming excellence of the first Acts – strongly reminiscent of Millar's earlier "memory" play Thunder in the Air (1928) – not entirely obscured by flaws, brought little acclaim in 1946, when war-weary audiences sought less melancholy entertainment.

1955 saw Millar's comedy The Sell Out at the Citizens'. This tale of rival store owners in a Scottish country town is an unexceptional if competent work, with a rather heavy-handed "serious" theme underlying its lightness. Elderly Samuel Bauldy, proud and independent, battles against modern business methods in the shop of his longstanding rival, Taggart. Taggart's widow has placed the control of the business in the hands of Tom MacBain, an ambitious manager who recognises the need to join a large-scale combine operating at national level. To interest one of these groups he proposes a union of Bauldy and Taggart business, a suggestion fiercely resisted by the old man. Meanwhile, Bauldy's portrait is being painted by bohemian artist Sandyman Petrie, who soon decides to join the battle on Bauldy's behalf, aided by Diana, Bauldy's granddaughter, and John MacColl, a shop-assistant. Together, they stage a fire – which apparently is standard practice in trade, due to the profits to be made at fire-sales. The desired effect is accomplished, but the fire-raisers almost land themselves in jail by their action. Finally, old Bauldy gives in to MacBain's arguments, and retires from business after the merger. Diana and MacBain become engaged, and Petrie flees from the entwining arms of Mrs. Adair, would-be voluptuary of the Dress Department. The

play is mildly entertaining, but extremely slight, most of the comic characterisations being noticeably strained and the plot being stretched to the utmost.

The only other work of Millar's produced by the Citizens' was a farce, Royal Scotch (1957). This is a fairly conventional comedy concerning a bet made one boozy Burns night by young Sir James Craigieson that he can steal a cask of unblended whisky from his friend Pogget's distillery, and keep it undetected for two days. The theft is duly committed, Sir James being assisted by his servant MacPater, descended from a long line of Glasgow criminals, and Dougal, a highland employee. A love interest is provided by Lucy Semple, who though engaged to the bullying Clayfield, and employed by Pogget at the distillery, is clearly destined to be Sir James' sweetheart. After several moments of near-discovery, the thieves finally conceal the cask in the old mill-house cellar, only to find that Lucy's two aunts and heroically alcoholic uncle are planning to holiday in the building. Despite strenuous efforts to remove the cask – including a farcical attempt by MacPater dressed as a village siren, to lure uncle Henry into a bedroom while Dougal escapes with the whisky – the eccentric old imbibor finds the cask and sets out on a Dionysian frolic round the neighbourhood dispensing free drams to all and sundry. Just before the time-limit for the wager expires, one of Lucy's aunts recovers the cask, and Sir James eludes the taint of felony. Lucy abandons her self-centred fiance, finding more congenial company with Sir James.

The plot is simple, but handled with pace and energy, and the characters of MacPater and Uncle Henry have a pleasing eccentricity which makes up for the conventionality of the others.

Inevitably, in the light of the powerful imagination and well-developed skill evident in Thunder in the Air, written fifteen years before the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre was created, Millar's later work can only be regarded as evidence of a talent in decline.

#### PAUL VINCENT CARROL

The tentative early stirrings of native drama at the Citizens' had a

rigorous critic in Paul Vincent Carrol, whose Irish plays had won him a fair measure of fame. Carrol was a schoolteacher in Glasgow, and had contributed some work during the war to the M. S. U. Theatre in Rutherglen. Invited on to the Citizens' Board, he let it be known that he would have few kind words to say until Scottish writers had achieved standards approaching those of the great Irish dramatists of the Abbey tradition, to which he himself was wholeheartedly committed. In this tradition, he had proved to be a powerful, if at times melodramatic writer, in plays such as Shadow and Substance, The Wise Have Not Spoken and The Old Foolishness, all of which the Citizens' gladly produced; when he turned his hand to plays of Scottish life, however, the result was less impressive. His best effort in this area was Green Cars Go East, boldly confronting the problems of a working-class family brought low by prolonged unemployment. Written for the M. S. U. Theatre, the play's title refers to the Glasgow tramcar route to the crumbling working-class tenements of the City's east side – the routes in those days being identified by a colour-code. The heroine of the piece is Mary Lewis, a thirty-year-old schoolteacher whose wages are the only support of her family. Her father and mother have already abandoned hope and respectability, and are steadily slipping into the morass of brawling, drunkenness and semi-criminality which will hold them forever in the slums. Her brother Bill has a bursary to attend University, depending on Mary's financial assistance to keep him there; but Charlie, her younger brother, is fast developing into a petty criminal. Mary has to lie for him to the local police when he is caught carrying lines for the local bookmaker. The constant struggle to maintain a semblance of respectability in the face of repeated humiliations reaches a crisis when Mary's wealthy fiance, fellow-teacher Johnnie McHardie, is offered a headmastership in Stirling and asks her to marry him immediately. When she refuses because her family need her more than Johnnie, his anger flares and the engagement is broken off after a row about her father's latest escapade which has dragged Mary into Court to plead for him. The young woman's devotion to her family is rewarded, however. Bill passes his University Finals, and young Johnny is found an



apprenticeship – even Mr. and Mrs. Lewis are finally bullied by their children into a semblance of responsibility. The future brightens even more when Johnnie McHardie comes to ask Mary's forgiveness: his own father has been charged with embezzlement. Mary welcomes his return, but sends him home to learn resolution in the face of his neighbour's middle-class censure, with the symbol of his tram-ride east into Glasgow's grim tenements as an anchor for the stoic virtue he has learned there.

This sentimentalized and somewhat inflated ending, coupled with Mary's unflinching courage and sense of duty saps the strength of the impression created in the first part of the play of the terrible nagging pettiness of poverty. It is no more than a gesture of hope, and as there is virtually no characterisation to speak of in Green Cars Go East it is quite without conviction. Indeed, it is difficult to accept that Mary, Bill and Charlie are the offspring of such a feckless couple as the Lewis's, for Carrol hints at no past steadiness in them which could have sent Mary to University. A disciple of O'Casey's expressionism, Carrol never satisfactorily discards naturalism, and many of his plays, like this one, seem to fall between two stools. The background of slum-conditions is adequately sketched, but the play really takes wing only once, in the school staffroom scene in Act 2 with its entertaining cameos of the lazy, placid Miss Scott, and the forbidding but compassionate headmistress. Credit must be given to Carrol for attempting to deal with a very real contemporary problem in Scotland: it is unfortunate that he overstates the triumphs of virtue.

Shortly after Green Cars Go East came the bombing of Clydebank, in response to which he wrote The Strings, My Lord, Are False, bitterly attacking the bumbling inadequacy of local authorities incapable of alleviating the tragedy. Remarkably popular at the time it was first produced in Rutherglen, the play now seems quite astonishingly melodramatic and clumsy, displaying as much subtlety as the blitz which prompted it. There is a noble young town-councillor who topples the corrupt regime of men more interested in profiteering than in protecting the townsfolk from bombs; a girl with whom he finds love though she is pregnant by another: a

priest whose faith and holy anger supports the flagging spirits of the rescue-workers; and a coward who ultimately escapes his fear. There is also a pathetic child, a prostitute with a heart of gold, and a consumptive Clydeside communist, complete with red scarf. The heroic efforts and religious faith of this caricatured cross-section finally defeat – though not without cost – corruption and German bombers. The peculiarities of wartime probably explain both the nature of The Strings, My Lord, Are False and the contemporary response to it.

No excuses can be found for the play Carrol wrote specially for the Citizens' in 1947, Weep For Tomorrow, a blatantly false picture of Scottish village life in which the author strove to echo rural despair and disillusion in the same manner as his Irish plays on similar themes. His expressionist technique here is quite risible.

His central figure, Skinner, is schoolteacher in the village of St. Bride, twenty miles north of Dundee, and the action takes place in his house – which requires for symbolic value and convenience sake, an adjoining schoolroom, an ancient tower, and an association with the national hero William Wallace. Skinner is apparently addicted to drams of whisky, even when teaching – Carrol never makes it clear whether this is to be viewed as alcoholic anaesthesia or an accepted Scottish custom – but is nevertheless the most respected man in St. Bride, frequently called upon to settle disputes. This he does, incredibly, with the aid of a tawse administered to all parties in a quarrel, and a Vision of Eternal Values.

There is a strike at the local factory led by Bill Craigie, a communist – and for good measure, also work-shy and ignorant; and Bill's utterly unbelievable daughter Femina, a farcically ruthless, dedicated Red who dresses in overalls and boots to win the confidence of the workers. An unexpected flood at the riverside brings the Craigie family into Skinner's home, where Femina receives a proposal of marriage from the factory owner himself, George Austen. George really wishes to retire from managing the business, which he would leave in Femina's hands, and devote himself to furniture design and art: with Femina's "gentle" sister Katherine he represents

sensitivity, creativity and human values in the play. Before the wedding of this unlikely pair – for Femina accepts him – the bride-to-be discovers the pleasures of femininity and seduces local-boy-made-good Allan Graham, now a famous engineer; who like her represents intellect, atheism, and the mechanistic force of history. After a loveless mating in the schoolroom, they decide to marry in order to keep each other's brains stimulated, and George seeks consolation in Katherine.

Throughout Weep For Tomorrow Skinner has mooted his pet scheme of using the local river as a source of electrical power which will restore life to the declining rural valley. Ironically, when his proposal is accepted and Allan Graham, his star pupil, comes to implement it, unsentimental technology improves on his plan and informs him that the village itself will be flooded. The schoolteacher, on learning this, abandons all his faith in God and the future.

Carrol succeeds only in exaggerating the gloom. Many passages are lifeless, and the play in general is simply too long, with its language falsely inflated and unconvincing. There is not one character who bears the least resemblance to a genuine person, and the political and social comment is stunningly crude. Weep For Tomorrow is frankly infantile. According to Winifred Bannister, it so shocked James Bridie that he wrote the sensitive Mr. Gillie "to wash the taste of Weep For Tomorrow out of our mouths".<sup>1</sup>

In each of these plays, Carrol fails to match the achievement of his Irish plays, and as an example to budding Scottish playwrights, Weep for Tomorrow is laughable. Nevertheless, it is in Carrol's favour that he did attack contemporary social issues in his plays, employed an advanced dramatic technique, and was not afraid to deal with ordinary working-class situations: as a result he had some influence on Glasgow Unity Theatre in its pursuit of social documentary for the stage. The failure of most of the native-born playwrights encouraged by the Citizens' even to attempt to grasp firmly the nettle presented by modern Scotland was marked, disappointing, and ultimately crippling.

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1 Bannister p. 230 James Bridie and his Theatre

## GEORGE MUNRO

A similar confidence in handling working-class themes and settings marks the plays of George Munro; two of which, Vineyard Street and Gay Landscape, were performed at the Citizens'. The other trade-marks of his pen are his remarkable skill with dialogue, his O'Casey-like stylisation, the specifically Scottish targets of his ire, and the sheer bitterness of his invective. Add to this two further recurring features of his plays, a preoccupation with religious bigotry and drunkenness; and an impression is received of a rare creature indeed in Scottish drama: an iconoclast, bent on stripping bare the evils he perceived eating the heart out of Scottish life. "... he set out... to take the essence of West Scotland Life as he saw it, to heighten what he found, and place it in a grandly formal context, peopling his plays with men and women who lived, loved and hated with an intensity and passion beyond any 'realistic' style of playwriting."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps it is inevitable that he received little encouragement to develop his talents: only four of his plays were produced on the professional stage before his death.

Munro was without doubt a remarkable man. From a working-class background in Govan and Ayrshire, he turned to the sea for an occupation as a merchant sailor, and was largely self-educated. His interest in the theatre was encouraged by conversations with an ailing Russian aristocrat on a voyage to Russia, from whom Munro learned of Stanislavsky and the work of the Moscow Arts Theatre. After leaving the sea to become a journalist, he developed his theatrical knowledge so diligently that he 'ghosted' for Max Reinhardt during one of the great impresario's visits to Britain, probably at the beginning of the 1930's. In 1935 Munro's collaboration with Basil Dean, Murder Gang – written out of his experiences as a journalist – was produced in London, where it enjoyed wide acclaim.

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1 Tony Paterson, "The Playwright who sought the heights", Scottish Theatre Jan. 1970 p. 10

Described as 'an admirable thriller, with enough character studies to raise it well above the squeal and bullet level', Murder Gang took an unusual slant on a murder investigation and subsequent trial and portrays the irresponsible ruthlessness of a crime reporter bent on creating a sensational story regardless of who suffers. The Times found it a 'vivid and veracious and disgusting picture'.

"The authors evidently intend the picture to excite disgust and, indeed, they allow themselves so much propagandist licence that in the end it deranges the values.

... with the suspect's arrest the authors force the story to take second place while they bend all their energies to an exposure of the 'crime reporting racket'.

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In 1947 Unity Theatre in Glasgow produced Gold in his Boots, Munro's study of professional football and the bitter rewards it offered even to the best players. Despite the author's skill with dialogue and atmosphere, the play comes to grief on the shoals of poor construction, confused intention, and a forced, rather self-congratulatory posture of despair.

The story is basically simple enough. Young Tommy Craig, studying for a place in a University to escape the chronic unemployment of a mining village, finds his talent for football to be a more direct passport to wealth despite the opposition of his religious mother and Kate, his University-educated girlfriend. Their fears are compounded by a fatherly journalist, Bob McColl, all too familiar with the transience of football fortune. At the end of the first Act, Tommy, now a popular idol, returns home to discover his father uproariously drunk on the proceeds of his son's success. Despite this omen and Kate's continued opposition, he chooses to forget University and pursue a career in football.

Although there are some awkward moments in Act 1 indicative of Munro's hesitancy to reject naturalism altogether, as when a seemingly endless stream of unlikely characters pours into the Craigs' kitchen, it is fairly successful in bodying forth a simple theme. Unfortunately

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1 Times, Nov. 16, 1935.

two further Acts continue to elaborate the plot without adding anything of value to the play: the figure of MacColl is treated with an indulgence which transforms him into a heroic – and unbelievable – champion of truth; and a murder–mystery with Tommy as principal suspect reduces the play to the level of a children's comic. Furthermore, with each passing scene, Munro's intention becomes less and less sure, and the play ends with a most unsatisfying compromise, part "happy end", part bitter irony. Tommy, his name cleared of suspicion – by, of course, an unlooked–for confession from the true murderer – wins the Cup for his team: in the process he is crippled for life – but marriage to Kate awaits him, and substantial gifts from wealthy admirers begin to flood in. Not content even with this fortunate twist, Munro brings the curtain down on MacColl sharing a whisky–bottle with an ex–star of the football pitch, now cast aside into poverty. Fortunately, Gold in his Boots was far below the standard of Vineyard Street and Gay Landscape although Munro never overcame his habits of self–indulgent verbosity or of cramming in quantities of widely disparate material. It is at its best in the scenes of Tommy's family home, where characters and atmosphere have been created with verve and confidence.

Vineyard Street (1949) is one of the rare attacks on the very core of Scottish respectability, religious bigotry. 'Nineveh', the epitome of a Scots seaside town, provides the background for the fire and brimstone world of an extreme sect of Protestantism, in which an impressionable young girl, Mary, sublimates and warps her physical and emotional attraction towards a young sailor, Heuck, and transforms it into a hysterical desire to be "possessed" by "the Spirit of the Lord". Her spiritual excesses induce an ecstatic, helpless frenzy, in which condition she is unwittingly seduced by Heuck. Her resulting pregnancy brings disgrace upon her puritanically righteous family, but she refuses to show a sense of shame, insisting instead that "a promise has been fulfilled", believing that she has been chosen for a miraculous birth in "the hold of everlasting arms". Appalled by Mary's conviction, and rejected by her as a husband, Heuck returns to the sea, and shortly is reported to have drowned. Twenty–one years later the

sect are rediscovered vying with each other for spiritual superiority as they await the fulfilment of the "promise": the coming-of-age of Mary's miraculous son, Emmanuel, who has been brought up according to the narrowest tenets of their faith to be, at the very least, their greatest evangelist. Their welcome is forestalled however, by the return of Heuck, who finds Emmanuel alone. Annoyed by the boy's priggish conceit and unquestioning obedience to a faith which Heuck can only detest, he tricks the young prophet into drinking with him, ultimately making him drunk. Disgusted by his own cruelty in this, Heuck confronts Mary and forces her to recognise the less than miraculous truth about her son's begetting: together they decide to leave Nineveh, and remove Emmanuel from the distortions of religion which have so marred their own lives.

The play has weaknesses - mostly in the last Act, when the conversation between father and unwitting son becomes laboured, when Munro permits himself indulgence in tedious flights of rhetoric from Heuck of precious little relevance to the play, and when the final revelation of the truth to Mary is surprisingly rushed. Her relief and acquiescence in a new life is a bare, unconvincing sketch compared with the carefully-studied nuances of her earlier obsession. Nevertheless it shows an astonishing ability, not least in the confidence, understanding, and ultimate sympathy with which Munro grasps the nettle of blasphemy and sectarian narrowness. The world he deals with in Vineyard Street proved meat too strong for many in his audience in 1949: one reviewer observed "Scots religious taboos are perhaps too strong to absorb without discomfort the parade of hypocrisy and the uncouthness inherent in (the) theme...".<sup>1</sup> It would be more correct to say that Scots uncouthness and religious hypocrisy could not but embarrass any spectator. Characterisation is, in this respect, all-important. Munro's characters, from the blindly ecstatic Mary to her narrowly hypocritical father, Moses Maclsaac, and the oversensitive petty gentility of his wife Martha, down to the quickly sketched supporting characters Magdalene, Maggie and Tapey and the play's yardstick of well-intentioned

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1 Glasgow Herald 11th Oct. 1949

simplicity, Geordie, provide a rapid but sure impression of human response to the stifling strictures of extreme puritanism.

Vineyard Street shows Munro at his best with dialogue, unerringly accurate in terms of character through the first two Acts, yet concealing the author's careful control of pace, theme and plot beneath its easy flow. Above all else it is the combination of simple naturalness with vivid and unmistakably Scottish expression, which impresses. In Act 1, the following passage occurs after the warmhearted zeal of Geordie, one of the Brethren, has prompted Mary to public confession of her "sins", much to the mortification of her parents :

Geordie: Moses, sorry am I that word of mine worked division between you and your lass. . . .

Moses : (in manacled fury) Now I'm named the man who stood between his child and conversion.

Sheila : Maybe if Mary went away for a day or two?

Heuck : Haven't you a herb for the Desire to Feel Good?  
For Sex Hypostatization?

Magdalene : Mother of God, is that the new name for a long walk?

Sheila : I'd go with her, Mrs. MacIsaac, but I'm booked for a Nature Conference in Glasgow.

Magdalene : Ha, ha, Nature in Glasgow! It's no' natural.

Martha : She could go to Arran.

Sheila : The very place.

Moses : (quietly) What's wrong wi' her father's fireside?

Maggie : (muttering) It's too artificial.

Moses : D'you hear? I'm artificial.

Geordie : You're thrawn, Moses ma-an. Gie Mary the kiss of a father: aye, the kiss Saint Paul bids us bestow on the anointed!

Moses : She's stabbed me in the back.

Mary : (quietly) Because I Testified, father?

Tapey : We took your testimony for granted.

Mary : So did I. Then Geordie showed me the road to Calvary. I heard a Voice saying : 'Come, Come unto me'. The words that woke me were Geordie's 'You, you, or you', he said, but the Voice that said



'Come' was no Nineveh voice.

Magdalene : Oh, Mary. When ye put it like that I see it's a vocation you've got, right enough. If only ye'd have a word wi' Father Gallacher.

Maggie : If only she's have a word wi' the Parish Minister. Better still. Come wi' me and have a word wi' a big washin'.

The tension between Mary's elation, the bitterness of offended respectability in her parents, Heuck's disgusted cynicism, and the homely but disquieted humour of Catholic Magdalene and four-square Presbyterian Maggie, forms a deeply convincing composite maintained at perfect pitch, holding the attention without becoming flippant, bodying forth the theme without becoming ponderous.

The central incident of the last Act, the father vengefully forcing drunkenness upon his son, is worth noting. A similar scene is hinted at in Gold In His Boots, and is intensified in Mark but this Flea, a play also dealing with Scottish religious hypocrisy and extremism which was not produced till after Munro's death. The use of drunkenness is prevalent in James Bridie's plays and elsewhere in Scottish writing: Munro's handling of it suggests a profound insight into at least one aspect of this preoccupation, its basis in a self-disgust that borders upon perversity, and extreme reaction to religious and social mores demanding an impossible rectitude.

Vineyard Street did not mark the start of a notable career in dramatic writing for Munro. It was 1958 before another of his works reached the stage, and this play, Gay Landscape, proved a disappointing successor to Vineyard Street. As with Vineyard Street, the play spans two generations, the children having to pay for the sins of their parents, the greatest sin being hypocrisy. Each Act brings together the Gascoynes for the recurring family rituals of funerals and christenings, an acceptable formal framework within which to hold such an extended time-scale. Indeed, Gay Landscape displays a marked formality throughout – a stylisation reaching for the inevitability of Greek Tragedy.

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The womenfolk and their bitterly argued rivalries dominate the play. In Act 1, gathered for the interment of their late father, they provide considerable colour and fire. Each has cause to feel superior in some way, each gives the others cause for annoyance: Katherine is married to a wealthy, but much older carter; Anne, to a minister of the kirk, which gives her moral and social pretensions; Margery, to a schoolteacher whose Socialist cause she has also espoused with insensitive enthusiasm; Martha attends university; and Meg, the youngest, is a fiery rebel against convention. At the end of the Act she meets Margery's husband, Joseph, alone, and in a shrill denunciation reveals to the audience that he has not only had an affair with her, but that he has turned from her to Martha for his gratification. Meg then steals Martha's boat-ticket to America and leaves home.

The second Act has Martha delivered of an illegitimate child, Joseph's guilt being ultimately revealed to the horror-stricken family by a spiteful Meg, returned from the United States after successfully hunting for fortune. In the third Act, Martha's child Liz has grown to young womanhood, and being no better than she should – though Munro seems unable to decide whether she is, in fact, a slut, or simply a nice girl who goes into pubs – almost commits unwitting incest with Joseph's legitimate son, a young naval officer, on the eve of her grandmother's funeral. Discovered by the appalled Gascoynes, Liz in her turn casts in the family's outraged faces their own callous neglect for their deceased mother and it is they who are humbled.

The final shock, or rather shocks, are curiously without weight or point. Perhaps if Liz had slept with her half-brother, the play would have reached a grim but satisfying climax – Munro contents himself with less startling but more verbose phials of wrath from a girl outraged by the Gascoyne's insults. The business of the family's neglect of their mother is inadequately prepared for and plainly contrived as a convenient reversal of judgements.

Gay Landscape, gifted as it is with excellent dialogue, which is almost as fine as that in Vineyard Street, quite simply loses its way in the last Act, and depends too heavily on the sense of life which the

dialogue alone grants to it. Munro's grand formal structure is denied the stark simplicity it begs for, and instead houses shrill confusion.

"It has spirit and conviction, much energy, and more gall; indeed for a continuous sustained atrabilious flow it must be hard to equal . . . It is good strong stuff, with no holds and few words barred, and an impartial chance for everyone to bawl out everyone else . . . unfortunately it is the only thing Mr. Munro can think of . . . the thing soon merges into a single undifferentiated slanging match, with no hope of conclusion or even of movement. . . ." 1

Suggestions that Munro is about to develop as themes the influence of the industrial Clyde on those who live around it, or the lack of charity in Scottish life, come to nothing after their introduction, and serve only to increase disappointment at the play's conclusion. A striking formal eulogy of Glasgow's river in Act II achieves a rare intensity after which the quality of writing goes into obvious decline :

I've walked Clydeside at daybreak and mirkest hour.  
I've studied it in storm and sun. Buildings and  
wharves and stocks move into skyline setting for  
me. I've felt tender for the tracery of tenements  
touched by sun or winter cloudbank. But it's an  
eye below my seeing eye; an alien eye; that's  
taking it all in.

That's your hieland eye. For we're alien. We're  
no tenement trash. It was glen and mountain side,  
not close stairs and tenement gullies we were born  
to tread. (In rage, she goes to the window) That  
sheuch was never meant to croon our cradle song.  
Clearer water should've made the lullaby we  
heard. We opened our eyes to clatter, batter,  
bash and blistering shriek. (Swings on her heels.  
Comes down CENTRE almost to the floats). There's

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1 Glasgow Herald, 25 Feb. 1958

times when he's climbing the pulpit ahint the beadle, that I'd like to take a grip of Ian Alastair's coat-tails. (Oracularly) "Ye men of Clyde," I'd say, "Unplug your ears. Strip the blinkers from your eyes. When you chitter nonsense about the bonnie banks o' Clyde unfankle your teeth. Clyde built! Roamin in the gloaming! Take another look. You'll maybe tell yourselves the truth then. A stretching stream has worked on you a patriotism that's a world's wonder. If only it'd suck all of you into its maw, calamity'd be complete. From Falls of Clyde to Tail o' the Bank it works nothing but destruction. Destruction. Dirt. Despair. Grappling with it men become Masters of Men. But never Masters of You. Mother Clyde! I hate you.

Slightly bewildered, ANNE stares at the others.

Katherine : A kindly current, I used to think. My first minding is of paiddling in it. By Water Row. Above me, the thatched, weavers' cottages: beyond me, Campsie and Ben Lomond.

KATHERINE, entranced by retrospective mental view, takes ANNE's place down CENTRE

Where the iron palings are now, a path ran below the Auld Kirkyard. You could see green grass, even. When Alick began courting me, he'd a bit ground for the grazing. His horses were stabled in a bigging. Leased by him, but belonging to the Clyde; for Clydeside rats used floor and loft as a drying dormitory.

In general, George Munro's plays indicate a considerable ability denied an opportunity for full development. The working-class

basis of his plays, and his feel for the epic scale, the conflict of generations, is well-nigh unique in Scottish Theatre, and is certainly in stark contrast to the mainstream of writing, influenced through James Bridie and his predecessors by less uncompromising conventions. Munro successfully penetrated the core of contemporary Scottish working-class life without any sense of mere documentation and without relying on textbook social themes.

"His faults are obvious and we cannot appreciate his qualities unless we recognise 'warts and all'. He can repeat himself - characters, situations, - lines of dialogue, even, and his writing is often too wordy, and bestrewn with 'texts' : it requires not so much cutting as shredding.

His best plays are, however, and in every way, big plays. If they are failures, then they fail on a big scale, as some might feel. One may admire, one may dislike. One cannot ignore them."

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#### ALEXANDER REID

Fantasy found a Scots voice in the plays of Alexander Reid. Adapting traditional ballad material to his purposes, this author is best-known for The Lass wi the Muckle Mou - based on the same legend as Robert MacLellan's earlier Jeddart Justice - and The World's Wonder, both of which were published in an English version and received favourable attention at the time in England and further afield. Both plays share a light and enchanted atmosphere reminiscent of Christopher Fry's The Lady's Not For Burning, though lacking the English dramatist's dizzying and perhaps precious poetic fervour. This similarity is most notable in The World's Wonder where imitation seems to have outweighed invention.

Reid's first play, Worlds Without End (1946) produced by The Wilson Barret Company examines the complex question of scientific

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1 Tony Paterson, "The Playwright who sought the heights", Scottish Theatre, Jan. 1970 p.11.

responsibility, a problem particularly topical in the immediate aftermath to Hiroshima with the Cold War polarising the political antagonisms of the world. Professor Michael Quilter, the head of financier Harcas' science research institute, informed of the institute's imminent closure due to Harcas' monetary problems, offers to rush to a conclusion an experimental programme building an advanced atomic disintegrator to provide cheap power. There is a considerable risk that in the process, a single miscalculation could provoke a chain-reaction of atomic fission which will destroy not only the research unit, but the entire world. Some of the scientists refuse to work on the project, but most remain loyal to Quilter despite increasing pressure from the outside world until the very last moment, when the awful implications of their action finally sink in. Humanity in the laboratory is represented by Doctor Robert Hislop and his girlfriend Ann, and Maggie Story, the simple soul who makes tea and coffee for the scientists and tidies up their common-room. Hislop forces Quilter to a debate about the morality of what he is doing, but Quilter persuades his doubting colleagues that the Pursuit of the Spirit of Truth outweighs the Pursuit of the Spirit of Man. They agree to let him complete the final experiment, but before he can do so, Maggie Story poisons him. Ironically, the atomic disintegrator, switched on by one of Quilter's supporters, functions perfectly. Amidst scientific rejoicing, Hislop rather weakly asks whether such enormous risks are acceptable even in the light of success.

Apart from some fine observation of casual behaviour, particularly in the first scenes, Worlds Without End fails to convince, partly due to curiously misplaced satire of pulp newspapers and a rather low-key emotional level ill-suited to the magnitude of the impending disaster. Intellect, rather than feeling, is the hall-mark of the play, although a dream-sequence illustrates the vanity which underlies Quilter's dedication to the unchained Spirit.

The Lass wi the Muckle Mou first performed in October 1950 by the East Lothian Repertory Company, though written for the Citizens' Theatre and produced there later in the same year, is Reid's most successful piece. To the tale of a young Border reiver given the

choice between marriage to an ugly girl and death on the gallows is grafted the return from Elfland of Thomas the Rhymer. The curtain rises on Thomas taking his leave from the land of Faery after a seven-year sojourn to seek out the excitements of the mortal world's instability, which he hopes will provide the basis of a great ballad. His supernatural lover, unwilling to lose him and sceptical of the world's charms, wagers that he will uncover no great heroic deed, but insists, with the aid of her magical power, that he tells only the strictest truth in his poem – a severe embarrassment for any creative artist.

Thomas finds himself at Elibank, in the home of Sir Gideon Murray, whose daughter Meg is renowned throughout the Borders for her uncommonly large mouth – a somewhat undeserved reputation created largely by an idle old rhyme of Thomas,

"Meg o Elibank had a mou  
Where ye could stall a Galloway coo,  
And gin her teeth were drawn aside  
The herd as well could bide inside!"

Not surprisingly, Meg is on the shelf, though "well-shaped and pleasant looking". Warned in advance of a raid by the Scott family, Sir Gideon – who hankers after more lawless days – lays an ambush in which young Willie Scott is captured. When Gideon proposes a summary execution, his wife Lady Grizel and Meg point out that Willie would make an excellent husband for the luckless girl, and the victorious laird gleefully agrees to their suggestion. Willie is given his choice between death or marriage and to Thomas' delight, chooses the gallows. Languishing overnight in a dungeon, the young man is visited in turn by Meg, pretending to be a servant; Thomas, seeking to strengthen Willie's heroic resolve; Sir Gideon attempting a compromise; and a shrewd Lady Grizel who observes that her daughter might not accept Willie even if he does change his mind. At one point Meg is hiding under the prisoner's straw from Thomas, and Thomas is hiding there from Sir Gideon, and the whole scene ends with Thomas dragging her into the light where she is revealed to Willie as Muckle Moulded Meg.

Next morning, Willie, by now quite taken with Meg's gentleness,

tries to bargain with Sir Gideon about a tocher, and is only saved from his prospective father-in-law's indignation when Meg appears with a rope round her neck threatening to leap from the battlements if her father will not acquiesce. His tower now surrounded by vengeful Scotts, Sir Gideon gives way: the young couple depart joyously together, and Thomas the Rhymer, disgusted by the effete days that have fallen on his heroic, bloody Borders, returns to the mysteries of Elfland.

The pace of the play, after a rather stilted opening with Thomas and the Lady in Green, is brisk; the dialogue confident, though there is none of MacLellan's earthiness. The tension between the poet's desire for grand gestures of hopeless defiance and the down-to-earth realities of those more immediately involved in the situation is cleverly handled and maintained to the end of the play, with incidental comedy from the much put-upon Sir Gideon and his clear-headed wife, and a shrewdly measured quantity of sentimental pathos when Meg and Willie are alone together in the dungeon. Though hardly startling, The Lass wi the Muckle Mou is a pleasing comedy of above average interest, successfully maintaining its lightness of touch from beginning to end.

The World's Wonder (1953), a more ambitious work, is in the end less happy. Reaching out for metaphysical heights, Reid loses contact with drama; the play never accelerates beyond the ponderous, with a last act where stasis achieves a quite remarkable pitch. Nevertheless, his play was outstandingly popular – during a three-week run (in Glasgow) in 1955 it was seen by 20,000 people.<sup>1</sup>

The play tells how Michael Scott, the great Scottish necromancer, – though Reid makes little of this potentially rich character, creating instead a humorously stern fairy godfather – becomes involved in the affairs of the little town of Dubbitty, where the step-

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1 Glasgow Herald Sept. 10, 1955



daughter of the Provost is apparently bewitched. An imposter claiming to be Michael is tempted by the reward offered to attempt a cure, but before he can, Michael himself challenges his authenticity and after a contest of magical skill, the interloper is defeated and revealed as Black Minnie, a local witch. With Minnie disposed of, Michael turns to the problem of Jeannie, the Provost's daughter, whose coma is delaying the marriage her father has arranged for her with the far-from-inspiring Laird o Clartydykes. When Michael learns from the Provost's wife that :

"Jeannie's beensaft i the heid for the best o a year!  
.... Readin in buiks o rhyme! .... Wantin tae mairry  
a shepherd.... "

he divines the truth of her "enchantment" and after clearing the room of all but his new-found servant, Lazarus, he tricks the girl into admitting her ruse and persuades her to confide in him. She is in love with a shepherd, Jock, who is seen with the aid of Michael's magic mirror. According to obscure local custom, whoever marries her becomes Provost of the town, and it is this honour which her step-father and Clartydykes, old associates in corruption, connive at securing. Michael solves the problem by pretending that Jeannie's 'cure' is marriage, but that her husband will take a curse upon his own shoulders and die within a year. Clartydykes readily surrenders his claim to the willing Jock, but Michael's mirror reveals that he and the Provost plan to do away with the shepherd and have Jeannie remarried to the Laird, and the young couple, together with Michael and Lazarus, are obliged to flee through the magic mirror itself, which translates them to regions remote from Dubbitty's debased oppressors. Here, scudding through "the deeps of the sky" in a small boat, Michael reveals himself to Lazarus as Merlin, Faustus, Nostrodamus, Paracelsus and a host of other astounding figures; and to have practiced:

". . . . near aw professions  
Except the law, whilk I could never bide! "  
\* \* \*\* \*\* \*\*

Michael :       Whenever the world fa's back in the weary rut  
                  Worship o dogma or the casual chain  
                  Back tae the auld broon earth I come again  
                  Tae brak the shackles on imagination!  
                  Confoond the dominies and upset the laws!  
                  Burn up the systems in amazements' fire  
                  Skail aw the schools and set young fancies free!

Lazarus :       ". . . . ye're the world's wonder!

Michael's immortal name is "wonder" itself, and the play ends as the boat passes out of sight into the depths of the universe.

                  " 'I've set a course ayont the last kent stars.  
                  Gin we win through we burst the bands o space  
                  And beach the morn upon Infinity!  
                  Jetsun the chairts! "

This soaring affirmation of the fantastic imagination is too heady, however, for the theatrical means employed. Reid's blank verse is insufficient in imagery, freshness and excitement to replace with poetry the movement wholly absent from the stage in this last scene, which by wiping out the petty conflict of Dubbitty has also wiped out dramatic tension. The contest between Michael and the imposter in Act 1 employs a set of scales in which their spells are weighed – a feature strikingly similar to the contest of poets in Aristophanes' The Frogs : and is generally over-long and wordy, although its magical devices are imaginative, colourful and unexpected. Elsewhere the comedy is halting and painfully obvious; and the play is in the main a disappointment, characterless and unconvincing despite the audacity of its pantomimic effects. The Scots language, which compares well in dramatic effect with the English version of the play, does not save The World's Wonder from an overall impression of inflated sentiment and shallow philosophy. The Glasgow Herald critic, recognising the play's indubitable popularity, takes note of its theatrical appeal as well as its limitations –

                  ". . . for most of its span (itis) quite magical,  
                  full of colour and high comedy, wisps of  
                  poetry and philosophy, even moments of  
                  beauty and wonder, and with enough conjuration  
                  proper . . . to satisfy the most incredulous child.

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There are places where the piece flows sluggishly, for the story is so slight that more is demanded of mere words and pasted-board characters than either can give. "

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Diana premiered at the Citizens' in 1954, is a superficial melodrama mingling pseudo-psychology with the supernatural in a Highland manse haunted by an organ-playing poltergeist. A team of psychic investigators led by young Dr. Neil Gordon discovers that Diana, the shy, repressed, dutiful granddaughter of the stern minister, Joshua MacAlpine, is the source of the phenomenon, schizophrenically expressing her inhibited instincts. There is a reasonable measure of suspense in the play, but melodramatic clichés abound, and characterisation and comic effects are rudimentary and weak. The real interest of Diana is psychological, but Neil Gordon's realisation of the truth is let out of the bag by the end of Act II, and the last Act holds few surprises. Mercifully Diana is fast-moving.

A more credible treatment of the psychic/psychologic experience is apparent in The Wax Doll (1956). The centre of attention here is in people's response to superstition rather than in melodramatic effects, and the conclusion is unexpectedly grim and pessimistic.

John Darnley, the principal character, is president of the Society for the Propagation of Rationalism, and a dedicated campaigner against superstition in any form from religion to fairground fortune-tellers. He has of late been troubled by a reviving popular interest in supernatural healers - "rooted not so much in the will of the charlatans to deceive, but in the will of the masses to believe". His own family has been suffering a series of misfortunes, the worst of which has been the crippling of his daughter Jenny; and when Sardou, a Glaswegian "faith-healer" cures the paralysed arm of a local child, Mrs. Maria Darnley becomes haunted by the hope of a similarly miraculous answer to Jenny's troubles. Sardou himself is then cast up on the Darnley's doorstep by a car-accident, and despite John's objections is invited to treat the girl. Employing hypnosis and a

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1 Glasgow Herald Oct. 18 1955.

symbolically broken wax doll which he reassembles over a flame, he effects a cure, utterly confounding the astonished rationalist. In the general delight which follows, Maria asks if she may keep the doll, and Sardou agrees, saying carelessly: "You haud on tae that Mrs. and as long as it keeps thegither so will Jenny". It proves to be an unfortunate remark, for John soon finds his family treating the doll as an idol, investing in its safekeeping a magical power without which Jenny would once more become an invalid. Trying to make Jenny see that her cure depended on the power of her own faith, assisted and given confidence but nothing more by Sardou, John persuades her to destroy the doll and liberate herself from mental slavery. Maria interrupts them, sees the broken doll, and cries "She's crippled again! I know she is! I know she is!" Her hysteria communicates itself to her daughter who finds herself as a result unable to move. Even when her young brother confesses to having broken the doll earlier, then repaired it without her knowledge she remains paralysed. Baffled and defeated, John agrees to recall Sardou.

The Wax Doll moves briskly and the characters, though briefly sketched, are surely created. The opposition of John Darnley and Sardou is very finely balanced: Darnley a painstaking, rather old-fashioned liberal humanist striving against dangerous ignorance, Sardou a surprisingly frank working-class Glaswegian, a professional entertainer nevertheless wholly convinced that he is the agent of a mysterious power of healing. A lifelong commitment to his creed makes the deeply concerned father let slip to Jenny after the miracle that he would rather see her crippled again than chained to superstitious belief, an unintentional confession no less true to his character than it is unexpectedly brutal. That John Darnley is immediately faced with the literal consequences of his statement, however unlikely the event, is typical of the play. Reasoned logic cannot but fail under such circumstances when improbabilities begin to multiply fantastically. As Farquharson, Darnley's fellow-rationalist, says of the vulgarity which accompanies Sardou's miracle-working - and indeed, surrounds the grotto at Lourdes - "One feels, if this were only a lie it would be a more skilful one."

Thus the thunderstorm which rolls ponderously over the First Act is somehow more than mere hackneyed stage-effect: on this occasion it is as much a defiance of reason as is the mysterious healer it forces into the Darnley's home.

The play has its unsteady moments, such as the visits of Mrs. Bateman with her son whose crippled arm Sardou restored to health, but in general it is an effective study of an unusually disquieting subject, and as such is vastly better than Diana.

A very different work is Voyage Ashore, (1956). A version of the return of Odysseus to his home in Ithaca, it makes good use of comedy, most notably in the figure of Penelope, a superbly self-centred Merry Widow enjoying her plague of suitors – all English, in contrast to Odysseus' Scots – to the utmost. The play's conclusion is reached in Athene's command to Odysseus to sail for the Western Isles, which compares well with the expression of similar sentiments in Reid's later and much more well-known play, The World's Wonder :

Odysseus : When I was fechtin' in Illium wi Agamemnon  
And later wand'ring the warld, this sea-girt island  
Glowed in ma mind wi near on fabulous beauty  
O Grecian Helen upon the Trojan tours.  
But noo I'm back, It's not the least like I minded it!  
Aw that I yince thocht great has grown mean and sma  
Things that I luv'd the best hae become maist strange  
tae me –  
Like the unco face o a corpse thas was yince a freend!

Here, the tone of regret is subordinated to a restlessness and brevity which avoid the longeurs and sentimentality of the earlier work. Reid adds little, however, to the noticeably bare bones of the plot, and as one critic acidly observed about Odysseus' abrupt disillusion with his long-cherished dream of home-coming, "There is a 'surprise' ending, only the surprise is a little spoiled by having been thought of first by Tennyson."<sup>1</sup>

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1 Glasgow Herald 3 Jul. 1956

## ROBERT KEMP

The most frequent Scottish contributor to the Citizens' Theatre, and also one of the first to take advantage of its patronage, was Robert Kemp, whose name is one of the best-known in Scottish Drama and broadcasting. Kemp began to write plays before the Citizens' took an interest in him, and did not allow the interests of any one theatre to rule his pen; but no consideration of the upsurge in native drama associated with the Citizens' can be complete without including his plays. By the early nineteen-fifties he was producing historical pieces for production in Abbeys and Cathedrals, and in 1947 his play The Walls of Jericho was presented by the briefly revived Scottish National Players.

Considerable talent seemed to be promised in his early plays when even so light a fantasy as Polonaise was underpinned by an impressive seriousness of purpose; but Kemp's turn to the less troublesome pastures of Scottish period comedy in the main stifled this prospect. Of his more adventurous forays into historical documentary, The King of Scots, The Saxon Saint, and Master John Knox, only The Saxon Saint evades tedium and stilted verbosity. The most prolific writer of the "new wave" of Scottish dramatists which followed the war, Kemp wrote only two plays of lasting worth, The Oher Dear Charmer, and Let Wives Tak Tent - and the latter is a translation of Moliere's L'Ecole des Femmes and to Moliere must go most of the credit, despite the excellence of Kemp's adaptation.

Seriousness is the keynote of Victory Square, the first of Kemp's plays to be presented by Citizens' where it appeared in 1945. Set in wartime France, it traces in the character of Jean-Paul Duparc the movement from disillusioned bitterness at France's defeat to grim resolution when he joins the Resistance and faces certain death. Written in the spirit of wartime, Victory Square is possessed of an austere heroic tone. There is some admirable characterisation, and the first Act, when much is said about the Fall of France and the reasons behind it, achieves perfectly the tone of defeat, resolution, and angry despair of the conquered. Jean-Paul, returned from a mismanaged French army, cynically and coldly rejects his parents, whose generation he accuses of all the nation's shortcomings; eventually

to be won over by his sweetheart, Madeleine, and the courageous example of Blondin, the communist fore man of the town's loco repair shop, and leader of the local Underground. M. Duparc, Dr. Levallois and Leblanc the maire, make solid supporting characters; and Kemp makes a good contrast between the confidence of the German garrison and the apparent hopelessness of Resistance efforts, balancing the seemingly impregnable Atlantic Wall against the feeble illegal newspaper which Jean-Paul and Madeleine risk their lives to publish. Considering the opportunities for cheap applause a propagandist could have found in such a theme, Kemp strikes surprisingly few false notes, and Victory Square is an admirable attempt to capture the full measure of the sacrifice called for in wartime Europe.

The grimness of the nineteen-forties also prompted Polonaise (1947), but this was a very different work, a comic fantasy of considerable charm and deftness of touch concerning the impact of the exiled Polish Army on a small town in Fife, Haufstarvit. With the town represented behind him on a music-hall backdrop, the Haufstarvit Bellman, dressed in an antiquarian uniform of seventeenth century vintage, introduces the play to the audience in confidential Scots, in the intervals between his town-crying. Haufstarvit, he says, is the back of beyond: its youths flee as soon as they are old enough to get jobs in the cities, leaving behind only the most inferior specimens, like the vaunting gomeril Jock, who is nevertheless pursued and wooed desperately by the lonely young women of the town. News arrives of the Polish Army's imminent stationing in Haufstarvit and in panic at the prospect of their effect on the womenfolk, the town Provost invokes an ancient law empowering him to impose a curfew. The only woman to escape the ban is Taiglit Meggie, the Provost's distinctly unattractive servant-girl. The Poles arrive, only to suffer a fate similar to that of the Haufstarvit women from their commander, Colonel Starchiewicz. Once more, an exception is made, this time to Lieutenant Plugugski, who as his name implies, is something less than handsome. Plugugski and Meggie meet, and fall in love; and soon the curfew is being broken by all and sundry. Attempting to impose authority, Starchiewicz and the Provost are dumbfounded by the sight of Meggie and her sweetheart. The curfew is abandoned ,

and to maintain a semblance of respectability the Colonel forms a literary society, though only the literature of love is studied.

Gently satirical, Polonaise conceals behind its lighthearted nonsense a deep sense of tragedy and loss which occasionally makes a brief effective appearance on the surface. Plugugski's linguistic studies allow some comment on the politics of the time as well as laughter at his mastery of Scots. The Polish soldiers' continued exile can never quite be forgotten, and their wistful regret for an unobtainable past echoes through the play. Lastly, note should be taken of the use of Scots, particularly by the Bellman, in achieving a gossipy, secretive intimacy for the play's revelations.

The contemporary world was forgotten in The Walls of Jericho, a period comedy. This was toured by the re-established Scottish National Players, when under Moultrie Kelsall's leadership they vainly tried to re-assert themselves as a dramatic force in Scotland in 1947. Hardly Kemp's best work, The Walls of Jericho is pedestrian entertainment, its most striking feature being the unusual background of the Disruption of the Scottish Kirk in 1843. Although a major feature of the play, the Disruption – which split the Kirk on the issue of patronage – is little more than decoration to the quarreling sisters Elspeth and Janet; whose decision to live separate lives within the same house provides the main business of the comedy. With chalk-lines drawn on the floors, the pair ignore each other's existence, despite considerable inconvenience to their friends the Maclsaacs – a clergyman and his family who have withdrawn from the Kirk in the controversy – and their cousin, the adventurer Tom Peploe, briefly visiting from Jamaica. Tom eventually prevails upon his cousins to end their mutual silence, and the household returns to argumentative normality; but his arrest for smuggling rum robs his sermons of moral authority, and chalk-lines and peace are restored. Tom is saved from prison by – of all things – the Disruption, for the police officer who arrests him is also an elder of the Kirk, and engages the Reverend Maclsaac so readily and wholeheartedly in debate that his prisoner is able to walk quietly out the building before his absence is noted.



The obvious parallel between the Disruption in the Kirk and the quarrelling sisters carries little weight, especially as the character of the servant, Mrs. MacMurtrie, whose relationship with her husband is of violent amity, confuses judgement by suggesting the normality of perpetual disagreement. Though Elspeth and Janet make a convincing pair of characters in the pettiness of their rages, Tom Peploe is a very wooden attempt indeed at a fiery "Character". Oliphant the police officer exclaims :

"I would have been unco dowie to miss my auld friend.  
Aye, I would have been fair casten down. . . . His departure  
is a thought sudden, I jalouse?"

The restriction of Scots to "colourful" expressions in an otherwise English speech cannot avoid artificiality, an awkwardness, which minor though it may be - for Scots is employed very sparingly - echoes the general unsteadiness of the play's theme and construction. The choice of such uninspiring material for a comeback can only reflect poorly on the S.N.P. , which faded out completely after their tour of Kemp's comedy.

The balance was more than redressed in 1948 when the Citizens' Theatre produced Let Wives Tak Tent, Kemp's translation into Scots of Moliere's L'Ecole des Femmes. By transposing the action to seventeenth century Edinburgh Kemp found the perfect setting for the hypocrisy, repression, and elaborate scheming of Moliere's protagonist; who, freed from mannered linguistic sophistication, is instantly convincing in his Scottish embodiment. Let Wives Tak Tent was a considerable triumph, and was carried successfully to London, but it can only be regarded as a translation, its wit and intricate plotting belonging wholly to Moliere. In 1955, Kemp turned his hand once more to translation, placing Moliere's L'Avare in a Scottish setting with an eye on John Galt's tale of obsessive avarice, The Entail, under the title of The Laird o Grippy.

The play's success, and the success of Robert MacLellan's historical comedies, perhaps prompted Kemp to continue in this direction, with varying results. His comedy, The Scientific Singers (1950), bears some similarities to MacLellan's style, employing Scots throughout and being obviously the child of detailed research. Based on a curious incident in Aberdeen University in 1753, it concerns the efforts of Professor Meldrum to restore the Scottish Psalms to a true

musical form at a time when public worship had declined to a dismal level of droning after a precentor instead of singing, and when only twelve tunes were heard in the Kirk. Meldrum, an enthusiast of "scientific" singing – with proper time, harmony and organised parts – secretly engages Tim Shannon, an Irish Dragoon skilled in the art, to instruct a choir. A young student, Gideon Duncan, who betrays ownership of a fine tenor voice, is forcibly recruited to the cause, and after various – and violent – objections from the Solemn Singers' faction, who believe that harmony distracts from devotion, the interest of the University Principal is won. Meldrum's blackmail of Duncan has by this time backfired, as with superb arrogance the young man threatens exposure of the academic irregularities sanctioned by the Professor to secure his tenor's allegiance – unless Meldrum's daughter is freed to marry him. A good sub-plot is provided by Tim Shannon's dalliance with Kirsty Kellas, whose father heads the Solemn Singers, and the twists of the action are well-handled. The Scientific Singers remains, however, a very lightweight piece, and does not escape some tedious moments of historical "dressing".

More pleasing is The Highland Fair, a similarly light piece allied to an altogether lighter style, musical romance. Based on a ballad opera by Joseph Mitchell, this sprightly entertainment deals with the enforced reconciliation by the Hanoverian government of a feud between two Highland clans, in the vague, mythical years between the two great Jacobite rebellions. The basis of the settlement is intermarriage between the chieftain's families, which satisfies the lovers Alaster and Jenny, but requires a less happy union of Nanny, in love with brave young Kenneth, to the strutting peacock Hector. Nanny's refusal to comply in the compromise and the subsequent arrest of the rebellious Kenneth provide the basis for the action, but all is resolved when Kenneth's widowed sister, Maggy, a sophisticate fully experienced in the manners of wicked London society, captures Hector's heart. Although this conclusion becomes obvious about half-way through the play, there is considerable delight in the satirical observations of Highland pride in the two

chieftains, Highland second-sight in the prophetesses Catriona and Devorguilla, and Highland chicanery in Miss Watt and MacFadyean, the arbiters in the settlement. Some of the songs – particularly Hector's salute to Edinburgh fashions – are first-rate satirical comedy, and the plot on occasion threatens to become original. Altogether, The Highland Fair is as merry a romp as Linklater's To Meet the MacGregors, a similarly pleasing exercise in wit and fantasy.

Period setting provides Kemp with his best work, a study of Nancy Maclehose and her dalliance with Robert Burns, The Other Dear Charmer, first performed by the Glasgow Citizens' at the Gaiety Theatre, Ayr, in 1951. The purpose of the play, as Kemp writes in the preface to the printed edition, "is to tell the story in all its self-delusions, miscalculation, and ineffectual dreams, of a foolish, loving heart . . . . This is emphatically not 'a play about Robert Burns' . . . (but) . . . about a human being yielding to the mirage of a love for which she had not the capacity . . . ." This aim is admirably fulfilled with intelligence, perception, and skilful construction. Burns, though very real, is not permitted to dominate the figure of Nancy, the young wife deserted by a feckless husband and desperately seeking some fulfillment for her wasted life in the literary cause celebre of her day.

When the play opens she is discovered preparing to receive the poet at her home, ignoring the protests of her outraged uncle and protector, Lord Craig. The restrictive world she lives in – and against whose mores she chafes – is embodied in the little assembly which gathers to entertain the "heav'n taught ploughman": Mary Peacock, plain, gauche, but earnest; Miss Nimmo, an ageing spinster who seeks vicarious release for her thwarted energies by drawing together poet and patroness; and lastly Nancy herself, with her pretensions to poetry and, even more so, to critical ability, her head filled with the commonplace of contemporary opinion ready to indulge her fantasy as a genteel patroness –

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1 The Other Dear Charmer, preface

"... if I can place my knowledge of letters at his service and guide him past the shore set for him by his own rustic ignorance ... if I can be his mentor and by the light I hold aloft guide him to that correctness, the want of which is his sole reproach .... oh, then I shall feel that life is not ended for me, but new begun! I could forget all these years of wretchedness in such a reward!"

The poet arrives with his current boon-companion, Robert Ainsley, flushed with the confidence – indeed arrogance – of the lionised popular hero; and for a little while the ladies are joyously overwhelmed by his attractive personality, though already Nancy is adopting her role of judicious critic. Their pleasure is cut short however, by the unexpected intrusion of Nancy's minister, Kemp, who in the full vigour of clerical "rectitude" insults Burns into an abrupt departure. The broken-hearted Nancy is soon comforted, for the poet returns swiftly under the mistaken impression that her secret correspondence with him, in the precious Pastoral mode of the age, was the prelude to a much more substantial affair. Shocked by his forwardness, Nancy explains that her intention is purely platonic:

Nancy           .... the first lesson you must learn, that I am not Nancy but Clarinda, and that you are not Robert but Sylvander. We are not quite flesh and blood, but creatures fashioned by the Potter's hand, and ordered to stand in the one changeless position.

Robert :       This will be a new thing for Robert Burns.

Nancy :       But you will learn the lesson, Sylvander?

Robert :       Yes, Clarinda, I will!

The second Act finds Nancy head-over-heels in love with her "Sylvander", heedless of the united protests of Lord Craig, Kemp, Miss Nimmo, and even her maternal servant, Mirren. Her euphoria is then cut short by Burn's announcement that he must return for a short time to his farming interests, and the couple quarrel briefly, only to be reconciled over his parting gift of engraved glasses, and his impassioned rebuttal of Jean Armour as in any way a rival to his "Clarinda" :

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Robert : My Jean! She is not my Jean, and not fit to be named in the same breath with Clarinda! I am disgusted with her! I cannot endure her. Sometimes I have had the profanity to compare her with my Clarinda – t'was setting the expiring glimmer of a farthing taper beside the cloudless glory of the meridian sun –

Nancy : No Sylvander!

Robert : (bearing on) Yes, yes! There I found tasteless insipidity, vulgarity of the soul and mercenary fawning, here . . . oh here, polished good sense, heaven-born genius, and the most generous, the most delicate, the most tender passion –

Nancy : Sylvander! (half-protesting) You are carried out of yourself!

Robert : I have done with her!

Several months later, he returns to Edinburgh, only to find that Nancy has just become aware of his amours with Jenny Clow, a girl of doubtful reputation, during the Clarinda-Sylvander exchange. Further, his return is to be of the briefest, for he has realised the folly of his infatuation with Nancy and the life she represents, has married Jean Armour and returned to his life as a farmer. In agony and humiliation, Nancy smashes the glasses of his gift, tears the poem he presents to her, and drives him from her. The play ends as she hides her remorse and distress under a display of lightness before Mirren, though having read the poem – Ae Fond Kiss – she cannot bring herself to part with it.

Characterisation in The Other Dear Charmer is outstanding, and is ably supported by a simple but always effective construction. The only distractions from the three stages of the affair between Nancy and Burns are scenes which place it within the context of their society. In Act 1 the almost hysterical enthusiasm for the poet of Miss Nimmo and Mary heavily qualifies the attitude towards Nancy in her role of literary patroness, while the careful respectability of Lord Craig and the self-righteous fury of Kemp are an indication

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of the insecurity of Burns's acclaim. In Act 2, Miss Nimmo has joined Lord Craig and the minister in condemnation of Nancy's behaviour, and clearly the young widow is fast losing interest in purely literary ambitions. Her withdrawal into the unexpected joys of her private world is rudely jolted in the last Act when the harsh reality of Jenny Clow forcibly opens her eyes once more to events outside the enchanted realm of her drawing-room. The first warning of disillusion comes at the opening of the Act, when Mary and Bob Ainslie, whose relationship has blossomed with Nancy's aid, demonstrate the betrayal by Edinburgh's literati and their followers of a Robert Burns suddenly become less than fashionable. Their timidity in the face of the radical shift of opinion, is, if comprehensible, contemptible: it also has an uncomfortable echo of the fashionable fervour of the first Act.

The portrayals of the minor characters are economical but sure; and when it comes to Burns and Nancy, Kemp is superb. The difficulty of maintaining such a rich personality as the poet's within the bounds necessary if he is not to overshadow everyone else, is successfully overcome without any loss of conviction in himself. Far from being the inspired genius and irresistible Casanova of romanticised legend, Burns is sufficiently a living creation as to be distinctly unpleasant at times – in Act 1 his vanity, inflated by the accolades of Edinburgh, makes him imagine an easy conquest in Nancy Maclehose; and his behaviour when he returns after the incident with Kemp is swaggering and cheap; later, when prompted to deny Jean Armour, he does so with an extravagance which cannot fail to leave a bad taste in the mouth of the beholder. Yet he is also the sensitive and frank poet, despite the excesses of superficiality and self-indulgence which spring from him as he finds himself in a situation of hitherto undreamt-of success. Drawn into a strange world of refinement, he willingly enters the sophisticated game of the Pastoral, until first passion, then the recognition of its folly interrupt the dream; but his sincerity continually breaks through the narrow confines imposed by polite convention. Amidst the tea-cups of Nancy's drawing-room he talks of the backs of a farm-girl's knees with an honest insistency which

stirs the imagination as much as it stuns the gathered ladies. His ultimate refusal of the fantasy offered by Nancy and the real possibility of continued social acceptance and fame which accompanies it, is direct and forceful: for the first time Burns is wholly himself; voice, heart and mind unanimous in their rejection of Edinburgh's sugared falseness :

Robert :        "... You're a married woman, and I'm a man of bedlam passions that I cannot master. You're a fine Edinburgh lady; I'm a tenant farmer who if he is to live must win a living from the soil. And never mock Jean Armour, I beseech you! Had I been able to make you lady of Ellisland, could you have risen in the dark to milk cows and make brose for the men? Could you have brewed the harvest ale and gone as bandster behind the scythes? Look at your small white fingers, and give me an honest answer! "

Nancy :        I wasn't bred up to farm work. I never pretended to be! But you aren't a farmer, Robert! You're no plodding ploughman. You're a poet, and think how I might have helped you there! I could have understood your mind, read to you, criticised your verses -

Robert :        Nancy, this truly it grieves me to say. You could have helped me not at all!

At first Nancy is, as the author observes in his preface, "a foolish, vain, light-headed young woman", pursuing literary fashion as a means of filling her otherwise empty life. "She might as easily have taken up water-colour painting or music, and she would have been no better at either . . . ." At first she has no thought beyond the opportunity presented by Burns of playing the part of self-sacrificing mentor to his "heaven-taught" genius, and is quite genuinely shocked by the poet's presumptuous, premature advances in Act 1. The second Act, however, sweeps aside such superficial poses as her emotions soar in the delight of the developing relationship with Burns which swiftly outpaces the platonic game of Sylvander and Clarinda. She is now almost girlish in the unlooked-for promise of fulfilment, heedless of the stern disapproval she courts. "Fie for shame, all

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of you!" she cries to Lord Craig and the angry Kemp,

"What long faces for such an exquisite afternoon. "  
Did you feel the air? There's a balm in its touch. The sky is as green as an opal behind Heriot's hospital, and a mavis is singing in one of the bushes by the Nor' Loch! I declare it's the first day of Spring! What right have you to be moping indoors? Uncle, if I were you, I'd sentence everyone to transportation who was found indoors on the first day of Spring!

The naturalness with which her mood becomes tinged with spite at the mention of Jean Armour, and her ill-concealed pleasure in Burns' denial of the rival, are conveyed with confident mastery by the playwright, whose skill in the last Act makes the shattering of the glasses an act of stark violence shrieking the anguish of the betrayed woman more effectively than any speech. When she follows this by ripping the poem, childish spite has replaced the moment of high intensity, and thus leads into the final reassertion of superficiality which rescues her from the hopeless distraction of her pain. With brittle heartiness she announces that she will join the husband who deserted her, in Jamaica; and refuses to admit to herself the effect of Ae Fond Kiss :

Nancy : "Mirren, it is foolish of me, I know. Oh dear, I can't help wondering what Mistress Jean Armour would say if she could see ... this! Go, look in the middle drawer - you'll find an egg cup full of paste ..... and my best note-paper ... and the shears. Do you know, Mirren, when I am alone in my room in Jamaica, I think I shall often take this out and .... laugh over it. I shall think of that cold, sour farm and the swarm of barefooted brats and Mistress Jean with a new babe every year at her breast!"

Mirren : "Aye, there are some facts waur than Jamaica. I think Mistress Maclehose, ye've had the best of the bargain! "

On the unconscious irony of Mirren's comforting remark, the final curtain descends on this ultimately deeply moving portrayal of Nancy Maclehose and her hopeless dream of love in a wasted life. The Other Dear Charmer is indisputably a very fine play, and it can only be

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regretted that the author failed to achieve similar excellence in his other work.

His attempts to write for settings less conventional than the proscenium arch produced three historical documentaries, The Saxon Saint, The King of Scots, and Master John Knox, originally planned for performance in church-buildings. Of these, only The Saxon Saint has any large degree of success.

Written for a production in the Nave of Dunfermline Abbey, this play gives an account of the life of St. Margaret, Malcolm Canmore's Queen; relating her arrival in Scotland after the Norman conquest of England - her brother, Edgar Atheling, being an unsuccessful claimant to the English Crown - her appeal to King Malcolm of the Scots for protection, and his subsequent proposal of marriage which saves her from the cloister, the religious zeal with which she was inculcated during her childhood in crusading Hungary and her reform of the Scottish Culdee Church with its un-Roman practices, the estrangement of her son Edmund through her dislike for Scottish custom and the resulting civil war which kills her husband and eldest son Edward before she dies, exhausted by her religious devotion but inspired by her faith. The various episodes are well linked by a monk who acts as narrator, and the pace matches in its briskness the fast-changing scenes of Queen Margaret's life, which are in themselves chosen to present a swift but varied portrait. The play does not avoid the bitterness which haunts her later years, and passes no judgement either on her son, or on the chilly dedication of the Queen herself. Having brought the Scottish Church into conformity with Rome with the aid of her husband's strength, she then takes Edmund to task for his "irreligious" dallying with the girls of the palace and his interest in secular songs and poetry, only to provoke an angry retort criticising the emphatically English temper of her devotion :

"You have made war on them! You have brought in foreign ways! Can you blame the people for wishing to have at least their own songs and their own dreams? Anything you cannot understand you judge evil and a work of the devil!"

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Some effect is derived from improvised scenery in a style which accords well with the medieval atmosphere of the play with servants holding out branches to signify a wood, and a stylised setting for the Synod at which the priests from Canterbury defeat the Culdees in debate, where the scene is dominated by the grim grandeur of Malcolm, very much the warrior-king. The Saxon Saint is an interesting impression of a sensitive, courageous, blind, narrow-minded and when all is said and done, holy Queen.

Less happy is an attempt to deal with the history of Robert the Bruce and Scotland's struggle for independence, The King of Scots (1951); which after a good start becomes bogged down in verbosity and inflated pseudo-Shakespearian blank verse.

Beginning with Bruce at the English court on the day of Wallace's execution, the play follows – sometimes with painful slowness – the future King's long and bitter guerrilla war against Edward I up to the final victory of Bannockburn over the "Hammer of the Scots" son, Edward II. The characters are the merest puppets, and oddly it is Edward's English nobles who have the most vitality, with all the Scots save the doomed Comyn struggling with a forced heroism and grandiloquent posturing. The language deployed is extremely unsteady; all the nobles speak English, and the Scots peasants supposedly speak Scots – but frequently they too lapse into English, including the Blind Harper to whom is given the task of chorus and narrator in one, aided by selections from Barbour's Brus and The Complaynt of Scotland. The author's lack of confidence is never more obvious than when this Harper, after several Scots songs and much Scots speech, suddenly forgets his nationality :

Harper :       Come, desperate folk to hail your desperate King!

Hugh :         How may we carry out that hanselling –  
                  The honours are stolen away!

Harper :       No they are here!  
                  The sceptre is your strong, indignant ire,  
                  The ball's your heavy grief, the crown is still  
                  The golden garland of your burnished will,  
                  Tossed new-forged from the fires of shame and hate!

Hugh :            These we supply!    Where is the sword of state?  
 Harper :        You are that sword, through ages past undaunted.  
                   Now stained with tears and by betrayal blunted!  
                   You are that sword, now sharpened by the dule  
                   Of vilest serfdom and an alien rule.  
                   Will you crown the King who comes to set you free?  
 Hugh :            Crown him and fight for him!

The false note which rings throughout such passages – and there are many of them – dominates the play and cannot be relieved by the occasional glimpse of greater potential: the use of the Harper's songs to tell of the war's progress, the excellent opening as Edward triumphs over Wallace's gory death, the employment of music, singing and organ. Bannockburn is grossly over-reported, and too much attention is focussed on the plight of Lady Buchan in her cage at Berwick. The stilted, mechanical rhyming couplets in which it is couched finally reduce The King of Scots to monotony and pretension, robbing the colourless figures of what little life may at first have been their lot: and a similar ailment besets the play which Kemp wrote at the special request of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to mark the fourth centenary of the Reformation, Master John Knox (1960). With his object "the extraordinary and total revolution in religion" rather than the tempting but vastly difficult challenge of a character-study of Knox and Mary, Kemp produced what is ultimately little more than a pageant, seeking conviction and dignity in clumsy blank verse which only stifles emotion and action. As a mob attacks the Catholic churches of Perth, Knox's horrified protests to the silent nobles strive fatally after the "poetic" :

"Oh look my Lords!  
 The Charterhouse of Perth in flames!  
 See, the flames licking through its ruby windows  
 And the roof crashing!  
 My lords, I sought the abasement of idols,  
 Not universal riot –  
 Your armed authority must speak out now! "

Scots is used, but sparingly – only by the common-folk, the soldiery, and the bonnet-lairds. Of all the other s, including Knox, James Stewart, the Earl of Moray, Lethington and Bothwell, only Archbishop Hamilton is permitted to slip into the vernacular. Inevitably, Knox

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and Mary receive much attention, but here Kemp's intention to subordinate them to the forces of history succeeds, and they remain the merest sketches – Mary is young and headstrong, Knox determined and craggily wise. Kemp's sympathies are those of the Scottish Kirk; Mary plans to restore Catholicism to her unruly kingdom, and shows great distress when his sermon at Perth stirs the mob to a frenzy of destruction. The detailed slowness of the first part of the play with its account of Mary of Guise and the French domination gives way to a desperate haste clogged with incident as the author tries to cram into it every twist and turn of Mary's eventful reign.

Other plays by Robert Kemp return to the contemporary world. These include What The Stars Foretell and The Penny Wedding, the first of which is an uninspiring piece vaguely reminiscent of Bridie's The Last Trump, and the second a contrived but at times gloriously funny romance with satiric overtones; Conspirators, a study of the totalitarian state which eventually transforms itself into a thriller; and a curious modern adaptation of the Ballad of Tam Lin, The Man Among The Roses.

What the Stars Foretell (1953) returns a boorish newspaper-owner, Lord Inchgarvey, to his birthplace, a remote Hebridean island where his obsession with danger can momentarily relax. He decides to buy island and castle, despite the local laird's refusal to sell, only to discover that he has a physical double in MacQuhillie, the local merchant. The truth behind this curious coincidence is that Inchgarvey's father, whose memory he reveres, had one unfortunate failing in an otherwise blameless life : he was a lecher, and MacQuillie is his illegitimate offspring. After a brief involvement with MacQuillie's mother, a highland seer, and some most unconvincing attempts at slapstick comedy, the newspaper magnate is tricked into departing for London under the impression that the island is a source of uranium, soon to be quarrelled over by the great powers. His personal assistant Rachel remains to marry the laird. Wit is sparse, most of the situation excessively contrived, and characterisation extremely weak.

Equally contrived, but much more entertaining, is The Penny Wedding (1957) satirising the excesses of patriotism inspired by the "Scots Renaissance" in art, and Scots snobbery with its slavish imitation of England, finding a solution to Scotland's problems which, if more pragmatic than enforced Lallans or Gaelic, is nevertheless at several removes from the hopeless compromises of Scottish "common-sense". David Sillar, a Glasgow Baillie and renowned local baker, is married to Lizzie, a social climber despising all things "common", in particular, her husband's working-class background and his utterly unpolished sister, Jessie. Their son Archie has been despatched to England for his education, lest he be tainted by unfashionable association with Scotland. While the Sillars are entertaining the pompous Sir Waverly Geddes, the aristocratic mouthpiece for financial interests who wish to take over Sillar's bakeries, Jessie intrudes disastrously, and is shortly followed by the unexpected arrival of Archie from Oxford refusing to speak anything but "Synthetic Scots" at its most obscure. The Geddes family withdraws from the domestic uproar which follows, and Lizzie insists that Jessie, whose influence on her son has produced this incomprehensible fanatic, must leave the house.

The Second Act finds Archie in the working-class home of baker Deas, whose daughter Elsie he is courting. After an involved argument about the future of Scotland with his friend Wilkie Ligertwood and Deas, Archie discovers that his aunt is lodging with the family, and Deas discovers that his strange young guest is the son of the most respected baker in the trade. Archie and Elsie marry, but to the horror of both sets of parents it is a traditional "Penny Wedding", with a minimum of ceremony – and what is more socially embarrassing – a minimum of expense. Archie, who has vague notions of being a poet, decides when he hears of his father's readiness to sell the bakeries to become a baker himself. Delighted by this, David Sillars defies the financiers and joins hands with Archie to maintain an independent family business pledged to high but homely standards.

The bakery theme is somewhat clumsy, and the ending marred by an unconvincing reconciliation between Archie's mother and the "common" values she has despised throughout the play; but

Kemp maintains a very fine balance in Archie's nationalism which is always sufficiently self-ridiculing to avoid becoming a rant, and the underlying seriousness of his plea for Scots to accept the challenge of restoring their country's pride in itself is presented with much humour. Archie's Oxford-accented "braid Scots" is a comic delight to the Scottish ear, but does not detract from the sense of his opinions; and in the argument in the Deas' home, Kemp displays a pleasingly well-observed study of working-class taboos in conversation and behaviour. Not a great work, The Penny Wedding is nevertheless a very serviceable comedy.

Despite the undeniable excellence of The Other Dear Charmer and Let Wives Tak Tent, Kemp's plays in general are a disappointment, for the promise of this pair – which were written, after all, relatively early in his dramatic career – find no successor in his later work. The emotional power felt in Victory Square, Polonaise and The Other Dear Charmer has no echo in either the period comedies or the historic documentaries; and a similar isolation attends Kemp's obvious confidence in fantasy in Polonaise and The Highland Fair. Versatility is hardly to be condemned, but here there can only be a sense of failure of very real talents undeveloped while the author pursued considerably more pedestrian goals in light comedy.<sup>1</sup> There is also in Kemp's work after 1947 a marked avoidance of contemporary subject-matter, a tendency he shares with so many Scottish dramatists and which is at its most regrettable in his contemporaries: the past seems to have provided them with a refuge protecting them from the problems of the present, an area in which light comedy can flourish unimpeded by demands for a more complete portrayal of life.

### ERIC LINKLATER

One of the most distinctive contributions to the refreshed Scottish Drama movement inspired by the foundation of Glasgow Citizens' Theatre came from the pen of Eric Linklater, a well-established novelist and man of letters, whose plays, though few in number, are pleasingly mature in their humour, intelligence, and stagecraft.

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1 Kemp was financially dependent on the commercial success of his plays, which probably explains his erratic artistic standards.

The Devils in The News (1934), his earliest play, is an uneven satire on the egocentric irresponsibility of newspaper proprietors. An excellent first scene in which a seance gathered to meet the spirit of Dante conjure up instead a sinister monk offering undreamt of power to the newspaper Lords Drum and Bugle, gives way to increasingly vague and tiresomely elongated ramblings involving a love-affair for Drum's young and beautiful wife; a costume-ball in which illusion asserts itself over reality; the discovery of the Devil concealed within the monk's habit; and his final triumph over all but Lady Drum and her lover. The very real power of the first scene, with the sudden discovery of the Dominican Friar whose fluent but simple blank verse tempts his victims into Hell is wasted in the confusion which follows. Drum and Bugle could hardly be more tedious, and the bewildering schizophrenia of the fancy-dress ball is hardly made clear by the prominence of Lady Drum's lover, who changes his costume identity twice, and whose real identity is only revealed – in the most slip-shod fashion – in the last scene of the play. The satiric potential with which the Devil whose powers are exhausted and who relies wholly on his past reputation makes his conquest of souls by offering in Hell a respite from twentieth-century boredom, wastes itself on an ending devoid of subtlety as two newsboys trumpet at considerable length the fate of Drum and Bugle.

After the success during the war of his radio "conversations" – The Cornerstones, The Raft, Socrates Asks Why, The Great Ship, and Rabelais Replies – dramatised philosophic dialogues discussing the social ills which led to World War, the spirit created in that war, and the optimistic future which could be developed from it – Linklater adapted their style for the theatre in the comic fantasy Crisis in Heaven (1944). As in most of the "conversations", the setting is Elysium, in which are gathered the great of all ages. When Pushkin and Burns, rivals in their love for Helen of Troy, fail to appear for a public discussion of "The Poet and His Responsibility", the meeting is addressed instead by a recent arrival, Froust. Froust is an English poet who has been sheltering in Mexico from the European war, though his poems advocate courage and resolution in the face of tyranny and carnage, and his self-

pitying speech provokes a widespread disagreement about poets which escalates into a Heavenly civil war. In despair, Aristophanes persuades Helen to marry Voltaire, in order that Beauty and Reason united will bring about the birth of Peace. After some difficulties involving Voltaire's reluctance to abandon his bachelor existence, Peace is born in the alarming person of Irene, who springs from the womb full-armed with truncheon and police-woman's uniform. Easily defeating both warring factions she decides that her new reign must be shared with a suitable husband. She turns down the amorous Pushkin, eventually finding in a British Private soldier the personification of Courage. On this patriotic note - tempered by a gesture towards the continued failure of Pushkin - the play ends. Like the "conversations", Crisis in Heaven depends heavily on the novelty inherent in the Elysian situation with its possibilities for unusual encounters. Humour is no less heavy in the play for being well-educated, and the same is true concerning the conviction of various wartime sympathies. The pace is slow and characterisation wordy rather than dramatic. Thankfully, Linklater abandoned this ponderous manner and in 1946 he wrote a splendid burlesque of Walter Scott's Rob Roy for the students of Aberdeen, called To Meet the MacGregors; and later in the same year it was produced by Glasgow Citizens'.

With irreverent lightness, Linklater makes the improbabilities of Scott's novel the principal target of his humour, filling out his caricatures of Andrew Fairservice, Diana Vernon, Rob Roy and the rest with a chorus of Rob Roy's daughters whose songs lampoon modern highland life with its Women's Rural Institutes and gauche small-town beauty contests.

The tone of To Meet the MacGregors is set in the opening sequence in which Andrew Fairservice, with the aid of Rob Roy's sons, Ronald and Donald, lugs on to the stage a large trunk, prominently labelled "Osbaldistone and Co.", and then addresses the audience as follows :

"There's a trunk full of documents over there that will stir up trouble wherever they go - and that's why they're here, just to stir up trouble - and there's a lassie, that's the heroine of the play, a wild bit lassie called Diana Vernon, that'll make all you young folk just loup in your



seats, and all you puir auld bald-headed creatures, with your wives sitting doucely beside you, will groan in your hearts to think of the days of auld langsyne, and to realize that all that kind of thing is past, long past, for the likes of you and me".

Such unabashed explanatory asides and observations continue throughout the play, establishing an easy intimacy with the audience which reinforces the author's satiric intentions. Francis Osbaldistone makes a typically colourless earnest Scott hero, and the villainous Rashleigh becomes in Linklater's hands superbly evil, exulting in his infamy: "Doom is what I dote upon! . . . . I must think of some device to ruin my fair cousin Diana". Rob Roy himself pops up like a genie from a bottle at every possible - and impossible - opportunity, casually explaining to the astounded Diana and Frank :

"In time of need you can always depend on Rob Roy. I'll turn up in most unexpected places, without rhyme or reason, but just because it is my nature to be in the midst of trouble, and because it is my pleasure to be of help to my friends".

With a Jacobite rising afoot, and Rashleigh in possession of the Osbaldistone trunk containing now the secret plans of both the Government and the Rebels, Rob Roy has the fullest opportunity to turn up in the most unexpected places, as various participants close in on the apparently magnetic Clachan at Aberfoyle. The trunk changes hands several times in the course of the journey; the MacGregor girls' chorus carries even lighter relief on to the stage than is provided by the farce; and finally, in the clachan, all the incriminating documents and secret plans contained in the trunk are burnt in ignorance by Ronald and Donald to keep their whisky-still in operation. The whisky they produce brings the benison of love upon the sometime foes: Rashleigh renounces his claim to Diana for the unlikely companionship of Mattie, a Scots girl kidnapped by him in Glasgow; and Frank is able to marry Diana. Everyone, of course, lives happily ever after; as is fitting in such an effervescent and witty offering as To Meet the MacGregors undoubtedly is.

In 1948 Love in Albania reached the stage, a sophisticated comedy about the excesses of romanticism and sentimentality. One night

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in the early summer of 1944 Will Ramillies, an attractive but intense poet and adventurer, is brought to Robert Lawn's London flat by the Scottish housekeeper, Flora MacIver. Ramillies, whose recent book on his experiences in Albania with the partisans has attracted considerable attention – especially by its poems dealing with the author's love-affair with a partisan heroine – is peculiarly brusque in his conversation with Lawn's wife, Susan, and apparently fixated by the notion that her morals are suspect, though she provides no reason for his suspicion. He is apparently pursued by the spectre of his Albanian affair, insisting that conventional attitudes to love only distort and degrade such passion as he has known, and that he has published the poems about his innermost, secret heart in order to "kill" his love by public exposure. He goes, leaving Susan somewhat disturbed by his intensity and equivocal attitude towards her, only to return a little later to explain his curious behaviour. He admits that she is an attractive woman, but asserts his hatred for such attraction, "one of civilisation's most powerful enemies". Sexuality betrays his ideal of romantic love, which he would save from the degradation of physical consummation. By this time, Robert Lawn has come home, and is less than delighted with the involved argument his wife is holding with an apparent stranger on such a striking topic. Retreating aggrieved to the bedroom, he receives a greater surprise when an American Army Sergeant suddenly climbs in the window brandishing a gun. This is Sergeant Dohda, a self-confessed wife-killer of Albanian origin paroled from prison to fight for democracy, and father of Draga, Ramillies' partisan heroine. Dohda is under the impression that his daughter is dead, and that Ramillies is in some way responsible. The rest of the play concerns the efforts of the Lawns to dissuade Dohda from his murderous intentions towards the poet, and to ferret out the truth about the Albanian affair, for Ramillies' explanations are plausible but somehow unconvincing. At one point Dohda is even persuaded to go, and release the household – he has jammed the front door shut from the outside, hence his unusual entry through the window – but an air raid begins, forcing his rather wearing company on the household for the rest of the night.

Finally, with Dohda's suspicions once more at violent fever pitch, Ramillies breaks down and tells all: that Draga had sneered at his love, and jeered at his torment until in a blind rage provoked by her mockery, he killed her. Dohda, whose American wife was of similar temperament and came to an identical end, is for a moment deeply grief-stricken: then, looking in strange sympathy at Ramillies, exclaims - "That was Draga my daughter . . . . And was she a bitch!"

Dohda departs, and Ramillies collapses in half-drunken exhaustion, and Robert and Susan Lawn retiring at long last to bed, congratulate themselves with happy complacency on their comparative normality.

Susan :        ". . . . in comparison with other people, we seem almost saintly."

(Susan looks for a moment as rapt as any saint; and Robert, seeing a splendid vision of himself, is perceptibly gratified. . . . And upon this scene of mutual satisfaction there descends the final curtain.)

Love in Albania demonstrates Linklater's mature talent, his well-developed sense of comedy, and his totally confident command of technique. By using a double-roomed set, and isolating the varying combinations of characters from the occupants of the neighbouring room, he multiplies the tension through the audience's sense of irony. When the "All Clear" sounds at the beginning of Act III, and Robert, Susan, and Ramillies return with obvious relief to the casual distractions of ordinary life, Dohda can be seen in the next room grimly preparing his pistol. Characterisation, if hardly profound, is sufficient for the comic purpose of the play. Ramillies is drawn with laudable perception, and Dohda is a highly entertaining caricature of the shadier aspect of American culture. Ramillies' inflamed rhetoric in the first part of the play prepares for the confession of the murder :

"Either total abstinence or magnificent debauchery:  
that's my rule of life."

"You make of love a trivial affair like a glass of  
sherry before dinner. If you rescue it from  
agony, you rob it of its glory. . . ."

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The confession is a surprise mainly because his high passion was in reality unreciprocated – Draga's death seems a quite natural outcome. Dohda's vengefulness springs from a similar romantic streak. He talks wildly about observing the barbaric tradition of the Albanian blood-feud; is respectfully enthralled by Flora's disclosure that she has not only served in the Royal Artillery, but has been wounded in action during the Blitz; and once he learns the truth about Draga, not only forgives Ramillies but insists that he and Ramillies are 'simpatico'.

Susan and Robert make a pleasing "normal" pair, their own eccentricities – Susan's untidiness, Robert's stuffiness – piling to insignificance when contrasted with those of their guests; and Susan's easy sympathy is finally complemented by her husband's cool decisiveness in demanding Dohda's gun and commanding the truth from Ramillies. Their complacent pleasure at the conclusion is beautifully gentle satire with a persistent element of genuine conviction.

Flora, the remaining character, begins as a pleasant caricature of the sensible, well-built Highland spinster, only to find sudden depth by her confession of hopeless love for the unconscious Ramillies as she carries him to his bed over her shoulder. Somehow, the pathos here is free of indulgent sentimentality.

In all this, Linklater's eye for light relief remains true: the main plot is spiced by the telephone calls of Susan's scatterbrained friend, Audrey, whose pet alligator escapes to rampage her flat during the air-raid. "Alligator" is misapprehended by Dohda as "agitator", who, under the impression that Audrey is besieged by bloodthirsty communists, finally leaves the Lawn's flat to rescue the distressed lady and defend democracy. When the opportunity arises for a gentle assault on Scottish pride, Linklater does not resist. Ramillies, describing Albania, says: "Its a savage and magnificent country. Terrible in winter, terrible in the darkness – but in the morning sun the mountains are like the landscape of some heroic paradise." "It must have reminded you of Scotland" observes Flora.

The Atom Doctor (1950), later known as The Mortimer Touch, is a free adaptation of Ben Jonson's The Alchemist, softening the satire of the original and allowing the cunning of Mortimer, the modern

Subtle, to triumph over the susceptibilities of his victims to the very end. Mortimer, indeed, is a highly sympathetic figure, as attractive as any of Bridie's eccentrics, whose role is almost that of ironic mentor to the foolish, avaricious and deluded.

Mortimer and his fellow-tricksters, Connie May O'Leary - "A proletarian adventuress" - and Shurie - a lowland Scot, "less dishonest than at first appears" - have established a regular practice in the impressive Edinburgh home of Shurie's absent employer, Major Kemnay, who is on active service in Malaya. Here they deal in fraudulent palmistry and quack medicine, advertising Mortimer as "the Atom Doctor", employing the impressive terminology of nuclear physics to hoodwink the gullible with miracle cures unknown to orthodox science. Mortimer, however, has grown tired of such mundane operations, and against the wishes of his partners, plans fraud on a much grander scale. To the Sobieski-Smith sisters, spinsters on the lunatic fringe of Scottish Nationalism, he has promised nothing less than an atomic bomb; to the Duke of Applecross, a penurious aristocrat determined to recapture the vast wealth of his ancestors, he has promised even more - the transmutation of lead into gold. Repeatedly altering their appearances and personalities, the criminal trio systematically fleece the Sobieski-Smiths, the pathetic Alfred Shinney - who despite "a sparrow's voice" and a physique to match is convinced that he is being transformed into a great political orator who will inspire a Communist revolution - and Tom Thistleton, a prosperous publican whose self-confidence has been utterly destroyed by a snobbish, self-centred and well-bred wife. Mrs. Thistleton herself visits Mortimer, and it is plain that he proposes to take the fullest advantage of her discontent with her husband and total lack of moral restraint, even though he affects stern disapproval of her unexpected arrival.

As the charlatan approaches the culmination of his rhetorical talents, the gulling of the far from impressionable Duke with a "transmutation" of base metal into gold, using a complicated mock-Cyclotron, the carefully-built edifice of lies begins to crumble. Connie, disenchanted with Mortimer both as business-partner and lover, is plotting to run off with Tom Thistleton.

Julia Sobieski-Smith, the more unbalanced of the two sisters, comes to the house with a supply of gold trinkets, and left unattended, conceals herself behind the curtain which screens the store of chemicals used in the "miracle cures". As the cyclotron operation reaches a climax, the process is interrupted by the stormy arrival of Alfred Shinney's irate, coarse-tongued, vengeful mother, whom Alfred has robbed to pay for his treatment. In the chaos which follows, Major Kemnay, the owner of the house, returns. Even now, Mortimer attempts to brazen himself out of danger, successfully focussing all attention on the still-humming Cyclotron, from which he produces a fragment of pure gold. The superstitious, awed hush which descends is rent by a sudden explosion from the chemical store, where Miss Julia has succeeded in building a bomb, knocking everybody over and blowing off her patriotic kilt.

Deserted by Connie, Mortimer succeeds the following morning in averting Kemnay's wrath, playing on Mrs. Thistleton's vampire infatuation for the Major, her old flame; and when his victims descend wrathfully on the house in the company of a policeman, he not only makes a brilliant escape, but carries with him a new innocent, the wealthy Mrs. Bonamy, already putty in his hands.

The play depends heavily on the part of Mortimer, for the other figures are either comic caricatures, like the Sobieski-Smiths and the Shinneys, or mere shadows, like Mrs. Thistleton and Kemnay. The other tricksters in the trio have surprisingly little to offer: Connie has the same function as a conjuror's female assistant, surviving in the audience's attention mainly because she is able to change her costume according to her various "identities". Only when she is in conflict with the lecherous Mortimer does a trace of real personality appear. Shurie has rather more opportunity to gain conviction, and Linklater makes something of the character's curious scale of criminal values which regards Kemnay's justifiable suspicions about the safety of his home as an insult.

Mortimer is superb. In the first two acts his persuasive voice, alternately thundering and soothing, lulls the suspicions of victims and partners alike, with magnificently wordy elaborations

of utterly meaningless pseudo-scientific jargon. To the Sobieski-Smiths he is a dedicated but unorthodox scientist; to Thistleton, a deeply-concerned psychologist. For the Duke, he affects evening dress and the easy dignity of a half-forgotten aristocratic past; and the nobleman's lack of interest in practical details only spurs him on to the furthest flights of his imagination and acting skill.

Linklater extracts from this much humour at various levels. There is the contrast between the slatternly existence of breakfast at four in the afternoon on bottles of beer and the display of professional solidity which greets the victims; the farce of Alfred Shinney's desperate hopes - "I made an interruption at a meeting last night, and a lot of people heard what I said. They turned round and cried on me to shut up - you can tell how pleased I was." - and the preoccupied inattention of the Duke during Mortimer's finest moment:

Mortimer : "Ten million volts whip up the particles, those particles charged with power - protons as sturdy and stable as a rock, neutrons as variable as April weather or a woman's mind, and electrons bent upon destruction. Think of that magnet, beneath whose arms they dance, as if it were a slave-driver, merciless and gigantic, and the crack of his bull-whip is the fluxion of ten million volts."

Duke : "As much as that eh? Well, I suppose it needs them all. Do you know, while you were talking away there, I was thinking, and I rather think that one of the first things I'm going to do, when I get my money, is to buy about forty tons of good farmyard dung. . . . Good dung's very difficult to get nowadays. . . ."

The Duke indeed, is the only character who approaches Mortimer in entertainment value, for in asking for his lead roof to be made into gold, he insists - rightly - that he is not a crank in the sense that the Sobieski-Smiths are. He simply wants to have as much money as is humanly possible; hardly an unusual sentiment.

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The last Act, however, upsets the play. Though there are occasional flashes of the wit found earlier, Linklater now eschews the vitriol of Jonson's original, and depends too heavily on farcical effects to avoid a sense of disunity. Mortimer is saved by the unconvincing retreat of Kemnay in the face of Mrs. Thistleton, and the final chase asks for a belief in Mortimer's persuasive power which could only be accepted as hypnotism. This is a pity, for there is conviction in the "Atom Doctor's" argument that, like the regular soldier, he is a regular charlatan, both of whom depend for their livelihood on the follies of the rest of mankind.

Like Alexander Reid, Linklater was influenced by Christopher Fry. His Breakspear In Gascony could hardly be more derivative, instantly recalling The Lady's Not For Burning with its linguistic flamboyance, self-indulgent intellectualism and surrealistic medieval setting. It concerns the dire effects of a heretical religious fanatic, Brother Melchior, on the impressionable countryside of Gascony when he preaches the supremacy of Satan. Imprisoned for homosexual offences by the stouthearted Sir William of Castle New, he seduces first Sir William's retainers from their fealty, then Sir William's daughter Alys from her chastity. Released from his pleasant incarceration by his enthusiastic adherent Count Geoffrey, whose new-fangled cannon upset Sir William's feudal security, Melchior seems to be in the ascendant; but Alys' lover, Walter Breakspear, an English winemERCHANT, refusing to accept the distracted girl's refusal to marry him, brings an English Free Company to break Count Geoffrey's military power. The English however, will do nothing about Melchior and Walter is only prevented from murder when a wronged servant forestalls him.

The similarities to Fry are obvious from the very beginning of the play, in the rich imagery pursued mostly for its own sake:

Alys :            But what I want - no that's another matter and  
                      needs more words to explain than I can pick the  
                      cowslips in a ditch. It would need good garden  
                      words: words grown for the purpose, grown  
                      from seed to fill their own design - and the sun's



too hot to stoop and gather them. I tell you what I do not want, and in summer weather that's enough.

The exuberance of this style lasts for just as long as its novelty-value, then as the decorative quality of the language becomes excessive in relation to the sense it carries, the play is stifled under the layers of verbosity. This toying with words is conducted in a vacuum of characterisation, for here, as in Crisis in Heaven and the "conversations" Linklater – even more so than Fry – rarely creates an independent personality on the stage. Tight plotting and a convincing evocation of a disquieting darkness below the youthful colours of the play do not save it from monotony and an annoying streak of English national chauvinism.<sup>1</sup>

Linklater's contribution to the drama which emerged in Scotland in the forties and fifties is an interesting one, more closely tied to the styles prevailing in London's West-End than to the work of fellow-Scots. He has no interest either in Scots language or Scottish problems, but through the polish and urbanity of his post-war plays there can be distinguished a hint of Scottish flavour, a hard-headed quality behind the lightness and humour which tends – as it does in Bridie's work – towards satire. Apart from To Meet The MacGregors, it is never more than a hint: Linklater's value lies in the sheer theatricality of his later work, providing as it does an example of confidence and skill which many a budding Scottish dramatist would have done well to emulate.

#### ALEXANDER SCOTT

Alexander Scott, a lecturer in Scottish Literature and a poet of repute, turned his considerable talent for writing in Scots towards the theatre in the fifties, producing three plays for the stage at the Citizens' – Right Royal, Tam o' Shanter's Tryst, and Truth to Tell.

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1 Scottish chauvinism would be equally reprehensible, I hasten to add.

Before these, he had written several one-act plays and revue-sketches, Prometheus 48, Untrue Thomas, Shetland Yarn, and The Last Time I Saw Paris are the best, though the Jerusalem Farers - about Earl Rognvald of Orkney's crusade - is a striking piece for radio rather than the stage.

Untrue Thomas is a sequel written in Scots to the Ballad of Thomas the Rhymer, telling of his return from the land of Faery to the wife who has waited seven long years for him, refusing to accept that he is dead. Months of heartbreak and hardship, the tormenting gossip of her neighbours, and the persistent but respectful attentions of Mains, a farmer who wants her for his wife, drive Peg Rhymer to vent her bitterness on Thomas when he can offer only the fantastic story of the Queen of Elfland as a reason for his unexplained absence:

"Gae back and bide in yir mad imagination  
Wi her that held ye seeven year frae me!  
Ye're daft wi dreams, or drunk on the wine o words,  
Tae tell me siccan a tale and hope for either  
Belief or love - I've kent yir tales langsyne!  
Some tinker's drab ye trolloped the country wi  
Ye've cled in a wab o lees as Elfland's Queen,  
And biggit thegither a bourach a fushionless fancies  
Tae look like the Land o Youth til anither's een.

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I carena whar ye gae,  
But leave me, leave me! I'll no be wife again  
Til onie man whas mind I canna see,  
There's sic a darkness there its lichtinins burn frae.  
A man shud move in meridian-scarrowless air  
And niver mell wi the shiftan dreams o muneshine.  
Leave me! Leave me! Leave me my lane, and gae!

Hysterical, she breaks his fiddle, and the poet slowly walks out into the evening again. Peg tells her neighbours that she has just had news of her husband's death seven years before, when Mains bursts in to tell her that he has just witnessed Thomas walk deliberately into a deadly quagmire. Unsure whether he is even then dead, or whether he has returned mysteriously to "the dream ablow the hill", Peg realises that the past cannot be recaptured, that seven years of madness or magic stood between her and the possibility of renewing the love she once had :

Fare ye weel  
I loo'd ye fine, but nou ye're far, my jo.

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The blank verse used throughout the play is sufficiently versatile to carry a wide range of emotion – from Peg's irritation with the gossips, to her comforting of a frightened child, to the awesome heaviness of Thomas' apprehension of individual guilt and sin which prepared him for his mystical journey – and to do so without strain or loss of strident immediacy. This immediacy and skill with deceptively simple verse which compares very favourably with the Scots of Reid and Kemp, is a major feature of all Alexander Scott's work.

Less sombre, though no less serious, for all its humour, is The Last Time I Saw Paris, the lightly punning title of which belies the irony contained in the play. Again written in Scots, and in verse, it purports to present the "true" story of the origins of the Trojan War as told by Odysseus. Spurning Homer's more heroic version, Odysseus introduces Menelaus, King Consort to Helen, the Queen of Sparta, chafing under his wife's insistence that she alone is Sparta's ruler. Disenchanted by the discovery that "the Flower o Greece", "The Pearl i the Crown o Love", and "The Queen o Women" reflect Helen's political importance rather than her beauty and personality, Menelaus is diverting himself with the Queen's handmaiden, Phoebe. Odysseus has come to Sparta to discuss a new tax being levied by Troy on ships passing through the Bosphorous, and discovers that the Trojan Prince, Paris is also visiting. Ostensibly fascinated by a flattered Helen, Paris in reality has come to spy on the Greeks' reaction to the tax, recruiting to his cause with promises of love none other than Phoebe, Menelaus' favourite. Seizing an opportunity to win confidences more directly, Paris also passionately pays court to Helen, and is surprised by Odysseus while embracing the Queen just as he has previously done with Phoebe. The wily King of Ithaca then forces Paris to elope with Helen as the only alternative to death, and when they flee, explains to Menelaus that he has not only rid him of a troublesome wife, but also enabled him to rule Sparta in his own right. Furthermore, Helen's "abduction" will give them a cause with which to rouse Greece for a vengeful surprise attack on Troy, making them masters of the Bosphorous. The perfection of Odysseus' Machiavellian scheme is marred when

Phoebe, still infatuated with Paris, escapes to the Trojan ship carrying Menelaus' secret plans for the assault on Troy, ironically aided by an unwitting Odysseus.

The wryly comic treatment of the mythical characters and the reductive quality of the earthy, rather homely Scots, lends the play a bitter humour effectively satirising the traditionally heroic attitude towards the Trojan War: here all is self-interest, grossness and hypocrisy. The final irony by which Odysseus' "perfect crime" is upset is swift and devastating in its effect, a trivial incident which condemns Greek and Trojan to ten years of war, with an even more ironic outcome :

"Yon wey our tricks to win the Trojan's toun  
Were contered, ilka scheme we'd screint doun,  
And sae the Trojans stuid and focht the Greeks  
For ten lang years, no just for ten short weeks!  
We won the war at last, But och, what then?  
Menelaus had to tak Helen back again! "

Scott's full length play Right Royal broke all previous box-office records when it was produced at Glasgow Citizens' in 1954. A highly original musical comedy with broadly satiric overtones, it is set ostensibly in the quasi-mythical ancient Scottish kingdom of Fife in the 6th century A.D. where the ageing King Dod III finds his security disturbed by the arrival of Christianity from Iona and colonising Saxons from their recent conquest of neighbouring Lothian. Dod, " a little old man on whom his regal trappings sit 'like the silk hat on a Bradford Millionaire' . . . an odd mixture of silliness and sagicity" has just lost his wife as the play begins, finding in his bereavement nothing but relief. No sooner has the coffin been removed from the palace by the Royal Army – half-a-dozen arthritic pensioners whose failing strength has to be supplemented on this occasion with the muscles of Princess Deirdre and her maidens – than a Saxon herald brings the unwelcome news that the pirate king of plundered Lothian is sending an ambassador to Fife as a prelude to declaring war. The ambassador is his son, Eric Bignose, whose only civility to a Scotsman is "not to kick his corp." Realising that Eric Bignose comes only to spy on the disposition of the Fife army, Dod prepares a pathetic bluff to persuade the Saxons that in fact he commands a force of twenty thousand. In the midst of frantic preparation for the deception, a missionary from Iona,

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Meikle, arrives to convert Dod, but only succeeds in getting a hearing from Deirdre and the women-folk.

Eric Bignose proves to be all that Dod has feared, and not for one minute is he taken in by Dod's hopeless boasts. He is however, attracted by Deirdre, whose defiant spirit contrasts markedly with her father's barely controlled terror; and is persuaded to overcome her apparent reluctance and distract the young warrior from thoughts of plunder while Dod arranges an alliance with the martial, devout druid kingdom of Perth. The pretence of twenty thousand armed men collapses utterly when Dod's "scouts" attack Meikle in mistake for Bignose and are even then defeated. Distracted by the determined pursuit of the missionary, distraught by the imminent invasion of the Saxons, Dod's spirit is finally broken when the warlike Prince of Perth arrives only to announce his conversion to Christianity and spurn Fife as a nest of heathens. All seems lost when the Saxons at last land: Dod conceals himself unsuccessfully among the women, only to be saved by Eric Bignose, who has decided to marry Deirdre and become a Christian at her insistence. With Lothian and Fife thus united, Dod is retired with a pension, and at last relieved of all responsibility he unexpectedly attains the freedom and peace which has eluded him throughout his life as king.

Right Royal makes no pretence to be more than a romp,<sup>1</sup> and what it lacks in refinement is more than made up in its boisterousness and the self-deprecating humour of King Dod, whose first appearance on the stage is accompanied by the remark "Ach, it's a terrible thing to gae through yir life aye appearin like an anti-climax".

Although they are no more than comic sketches, the characters have a pithiness which accords well with the dry bite of the Scots dialogue, making a situation as stereotyped as the courtship of Eric and Deirdre fresh and lively. The satire of diplomacy and the place of religion in politics is no less effective for being gentle, and is spiced by the farce of General Jock Tamson's octogenerian

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1 Glasgow Herald, 4 May 1954.

army and the all-too-real "ghosts" from King Dod's past, Bella and Jean, seduced by him twenty years previously and now rushing to claim fulfilment of his idle promises.

Much of Scott's success with Right Royal – which is, after all, little more than a diversion – must be due to its use of dialect throughout. The Scots which he employs is confident and racy, but most important, it is essentially modern: Right Royal is not in any way an attempt to reconstruct the past – it is a comic myth, a deliberate anachronism in which contemporary attitudes and actions are lampooned with impunity. As such, the comedy is a sturdy indication that Scottish language is not confined to the historical or the precious, but is fully capable of the immediacy and vitality necessary for purely contemporary theatre.

In the following year, Glasgow Citizens' accepted another musical comedy from Scott, Tam O Shanter's Tryst. Based on Robert Burns' famous poem, the play first establishes Tam as a suitable target for the Devil's machinations, and then follows the well-known tale of the witches coven in Kirk Alloway stumbled upon by the drunken hero who is pursued and almost captured for Hell through his enthusiasm for Cutty Sark – here portrayed as a stunningly seductive witch, Nannie, directed by Satan to tempt his victim. In the play, however, the loss of his horse's tail does not end the adventure. Tam is pursued in to his very home by Nannie, who traps him into a fatal kiss: Auld Nick himself enters to claim Tam's soul for Hell, only to relinquish it once more when he sees his victim beset by a storm of outraged female pride, for the kiss has been witnessed also by Kate, his wife, and the Ayr landlady with whom he has been flirting. Judging Hell to hold no terrors comparable to such a situation, the Devil condemns Tam to remain where he is, knowing that his weakness for women will always betray him in the future.

The compulsive fun of Right Royal is occasionally recaptured as Auld Nick first sets Nannie her task and calls his reluctant warlocks from the grave to cold, inclement Scotland; or when Tam attempts to explain his adventure to a belligerent, disbelieving Kate. Auld Nick and Kate make excellent opposite poles of malicious intent towards Tam, the former being very much a traditionally

sympathetic Scots comic devil; and Tam and Soutar Johnnie are the perfect pair of reprobates: yet the sureness of touch apparent throughout Right Royal is lacking – the songs are more clumsy, more contrived, and less well-tailored to the plot, and frequently the action is obviously padded out to no purpose. Scenes in which Auld Nick argues with Kirk Alloway's Beadle are tedious, the conclusion to the play in which Nannie and the witches dance into Tam's house, and he frees himself from Kate to join them, is inept and lacks the panache which saved the clichés of Right Royal. There is a particularly protracted commentary about Nannie's lack of expertise flying a broomstick in Act 2, and Tam O Shanter's Tryst, is in general not up to the standard which might have been expected.

Truth to Tell (1958) shows Scott on form once again. Although Scottish language is only used in the second part of the play, the directness and wit associated with the author's earlier work prevails throughout in an intelligent, swiftly paced comedy about the effect on the world of Truth and Beauty. The play has its roots in Prologue to an Unfinished Play, a short theatrical joke by James Bridie.

Socrates, miraculously saved from the death-cell in Athens by his friends, is smuggled from the country unconscious. He finds himself in another prison, this time in Carthage, where his indiscreet examination of the lives of the citizens has also given grave offence. Here he meets Arete, a slave-girl of outstanding appearance and talents as a pickpocket, who arranges for her wealthy criminal owner to rescue her cell-mate. Together, they find themselves washed up on a Caledonian beach when the slave-owner's ship is wrecked on a voyage to Britain.

Caledonian society proves to be a surprise, for the women occupy the functions normally associated with the male sex. Socrates joins the men as a drudge; but Arete, as one of the privileged class, is free to indulge in amorous exercises with the Caledonian men which their social system normally denies: the result is a revolution inspired by the philosopher but led by the slave-girl. The men, once in power,

prove no better than their predecessors. Fergus, the most able, declares himself King and rules by force; far from learning tolerance from their experience, they enslave the women with vindictive pettiness. Soon Socrates is inciting the women to successful strike-action under the ex-Queen Finella, who arranges a compromise solution with Fergus, whom she marries. Fergus shrewdly recognises that with Socrates' advanced political theorising, and Arete's potential for creating unquenchable rivalries among the menfolk, the strangers must be removed if the kingdom is to be stable. His answer is to arrange deification, imprisoning the couple in a sacred cave. With Truth and Beauty thus safely translated to the ethereal realm, he settles down to rule in peace, unaware that Socrates and Arete are happily bringing up children who will return to disrupt future kingdoms.

This rather sentimentalised conclusion, apparent to the audience for most of the last scene thanks to an overgenerous supply of the broadest hints from the author, does not detract from the wide ranging comedy of the preceding scenes. When Plato enters the Athenian death-cell with its attendant chorus of grieving friends, the very real tragic dignity of Socrates' courage in the face of death is undercut by the broadest farce when the hemlock turns out to be a sleeping draught,<sup>1</sup> and a corpse brought in a laundry-basket replaces the condemned philosopher. Arete is a pleasing, quick-witted criminal whose frank worldliness makes a good contrast with the unflappably earnest Socrates, and their descent on Caledonia provides opportunity for broadest slapstick and political satire, as when the men quarrel over Arete, or Socrates attempts to explain democracy to his new hosts :

Socrates : I find on considering that no adequate explanation can be given of the workings of democracy.  
However, in practice it depends on each man having a vote which he casts in favour of the candidate most worthy of exercising the powers of government.

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1 This is Bridie's joke, in Prologue to an Unfinished Play



Donald : And which candidate's that ?  
Socrates : The voter decides that for himself.  
Dugal : But doesn't anybody tell him ?  
Socrates : Yes, the candidates tell him. But he doesn't believe them, of course.  
Hector : Then how does he make up his mind ?  
Socrates : Oh, he just votes the same way as he did in the last election.

The serious intention of Truth to Tell and the comedy are well-balanced until the somewhat static final scene: Scott escapes the oppressive didacticism of Linklater's Crisis in Heaven while maintaining intellectual conviction. It is a pleasingly workmanlike effort, if ultimately not outstanding.

Scott's work for the theatre is enthusiastic and intelligent. The full-length plays show a highly competent writer of comedy who also had something of interest to say, and some of his one-act pieces have great power and concentration. His command of Scots, and his ability to write good dramatic verse indicate the possibilities of the language for expressing essentially modern thought and emotion to a broad, general audience and are worthy of the highest acclaim. Yet this, in the last analysis, represents a foundation only; and Scott never went on the build any further. His theatrical ability is as good as Linklater's; he could have become the true successor to Bridie – he certainly enjoyed a similar taste for fantasy and satire – instead he stopped writing, eventually returning to poetry rather than drama.

#### CITIZENS' MISCELLANEOUS

Plays by other Scottish dramatists produced at the Citizens' Theatre in the forties and fifties included several of solid worth, but none of outstanding merit. Comedy continued for some time to be influenced by the castles and kitchens of established Scottish forms. Moffat's Bunt Pulls the Strings was revived to rescue the box-office on one occasion, mercifully not repeated, as was Donald MacLaren's It Looks Like A Charge; in Bachelors Are Bold (1951) by T.M. Watson, they found a similarly embarrassing

successor. The substitution of the Scottish laird and his castle for the English country-house found in Brandane's Heather Gentry was echoed by Moray McLymont's Retreat From Moonshine and Kemp's What the Stars Foretell. Scottish period settings, in the light of Robert MacLellan's success, were surprisingly less frequent. The Honours o Drummlie (1955), by James Scotland, an excellent period farce about the efforts of a Lowland town to protect its civic plate from a retreating Jacobite army, was written with vigour and wit; but a contrived tale of an encounter between Boswell, Johnson, and a disguised Charles Edward Stuart – which owed much to Walter Scott – The Guest of Honour (1952) by Donald Sutherland, is guilty of all the faults common in the genre: sentimental Jacobitism, Ossianic Highlanders, and wooden pseudo-historical figures.

A good attempt to wed comedy, satire and serious thought is made by Alastair Dunnett in The Original John Mackay (1956), if in the end it is marred by poor dialogue and stiff characterisation. The John Mackay of the title is a crofter whose life is made the lyrical subject of a best-selling book on the Highlands by one Leonard P. S. Beecher. Shrewder than Beecher suspects, John proceeds to write a much better book of his own, and on the proceeds begins a very successful career as a distiller and hotelier. The satirising of weekend "simple-lifers" who choke the Highlands with their crassness and insensitivity is light but damning: an attempt to depict the psychological collapse of John Mackay when he finds himself cut off from his past in the artificial world of the tourists' Scotland is worthy but unsuccessful, especially as Dunnett tacks on a happy ending of transparent contrivance. The Original John MacKay is one of the very few plays to take the dilemma of the Highlands with sufficient seriousness to penetrate beyond the facile, complacent assertions of Celtic dignity and wisdom typified by John Brandane's The Glen Is Mine.

The documentary style which flourished briefly with Glasgow Unity Theatre found a faint echo at the Citizens over the years in three plays: Now Barabbas . . . (1948) by William Douglas Home; Spindrift (1951) by Naomi Mitchison and Denis Mackintosh and All In Good Faith (1954) by Roddy MacMillan.

Spindrift, which won an Arts Council award for the best new play in Scotland during the Festival of Britain, is a delicately-written impression of the lives of Scottish west-coast fishermen. Naomi Mitchison collaborated with a Campbeltown fisherman, Denis MacKintosh, to write this play which traced the fortunes of the crew of one fishing-boat - the Spindrift - through hard times in the Depression to the brief post-war boom and the days which followed. One man leaves the boat in the hard days before the war, seeking a better life in the Glasgow shipyards, only to return once city life becomes too much for him. Another, Airgiod, more able and ambitious, buys a boat of his own during the boom years only to see it consume every penny he has painstakingly saved when the fishing slumps once more. Brought to the end of his tether by the collapse of his dreams, with his marriage becoming a nightmare of recrimination and harshness as he sacrifices all for the upkeep of the boat, he cheats his own crew, but is rescued from despair at this final degradation by his friend and former skipper "Juck" MacMillan of the Spindrift. Juck calms Airgiod and persuades his son Johnnie to lend £600 which will save Airgiod's boat though it will upset Johnnie's marriage plans. The play, lacking movement and overall tension, yet captures with great sensitivity the gentleness of the West Highlands without turning its back on the realities of avarice, fecklessness, anger and hardship. Johnnie's decision to lend the £600 is not an easy one and there is no pretence of a spontaneous disregard for riches. The sense of community is powerfully evoked and in the loan to Airgiod is seen a reassertion of its fraternal values in a new generation: seldom have economics found such a human-and dramatically satisfying-expression on the stage.

Roddy MacMillan's play, All In Good Faith is a direct development of the impressions of slum-life depicted in earlier plays from Robin Millar's The Shawlie to the Unity Theatre Production of Gorbals Story and Men Should Weep. MacMillan avoids both the sentimentality and melodrama which marred these precursors in a direct and highly effective study of the effects of an unexpected fortune on a poverty stricken Glasgow family.

A cruel joke played on Robert Bryson by a local bookmaker, who gives him a cheque for £15,000 in return for a drink with the intention of cancelling it, suddenly goes awry when the practical joker has a heart attack. On the advice of the bookmaker's sympathetic lawyer the Brysons learn of a legal device by which they can cash the cheque unchallenged, and as the excited family begin mildly to celebrate there is a foretaste of future developments as their loose-tongued son Nicoll starts an invasion of thirsty, avaricious neighbours. The second act illustrates to the full the peculiar tragedy of the Brysons, the utter incomprehension with which Robert, Nicoll and his elder brother Jackie respond to wealth after a lifetime living hand-to-mouth. A riotous party is in full swing when the curtain rises, a party which degenerates inevitably into a drunken brawl after the arrival of the Gancher, a truculent petty gangster, and his cronies. A friend of the family tries to warn them of their dangerous rake's progress from rags to more rags, without even a hint of riches in between, and from him is learned that there have been six weeks of continuous alcoholic merry-making between the discovery of the cheque and this night's excess. The youngest son, Allan, who once had dreamed of a technical education loses interest in his studies; daughter Rena loses her fiance, who doesn't wish to receive her father's cloying generosity. Then Nicoll, driving Jackie's new car without a license and half-intoxicated crashes and dies: in the shock which follows, Allan's education prospects are saved, Rena's fiance returns and the mother at last succeeds in bringing her unruly brood to heel.

It is a simple enough story, given life by MacMillan's easy familiarity with the setting and the characters, and his sure grasp of their Glaswegian speech. The problems of existence in a degrading industrial slum are sharply highlighted with an understanding sufficiently detached to avoid the clichés of social propaganda, and MacMillan successfully exploits the inarticulacy and incomprehension of the Brysons, without falsifying or idealising them.

MORAY MacLAREN

One Traveller Returns (1946), performed first at Dundee and subse-

quently at the Glasgow Citizens', first drew attention to Moray MacLaren through its startling and peculiarly gripping theme, the study in a Scottish mental institution of a man who not only claims to be the embodiment of Shakespeare's Hamlet, but who can – almost without thinking – offer disturbing proofs of his claim. His own reason for seeking psychiatric aid is to penetrate the truth of the Shakespearian scholars' traditionally insoluble problem, whether or not Hamlet is mad, or merely feigns madness. Thus a two-fold enquiry runs through the play: the perplexity of doctor MacDonald, the superintendent, and Carnegie, his younger assistant, about their strange patient's identity, a perplexity compounded by the startling and inexplicable events which occur around him; and the stranger's personal quest for self-knowledge.

The author deliberately plays on the confusion created throughout Act I and most of Act II, as suspicion of the stranger's identity swings back and forth. The cabbie who delivers him vanishes mysteriously and foul play is suspected; but then two sinister psychiatric 'experts' arrive from London, named with bizarre coincidence, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Gradually the stranger's attitude to himself begins to prevail, especially when he is introduced to Dr. MacDonald's "mutual hope society", a group of patients on the verge of complete recovery who find their feet through communal activity. With them, the enigmatic newcomer begins to explain himself – and here the audience are asked to suspend a considerable measure of disbelief – as a physical entity created by the collective subconscious of mankind under the inspiration of a great artist's creative imagination.

Urgency is lent to this rather fragile assertion by the arrival of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, men of considerable reputation from Vienna looking "foreign and sinister" with "the quiet repulsive charm of the professional Central European psychiatrist". These gentlemen wish to remove the stranger at once to their own prison-like establishment on the grounds that he is possibly dangerous, ruthlessly applying political pressure on Dr. MacDonald to achieve their end. Their quarry rallies, however, after being told by an elderly fellow patient that where before he existed as a manifestation of other people's imaginations, he now exists as a person – a person with a soul of his own. At the very moment when Rosencrantz and

Guildenstern appear to have overborne all Dr. MacDonald's objections to their custody of the patient, Hamlet bursts in upon them and in their surprise, unwittingly, they call out his name. There is a brief explanation of the situation to MacDonald.

"Through the centuries they have pursued me. The creatures of evil pursuing the flying, the fleeting spirit".

Then aided by the magically returned cab-driver from Act 1 – described by Hamlet as "the most recurrent eternal type in the mind of the man who created me . . . . . much simpler, more likeable, more laughable . . . . .", – the doom of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is ritually set in motion by the quotation from Hamlet, "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern hold their course for England". With that, Hamlet and the cabbie vanish, and his two arch-enemies are arrested by the police. The play ends in the formal triumph of Hamlet, in his traditional stage-costume, acting out the graveyard scene from Shakespeare's play with the cabbie as gravedigger, before returning whence he came.

The strangeness of the play is one of its principal qualities, its unexpectedness firing the audience's enthusiasm for the author's apparently boundless ambition. Initial promise is not fulfilled, however. MacLaren's imaginative theme demands a seriousness of his audience which reveals a telling lack of substance behind the immediate surface of the play's thought. Skilful parallels to Shakespeare are pursued in Hamlet's abrupt decision to abandon introspection in favour of action, yet this in fact leads only to a brief, dismissive and mystically-employed quotation and an all-too-convenient, unexplained and scarcely credible removal of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern by those heroes of traditional British melodrama, the police. It is as if the duelling-scene in Hamlet was interrupted by Fortinbras bearing an antidote for the poison and a warrant for Claudius' arrest – the high-point to which the whole play has built tumbles into banality. From that vantage-point it can be seen that One Traveller Returns fails to satisfy its claims to profundity. The characters are for the most part, stock figures: Dr. MacDonald is over sixty, "humane, wise and Scots-spoken", a yardstick of integrity for the audience to identify

with. Carnegie is "younger, accentless", and possesses "less obvious character" – it is his naive enthusiasm which brings the Viennese experts to the asylum – there is also a maternal Scots nurse, in whom Hamlet discovers his first taste of humanity and love. There are certainly no surprises here. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are caricatures, and unpleasant ones, of Austrian Jewish psychiatrists, – and MacLaren quite inexplicably indulges his prejudices to the extent of identifying them with Nazism at one point, and later with faceless bolshevism as manifested by the post-war Welfare State bureaucracy. Their purpose in wishing to imprison Hamlet is never explained, and never related to their Shakespearian function; and their removal at the end is even more mystifying than their fate in Hamlet – at least in that play a letter was altered to provide a convincing mechanism for their destruction.

MacLaren's failure to meet the conditions he sets for himself in the play is a disappointment. His technical capability in handling a complicated plot and brief flurries of "infinite jest and most excellent fancy" with the cab-driver is impressive; and the boldness of his imagination in transforming Hamlet's sea-voyage into a journey of the soul in a psychiatric ward, quite breath-taking.

The omens for dramatic development in Scotland in the early and mid-fifties were therefore encouraging, if not superlative. The more facile styles of comedy and historical romance were dying out, and the imitative impulses found in Linklater and occasionally Kemp and Reid had given way to more self-confident work typified by Scott. Reid and Scott had in their fantasies convincingly upheld the use of Scots in the theatre without consigning it to a severely restricted audience or limiting it to historical reconstruction. If the immediate concerns of the contemporary world tended to be ignored, they were not entirely so: the handful of social documentaries and plays like The Original John MacKay and Vineyard Street were a reminder of a more prosaic vision.

Then quite abruptly the flow dried up. The "angry young men" of the English theatre in the late fifties had no parallel on the Scottish stage. Glasgow Citizens' Theatre ceased to encourage native dramatists,

and the few Scottish plays performed there after 1956 indicated but small response to the winds of change blowing from south of the Border.

Fantasy, comedy and satire are the common features of the Citizens' Scottish output in the 'forties and 'fifties, and frequently historical setting aids the writers' escape from mundane contemporaneity, and perhaps also from parochialism. Fantasy in particular is striking in the work of four of the most prominent contributors - Scott, Reid, Linklater and Kemp - and seems to be symptomatic of their desire to write of generalised philosophical themes, rather than specific or national topics, although all of these authors are particularly noteworthy for their ability to discover an immediate, Scottish expression of their ideas. Reid and Scott in particular made excellent use of the vivid Scottish folk idiom. Whether or not the highly intellectual theatre of contemporary France had an influence - Reid certainly has a very strong personal connection with that country - is less than clear, for Scottish theatre seems in general to be barely touched by the outside world: for whatever cause, the air of scholarship is plainly detectable in their work.

The issues which affected the contemporary world were dealt with in the main, by less popular playwrights - George Munro and Paul Vincent Carrol, for example. The setting for these is invariably working-class, within which Carrol tried unsuccessfully to deal with economics, and Munro - perhaps too successfully - with religious bigotry.

It was in this period before the Citizens' directors turned their backs on an independent Scottish drama that the Citizens' Theatre came nearest to emulating the achievements of Irish theatre, combining professionalism with native inspiration to create a serious drama. All too soon Scottish drama was returned virtually to its starting-point.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### THE GATEWAY

As the Citizens' Theatre in Glasgow grew and flourished, a similar stirring of theatrical endeavour became apparent in Edinburgh. James Bridie, pleading the case for a Scottish National Theatre to the Arts



Council with his own Citizens in mind, had been momentarily stunned by the possibility of available funds going to support an Edinburgh venture instead, for George Scott-Moncrief and Edwin Muir had consulted with the capital city's Provost with a view to founding a new theatre, and only the lack of suitable premises thwarted them. Glasgow Citizens' received the Arts Council support and became an unofficial National Theatre: the Edinburgh Stage discovered instead a most unlikely ally in what had been traditionally its most implacable enemy, the Scottish Kirk.

An Edinburgh Cinema-Music Hall was presented to the Church of Scotland in 1946, and under the imaginative direction of the Reverend George Candlish, Sadie Aitken – a well-known personality in amateur circles – was appointed to manage the building as the Gateway Theatre, with visiting companies like Perth Theatre, the Wilson Barrett Company and the Pilgrim Players; amateur groups; its own semi-professional companies; and seasons of ballet, opera and films. On this basis the Gateway provided an extensive diet of drama in the long months between the city's newly-established International Festivals until 1953. As the actor Tom Fleming comments, by then :

"the need for a non-commercial permanent company in Edinburgh performing new plays by Scottish authors, plays by new authors, contemporary plays of international merit, and classics of the theatre, had become urgent, and indeed a basic question of honesty and integrity. A city that sponsored annual Festivals of Drama . . . . and had at that time no living theatre rooted in its own all-the-year round life, seemed a bit of a lie."

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The part amateur companies formed at the Gateway proved capable of playing protracted seasons, even short tours with standards comparable to fully professional companies. In 1950 a season of twelve plays, ranging from Uncle Vanya and Mourning Becomes Electra to Dandy Dick and The Importance of Being Earnest was performed by the Gateway's own players, and in 1953 a similar season turned its attention to Scottish plays like MacLellan's Torwattletie.

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1 The Twelve Seasons of the Edinburgh Gateway, pp. 25-6  
T. Fleming.

The success of these groups prompted the creation of a permanent body in 1953, which as a professional company, had to be officially separated from the easily embarrassed Church of Scotland. This meant, however, that the company would be in a position to receive Arts Council support. Robert Kemp, the playwright, who had been associated with the Gateway since 1946 was invited, together with the actress Lennox Milne, to form a professional acting company independent of the Kirk to perform in the theatre. £2,000 were raised partly by subscription, partly with the aid of the Arts Council, and a "non-profit distributing limited company" was formed, "designed to gain exemption from entertainment tax, and to qualify for grants from public funds", to be known as "The Edinburgh Gateway Theatre Company".<sup>1</sup> The avowed policy of the new theatre was to :

"present plays by Scottish dramatists, classics  
and English and foreign plays of interest." 2

Even more so than the Glasgow Citizens Theatre, the Gateway committed itself to the presentation of native talent, concentrating from the outset on plays by Scottish authors. Lennox Milne was later to write :

"The driving impetus behind us in the first three or four years was, I think, the belief that, apart from the joy of acting in itself and the inescapable love of the theatre we might be building another pillar of the theatre in Scotland . . . . Our purpose was roughly the same as Bridie's had been for the Citizens: to foster the talents and work of Scottish actors and playwrights and to provide dramatic entertainment which the people of Edinburgh would be unlikely to see otherwise." 3

The Glasgow theatre had at first presented Scottish plays with some hesitation but the Gateway, opening ten years later, had no such qualms: in their first season only two out of a total of eleven plays were not by Scots; in the second season only three out of fifteen. 158 productions were mounted by Gateway in a twelve-year existence: half of these were by Scots authors. Of

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1 The Twelve Seasons of the Edinburgh Gateway Company  
St. Giles, Edinburgh 1965 p. 9

2 The Twelve Seasons of the Edinburgh Gateway Company  
: p. 11

3 The Twelve Seasons of the Edinburgh Gateway Company  
p. 16

that half, 24 were new works. A less fortunate aspect of this nationalist fervour was the indiscriminating choice of material – Graham Moffat's excursions into the Kailyard regularly took the Gateway's stage during the nineteen-fifties; and a large number of the other native works bore a similar stamp. Of the "classics and English and foreign plays" there was little to create excitement until 1960 when under Kelsall's direction there was an abrupt widening of the Gateway's range. Up to then, there had been one O'Casey, one Synge and one production of Look Back in Anger in 1958. The sixties saw Ionesco, Wilder, Hasek, Pinter, Becket, Anouilh, Wesker, Frisch and Whiting performed at the Gateway, a development not always appreciated by audiences. Works by Scottish authors were markedly less frequent in these later years. Productions of Bridie and Kemp, Maurice Fleming's The Comic and Roddy MacMillan's All In Good Faith indicated a continuing willingness to encourage native drama, of suitably high standards, which unfortunately failed to elicit a convincing response.

A "native idiom in Acting" was sought after, and from the start the Gateway stressed ensemble acting, which Tom Fleming attributes as much to the physical peculiarities of the building as to idealism – "dressing rooms were allocated not according to status, but according to accessibility".<sup>1</sup> Many of the best known faces on Scotland's stage worked at the Gateway: Tom Fleming, Lennox Milne, Bill Simpson, James Gibson, Nell Ballantyne, Roddy MacMillan, and Victor Carin are only a sample. The Scottish emphasis in acting continued, even when the supply of fresh Scottish plays began to dwindle and the range of work produced broadened out. Unlike the Glasgow Citizens', the Gateway never lost its native atmosphere, maintaining single-handed a tradition very much threatened in the nineteen-sixties.

Inadequate financial support proved critical as soon as the Gateway exhausted its stock of tried and tested Scottish favourites, however.

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1 The Twelve Seasons of the Edinburgh Gateway Company p. 27

With only a small grant from the Arts Council the theatre was always on the verge of collapse – it is a tribute to the acumen of the directors that the Gateway functioned so well for so long, when most theatres depended on vastly greater subsidies – and a crisis was reached in the 1960–61 season when, after several successive box-office failures, the bank refused to permit further borrowing. Edinburgh had not found Ionesco to its taste, returning to the theatre only when "A Lecture by Mr. William MacGonagall, Poet" was substituted: the Gateway reaped the bitter harvest sown by its penchant for Moffat and Watson and similarly "homely" entertainments. Robert Kemp, worn out by the struggle to make ends meet, had resigned and been replaced by John B. Rankin. Rankin proposed a production of Aristophanes' Lysistrata, provoking a controversy which resulted in his own resignation and crippling adverse publicity for the theatre. Moultrie Kelsall, Rankin's successor, blames the particular translation of the play, suggesting that it was needlessly offensive: whether this was true or not, advance notices of "a rollicking excursion into impropriety"<sup>1</sup> evoked all the narrowness and ruthlessness of which the Scottish Kirk is capable. The Gateway Theatre Company was threatened with eviction if Lysistrata was performed in premises owned by the Church.

"... The Church appeared as the censor of the programme and policy – a constraint it never had before, nor has ever since made the slightest attempt to exercise – and those of our critics who had long chosen, quite unjustifiably, to suspect that such censorship existed, pointed to the withdrawal of the play as proof of it." 2

wrote Kelsall in his account of the Gateway's final five years. An official report entitled Kirk and Theatre published by the Church of Scotland in 1961, reflects by its vagueness, platitudes and heavy qualification an unsureness of aim as regards the Gateway and its work, a total lack of a clear statement of policy, and an unmistakable assertion of the Church's right of arbitrary veto :

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1 Twelve Seasons of the Edinburgh Gateway Company p. 32

2 Twelve Seasons of the Edinburgh Gateway Company p. 32

"All depiction of life which is worthy of the name of art involves both selection and interpretation, and what is important is the kind of interpretation of life and values which the dramatist seeks to set before his audience, i.e. whether . . . . he confirms in his audience that Christian values and virtues are ultimate and worthwhile. The Church must be wary of the temptation to expect any playwright who is a genuine artist to produce plays to order which would convey only Christian truth as conventionally formulated . . . slick comedies, all tailored to be winners and stuffed out with fashionable banalities relating to sex, slang and drink . . . should not appear on the Gateway stage . . . .

What is important, is not that objectionable matter should not find a place on the stage, but that when there it should be . . . seen to be objectionable both by the playwright and the audience. "

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Those critics complained of by Kelsall may have been unjustified on most occasions, but it could equally be observed that the Church's censorship was wholly effective on the first and only occasion a disagreement occurred. The following season saw greatly reduced audience figures and financial crisis for the company.

Eventually Edinburgh Corporation were persuaded to grant the theatre £1,000 to help pay its creditors, and the Arts Council and Edinburgh University rendered further assistance. The Gateway struggled on. Good fortune returned briefly with the success of Kemp's Let Wives Tak Tent, revived in 1961; then declined once more into a state of flux, despite a regular grant from the Town Council. Journey's End, the last production of the 1965 season, proved ironically to be the last production of all. Edinburgh had been planning a fully-fledged Civic Theatre, and announced unexpectedly that it would open in the autumn of 1965 in the Lyceum. Tom Fleming was invited to be its first director.

The Arts Council promised that the Gateway would continue to receive its support, but the loss of Fleming, the increasing costs of

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1 Kirk and Theatre, Church of Scotland, 1961

production and a realistic appraisal of the effect competition would have on audience-figures, led the Gateway to decide for a voluntary demise.

"To launch out on another season, as a bold gesture of confidence that more theatre would create more audience, had an undeniable attraction, but if we failed, the Civic Theatre, with its much greater resources, would be seen to have killed us, which would surely be an unbecoming end for the old venture and an unfortunate start for the new. We had maintained professional repertory in Edinburgh through thick and thin for twelve seasons, in the hope that stronger hands than ours would ultimately take over the responsibility and that time had now come." 1

After one further production in the Edinburgh Festival of The Man From Thermopylae by A.F. Kay, the Edinburgh Gateway Theatre Company disbanded. The Lyceum, it was believed, would take up the Scottish cause where the Gateway left off.

The achievement of its twelve seasons lies in the acting company and the commitment to a Scottish theatrical ideal. With only a minute subsidy the company succeeded in attracting the common folk of Edinburgh with a diet of Scottish plays performed by Scottish actors. The Scottish plays produced are a much more dubious factor. The reception afforded to Ionesco is an indication of the stultifying effects of a diet of homespun comedy, and although the last seasons brought a marked change in favour of more stimulating topical fare, the Gateway very seldom dealt in the avant-garde.

Robert Kemp, whose works have already been dealt with, was the most prominent contributor of plays to the Gateway, giving six new works in addition to numerous revivals. For Lennox Milne he wrote a special solo-entertainment, The Heart is Highland, which proved one of the most popular successes of the theatre's history; Let Wives Tak Tent and The Other Dear Charmer indicated what Kemp was capable of; but frequently his efforts were less impressive - The Daft Days for example, is as silly and sentimentalized as any-

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1 The Twelve Seasons of the Edinburgh Gateway Company p. 40

thing written by Graham Moffat, and is a poor reflection on the Gateway's attitude towards the growth of a healthy native drama. Alexander Reid was also given much attention, although only one new play, The Wax Doll, resulted from the association. Alexander Scott and George Munro were ignored, perhaps due to their explicit religious scepticism.

The playwrights who might fairly be regarded as "Gateway dramatists" are few in number: R. J. B. Sellar, whose Brief Glory had already won much praise before the Gateway was formed, was second only to Kemp in prominence with four plays premiered there; Albert Mackie gave three promising plays about life in contemporary Edinburgh; Moray MacLaren had some work produced. Of the handful of other Scottish plays, only The Comic by Maurice Fleming, and The Keys of Paradise by Ronald Mavor stand out.

In Conspirators (1955) Kemp made a rare attempt to come to grips with an immediately compelling theme, the betrayal experienced by a left-wing idealist brought face to face with institutional cruelty and corruption in the revolutionary society to which he has committed his entire life. Vassia Zubof, of the Bureau of Collective Farming in an unspecified Soviet satellite state, is abruptly called upon to replace Galkin, head of the Secret Police, when the latter falls ill; supposedly because his local knowledge of his home town fits him uniquely to the command of an enquiry into a smuggling ring which of late has arranged escapes for defectors to the West. In fact, Galkin has organised the whole business to prevent his permanent replacement by an able subordinate in the police, hoping that Zubof's incompetence will emphasize his own merit. Zubof finds himself interrogating "Auntie Tanya" - ageing, garrulous Tatiana Ivanova - Ozol, a drunken peasant petty criminal; and Kyra Nicolaevna Beloff, who in years gone by was his lover. Unaccustomed to police work, Zubof prepares to release the first two, but his personal knowledge of Kyra's royalist father and her own anti-soviet attitude lead him to condemn her, after much heart-searching, as an enemy of the state, a noble opponent who cannot be allowed to escape. Galkin then returns briefly to reveal that Ozol and Tanya are at the very heart of the conspiracy, and that Kyra is his own undercover agent - more than that, his mistress.

Kyra eventually brings Zubof to understand his naivety and the full extent of the evil which permeates the state. Discovering that the ruthless Galkin has plans to sacrifice him too to his egotistical ambition, Zubof escapes to the West with Kyra and the conspirators.

Up to this point, the play is satisfactory with some well-conducted arguments between the characters, although Zubof is too gullible and innocent to be wholly believable. The final escape is far too easy, both as a physical possibility and a philosophical conclusion, ultimately placing Conspirators in the black-and-white world of the trite adventure story. The earlier tone of growing disillusion and despair is much more successfully evoked, with Kyra as its most eloquent spokesman :

Zubof :           We are all children of the dragon's teeth, who will rise against one another. Why does the President decorate me and the Council of State acclaim me? Not on behalf of the peasants, Kyra! . . . . But they know I'll feed the battalions who wheel about the barracks square and the workers at the forges where the tanks are ground out for the May Day parades and the wars to come.

Kyra :            Across the Border it's the same. The world is preparing everywhere. The children of the dragon's teeth are rattling their swords and shaking their shields. They fulfil themselves by imposing their will.

After a poor start with lifeless verse imitating Christopher Fry and a tedious pace never entirely overcome, The Man Among the Roses (1956) strives to recreate the unnerving strangeness of the traditional ballads with a contemporary setting for Tam Lin, now Tom Lane, a Canadian serviceman. Tom has fallen victim to the unearthly Gay Carline, the Queen of Faery who haunts the Scottish borders, and been reduced by her to a zombie-like state in which he is ravished by the exquisite beauties of her immortal world. He is rescued on the eve of being sacrificed as the Carline's tithe to Hell by Janet, a bored young aristocrat whose search for intensity has resulted in a chance meeting with him on a night of



storm in the woodlands. Most of the play's effect is derived directly from the original ballad, for Kemp makes a poor job of linking the various episodes and a worse job of providing a credible framework – Tom is briefly and vaguely referred to by a worried clergyman with an understanding of the occult, and this is supposedly enough to send Janet speeding off in her sports-car in search of him, leaving her birthday-party. The last Act, in which the naturalistic style of the play abruptly gives way to heavy-handed symbolism, does however make good effect of a hitherto ignored psychological plane when Janet's parents gradually merge surrealistically with the baleful spirits who oppose her. There then follows a postscript to the play which approaches a depth of thought and feeling noticeably missing from most of what has gone before: with Janet married to Tom, they stand at an open window, unable now to hear the voices of the spirit-world heard calling outside :

Spirits :       Away, away, away, away, away.  
                  Our revenge will be silent and slow.  
                  We will bleach the colours out of the dawn  
                  And wither the flowers where they grow!  
                  Away!  
                  We shall make the wheeling of moon and stars  
                  Repetitive and dreary  
                  We shall quench the diamond's fire  
                  We shall drain the blood of the ruby  
                  The racing heart will tire.  
                  Away, away.

Tom :            Oh, close the window!  
                  The night is turning cold,  
                  And if I listened longer to the babbling of the waters  
                  I should be terribly oppressed by fear.

The verse employed unfortunately mars the impact, and elsewhere in the play is very bad indeed, at its worst in Act 1. Startled by a mysterious cry, several guests at Janet's party surprise a guilty-looking butler, Haliburton –

Angus :         This verbal candour won't deceive us!  
                  Haliburton, you seem to me

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A witness visibly discredited  
By multiplicity of twitchings!  
These burglaries in country houses –  
We've read of them you know!

Haliburton : Oh, Sir!

Clifford : Did you not read that interview  
(Of unexceptionable authenticity)  
With Bludgeon of the Yard?  
Always, said Bludgeon, an accomplice works inside!

Haliburton : You cause me dolorous pangs!

Comparison of this with lengthy quotations from Tam Lin is disastrous. In general, The Man Among The Roses appears to be half-finished, with a few attractive notions only partially developed and the entire piece remaining disjointed and frequently obscure.

Although Moray MacLaren was no new "discovery" of the Gateway, his plays were favourably received by the company, and it is convenient to consider them here. MacLaren, a well-known and versatile writer married to Lennox Milne, had begun his association with the Scottish theatre in the latter years of the Scottish National Players, showing himself on occasion to be a competent and thoughtful dramatist. His work lacks consistency, however, and even at its best was never outstanding.

One of his better efforts is Heather On Fire. Although the play is far from perfect, it successfully recreates the middle-class bohemianism of a certain kind of artist and poetaster in early-Victorian Edinburgh.

After the success of some early work published under a pseudonym, young Robin MacFarlane Balquhain defies the outraged respectability of his father, leaving home to pursue his talents in an artists' studio in the teeming Old Town. He is encouraged in this by his wealthy cousin Hector, a dabbler in culture and creativity; and by his sister Christian, whose practical mind and quiet determination strengthen his resolution and aid him to a suitable financial arrangement with Fenwick, his English publisher. Robin has for sometime been pursuing a Jekyll and Hyde existence, slipping away from his father's respectable household to join the roistering commonalty of

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the city, but commitment full-time to this picturesque life proves destructive. His ability to work declines, he sinks ever deeper into depression, and seeks a dangerous solace in opium. Despite this a manuscript is delivered to Fenwick by Christian, who acts as a copyist for her brother, which the publisher hails as nothing short of brilliant, but Robin collapses before anything more can be done. Christian takes him, weak and unwell, back home to his welcoming father, who fears for his son's sanity and to save him asks that his literary ambitions be abandoned and the manuscript left unpublished. Christian agrees with her father's plan, only to have Robin reveal that she is the real author. Distraught by the distress he has undergone for her sake, Christian tries to burn the novel, but is checked by her father, who tells her to defy Victorian propriety and publish under her own name.

Certain features of the play are noteworthy: the absence of sentimental over-indulgence in the portrayal of Scottish life; some excellent comment on schizophrenic Edinburgh riddled with the hypocrisy of the unco' guid; and some surprisingly well-drawn characters – Robin, Christian and Hector in particular. The relationship between Robin and his sophisticated but posturing cousin is handled well, even if their scenes of playful debauch with the wilder citizenry are needlessly protracted. What cripples the play is the implausibility of the plot with its convenient but inadequately prepared conclusion. Apart from a lively sharing of details in a projected story at the end of Act 1, when she is alone with Robin, there is absolutely no sufficient hint before the revelation in Act 3 of Christian's authorship.

Muckle Ado is a very slight farce about an ancient stone, suspected of being Scotland's Stone of Destiny, discovered on a farm in Perthshire, and the efforts of the finders to protect it from exploitation by the news-media, politicians of varying degrees of sanity, and a marauding party of English Rag-Week students. The rock may also be a Druid stone: in the end it disappears literally by magic to solve the conflicts of the play.

The Non-Resident (1957), premiered at the Gateway, is an adaptation of the story of Madeleine Smith in an Edinburgh setting, involving some rather unconvincing psychic phenomena whereby contemporary characters

are "possessed" to act out the murder-story. It is no improvement on Howard Lockhart's earlier play based on the same tale.

Albert Mackie first came to the attention of the Gateway before the wholly independent Theatre Company had been formed, when his Hogmanay Story, boldly grasping the nettle of contemporary politics, formed part of the 1951/52 Season. In the following year another of his plays, Festival City, appeared on their stage; and when yet another, Hame, featured in the programme for the first "independent" Season, it must have seemed that the Gateway had discovered a dramatist tailor-made to be their rising new "star". Beginning as an agonisingly slow, working-class kitchen-comedy, Hame (1954) gradually develops a serious plot. In the McNorie household, the sons, schoolteacher Bob and Jack, a ne'er-do-weel recently returned from Jamaica, clash bitterly each time they meet about the latter's egotistical lack of concern for the rest of the family. Their mother dotes upon Jack, refusing to admit to herself that he is capable of evil, despite oft-repeated evidence to the contrary; but nevertheless sees in Bob's success a foothold towards social elevation, to which end she severely criticises his romance with May Cooper, their neighbour, hoping for a match more resplendent by far. Janet Blair, a university acquaintance of Bob's, cultured and well-mannered, meets Mrs. McNorie's approval, but Janet falls for Jack, attracted by his raffish good-looks and swashbuckling manner. She stands by him when he is caught embezzling his workmates' holiday fund, assisting the McNorie family to make up the sum from their savings. Bob, enraged by their readiness to excuse Jack yet again, refuses to help, and is accused by Janet of jealousy for his brother's better looks and personal style. Stung by the bitter irony of the situation, Bob contrives to give his brother a hundred pounds anonymously, disguising it as unexpected good fortune from Jack's Jamaican adventures, only to be vilified by the exultant Jack. Janet sees through Bob's trick, however, and forces Jack to see the truth: her disgust at his vanity and self-interest finally breaks through the veneer of shallow cynicism behind which he hides from himself, bringing him at last to a genuine attempt to reform.

There are several moments of acute observation once the plot gets under way, most notably when the family closes ranks to protect its good name in the district by making good the pillaged holiday fund. Some of the characters, too, spring direct from working-class life: the father, Jim McNorie, proudly displaying his self-education and quoting Burns as only a Scottish fanatic can – occasionally receiving a gentle rebuff in the form of a correction from Janet; Mrs. McNorie, scrupulously discounting every adverse fact concerning Jack, trying ruthlessly to cold-shoulder May Cooper from Bob's affection, turning hysterically on Bob when he declines to part with any more money to protect his brother; and the pleasing lightweights of the daughter and her boyfriend, whose humour lightens the play's frequent clumsiness with its good-natured sharpness. Less happy are the main characters. Mackie has failed to maintain in them the veracity of the others: Bob, Jack, and most especially Janet, are stereotypes, insufficiently developed into independent personalities. They are ideas, not people. The brothers, imbued with recognisable sentiments, are palatable where Janet is not – with this intelligent, perceptive and sophisticated woman the author is quite plainly out of his depth. Nevertheless, frequent awkwardness does not obscure the real power of Mackie's talent; which makes the unlikely reconciliation and reformation at the end doubly disappointing. The attempt to lend conviction to this happy ending by making it dependent on the relationship between Jack and Janet is energetic but misguided: the abrupt reclamation of the black sheep is simply too good to be true.

The feeling for working-class life so apparent in Hame is repeated in Sheena (1955), this time allied to characterisation much more satisfying. A young American serviceman, Ian McCalman, spends his leave sketching the buildings and closes of Edinburgh, for he is a professional artist and illustrator in civilian life. One summer evening, as he sits in a close, he meets Sheena Lenny, an attractive girl struggling against the degradations of slum-life to support her widowed mother. Sheena's father was also an artist, one who sacrificed comfort, family and ultimately his life to his painting. Sheena has no romantic illusions about artists as a result, but is nonetheless strongly attracted to the young American. Her brother Johnnie has fallen under the unfortunate influence of Sandy Boswall, a teenage delinquent notorious in the district, and to impress his vicious idol steals a valuable cameo from an

antique shop literally at his back door. The antique dealer, Ginsberg, a gentle old Jew of more than average wisdom, discovers the culprit when Boswall attempts to blackmail Sheena with his knowledge of Johnnie's guilt. Ginsburg persuades Johnnie to return the cameo, and gives him a job; and Ian, discovering Boswell alone, fights and beats him. As in Hame, the conclusion to Sheena, with Ian and Sheena at last embracing openly, is too conveniently happy and just to be at all convincing; but it is not in the hardly startling plot that the value of the play lies. Sheena is - particularly in the first Act - quite superb in its evocation of character and location.

The shabby close, relieved of its depressing gloom by the long sunlit evenings of Edinburgh summer, finds a counterpart in the gossiping housewives who dawdle through it; in Ginsburg and his snobbish assistant Elspeth, relaxing in conversation with the artist sitting on the step of their back door; in Sheena lit by the tentative promise of romance, momentarily escaping the drudgery of her life in the half-serious fantasy of "True-Life Tales" magazines which Ian illustrates; and in the sudden menace of teenage violence exemplified by Sandy Boswall and Johnnie.

The relationship between Ian and Sheena is delicately created, its charm free from sentimentality or idealisation: both are sufficiently hard-headed and experienced to avoid such pitfalls, and the author makes excellent use of the "True Life Tales" incident - in which Sheena, tongue-in-cheek, describes herself according to the accepted formula of romantic pulp-fiction - to place wish-fulfilment in a convincing and effective context. Ian, whom life has failed to rob of open-heartedness, willingly befriends Ginsburg, Elspeth and even Sandy Boswall. His characteristic good-nature is combined with impulsive humour directed frequently at himself, preventing him from seeming merely the instrument of virtue throughout the play, softening even the "rough justice" which he metes out to Boswall - though this is unquestionably a very weak moment indeed.

Sheena is given depth by playing off her attraction to Ian, evidenced in her excessive jealousy and outrage when he fails to rebuff Elspeth as speedily as he might, with her own "official" love-match with Willie Main, a local mechanic. Unfortunately, Mackie's handling of Willie is quite openly rudimentary, upsetting the sense of wholeness which otherwise pervades the play. Sandy Boswall,

on the other hand, is finely observed in his pursuit of the gangster-rebel image, his sharp wit – vastly superior to the clumsy Johnnie's – and his rare moments of genuine charm warped by cynical self-assurance.

The interest maintained by character and atmosphere through the greater part of a plot both simple and unfashionably moralistic indicates the measure of Mackie's skill as a dramatist.

His next play, MacHattie's Hotel (1957) is a comedy. After a limpid first Act introducing the inhabitants of an Edinburgh hotel owned by domineering, chauvinistic Gael Angus MacHattie, interest increases as MacHattie's much put-upon daughter Agnes chooses between two suitors: Alan, an attractive, clean-cut stranger; and Bill, an "angry young man" of the era. Played against a background of the wilder fringes of Scottish Nationalism, the love-triangle is drawn into the political strife when Alan is revealed as a police spy set on the rooting out of Communism, which he sees manipulating the Nationalist excesses of the merry widow Elvira. Supported by a McCarthyite American hotel guest, he challenges Bill to confess his role as an agent of Soviet Russia, receiving instead the confession of a disillusioned but courageous intellect committed to the Left but shamed by Stalinist repression and the Hungarian uprising. Defeated, Alan is yet the final victor for he asserts that his deceit has not prevented him from falling in love with Agnes, and she in the end chooses him for a husband because emotion is not guided by reason. Bill wins her respect, but nothing more. This rather unhappy plot is brightened by the comedy of Angus MacHattie's overwhelming "Scottishness" and his relationship with the fawning Dougal MacDougall, which unfortunately misfires when the despised worm, Dougal, eventually turns: the plot by then has become too complex to permit much effect to his denunciation of his hypocritical former friend. Hampered by creaking stagecraft and its hack-response to the prevailing contemporary fashion for tortured intellectual 'angry young men', the comedy is kept alive by its unpartisan political satire and some touches of acute, if 'folksy' psychology.

As a dramatist of specifically Edinburgh life, Mackie discovered what is possibly an ideal relationship with a local audience – and

no playwright of a similar nature appeared elsewhere in Scotland apart, perhaps, for Joe Corrie in the amateur theatre and T. M. Watson in Rutherglen.

Yet each of Mackie's plays leaves a sense of disappointment: Such skill in character-drawing, such perceptiveness, surely should produce eventually a play of great power – the hard fact is that it has not, that the author in the end has backed away from unpleasantness, however true it may be as a conclusion.

A similar failure flaws Maurice Fleming's study of ruthlessness, The Comic (1961). Set mostly in the shabbiness of a variety theatre dressing room, the play traces the rise and fall of Roddy Scott, a young man determined to become a great comedian in the Scottish music-hall tradition. He insinuates his way into the Variety Show of a well-known aging Scots comic, Sandy McDowell, taking advantage of opportunities presented to him by the flirtatious Perina Lane, a singer trying to arouse jealousy in the theatre manager, and the naive scriptwriter, Neil. With one eye fixed constantly on the future, he unexpectedly announces his engagement to his girl-friend Alice on Sandy's birthday, thereby robbing the older man of a large measure of the attendant publicity. He finally triumphs at Sandy's expense by withholding a warning about an unruly teenage audience whose riotous behaviour prompts the distressed comic to announce his premature retiral. The Sandy McDowell Variety Show becomes the Roddy Scott Show, and at first the young man seems destined for a brilliant career on stage and television, but his calculation and insincerity are apprehended by audiences where it was missed by his promoters. Soon he is out of work. Now it is the turn of Alice to be ruthless. She gathers the people from Roddy's first show – Sandy McDowell, his straight man, Jim Stead, and Perina Lane – and persuades them not only that Roddy is talented, but that they have been in part responsible for his swift decline; McDowell by permitting him to rise too quickly, Stead by slipshod performances; Perina Lane by poisoning his reputation. Fully aware of Roddy's egotism, hypocrisy and downright cruelty, she is yet prepared to aid him with all her power, because despite his many faults she still loves him. A place is found for him in a new show but just before he is due to go on



stage, his boasting vanity prompts from Jim Stead an outburst of home truths, including the lengths to which Alice has gone for him. His confidence shattered, he becomes paralysed in the wings and old Sandy is obliged to take the stage in his place. The play should end in this defeat, the shock of which in the dressing-room is sharply observed, but instead, the platitude of a "happy ending" is tacked on, with Sandy McDowell deciding on a come-back and a double-act with Roddy.

The mechanical ambition of the principal character is well-drawn and given psychological conviction by his need, as an orphan, for the emotional warmth of an audience for a popular performer. Sandy McDowell is a reasonable portrait of the traditional comic, sentimentalized only in so far as such a figure depends to a large extent – in Scotland at least – on sentimentality. Outstanding is the character of Jim Stead, cold and cynical in his professionalism, a startling contrast to his stage-personality and to Sandy, who instantly penetrates Roddy's mask but refuses to be drawn from his passive fatalism into overt action. Alice somehow is less convincing, as is the philosophical Neil: both lack the complexity required of their position in the midst of the conflict, and are too positively "good". Alice's machinations do not convince, appearing ultimately to stem from much the same basis in the author as the patently falsified conclusion. As with Albert Mackie's plays, The Comic holds forth considerable promise, only to decline into weakness and lack of conviction.

Far more satisfying is Ronald Mavor's The Keys of Paradise (1959). The title is taken from De Quincey's reference to opium conferring upon him the keys to Paradise, and the play is a serious and responsible study of a problem all too familiar in the modern world – the use and abuse of drugs. The play's central figure is Brian Crow, a brilliant anaesthetist who doses himself with his chemicals for the pleasure derived thereby. A minor controversy exists in the hospital where he works: Keddie, a surgeon, refuses to have Crow as his anaesthetist, but will give no reason – a practice apparently not unusual in surgery where there is much emphasis on team-work – the puritanical Truffit and her fiance Spinney are more outspoken in their

opposition, with repeated threats of complaint to higher authority of their suspicions. Crow maintains a dignified, or perhaps contemptuous silence, but confides to a young doctor, Powrie, his attitude towards the use of drugs. In the past, he explains, new chemicals frequently demanded testing on the spot, and the obvious subject for such experimentation was the anaesthetist himself. Crow is utterly devoted to medicine, and is well known for his research-work: yet he confesses to doping himself.

"Oh, I'm not an addict. I know too much about drugs of addiction. But I've found one or two that - they really transform life without distorting it. Can you believe that? One sees everything perfectly clearly - with superhuman clarity, in fact. Everything is as clear as crystal. And at the same time the meaning of everything is clear-cut, sharp and distinct. The reason for everything ... Each operation that I give the anaesthetic for becomes a symbolic play that teaches me the meaning of the universe, the meaning of creation ... it's a unique feeling ... Oh, I don't take as much as would alter my judgement at all."

In a confrontation with Spinney, who has just broken off his engagement, he succeeds in ending their quarrel. Shortly after, they are thrown together in the operating theatre when another anaesthetist fails to arrive, Spinney - and indeed Keddie - affirming their confidence in Crow. The operation, conducted on a sixteen-year-old girl, is a disaster, the patient lapsing into a coma and dying when Crow's newly designed anaesthetic mask develops a fault and robs her of oxygen for a short but fatal period. Crow, who had not expected to be called for the operation, had been slightly "high", but only the vitriolic Truffit blames him for the tragedy, the others refusing to admit that he could have been responsible. Crow however judges himself to be guilty :

"Maybe ... how did you put it? ... it isn't given to man to know. One can be like a god, but only for a few minutes and then ... and then like a beast. De Quincey said Opium gave him the keys to Paradise. It's not true; you just get a glimpse and then you get thrown out."

He goes to his preparation room and kills himself.

The Keys of Paradise is a discursive work, intellectual rather than essentially dramatic, but Mavor largely succeeds in bringing the conflict of attitudes to life, if here and there he permits too much

talk to little point. The characters are well-conceived, though understandably are rarely viewed beyond the strictures imposed – however informally – by the hospital. An excellent parallel issue is made of responsibility and duty, and each character is measured by his response to these concepts. Brian Crow is a solid, restrained portrait of a dignified, philosophical and slightly melancholic mind, his slightly lyrical flights when discussing drugs conveying both his enthusiasm and experiences. The final verdict on the subject avoids any heavy-handedness by being his own, and it is completely true to his character as portrayed in the play. The other characters are quite sufficient for their roles, from Ellis and Truffit, who confuse – though in very different ways – duty with self-interest; Keddie and Spinney, cautiously treading the thin dividing-line between professional respect for Crow and irresponsibility in working with a man they suspected might be unfit: to the father of the dead girl, bewildered and almost mute, trying to discover what went wrong with pathetic restraint.

It is very much to Mavor's credit that he maintains a deliberate low key throughout his thoughtful and carefully handled play. Never for a moment are the characters less than human, and Crow is obviously a man of great integrity and essential goodness. There is almost a prophetic air about The Keys of Paradise: it would probably arouse more immediate interest five, ten, or fifteen years after its first performance at the Gateway, as the controversy over drugs has become more prominent in Britain in this time – a rare and praiseworthy achievement for a Scottish playwright.

#### CHAPTER FOUR

#### SCOTTISH THEATRE IN THE '60's

The civic theatre which superseded the Gateway in Edinburgh, the Royal Lyceum, rapidly revealed itself as no partisan of native Scottish drama. From its inception in October 1965, up to December 1970, only one new Scottish play of any weight had been produced there: Robert MacLellan's The Hypocrite (1967) Bridie's Daphne Laureola was revived in 1968, and there were two lively and popular translations into Scots – Carlo Goldoni's Servant of Two Masters, adapted by Victor Carin; and Douglas Young's version of The Birds, by Aristophanes; in 1965 and 1966 respectively. The Royal Lyceum up to 1970 worked as any provincial repertory theatre

might, presenting a wide and creditable selection of classical and contemporary plays, with nothing to distinguish it – for good or ill – as a Scottish theatre.

The Glasgow Citizens' Theatre, in the same period, pursued a similar policy with regard to Scottish playwrights; and two new and important experimental theatres which opened in Scotland during the sixties, the outstanding Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh, and an offshoot of the Citizens' in Glasgow, the Close Theatre, found nothing to interest them in Scottish drama of the past and extremely little in Scottish drama of the present.

The budding flower of a self-confident but unparochial Scottish theatre which James Bridie nurtured so carefully before his death, withered in the harder climate ushered in by Look Back In Anger. The favour shown to local writers by the Citizens' and the Gateway was transformed by the more demanding standards of the "new wave" into a suspicion of anything labelled as "Scottish": after the demise of the Gateway, voices were raised accusing the Citizens' and the Lyceum of allowing suspicion to grow into barely concealed antipathy. Even revivals of Bridie became rare events. The only surviving aspect of the native dramatic movement lay in the more pedestrian part of Scottish amateur theatre, where unabashed enthusiasm for Scots kitchen comedy and period romance served only to embarrass those who argued for more favourable reception of Scottish work in the serious theatre. The Scottish playwrights whose names were familiar in the forties and fifties had vanished from the professional stage by 1970, and with them, all sense of a developing native tradition. The few Scottish playwrights whose work reached the stage in the sixties had little in common with their predecessors, clearly deriving much of their style and subject matter from England and abroad, and for the most part avoiding all reference to national identity. Paradoxically, by committing themselves wholeheartedly to the contemporary international theatre, they may well have restored to future health a native drama in serious danger of isolating itself in parochial mediocrity.

In 1961, Stewart Conn, a Scottish poet who turned his pen with some success to the making of plays, wrote :

"A Scottish National Theatre has been advocated. But a National Theatre pre-supposes a National Drama, and would have to provide an international platform for a nation's highest talent in whichever plays form that nation's dramatic heritage. Scotland has no classical dramatic tradition. That there once was a potential Scots drama is shown by The Thrie Estates, and, say The Wallace. With the exception of Bridie, ours has been a coterie drama, a drama of whimsy and the kitchen sink (this term being used not in contempt but to indicate that our drama has lacked those wider terms of reference necessary for it to surmount parochialism)." 1

This dismissive attitude towards previous Scottish writing reflects the tone of the decade. New writing in the Scots language almost vanished from the stage, being reserved to Sydney Goodsir Smith's massive essay on patriotism, The Wallace, Robert MacLellan's The Hypocrite and to a few translations such as those of Aristophanes in The Puddocks (1958) and The Burdies (1966). This is in marked contrast to the preceding decade, when most of the better-known playwrights in Scotland were committed, in varying degrees, to the use of Scots. Similarly, light comedy, so popular before, disappeared completely as indeed, did a popular vehicle for Scots, the history play.

The Wallace, performed at the Edinburgh Festival in 1960, is an exception. It is an uncompromising exercise in national pride, written in Scots, reconstructing with strong rhetoric the Scottish hero's defiance of Edward II's ruthless English imperialism. William Wallace, sworn to implacable opposition to England after the brutal murder of his wife by one of Edward's governors, is betrayed in the field by the internecine rivalries of the Scottish nobility whose military aid he must rely on; then, when defeated and fugitive, is again betrayed and delivered into his enemy's hands by a Scottish nobleman trying to restore peace at any price to war-ravaged Scotland. At his "trial" in London, Wallace confronts and confounds in debate the elated Edward, transforming his hideous execution into a dignified and inspiring act of patriotic dedication.

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1 New Saltire, Summer 1961 No. 1, Stewart Conn, p. 59  
Theatre In Scotland In 1961

Historically, The Wallace may be impressive in its accuracy: dramatically, it is open to question.

Goodsir Smith describes The Wallace significantly, as "a Triumph in five Acts" -

"Triumph has a technical meaning in dramatic writing. It is a sort of warning that the show is not so much a play in the ordinary sense as a special kind of masque, a shout of poetic pride." 1

A shout of pride is indeed a good description of the play, but it is patriotic, rather than poetic pride. J.M. Reid, the critic whose observation is quoted above, goes on to note that such a piece contains no "subtle development of character" but deals in simple, stereotyped figures - "White was white and black was always black".<sup>2</sup> Deliberate simplicity of this kind can be enormously effective in the theatre, especially when free from the proscenium-arch conventions, as The Wallace was in the Edinburgh Assembly Hall, for which it was specially written. It is far from enormously effective in this play, mainly because it is accompanied by a rhetoric which strives after the ponderous dignity and richness of "Shakespearian" blank verse, and instead maintains a repetitive dullness depending almost entirely on "stark" heavy hammer-strokes of sound. Occasional forays into colourful imagery seem as a result merely contrived and pretentious. The author deploys English and Scottish chroniclers to combine the functions of narrator and chorus, a device which is effective in tracing the history of Wallace's campaign, and dramatic in its contrast of attitudes and responses; however, the other figures, bare as they are, remain wholly within naturalistic conventions which only emphasise their lack of depth; and the author scrupulously avoids any form of violent excitement, eschewing battle-scenes. This perhaps preserves the celebration of Wallace's heroism and idealism from distraction, but it necessitates a good deal more talk than it does action, and the play suffers as a result. The final objection to The Wallace is its dependence on patriotic response as a substitute for emotion. Edward I, as is seen in the ghastly "entertain-

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1 J.M. Reid (Glasgow Herald) 23 August 1960

2 J.M. Reid (Glasgow Herald) 23 August 1960

ment" he stages after he captures Stirling, is fully capable of brutal sadism; but when in the last Act, after attaining a desperate dignity in his vain verbal struggle with Wallace, Edward gives way to cries of :

"He must die. And quickly!  
No, no! Let it be slow, very slow,  
And beautiful . . . . .

Goodsir Smith fatally overplays his hand. Such a descent from brutal monarch to drooling pervert is quite unnecessary and robs the play's climax of conviction: it smacks all too plainly of a propaganda atrocity story. When this is immediately followed by "a slowly mounting crescendo of drums, (to which) the whole cast re-enters. . . . finally, with a great crash, the orchestra breaks into the air 'Scots wha hae wi Wallace bled'", the irony so carefully developed in the last Act when Wallace lays bare the hollowness of Edward's victory, vanishes. Blatant chauvinism takes its place. As a conclusion this is trite and obvious, reducing to a jingoistic level a play which for all its faults, seemed until this point was reached to be pursuing the dignity of its central figure.

MacLellan's The Hypocrite has already been dealt with under another heading, but it is worth noting once more the note of pessimism, commitment, and distinctly ungentle satire which distinguishes that play from the rest of MacLellan's work in the historical mould. MacLellan, alone among the Scottish playwrights of the fifties, tried to change with the changing currents.

The new names in playwriting were Jack Ronder, Tom Wright, Stewart Conn and Cecil P. Taylor, of whom the first two turned increasingly to television rather than the stage. None displayed any commitment, or even particular interest in "Scottish" identity in drama, and when Scottish features were discernible in their work, they occurred with the spontaneity which marks similar features in Bridie's work – they were unquestionably natural.

Stewart Conn's career as a dramatist is interesting in that, though he only developed his skill towards the end of the decade, his plays show from the outset a determination to come to terms with contemporary movements in the theatre. So much so, indeed, that his

plays are almost without exception noticeably derivative. His first play, Breakdown (1961), one of the handful of plays by Scottish authors to reach the stage of the Glasgow Citizens' in the sixties, was an attempt to find a local equivalent for the symbolism, intensity and surrealism of Beckett and Ionesco. However well-intentioned, it is gauche in the extreme. Breakdown attempts to portray the myth of Orpheus in a modern setting, in this case a coffee-bar, significantly named "El Predicamento". This microcosm of mid-century existence is peopled by young girls exclusively pre-occupied with new clothes and "Romance", duffle-coated, rope-sandalled chess players, wholly absorbed in a carefully studied, but ultimately arid contest; and teddy-boys whose sole interest seems to be in mindless violence. A young singer who entertains them, Orph, searches with his fellow-musicians for a meaning to life. An attempt to discover it in the person of a girl from his past destroys him: waiting for her in an Underground station, he fails to recognise her in the crowd, his mental image of her has become so distorted by projection of his own ideal of perfection. A dream has robbed him of the ability to grasp reality, and he passively allows himself to fall victim to the predatory teddy-boys. The play goes on needlessly into a third Act in which Orph reappears at El Predicamento only to be assaulted once more and finally killed, and a conclusion is reached only when another of the musicians assumes Orph's visionary role.

Breakdown founders on the stiff flatness of its dialogue, the painful slowness of its pace, and the heavy symbolism so lavishly arrayed throughout its course; yet occasional glimmers of dramatic force escape the stifling layers of "significant" detail - the scene in the Underground station effectively unites pity for the numbed Orph with the mounting hysteria, fear and violence of his assailants.

Conn's next play I Didn't Always Live Here (1967), a far less immature work, shows him attempting to combine an evocation of working-class life in Glasgow from the Depression to the present day, with a study of individual anguish at the meaninglessness of existence. As in George Munro's earlier studies of working-class life, there is a marked tendency towards the epic. Here, the locale is far less important than the feelings induced by it, and the author



is clearly uninterested in the nostalgia which so often accompanies glances at the recent past. The play is flawed: its initial balance of attention between elderly, working-class Martha and her ageing neighbour Annie, endlessly lamenting her lost splendour amidst the respectable lower-middle class, is soon abandoned: on the divided stage, Annie and her flat literally fade into an obscurity, the presence of which through the rest of the play naggingly distracts attention. Martha, good-natured and acquiescent is a familiar figure in most towns and cities, but an unheralded outburst of passion when visited by a well-meaning cleric demands that her history is remembered. Pressed by the minister to be frank about her troubles, her response leaves him unexpectedly fumbling :

Martha :       Some things make it difficult. Losing your man makes it difficult. What do you know of that?  
Of an empty bed, after years and years? What answers have you for that?

Minister :     Get it out of your system.

Martha :       Out of my system? It is my system. It comes bursting back every once in a while, even at this date, welling up inside me. It's all been so..... so meaningless.

Minister :     Bleak maybe, but not meaningless. I would deny that.

Martha :       Deny it then. What do you know about it? I went through it. Jack went through it. What was there in the likes of you? What meaning? Can you answer me that? From your chapter and verse?

In a series of flashbacks, some of hesitant relevance to the theme, Martha's life is recreated: her early years of marriage in the struggling, penny-pinching Depression with the temptations and bitter rewards of petty crime forever hovering around the unemployed men-folk; the war with its home-front shocks of blitz and a son killed in action; then the slow drawing out of life and loneliness as husband and old friends die and the familiar city of her early life vanishes in redevelopment. So far as it goes the portrait is honest and moving. Unfortunately, the end result falls short of expectation, for Martha remains a generalised sketch, her disillusion and gathering despair depicted only in outline.

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The sense of personal concern evinced by Conn in this play was obscured in the work which followed, three short and highly derivative plays plainly inspired by Harold Pinter, brought together under the thematic heading of Victims (1970). As exercises in a particular style, Victims succeeds in creating situations loaded with ambiguous menace, resulting respectively in pointless violence, farce, and psychological terror. In The Sword, the first of the trio, a blind tramp is mercilessly baited by a young tough dressed in a cast-off army uniform, a symbol of authority commanding the tramp's obedience. When the tramp realises that he has been duped, a scuffle ensues in which he unwittingly kills his tormentor. In Transit makes sinister comedy of sexual fantasy. The last play, The Man In the Green Muffler, is a rather mystifying study of ambiguity, illusion and repressed hatred, in which a pavement-artist is prompted to unload his concealed feelings about a deceased acquaintance, only to discover that his listener has become virtually transformed into the dead man.

All three are competently written, and the last has a fair measure of complexity, but none has sufficient originality to be noteworthy: rather they are indicators of the road Conn has decided to follow, leading away from the physical basis of I didn't Always Live Here into the psychological realms of contemporary surrealism. From this point onwards, his work shows a much greater degree of skill and confidence, but suffers correspondingly from seeming imitative.

Broche (1968) adds to a Pinter-ish situation an element of moral pleading uncommon and unfashionable in much of modern theatre. On the surface, the play concerns the insecurity of the supposedly absolute materialist values to which men surrender their lives. Broche, the principal figure, is ultimately rescued from isolation and destruction by an act of blind faith which results in literal resurrection.

In the first Act, malevolent forces intrude into Broche's fragile edifice of marriage, secure employment, home and habit, in the shape of two latenight visitors, Judd and Clegg. Their threatening self-confidence rapidly reveals the illusions of Broche's stable world: he draws their attention to his new car, which they admire, although the car is invisible both to Broche's wife Diane

and to the audience. In a bizarre auction which follows, the distraught Diane falls helplessly into the power of the intruders, and is removed while Broche continues to insist that nothing untoward is happening because his secure existence is unassailable.

Diane's removal is a signal for a general assault upon Broche. Menacing messages, heedless invasions of his home by various groups of workers and finally the physical destruction of the house by a belligerent demolition crew overwhelm his tardy, weak attempts to reassert the "correctness" and "justice" of his life and beliefs. So far, the play follows a route hardly unfamiliar, but in the last Act Broche redeems himself in a manner far less expected. Judd and Clegg, institutionalized now by white coats, gloatingly return with Diane comatose on a stretcher, explaining that "She has - you see - given herself into our hands"; but at last Broche finds something worth asserting with all his strength - his love for his wife. In a compelling and dramatic image of desperate faith, Diane's life and independence are restored. The resurrection of Love does nothing to reconstruct the intricate illusions on which Broche formerly founded his life: instead it provides the resolution necessary to continue into a future which promises to be no less harrowing than the past.

Broche shows Stewart Conn handling his symbolic characters without pretension or clumsiness, developing his theme with an economy and clarity which eluded him in his earlier work; and the manner in which he transforms a virtually stereotyped situation into a distinct, personal vision is highly creditable. The distinguishing feature of the play is the sympathy with which the author approaches the character of Broche, an attitude which preserves a vital humanity amidst events which seek specifically to dehumanise, and enables him to portray a psychological conflict with Judd and Clegg as the projected demons of Broche's imagination, without losing sight of Broche as a feeling individual.

This fellow-feeling also lies at the heart of Conn's strange, esoteric The King (1967), which once again takes a subject - ritual violence - that has attracted many writers in recent years, and turns it in an uncommon direction. Atavism in itself does not interest Conn. Instead he evokes more subtle emotions: the

despair and longing of those caught up in the inescapable pattern of ritual, the sense of vast power which it is possible to conjure up in defiance of reason, the anguish of loss which inevitably follows useless sacrifice, the horror at the moment of death which can never be obscured or refined into purely spiritual mystery.

Attie, an unemployed gardener, by boasting drunkenly in a pub of "some sort of power, some magic" which he wields over plants finds himself in the power of a strange couple, Farrol and Lena. Invited to their flat with the prospect of a job tending their rose-garden, Attie discovers that he is a prisoner there, but is unable to assert himself against the fast-talking Farrol or the strange assurance of the serenely dominating Lena. Accepting the curious situation fatalistically, he settles down on their sofa for the night, only to have his attention drawn to a chest in which reposes a golden crown. Soon it becomes clear that he has been selected for the role of King in a ritual in which his life is staked against his ability to control the weather. Deriving some comfort from Lena's barely concealed sensual promises, Attie's growing terror gives way briefly to wild defiance, demanding first the obeisance of Lena and Farrol, then of the sky itself, in a magnificent, intoxicated assertion of magical omnipotence.

Outside, the thunderstorm which threatens the rose-garden rolls on unheeding. The moment of exhilaration passes, and Attie collapses helplessly, to be strangled with crude violence by Farrol. The King ends with Lena throwing herself over the corpse, weeping as Farrol carries in the sparse survivors of the ruined garden, bitterly lamenting "Why does everything . . . always . . . have to be spoiled?"<sup>1</sup>

The utter conviction with which Attie, Lena and Farrol are drawn, and the delicate shifts in the relationships conveyed, contribute

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1 The King, Penguin New English Dramatists 14 p. 183

very largely to the play's overall effect. Despite the oddity of the situation, its veracity is never questioned: for the characters demand to be taken seriously, especially when Lena and Farrol are seen to be in less than perfect accord and all too human in their irritability and sarcasm. It is because the trio are so recognisable as people that the murderous pattern they follow chills as it does. Conn's success here is sufficient for him to introduce openly poetic effects in the later part of the play without jar to the audience's sensibilities :

Lena : . . . . . this is between you and me, Attie.

You and me. Do you understand? Think how wonderful it would be? Imagine! Close your eyes and imagine how wonderful it would be. Think of the satisfaction. To us both. Especially to you. Can't you imagine it? The first seed, the slow flowering, the sweet slow flowering, the petals unfolding slowly and tenderly in the balm of the air, the chill giving way to warmth, being displaced, the seed thrusting its way in and up . . . and up . . . and up, to the air. All the world compressed and tightening, then slackening, slaking off, the whole flower rising and blooming, the petals spreading and perfuming the garden, the sweetness, the honey, the perfect luxury of it, the full flower there, there in front of you, before you, in your grasp for the taking, for the picking, the plucking, the pruning, your hand to do the plucking . . . All yours Attie . . . . yours.

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. . . . . the scent of pollen perfuming the air, the blue midnight air heavy and dripping with the scent of honey, of spices, blue in the night air, blue and green, and shot with gold . . . with velvet . . . and gold . . .

This astonishing verbal seduction, with its heavy, repetitive sexual imagery, is of great power in the theatre after the slowly increased tension of ambiguity and doubt in the apparently mundane household. It is followed immediately by an audacious and no less successful swing to a scene which contains the very essence of drama, in which ludicrous spectacle – Attie in a golden crown ringing a bell to stop the thunder – is juxtaposed with emotions

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far different – awe, and fear, and desperate hope.

I'll humour you. I'll ring your little bell. But only for so long as it suits me. After that things will change. Soon I'll have you kissing my arse. Do you hear? With this bell, I can stop the skies. I have power invested in me. I am master of the seasons. My world is awash with flowers, it trails with roses. I drink from the brandy-cask of the sun. Am master of storm and tempest, of moon and stars. I am King. Do you hear? King!

Behind this promethean explosion, at once both pathetic and terrifying, can be heard all the confusion, fear, hate, longing and frustration which has hounded Attie since meeting Farrol and Lena. It is wholly real within the context of the play. The collapse and murder which follow are an inevitable ugliness, a brutal revelation not of vicarious sadism, but of human helplessness before incomprehensible instinctual forces.

The King is hampered by the unfamiliarity of its mythic basis – ritual sacrifice in Europe is more normally associated with invocation of divine power rather than with failure to attain the supernatural, as it is here – but if it can be accepted, then the play is something of a dramatic tour-de-force for Conn, written with considerable theatrical skill and evoking an impressively broad range of tempo and emotion.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to Conn, Jack Ronder and Tom Wright, in whose work there is some similarity, proved their capabilities as playwrights from the outset of their careers. Their attitude to their work is that of hard-headed craftsmen, and in later years they have each turned increasingly to television, a medium more economically feasible for the playwright and less elitist than the serious theatre. Their successive stage-plays indicate a broadening of appeal as the shift to television progressed, and neither has shown much interest in experiment.

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1 It would be unfair to Conn to omit mention of his later work, in particular The Burning produced in 1972 by the Edinburgh Lyceum Company. In this play he returned to a specifically Scottish theme, James VI and his preoccupation with demonology, and united folk-song, music hall, fine characterisation and a profound sense of irony. Unfortunately it is outwith the scope of this study, but it is without doubt one of the best new plays to appear in Scotland since 1970.

Tom Wright's The Mask (1960) is plainly the work of an author in full command of his ideas and stagecraft. The metaphor with which he captures attention in the first moments of the play is maintained through to the final curtain, and this without straining after histrionic "significance". The setting is a prison cell – which may well be regarded as the principal image of the later twentieth century – in which a mystery-shrouded aristocrat, his face concealed behind an iron mask, is guarded by two ill-matched jailers under the surveillance of the enigmatic Warden.

The prisoner has offended an apparently omnipotent king by defying the concept of royal authority, and his intellect, sarcastic wit and promethean orations about individual liberty swiftly engage sympathy for him. His paradoxical boast is that despite the mask which conceals his once renowned beauty and his solitary incarceration, he alone of all mankind is free. All others obey the King out of fear or stupidity: precisely because of his lone defiance, the prisoner must be imprisoned but never killed, for the King would then be forced to recognise that the power of regal compulsion was not absolutely irresistible. The prisoner's arguments throw his jailers into confusion and frustration; a comic business, initially, but a more disquieting dimension is revealed as he brings each of them to the "freedom" of insanity. The good-natured harmonica-playing "Orpheus" discovers "silence – the perfection of music's possibilities". His clever, more rigorous companion, persuaded by the prisoner that he will never be allowed to leave the cell again now that he has spoken to the King's greatest enemy is driven insane by the prospect of never-ending intellectual torment. The prisoner's triumph is interrupted by the Warden, who has come to tell him that he has been freed: no longer is he a threat to authority – the world, and the King himself, have forgotten the existence of the great rebel. The prisoner refuses to believe the news, asserting that freedom can only be recognised when authority opposes it :

Warden :                    I see, You need authority to make you free?  
                                  Then are you free if there is no authority?  
                                  Is this freedom – or a kind of freedom?  
                                  What freedom have you shown here?  
                                  Freedom to rebel. Freedom to dominate

with borrowed authority – borrowed  
from a King your own imagination has  
created. Sell yourself into slavery  
when you leave here. Then you will  
have your kind of freedom . . . . ."

The iron mask, which the prisoner wears so proudly as a token of his martyrdom, has never been locked: it is now removed for him to gaze again upon his dazzling beauty. He gazes instead upon features "white, hairless, corpselike". The mask goes on once more. The Warden goes, but the prisoner does not follow him. He closes the cell door himself and returns to his posture of magnificent defiance, preferring the fantasy of his own self-importance to the deflation of his monstrous pride.

The play's symbolic scheme is admirably simple, and the religious echoes, while unavoidable, are not overemphatic: The Mask does not become simply a religious allegory. As it is, Wright doggedly follows his argument on the spirit of rebellion without glance to left or right; and within its limitations shows himself a capable playwright. The relationships which develop in the enclosed atmosphere of the cell are straightforward but convincing, the conflicting attitudes to their charge isolating the jailers from each other and forcing them into contact with the prisoner. Wright successfully varies the process of destruction for each jailer. The first becomes the confidante of the prisoner through his lack of guile, and is led to madness gently through a series of revelations on the "logic" of music: the second by his argument with an opponent of vastly superior intellect, is driven into schizophrenic hysteria by his inability to refute a logic which is irreconcilable to his duty. Between prisoner and Warden is the opposition of equals though at first the Warden's depression seems to indicate weakness and doubt. In the final scene it takes on another aspect, as the obsessive solipsism of the prisoner comes to light – an aspect of profound pity. In terms of mounting tension and atmosphere, The Mask cannot be faulted: the drabness of the cell is the perfect background for the rhetoric of freedom and the gathering hysteria of its occupants; and the arguments twist and turn through a thickening fog of hesitation and fear, which almost has physical embodiment on the stage.

All of this theatrical power is in the service of Wright's argument;



and it is the argument itself that ultimately fails to convince to the full. It must be admitted from the start that Wright's attitude to the rebel is not a popular one in the contemporary world, and that this in itself may be a temptation to some to reject The Mask without proper consideration. But inescapably the conclusion is reached that the Warden's crushing retort in Act 2 is altogether too convenient and trite: the author's concept may be quite valid, but he has offered the play as a conflict, not as an exercise in propaganda, and when the prisoner becomes increasingly the personification of all evil, the argument seems weighted and unfair. The prisoner becomes so extreme a figure, indistinguishable from Lucifer himself, as to destroy any ready correspondence with human experience, and much of the play's intellectual impact is dissipated. The closing scenes with their reliance on visual horror and irony, and the implication that the insanity now obvious has always been present are extremely effective theatrically: but the moment passes, and their conviction is found to be superficial only.

In 1964 Wright's most successful play was produced at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, and subsequently toured through a large part of Scotland. His subject was that most potentially disastrous to Scottish playwrights, the character of Robert Burns: its title, which reflects Wright's efforts to penetrate to the human being concealed beneath the slag-heaps of sentiment and myth, There Was A Man. It is in fact a dramatic arrangement of Burns' own words, drawn from his poetry and letters, with Wright acting as an arranger rather than as a writer.

The play is for performance by a single actor, and is presented as the character's own account of himself :

I have taken a whim to give you a history of myself.  
My name has made some little noise in this country.  
Perhaps a faithful account of what character of man  
I am and how I came by that character may amuse you.  
I do this under some twitching qualm of conscience  
arising from a suspicion that I am doing what I  
ought not to be doing. A predicament I have been  
in more than once before.

This is a Robert Burns familiar to the audience, and popular – confident, dignified, self-mocking and fraternal – his role is as narrator in a personal history which shows another Robert Burns,

a man weighed down with care, poverty-stricken, exhausted physically as well as mentally on the unrewarding soil of his farms; flushed with brief vanity in the days of his reception in Edinburgh as the "heav'n taught ploughman", filled with self-disgust at his moral cowardice in the repressive years of the Revolutionary Wars. The formative years of childhood and youth, the first stutterings of poetry, his sudden rise to literary fame and equally swift decline to a poverty-tormented death are traced with vigour and subtlety; and all the while there is the contrast with the composite myth of the narrator. The result is an impression of character of considerable complexity.

The real triumph of There Was A Man is not simply in its convincing portrait of a recognisable human being and the condition of his life; it is also in the use of Burns' poetry throughout the play to find the emotional depth of each event, skillfully stressing the genius of the poet together with the involvement of his poetry with everyday existence. That this should be done with a figure so obscured by Scottish sentimentality and hero-worship is in itself an undertaking worthy of praise.

### JACK RONDER

"Two of the most securely established personages we had met for a long time"<sup>1</sup> is how J. C. Trewin describes the middle-aged sisters whose tragic dependence on each other provides the core for Ronder's This Year, Next Year, first performed in 1960 at the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre under the title Wedding Day. The conviction and honesty with which the sisters Margaret and Louie are created overcome the weaker aspects of the play; - the underdeveloped secondary figures, and the noticeable contrivance by which a crisis-point is reached in the last act.

Margaret and Louie live a claustrophobic existence together in an Edinburgh flat with years of contention and recrimination behind them. Nothing seems to offer greater promise than escape from each other, but when the opportunity arises they prove incapable of ending their mutual torment, so ingrained has their familiar life become. Margaret, by far the more attractive looking of the pair, is no stranger to masculine admiration: her love affairs have

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<sup>1</sup> J. C. Trewin, preface, Plays of the Year 22 Elek Books, London 1960

been frequent and not without passion, and her amused tolerance of the infatuated Charlie, an adolescent neighbour, emphasises the contrast between her and the dowdy, self-pitying Louie. Margaret, however, cannot commit herself to a new life – "She nearly did (marry) you know", says Louie, "Quite a few times. She had four engagement rings... Every time she broke it off, she came home in floods of tears . . . ." Her most recent lover, her employer Bert, offers her marriage. He too lives with a close relative – his mother – but is willing to face the difficulties involved in a break from her so late in life; indeed, Margaret's indecision irritates him to the point of delivering an ultimatum – either marriage or an abrupt end to the affair. He sees all too plainly the destructive intimacy in which the sisters live –

"You're sterile, the pair of you! What do you get out of life? Except mutual strangulation? Leave her, and give her a chance too! Her life can't be much worse than it is."

Margaret retorts :

"Oh yes, it could. Much worse. She'd be a little old lady in an attic, with a shopping bag full of cat's fish and bird-seed and a library book".

Margaret turns Bert down.

Louie is now found being drawn towards Joe, an alcoholic widower who is the youthful Charlie's father. Nothing stronger than fellow-feeling unites them, but Margaret, stung by her conscience to end Louie's prolonged and embittering loneliness, encourages Joe to propose to her sister while she is reforming his drinking habits. Margaret's well-intentioned plan survives even the crisis of revelation when Joe mistakenly announces that she has arranged to leave Louie and live with Bert. On Louie's wedding-day the truth is discovered, that Bert has not only found another lover, but has fired Margaret, who has been pretending that a new post awaits her in London. Louie instantly – and quite callously – dismisses Joe, and the sisters resume the chains of habit and distorted emotion which bind them inextricably together, confronting as they do so an arid future void of further hope.

Ronder displays considerable skill as he handles the relationship between the sisters, capturing the basic selfishness at the root of

their strangely complementary, if apparently incompatible, personalities; and the sense of security they discover in the daily run of long-rehearsed conflict. When Louie, after neatly arranging present and card by Margaret's breakfast plate as a birthday surprise, discovers that her sister is not oversleeping – has not, in fact returned to her own bed from the previous night's dinner-date – her anger is first explosive, but soon is carefully stifled and replaced with an acid, sarcastic charm: Louie prefers "nursing her wrath to keep it warm". Margaret, bowing her head to this brooding recrimination, finds solace in the saintly pleasures of humility and self-abasement, only to be stung to anger by her failure to penetrate Louie's self-pity. Neither sister intends to alter for the benefit of the other: neither, until the very end of the play, realises how much they depend upon the other. Margaret's belated attempt to repay Louie for her years of dutiful drudgery is doomed from the outset, for Louie is afraid of independent adult life, and clings with increasing desperation to her prolonged girlhood with Margaret as her wedding day draws closer. When Margaret pretends to have a new job in London in the hope of freeing her sister by an act of considerable self-sacrifice, Louie becomes pathetically childlike :

Louie :                    Can't I come with you ? You'll need me now!  
 Margaret :                Darling, Joe needs you.  
 Louie :                    I want to go with you.  
 Margaret :                No darling. This is the chance of your life.  
 Louie :                    I don't want it! I don't want it!

In accepting Joe's proposal, it becomes plain that Louie had not considered sex: to her, marriage simply meant a change of pots, pans, dusters and duties, a new managerial responsibility. She cannot bring herself to accept even a kiss from her fiance; and her obvious fear of sex provides a further indication of her sterility and emotional immaturity. In the end, when she chooses – with considerable relief – to stand by Margaret, her brutal rejection of Joe, shocking as it is, is completely true to her character :

"It's off Joe. No wedding. There's a bottle of whisky there for you . . . . I'm sorry Joe. I don't love you, Joe. And when someone you love very

much pulls against someone you don't, there's only one way to go."

If the progress of the play reveals to Louie the claustrophobic limits of an existence she dare not change, it brings Margaret even lower; for not only does she fail to escape from the static sterility of life with Louie, but she is faced with the end of her pleasant career as a femme fatale. Even the doting Charlie finds himself a girlfriend of his own age by the last Act. As realisation of her loss gradually dawns upon her, her amused indulgence of the boy becomes increasingly regretful and ironic, sometimes even desperate. The development of this secondary theme provides the motive for Margaret's attempted self-sacrifice, as she tries to save something from the wreck of the sisters' supposedly unchanging situation. It also emphasises the note of grief and loss on which the play ends.

Other aspects of This Year, Next Year are less sure. The Times critic noted that "no part outside the relationship of the sisters has any true reality", "the sad truth is that as soon as the play ceases to revolve round the static single relationship it ceases to convince".<sup>1</sup> Charlie and Joe, as characters, undeniably weaken the play. Charlie, as the author's "lethal thrust at cliché-ridden youth"<sup>2</sup> is a source of much comedy, a gauche, naïve pretentious and tactless first-year art student, but beyond his functions of providing youthful contrast to Margaret and upsetting delicately-balanced situations with thoughtless remarks – it is he who lets the cat out of the bag concerning Margaret's dismissal from work – there is nothing; and in the intense naturalism of the play's style, the lack is obvious and dissatisfying. Only in the last Act does he appear as a living entity. Joe is less satisfying still, a distractingly exaggerated figure of pathos, neither straightforward stock character nor fully-rounded portrait, his flights of genteel rhetoric ill-matched by over-tentative hints of past tragedy and love. Joe is a series of postures convenient to the needs of the author rather than a believable, integrated person.

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1 Times, October 21, 1960 (18a)

2 J. C. Trewin, Plays of the Year 22, Elek Books, London 1960

These flaws are minimal, however, set against the overall impression of the play. When Joe, abruptly discarded after he no longer suits the sisters' convenience, briefly permits his anger to flare against them, the validity of his comment on the sisters' destructiveness serves to underline their isolation from the world beyond themselves. It also an eloquent plea for justice which can only elicit sympathy from the audience. Even as morality's judgement is about to be passed upon them, Margaret and Louie, alone now on the stage, come together in an image of hopeless despair and sad mutual comfort: their grief is deep enough and real enough to turn that judgement aside.

Within the naturalistic limits he imposes on himself in This Year, Next Year, Ronder works extremely well, indicating a firm grasp of his craft and a sensibility at once penetrating and sympathetic.

Ronder's delicate touch in developing his theme in This Year, Next Year is extremely impressive: unfortunately it was not employed in his later work none of which attempts such depths of emotion.

A far remove from This Year, Next Year is the didactic Who'll Do It This Time (1969) an entertaining excursion into science fiction satire which sets out to illustrate Ronder's thesis about human motivation. In the not-too-distant future, the scientist Cuillin probes into the secrets of behaviour with the aid of a computer brain identical in mental ability and structure to that of the average man. This computer, resembling a washing machine attached to a thick cable, gifted with independent thought and speech, is the dominant character in the play. To the research establishment comes government inspector and prominent clergyman Theo Well, who reacts with suspicion, fear, and hatred towards Cuillin's computer as the embodiment of a science which threatens the core of his belief in God - Well himself is quickly seen to be a personification of all the traits which Cuillin has assessed as dangerous to mankind's continuing existence, which may be conveniently assembled under the banner of rampant self-seeking. Clergyman and computer engage in struggle protracted even through a dismal apocalypse when a scientific accident provoked by misguided government economy renders sterile the reproductive ability of every form of life on earth.

The last scene of the play is conducted in a distant future where life has been reconstituted by the computers which survived the catastrophe. The only remaining veterans of that crisis, Cuillin's brain-child and the miraculously preserved Theo Well, rescued by the machines and provided with a mechanical body, are brought together once more, and the computer succeeds in uncovering the root of Well's self-asserting blindness, his fear of death and subsequent Hell. Persuaded at last that there is no God, and consequently no everlasting torment, Theo Well with a beatific smile of profound relief, switches off his life-support system.

The play is no less amusing for its lack of depth. Ronder, in pulling out the stops of his satire, is intent on theatrical effect not intellectual conviction: Well is first a Bishop of the Kirk of Scotland, which august body Ronder regards as being quite capable of Episcopal compromise in defence of clerical institution - later, the World Council of Churches is expanded to form the World Council of Religion in the face of impending doom - he seduces Cuillin's flighty wife; and maintains his health by a dedicated pursuit of spare-part surgery.

The computer is the most fully-drawn character in the play, chatty, self-centred, childish, cunning and appealingly hypochondriac, instantly engaging the audience's attention and delighted sympathy, the more so because it has no superhuman powers of memory or calculation to unnerve flesh and blood with feelings of inferiority. "He" further ingratiates himself with jokes, songs and unashamed appeals to sentimentality; tongue-in-cheek Ronder has his computer echo Peter Pan by pleading when threatened with destruction "if all those in the audience who believe in Science clapped their hands - ". Apart from Theo Well, the other characters are barely sketched, mere illustrations of various sections in Ronder's argument.

At times, the assault on religion and self-assertion is overstated and tedious - there is a particularly protracted and wholly unnecessary dream-sequence supposedly illustrating the paleolithic origins of society - and by the end of the play the inescapable impression is that despite the comedy and the excitement of the plot, the message which it so single-mindedly expresses is less startling and less

profound than the energy expended seems to indicate. This qualification apart, Who'll Do It This Time is a witty piece of broadly aimed propaganda for scientific materialism, overcoming its occasional moments of tedium by the constant provocation of the intellect. Such insistent, argumentative challenge in the theatre is indicative of the return to the Scottish stage in the sixties of a form of excitement which had rarely been seen since the death of James Bridie – the excitement of immediacy.

Ronder's most popular work to date clearly owes much to the success of Tom Wright's There Was A Man. It is Cocky (1969), a play for one actor, based on the autobiography of the colourful Lord Cockburn, a celebrated Scottish legal figure in the early nineteenth century. Without pretension to aim further than a brief sketch of character set against historical background, Cocky is a racy and amusing account of political grievances, social institutions, commonplaces and eccentricities; presented in a very freeform which allows great variety in mood and tempo. Detached, lyrical scenic descriptions give way on the instant to the degrading squalor of drunken excess; wistful reminiscences of departed pleasures contrast sharply with broad satires on the incapacity and brutal ferocity of the judges Eskgrove and Braxfield. As a portrait of an age the play is reasonably successful, but Cockburn's character remains largely unpenetrated. Ronder makes up for this lack of depth by interweaving amidst the historical vignettes the proceedings of the notorious Burke and Hare trial, in which Cockburn defended Burke's wife and saved her from the gallows. Such superficial excitements do not raise the play from its status as an entertaining but slight documentary.

From the tenor of their stage-plays it is easy to appreciate why Ronder and Wright have committed their later work almost exclusively to television, where their skills as technical craftsmen and their breadth of appeal stand them in good stead. Their workman-like contributions to the Scottish theatre have the value of emphasising a necessary seriousness and degree of skill related to the standards of world theatre which Scottish drama had for too long ignored. Whether they have anything else to offer is less clear.



At this point some mention must be made of a dramatist of considerable promise whose plays have so far been largely ignored in the professional theatre. Tom Gallagher, whose Our Kindness to Five Persons appeared at the Citizens in 1969, while lacking the steady theatre-sense of Ronder and Wright, aims much higher than either in an attempt to capture dramatically a complete personal vision, not simply isolated thoughts or feelings.

Our Kindness to Five Persons concerns a power struggle. Steve Manson has returned from social success in America to Glasgow, his native town, to persuade his younger brother Dan to join him, with the offer of a post in the same firm as himself. Everything has been arranged for the proposed emigration, but Dan hesitates to commit himself to his brother's keeping. During a reunion of the small group of stalwart friends who shared the Hansons' early struggles against desperate poverty, a series of crises occur in which secret crimes and conflicts from their past are brought – somewhat unconvincingly – to light.

Steve's marriage has broken down, and the real reason for his efforts to bring Don to America is the hope of restarting an affair with Don's wife, Allison, who was Steve's lover prior to his emigration, before she married. Steve's machinations are shattered by the enigmatic Judd Taylor, once the leader of the little group and more than able to out-manoeuvre the self-seeking brother and safeguard Don's – and Allison's – independence. The personal cost of this triumph for Judd, of which he is fully aware, is his own descent into the private hell of alcoholism.

Steve and Judd wield similar power over the others' lives, a power which Judd once employed as shamelessly as Steve is now attempting. The realisation of his responsibility to those he has manipulated has plunged Judd into self-loathing beyond endurance: all that defends him now against his need for alcoholic oblivion is a carefully preserved avoidance of human contact. The sight of Steve's tampering returns him once more to an active role as a conscious sacrifice against ruthless self-interest.

Journalistic superficiality in the dialogue and predictably regular "stunning" revelations rob the well-conceived characters in the play of plausibility and force; but inherent in the situation, and especially in the figure of Judd, is an emotional experience of

considerable complexity and force.

### C.P. TAYLOR

Cecil P. Taylor is without any doubt the most successful Scottish dramatist of the decade. His sizeable body of work – over a dozen plays produced, some as far afield as Poland and Australia – manifests a fast-developing technical skill in a variety of styles together with a deceptively unassertive, if at times unsteady, talent. As with Conn, Ronder and Wright, Taylor's writing is noticeably directed towards "the man in the street" rather than the sophisticate, to the extent that much of it is openly concerned with aspects of socialism; but Taylor is neither a propagandist nor a moralist: rather he is deeply concerned with the quiet ordinariness of everyday life, touched only peripherally by great events and movements of history or ideology. His strength lies in his ability to fuse into a single framework the limited ambitions and trivial preoccupations of mundane existence, and ideological and historical pressures which act on a scale apparently overwhelming the significance of the individual.

The typical Taylor situation is enclosed and in some way out of touch with an outside world which yet exerts an irresistible force: it is the homosexuals in Lies About Vietnam, locked in their hotel room in momentary escape from their anti-war campaign; it is the murderous gathering in Liphitz's flat with its supposedly broken telephone in Happy Days Are Here Again: in his most successful play, it is Alec and Morris, the Glasgow Jews whose lifelong inability to understand the world is depicted so effectively in Bread and Butter. Even when he adopts the informal flexibility of "open" staging, and launches into a semi-documentary like What Can A Man Do or a social fantasy like Em 'n Ben, his focus remains narrowed upon one or two figures, of generally unstartling character. The humour in the plays stems invariably from contrasting the bombast of ethical pronouncement with the less edifying self-interest of normal human behaviour, where once again the strident public voice is undercut by an apologetic personal whisper.

The theme in most of his plays is of the individual at odds with social conventions, historical pressures and political ideals; usually associated in some way with Socialism. For Taylor, like

many other British playwrights, Socialism embodies the conflict between self and society in its mid-century reassertion of ineffective humane liberalism and ruthless Stalinist fanaticism as its incompatible polarities. Thus in Thank You Very Much Moray Bell's uneasy compromise between elevating political ideals, material ambitions, and personal fulfilment, contains an element of naivety which draws destruction inevitably on his well-intentioned plans. In Allergy the lunatic fringe of revolutionary Marxism harbours farcical conventionality and unbridled self-indulgence. It is typical of Taylor that revolutionary philosophy in his plays produces no violence. While other writers are drawn to the extremes of experience, he remains always on a less intense level, recognisably the shared experience of the vast majority of mankind.

Similarly, his Jewish background provides him with another focus for individuality, for the Jewish rebel, even more so than the socialist, must overcome his most deeply-rooted beliefs and attitudes to family and orthodoxy. Morris, in Bread and Butter, one of his finest creations, is such a rebel, and one who is defeated in every skirmish. It is more than possible that a major contributory influence on his "everyday" apprehension of reality was his life in Glasgow as one of the Jewish minority within the conscious minority of Scotland in Britain, while being aware simultaneously of the international atmosphere of his ethnic identity. His political allegiance can only have emphasised an existing dichotomy between personal and universal. This exaggeration of the "Scottish cultural experience" by duplication may in itself be sufficient to explain why Taylor, almost alone among his contemporary Scots, has no qualms about "parochialism" when he employs overtly Scottish settings. George Bruce observes that :

"..... the stress .... is not on the eccentricities which set people apart as the funny kilted Scotchmen have done - but on the failings and foibles, the sympathies and worries which we share, only these general concerns are expressed through a particular Scottish setting." 1

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1 G. Bruce, Scottish Theatre, January 1970 (article, The Community of Theatre)

The plays which first won for Taylor critical attention, and which remain his most satisfying are those which clearly draw on personal experience. Jewish, Scottish, and disillusioned Socialist, they appeal paradoxically by their universality.

Most important of all is his evocation of relationships; a skill deceptively unobtrusive, but which contains the vital spark of life and immediacy informing all his better plays. His characters are apprehended through the intricacy of response to their fellows rather than creating themselves with volcanic self-expression, as for example, James Bridie's do. It is this which maintains the essential low-key ordinariness of his figures, none of whom are capable of asserting uniqueness by thrusting their personality on the audience over the heads of the rest of the cast.

Happy Days Are Here Again (1965) in which Taylor's Marxism is at its most orthodox, and his Jewish imagery most startling, has little in common stylistically or thematically with his subsequent plays, Political allegory and absurdist black comedy at one and the same time, it is imitative and self-consciously striving after significance, but as Irving Wardle comments in his introduction to the play, it has "a good deal more invention and sense of purpose than such (comedy of menace) exercises usually possess". It also compares favourably with Stewart Conn's absurdist exercises.

Liphitz, "a monstrous caricature of the Jewish father",<sup>1</sup> plays host to the regular patrons of his prostitute niece while she undergoes an illegal abortion in distant London. The assembled company represent a degenerate society: Monty, a wealthy businessman as much exploited as exploiting; Angel, a poisonously hypocritical cleric; Donovan, an egotistical disciple of science; Postman, a poet; and Waxman, a proletarian who, as his name implies is helplessly manipulated by the others. When word comes that the girl, Ruth, is dead, Liphitz viciously persuades the others to project their collective sense of guilt solely upon Waxman. Driven to extremes of maudlin regret

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1 Irving Wardle, introduction, Penguin New English Dramatists 12, p. 17, 1968.

by their accusations and his own inferiority Waxman commits suicide with their help; but Liphitz refuses to allow them relief from killing the scapegoat he gave to them: he has informed the police even before the murder was committed. Ruth it turns out, is still alive: the entire affair is the creation of Liphitz's demented, guilt-ridden impulse to destruction.

It is in Liphitz that the power of the play lies. The other characters, including Waxman, are little more than simple caricatures who together symbolize society and its attitudes to guilt and responsibility. Liphitz is much more compelling and intense, a nightmare combination of senility and hypnotic energy, whose insane fantasy penetrates the reality of collective culpability. Absurdist and Marxist interpretation of the play's meaning pale before this Hitlerian figure, so wholly obsessed with destroying both his victims and his supporters. Waxman is selected first as a target for complacent spite, then as scapegoat, because it is he who fathered the unborn child - in a sense, he is associated with Life where the others are associated with sterility and squalid sensuality. Liphitz is impelled by his guilt for being Ruth's original incestuous seducer, masochistically associating with the wide circle of her subsequent lovers, towards whom he is alternately vicious and ingratiating. Having initiated their actions, he then watches with relish their attempts to evade the consequences; finally forcing them, through those very evasions, to face their guilt. The final effect of Happy Days Are Here Again is its vivid statement of the contemporary commonplace that "we are all guilty", for this short play, despite obvious derivative features of style, is imbued with considerable power.

Allergy (1966), Taylor's next short play, is a complete change of tone and style, a light and sympathetic satire of an all-too human face of socialism.

In a lonely and decrepit cottage in Ross, Jim edits and prints "New Socialism", a political monthly. The scale and preoccupation of the venture are set by Jim's article, quoted at the start of the play -

"'Circulation'" sneers the current 'Socialist Reflection' editorial commenting on 'New Socialism', 'Thrombosis'

would be a more apt expression!" While admiring the wit, we can hardly applaud the accuracy. 'New Socialism' has a circulation of 200 copies per month, which compares more than favourably with 'Socialist Reflections' admitted 150 . . . . ."

The cheerful squalor of his existence is interrupted by the arrival of his friend Christopher, a respected reporter for a Glasgow newspaper-who contributes to New Socialism - under a nom-de-plume for safety - with Barbara, a stunningly attractive political sympathiser. Christopher and Barbara have abandoned their former lives and respective spouses with the intention of dedicating the rest of their lives to creative socialism in Jim's Highland retreat, living simply on the tins of asparagus, anchovies, goulash, chicken, champignons and the like which they have brought from the delicatessens of the south. Jim, at first annoyed by the intrusion, increasingly is fascinated by Barbara: Christopher surprisingly is strangely pre-occupied and unresponsive to her infatuation. At the first opportunity, he reveals to Jim that he has developed a particularly ugly rash all over his body:

Christopher : I've had slight attacks when I even started getting ideas . . . One of the girls in the office . . . Long red hair . . . . combed straight down . . . . You know what it is. It's an allergy.

Jim : To women?

Christopher : To adultery

The "arbitrary ethical code" of the Ten Commandments ingrained in him since childhood, has resisted successfully the rational arguments of his liberating ideals, and taken this bizarre, psychosomatic revenge. With suspect over-enthusiasm, Jim rushes to help him by presenting the allergy to Barbara as a hypothetical obstacle to the consummation of her love for Christopher; and after her ideological affirmation that no hypothetical ailment could alter her feelings, the reassured Christopher reveals all. Barbara at first stifles her repulsion with her faith in medical science, but when Jim explains that the cure for Christopher is not in drug or diet, but in sexual intercourse with her, she balks openly. Realising that he is fighting a losing battle, Christopher resorts to harsh 'political analysis' of the situation, provoking an argument which ends with his abrupt re-

jection of marxist faith and a vociferous appreciation of bourgeois materialism. From this extreme of pique he is rescued by the ever magnanimous Jim, who encourages him to re-examine the dialectic of his lapse from faith.

Soon Christopher is absorbed once more in the pleasurable pastime of advanced universal theorising, in which condition he is cheerfully packed off to Glasgow, his job and his wife, leaving Jim to the rapid conquest of a more-than-willing Barbara.

Any doubts created by a weak beginning are soon lost in the particular delight of Allergy, the fine precision of its satire which despite the political context concerns itself wholly with the mild hypocrisy and self-delusion of its image-conscious enthusiasts. Obvious contrasts between the would-be pioneers' elevated intentions and actual behaviour – escaping from the thralldom of the consumer society with stocks of champignons and slimming bread – are but the groundwork upon which Taylor builds a more subtle comic edifice in which each character employs ideological platitudes and political analysis in an unstated but clearly understood conflict about who wins his way into Barbara's bed. The aphrodisiac effect of Barbara's socialist parable about a Russian whose chaste commitment made him proof to her infatuated advances is quite stunning, and Christopher's effort to counter it by incessant attempts to divert the conversation towards the arid pleasures of intellectual debate is a masterpiece of grossly inflated trivia – Jim's healthy contempt of hygiene is rebuked as "absolutely un-Marxist", a chance reference to Russian socialism provokes a complicated refutation of the Soviet bureaucracy. Lust is proof to such assaults and Christopher is defeated; but his self-esteem is restored in the final twist Taylor gives to the plot, when the angry loser discovers fresh insights and analogies which quell his rage and restore him to his intricate pursuit of objective truth. The obvious sympathy with which Taylor presents this trio as they play at involvement with revolutionary philosophy and action provides a key to his next, and best-known work Bread and Butter (1966) a quiet humorously pessimistic, ultimately very moving study of two friends from pre-war hopes to present old-age.

Bread and Butter has similarities of plot and tone with Stewart Conn's I Didn't Always Live Here. Taylor's play shares the location in Glasgow and the tracing of its characters – two Jewish couples – through poverty and idealism in the depression, into Wartime uncertainty, and beyond into comparative affluence and disillusion in the 'fifties and 'sixties. It is indisputably a far superior play to Conn's despite the stylistic shortcomings observed by John Russel Taylor.

"The author's technique may seem limited and repetitive: in virtually every scene he uses to excess the old 'new drama' ploy of conversations continued at odds, with neither participant listening to the other . . . . Which is all very well in small doses, but continued obsessively in scene after scene can become extremely tiresome. "

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The dramatist's aim is sure and steadily held without distraction – John Russel Taylor writes of the "insidious hold" exercised in the play by "an element in general rather misprized by the newer dramatists . . . : plot"<sup>2</sup> – and the simplicity of the story of Alec and Morris and their wives belies the acuteness and depth of feeling with which they are treated.

Morris, the radical son of a moderately successful tailor, rebels repeatedly – and often, farcically – against the enveloping restrictions of orthodoxy in business, marriage and social life; forever pursuing, like the characters in Allergy, a romanticised image of himself. His enthusiastic speculations about establishing model socialist or Zionist states fails to save him from the niggling round of family duty and growing dissatisfaction with his life, and in the end he is a lonely and rather bitter figure, salving his self-respect with 'fashionable' worldliness in the form of casual sex and half-hearted amateur film-making.

Alec, a much more timid personality, is compensated for his lack of intellect or ambition by his unpretentious response to natural beauty. Faithfully following the ever-changing inconsistencies of Morris's

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1 J. R. Taylor, The Second Wave p. 187 Methuen 1971

2 J. R. Taylor, The Second Wave, p. 186



daydreams, he finds his relief from the surrounding hideousness of industrial grime in the pigeons which he feeds in the park at lunchtime - "Look how the sun catches their necks! Turn all colours of the rainbow!"

Like Morris, Alec's later life brings disappointment. After receiving an unexpected inheritance, he and his wife Miriam are able to escape from the city for six months in every year to a modest retreat at the seaside, but Miriam's thriftiness degenerates with time into acrimonious, penny-pinching meanness, and the harmony of their early years together breaks down.

Ronald Bryden, in his introduction to the printed edition of Bread and Butter congratulates the dramatist for having created "a world of language",

"..... where the Glaswegian accent has been moulded into the international rhythms of a vanished Yiddish. But to this rich mixture he's added the third element which turns a bizarre feast of speech into ironic drama - the thirties jargon of Marxism." 1

This must be qualified by observing that while true, it suggests a colourful richness not present in the play :

"Working class Jewish life in Glasgow between the wars, unfamiliar in the theatre, sounds much more attractively exotic than it is". 2

For the most part, Taylor's use of language is unobtrusive, the ironic rhythms of Yiddish being barely distinguishable in the sarcastic wit typical in, but by no means exclusive to, Scotland. The effect is subtle and rarely conscious, so well is expression fitted to character. There is a perfect correspondence between Alec's stumbling simple words and his cautiously limited horizon, between the hollow political slogans springing ready made from Morris and the ill-judged confidence with which he confronts the world.

Despite elements in the plot which suggest farce - as when Morris's father ruins the family business in the midst of high wartime profits by dabbling inexpertly in the black market - Morris and Alec are

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1 R. Bryden, Introduction, Penguin New English Dramatists 10, p. 14

2 J.R. Taylor, The Second Wave p. 187

taken seriously; their aspirations, failures and sorrows, however petty and unimaginative are nevertheless immediately recognisable as the common fare of day-to-day existence. Alec's timorousness is accompanied by great gentleness and generosity, and Morris's abstraction becomes cynical courage and decision during a gas-bombing panic. Such hints of potential strength in their character only emphasises their ineffectiveness and isolation; the movement of history impinges only peripherally upon their lives without eliciting – or even requiring – their understanding, provoking only vague or fantastic interpretations and prophecies from the eclectic mind of Morris, who in 1933 states categorically that Hitler is not against the Jews :

Morris :                   The way I see it is – what Hitler is against is capitalism. He's against the rich Jews. The same as we're against the rich Jews. Against all the rich ... Once Hitler settles down the new regime is consolidated, they'll forget all about anti-Jewish campaigns. It's just an election stunt, a show for the people ... A few anti-semites broke out. Windows broken. A shirt torn off a Jew's back. But you know our people – the minute some gentile gives a Jew a dirty look, they're shouting already – Pogrom! Pogrom! "

Repeated ironies of this kind firmly check any tendency towards sentimentality while the mockery they may induce is equally controlled by the delicately drawn relationship between the two friends, an unchanging if unobtrusive force which creates a remarkable depth clearly apprehended below the surface of inconstant distractions which fill out their lives. Their meetings are opportunities for each to pursue a dream, safe in the other's tolerance, and the dreams provide a yardstick against which all other values take their measure. In the end, Morris recognises that his aspirations to be an intellectual rebel have led him only to sterility. There is a curious mixture of wistful regret, unexpected honesty, and tentative hope after his ludicrously comic last attempt to defy the social order. Dragging the faithful Alec with him to stand on a park bench and shout at a passing rabbi

"Down with God – the marriage contract and the United Synagogue Council!", his nerve gives way. The intended victim does not notice even the transparent excuse offered for their antics. Morris at first seeks to alleviate his humiliation with self-justifying logic, but when Alec remarks, "The chaffinches'll be singing soon", he replies :

"Remember to point one out to me will you Alec?  
Don't forget. I'd like to hear it – for myself."

It is an enigmatic and entirely fitting conclusion to a play which consistently avoids the temptations of external comment, satirical or otherwise, and presents instead, two wholly believable people.

After the successful presentation of Allergy and Bread and Butter Taylor's writing became less steady. Who's Pinkus? Where's Chelm? in 1967, a musical, has little to recommend it. A simple Jewish fable, it traces somewhat protractedly the adventures of Pinkus, who leaves his home town of Chelm to seek better fortune in the mysterious city of Mazzeltov, only to travel unwittingly in a circle. Mistaken identity enables him to shrug off feelings of inferiority from his past and to win success and public acclaim. In relation to Taylor's other plays, the continued conflict between an individual and the identity which society tries to force upon him is worth noting, but otherwise Who's Pinkus? Where's Chelm? is undistinguished.

1967 saw a production by the Warsaw State Theatre of another piece of Jewish fantasy, this time with a distinct dash of political comment, Mr. David. The Mr. David of the title is a Messiah who literally drops in – through the skylight – on two Jewish tailors, Abie and Jack, to request their assistance in raising mankind from iniquity. After some initial support from religious and commercial institutions, public rejection of the Messiah follows hard on his first demand for an end to private property. The dream of redemption collapses, but not completely: Abie and Jack and their families find in the memory of the vanished Messiah an inspiration for their behaviour towards others, an inspiration symbolised by the golden crown which Mr. David leaves behind him as a token that the ideal he sought was not entirely a fantasy. Lively and uncomplicated, the play is an effective, if lightweight and unsurprising example of folk-theatre, and frequently displays the author's talents for

recreating the atmosphere of ordinary working-class life.

This atmosphere was all important in his next three plays, What Can A Man Do, Thank You Very Much and Em 'n Ben, all of which continue Taylor's efforts to work satisfactorily in broadly based, popular theatre styles closely identified with the Newcastle locality – where he lives and works – in setting and dialect. He explains his interest in the form with the following statement :

"As a writer, I'm deeply involved and interested in the community in which I live . . . I feel it's my job and the job of the theatre in my community to make the people living in my region more aware of their environment. "

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John Russel Taylor has noted that Taylor seems to require first-hand experience for his talents, so that his personal commitment to "People's Theatre" is probably more directly associated with the mainsprings of his art than other writers.<sup>2</sup> What Can A Man Do (1968) takes as subject matter a coal-tip disaster, highly topical at the time – the schoolchildren of Aberfan had been buried beneath a shifting tip shortly before – and as theme, the search for responsibility. The play is noticeably underwritten, touching vaguely on politics and bureaucratic shortcomings, hastily sketching the feelings of its central figure, a miner whose family has been killed. In maintaining his focus on the ordinary individual but widening his overall vision to take in the whole landscape of events, Taylor seems lost and distinctly unsure of theatrical effect.

Much happier is Thank You Very Much (1968) written in collaboration with the Northumberland Experimental Youth Theatre. Taylor is very much at home in this deliberately simple piece, with its socialist, working-class principal, and its distant but menacing background of a world moving to the brink of war. Set in 1914, the political developments following the Sarajevo assassinations establish a framework within which Moray Bell tries to defy the united authority of his family in running his own life, compromises his ideals for

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1 C.P. Taylor, Scottish Theatre, April 1970

2 J.R. Taylor, The Second Wave p. 190

convenience, and attempts to reconcile his love for the young suffragette Florrie Pollock with his marriage and children. Interspersed between the various scenes are musical turns of sometimes dubious relevance which are designed partly to emphasize the artifice of the stage conventions, partly to provide light and popular relief from the gathering gloom round Moray Bell.

The political and family issues dealt with in the play are sufficiently generalised and timeless to avoid any suggestion of mere pageantry, while the immediacy of the emotions portrayed endows the action with a vivid sense of life. The peculiarities of the period are seen as much in mental attitudes as in costume or background event. Moray's sisters form a particularly effective illustration of narrow-minded familial oppression, and Moray himself makes a good portrait of a soft-hearted idealist demonstrating against the growing threat of World War but not above accepting the high profits of war department contracts. His readiness to compromise, and his naive belief that others will act similarly, drives his wife to a hysterical condemnation of his divorce plans, but this final confrontation between Moray and hard unyielding fact seems too abrupt to have merited the painstaking preparation which precedes it.

Em 'n Ben (1969) carries the theme of individual against family and society into the present day, and is so far Taylor's most fluid use of the folk-theatre style.

"The story of an ordinary couple Em and Ben, from their birth to their death and beyond their death using the style and the images which is the basis of most pop-songs"

is how a programme note described this "seaside entertainment". In a rapid succession of landmarks in the lives of the two main characters, interspersed at suitable moments by excerpts from Church liturgy, the demands of a misguided world repeatedly frustrate individual aspiration and pleasure. From birth to death, Emily and Ben are the puppets of narrow self-interest and rigid orthodoxy. At their baptism they are consigned not to God, but to the inventive fantasy of Ben's father and his Christening Machine. Educationally, Ben's ability to read racing newspapers is ignored in the struggle to impress C-A-T upon him, and his

precocious commercial genius dealing in scrap-iron rouses the envy of his father and his headmaster, who apprentice him as an electrician. Marriage between Emily and Ben is decided by their parents, who rule their wedded lives with the iron rod of conformity. The couple are finally overtaken by disaster when their children direct Ben into catastrophic speculation on the stock market. An epilogue set in Heaven at last gives them their freedom, with each in a solipsistic individual paradise from which the irrationality of human love is not in the end excluded.

The gusto and humour with which Em 'n Ben is conducted is unified with its more serious aspects in a manner which evaded Thank You Very Much, and the bleakness which underlies the theme is strikingly summed up in the epilogue with its hesitant, tiny flame of affection set against almost universal loneliness. It remains, however, a light-weight work.

This is not true of Taylor's next plays in which he turned once more to highly sophisticated theatre, the companion - pieces The Truth About Sarajevo and Lies About Vietnam.

The first of these, a laborious very Black comedy, portrays the Dutch exile of the Kaiser in the months following Germany's collapse at the end of the First World War with the defeated monarch a pathetic prey to humiliation, delusion and court intrigue. Farcical and satirical undertones are almost oppressively strong, but Taylor as always is bent on depicting the essential humanity of his characters, and in the tension between their mundane behaviour, their social significance, and the catastrophic events in the world beyond their claustrophobic retreat, a note of sympathy, if not of understanding, manages to survive.

Devastated by failure and defeat, the Kaiser childishly dreams of miraculous deliverance under the guiding hand of his cynical aide Freddie. An incurable Anglophile, he readily succumbs to the charms of a beautiful young Englishwoman, Elizabeth - who in fact is Freddie's mistress, Elise, engaged in a careful masquerade directed by the aide for political ends of convoluted obscurity. The entire play consists of Freddie's ultimately successful efforts to persuade the Kaiser to take Elizabeth to his bed, and that "Willie"

finally does so to test his manhood prior to the arrival of his beloved Empress lends the whole affair an air of bizarre farce. The relationship between the trio is drawn with great skill - Freddie takes refuge in veiled sarcasm from his own unquenchable jealousy for Elizabeth - the atmosphere of irresponsibility and utter self-delusion is brilliantly captured, and the farce brims over repeatedly in laughter; but the play relies so heavily on references entirely external to what occurs on the stage as to seem without point.

Lies About Vietnam on the other hand, is a complete success.

Taylor in this play toys deliberately with the expectations aroused in his audience by the title, and by the opening sequence, of a shallow, fashionable indulgence in sophisticated voyeurism.

Two homosexuals, middle-aged Cyril and a young American Tom, feast on chicken and cheap wine in an inexpensive hotel, assailed from without by the telephoned efforts of an embarrassed manageress intent on their premature departure. Both men are deeply involved in a campaign against the Vietnam War. Their temporary relaxation in the hotel is marred by the analytic ruthlessness of Cyril "a professionally protesting politician" who uses his superior intellect as a scourge for the superficiality of the weaker Tom's involvement in the protest movement. It swiftly becomes apparent that his acid criticisms are rooted less in a superior responsibility than in petulant jealousy, for Cyril's ire is most stung by the memory of a barbaric but virile young airman who Tom met when a victim of the Draft. The tension of their quarrel is but a foretaste of Cyril's sarcastic wit. His opportunity comes when Graham, a thoroughly respectable righteously indignant toy-manufacturer bursts into the room on behalf of the manageress to oust these "disreputable elements". With cynical skill Cyril plays the intruder like a fish, turning the situation on its head by a calculated appeal to Graham's bigotry. Tom, he explains, is an American Army officer, and himself, an arms consultant: their mission, the sale of new rocketry for use in Vietnam. Photographs of maimed women and children from the anti-war campaign are presented as evidence of the new weapon's effectiveness; and Graham the toy-manufacturer overcomes his initial repugnance to these horrors by agreeing on their necessity in halting Communism. Cyril,

disgusted, is yet triumphant in his own nihilistic self-righteousness. Then Graham briefly returns with a gift – a Jack-in-the-box for Tom's invented "son". Cyril's brittle satire collapses, and it is with anguished despair that he and Tom finally embrace each other in the silence which follows Graham's final exit.

To the talent Taylor has always shown for creating wholly believable characters in intense but lightly-drawn relationship to each other is now added a highly-charged, deeply ironic and above all, sharply defined vision. Where Bread and Butter develops in terms of atmosphere towards an overall impression of the littleness of life, Lies About Vietnam is a tightly constructed essay in inhumanity, abruptly weighted by Graham's act of spontaneous generosity to plumb the depths of mankind's paradoxical soul. Up to that crucial turning-point, Cyril's insistent pursuit of cruelty and meanness has been undeniably cheapened by his very skill in manipulating Graham. His nihilism is self-congratulating despite the validity of its basis. Graham's gift transforms the entire exercise by continuing it beyond the scope of Cyril's limited purpose, reaching a truth far more appalling than his cynicism, that the cruelty of man is all the more incomprehensible by virtue of the kindness which co-exists with it. The device of employing two unpopular, or at least, unrespected figures to set a window in the soul of Graham, the man in the street, is outstanding; as is the symbol of the child's toy which carries the play to its fullest meaning.

Cecil Taylor's work up to 1970 is the finest of Scotland's small contribution to drama in the nineteen-sixties, and has won a place among the best British drama in the period, yet with the exception of the Traverse Theatre Club in Edinburgh,<sup>1</sup> where most of his better plays received their first performance, Scottish theatres have largely ignored him, despite his willingness to work in native settings and to commit himself to the community he lives in. Scottish audiences still demand sentimental homeliness from native

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1 Which has continued its interest in his work since 1970



playwrights, and Scottish theatres are so determined not to allow such cheapening mindless indulgence on to their stages that all Scottish writers are treated with automatic over-reserve. Taylor, and Scottish drama, must suffer both.

## CHAPTER FIVE

In September, 1970 the Scottish Arts Council published a report on Theatre in Scotland. After expressing concern with the state of Theatre in the country, it included among its recommendations the following statements :

"... we have come to the conclusion that there should also be a major drama company, of the highest quality, based in Scotland to undertake activities parallel with those of Scottish Opera and Scottish Theatre Ballet .....

A company serving the major centres of Scotland would have to rival the artistic standards of such companies as the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre which are receiving considerably higher subsidy .....

In all of this may lie the seeds of a theatre company which might approximate to what for years enthusiasts have described as a National Theatre for Scotland."

1

Whatever the value of this proposal - and it has proved a controversial one in Scotland's theatrical world - it highlighted the collapse of Scottish Drama as a living entity. After all the efforts from Alfred Waring to the Edinburgh Gateway, which came to fruition first in the Scottish National Players and then again in the heady post-war days of the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre, the wheel of fortune has come full circle, and the whole process must begin again. "Must" because there is a demand for plays of Scottish life, which manifests itself in the massive and largely uncritical enthusiasm for virtually any such play which does reach presentation. Furthermore, while other areas of Scottish literature continue to enjoy a lively renaissance, their effect can only be limited by the lack of the broad audience and immediacy implied in drama. One thing is certain, that in the past the lack of contact between the writers of prose or poetry and the writers of plays has been detrimental to both. Generally speaking, despite the frequent involvement of an enthusiastic intelligentsia in theatrical ventures, very few recognised novelists or poets contributed to them. It can only be suspected that the loss to

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1 Theatre in Scotland: The Report of the Scottish Arts Council, 1970.

Scottish Drama is considerable, especially in terms of developing an artistic theory such as occurred in the formative years of Ireland's Abbey Theatre. Scottish literature has for centuries been weakened by the failure of a theatrical expression to bring it to self-consciousness and maturity.<sup>1</sup>

"What we see in Scottish poetry after the sixteenth century is accordingly a gradual impoverishment of the vocabulary of poetry....."

2

Although the twentieth-century renaissance in Scottish letters has perhaps at long last escaped from the traditional Scottish dissociation of intellect and emotion, it remains for it to overcome the enormous gulf between literature and the great mass of the population, and offer its own salvation to Scottish culture as a whole: a healthy native drama would provide a bridge across the gulf. If such a bridge is to be built, then the lessons of the past must be learned.

The experience of the Abbey Theatre is vital in judging the development of drama in Scotland for two main reasons: firstly, the Abbey provided an example and an inspiration for Scottish enthusiasts, especially between the wars; and secondly, it is by comparison with the Irish Theatre that Scottish achievement can be put in perspective. Associated with both of these reasons is the assessment of how much – or how little – the lessons and ideals of the Abbey were understood by the Scottish Theatre.

Irish Theatre was granted two major advantages in comparison to Scotland and indeed, most countries: at its inception it was championed by dedicated writers of immense capability and sensitivity, Yeats, Synge and Lady Gregory, soon to be followed by O'Casey; and it enjoyed almost twenty years of existence in one form or another – ten of which were consolidated efforts by the Abbey – before the First World War and the unsteady years which followed of economic decline and depression. By 1924 the Abbey was recognised as Ireland's unofficial National Theatre, and disorder and civil war seemed to leave its spirit unshaken. Furthermore, its practical ideals concerning the attitude to nationalism and language

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1 Muir p. 77 Scott and Scotland

2 Muir p. 83 Scott and Scotland

were commonly shared: Scottish ventures were fragmented by mutually antagonistic theories on such topics. English, Scottish dialect and Scots have each contended for pride of place as the accepted language of Scottish Theatre. In Scotland a National Theatre venture had just been tentatively established when the Great War broke out and forced it into suspension. Revived in the 'twenties, it was faced with the Depression, and was ended by another World War. Its next manifestation, and its most adventurous, appeared in the midst of that war at the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre. In the mid-fifties, this too evaporated as the conditions of theatre in general altered radically, and today Scottish Drama exists primarily in memories and hopes; the latter sustained by the recommendation of the Scottish Arts Council.

W. B. Yeats, in Plays And Controversies, prescribed the essential requirements for any conscious movement towards a national cultural expression when he wrote :

"National literature is the work of writers, who are moulded by influences that are moulding their countries, and who write out of so deep a life that they are accepted there in the end.... I mean by deep life that men must put into their writing the emotions and experiences that have been most important to themselves. If they say, 'I will write of Irish country-people and make them charming and picturesque like those dear peasants my great-grandmother used to put in the foreground of her water-colour paintings', then they had better be satisfied with the word 'provincial'.

"If one condescends to one's material, if it is only what a popular novelist would call local colour, it is certain that one's real soul is somewhere else. Mr. Synge, upon the other hand, who is able to express his own finest emotions in those curious ironical plays of his, where, for all that, by an illusion of admirable art, everyone seems to be thinking and feeling as only countrymen could think and feel, is truly a National writer, as Burns was when he wrote finely and as Burns was not when he wrote 'Highland Mary' and 'The Cottar's Saturday Night'."

A distinct and healthy Scottish Drama, able to stand comparison with the drama of other countries, remains a thing of the future, principally because it has been hampered by a lack of such clear insight as Yeats' and because the tendency of some writers to condescend to their material became - justly or otherwise - the

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1 Yeats, quoted by D. Craig, Scottish Literature and the Scottish People, Chatto, Windus London 1961

most widely-recognised feature of the various movements towards its creation. Not that Scotland has failed to produce actors, theatres and playwrights of merit – the careers of James Barrie and James Bridie alone attest to this – but it must be recognised from the outset that none have achieved truly international status. The question of their relevance to Scotland is as important, however, for if they have failed to set Paris and New York on fire, they may yet have satisfactorily captured the troublesome spirit of their native land.

The combination of Scottish location and accents with farce, romance or sentimentality is the greatest besetting sin of Scottish Drama and cannot be further tolerated. The progress of the Scottish amateur dramatic movement and the history of theatres like the Rutherglen Repertory or the Gateway are clear indications of the debilitating effects of such national self-denigration. If Scotland is to have a theatre of any positive value, it must be a theatre which takes itself seriously as an artistic medium. One prominent and peculiarly enfeebling result of such combinations in the past is a response – still prevailing in Scotland today – of self-derogating derisive laughter at any business "typically Scottish" which occurs on stage.

Similarly, the treatment of Scottish history must continue to develop along the lines suggested by Donald Carswell in Count Albany, by Robert MacLellan, Alexander Reid and Alexander Scott, who each in his own way had something of importance to say, and were not simply providing costume-drama, romantic or comic escapism, or bolstering distorted and self-congratulatory myths concerning the Bruce, Prince Charlie, or Mary, Queen of Scots. Scottish history in any form may well be a dangerous area to the dramatist. Christopher Small, in Scottish Drama Today, displayed acute perception when he wrote :

"Now generally speaking, over the entire half-century under view – even going back to Home's Douglas – an extraordinary high proportion of Scottish plays – and plays not only by Scottish writers but by others about Scotland – have been historical, or at any rate set in the distant and even legendary past....."

What are we to make of this? It can be expressed in different ways. Is it just because Scottish history is so obviously "dramatic" that Scottish drama is so "historical"? It's tempting to suppose

so, but in fact it's putting the cart before the horse: it's rather that - at any rate in the past 150 years or so, since Scott anyway - the way of thinking about Scottish history has been essentially dramatic, even theatrical - and far outwith Scotland, as has been pointed out. It's as though, looking backwards, we think of the past as drama.....

"Now everybody does this, of course, it's the natural way people think about the past, the very notion of people having a particular history is essentially dramatic; drama has a special function in relating people to their past and moulding their sense of national identity. (One needn't go further than Shakespeare and the terrific p.r.o. job he did for the English monarchy).....

"..... this is natural, even useful and healthy as a stage or part of a process of self-realisation. But only I think as a stage; when one gets stuck in it, it bodes ill for development of drama itself and also perhaps of the nation.....

1

By choosing the past, Scottish dramatists have - for whatever reasons - all too often failed to come to grips with the present. It is interesting to note that with the two authors who conspicuously transformed quasi-historical, Scots language material into an expression of contemporary interests, Reid and Scott, the interests they focussed upon were essentially intellectual, abstracted from the immediate problems of day-to-day life. The entire impulse towards historical drama may be closely allied to fantasy - certainly in Reid and Scott it was a conscious use of both which, by heightening artificiality, emphasised contemporary relevance - and fantasy, a traditional Scottish attribute, is a very pronounced feature of Scottish Drama, particularly at its most mature.

Fantasy recurs in the plays of James Barrie, James Bridie, Reid, Scott, Kemp, Linklater, Moray MacLaren, and a modern variant, in Conn. Edwin Muir, writing of Scottish poetry, says that fantasy is "either a comic propitiation of terrible things..... or a tangential escape from the ordinary world".<sup>2</sup>

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1 C. Small, Scottish Drama Today, Association for Scottish Literary Studies, Occasional Papers Sept. 1972

2 Muir p.109 Scott and Scotland

"Scottish fantastic poetry is the natural recoil from 'a maudlin affection for the commonplace', but it has no peculiar virtue beyond its naturalness. It is... a temporary reaction bringing us back to the point where we started...."

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This does not hold true for Scottish Drama, for these authors employ fantasy consciously, in the form of surrealism, as a deliberate technique for distancing the audience from the action the better to perceive the argument, to penetrate to the core of feeling. Barrie's personal sentimentality tended to return him from that point back to escapism, but occasionally there is a hint of malice as he does so. In Bridie fantasy reaches its greatest refinement in Scottish Drama, when in plays like Daphne Laureola it achieves the heights of poetry yet paradoxically merges imperceptibly with naturalism and "normality".

Attempts to confront "normality", the everyday world of common experience, in a manner sufficiently broad to encompass general social influences, are less frequent. A steady, if small stream can be traced throughout the course of Scottish Drama, beginning with Donald Colquhoun's Jean in 1910 - the first notable native presentation of the Glasgow Repertory Theatre - and pursued by George Blake, Joe Corrie, Paul Vincent Carrol, the Unity Theatre playwrights, George Munro, Ewan MacColl and Cecil Taylor. If the great majority of writers in this category are concerned with the lives of the working-class this should be no surprise, given the political development of the twentieth-century and the swiftness with which economic change affects this section of the community: the surprise lies, perhaps, in how few of them are propagandists - indeed, how a sizable number do not deal with politics at all. Similarly, Scottish writers have avoided that most obvious of national evils, religious bigotry. Two who did not, Malloch and Munro, called upon their heads such volumes of outrage that the others were possibly warned off the subject, but there is little evidence to indicate any widespread desire at any stage to emulate them. Scotland's closest approach to the kind of religious and political controversies which frequently surrounded the Abbey Theatre occurred at Glasgow Unity Theatre but Unity attained neither supreme artistry from its local playwrights, nor the status of the occasional riot.

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1 Muir, p.113

Scott and Scotland

It is by comparison with Ireland and the Abbey that a fair assessment can be made of Scottish Drama and its achievements. It brought forth no Yeats, no Synge, no O'Casey, it never reached internationally-recognised status. Yet it did, again and again, provide Scotland with theatre which if not great, was at least competent, and sometimes very much more than competent.

The crucial error of the various movements towards a Scottish Drama was their assumption that the model provided by the Abbey Theatre's experience could be transplanted, lock, stock and barrel, to a nation with an entirely different cultural, historical, political and economic heritage. The Celtic Myths pursued by Yeats, Lady Gregory and others were still alive among the common folk of Ireland, the readiness to build fresh legend out of contemporary fact all-too-prevalent<sup>1</sup> – myth and legend were, in effect, timeless in aspect there. MacLeod and Bottomley, who attempted similar exercises with Scottish Gaelic mythology, found themselves writing for a precious minority, completely out of touch with Scotland's present. Synge and other Irish writers, in portraying peasant life, had few illusions about pastoral simplicity and delight, and knew the hardship<sup>2</sup> of the countryside; Brandane and other Scottish writers who followed suit created an impossibly rosy picture of West Highland rustic charm and wisdom which prevailed over more realistic impressions from J. A. Ferguson's pen. There is the question of language, solved for the Irish dramatists by their close attention to the speech of their contemporaries, particularly of the lower orders. Their Scottish counterparts continue undecided about which language – English, Scottish dialect, or Scots – is the correct one for the public stage, and in general displayed scant awareness of the potential for a heightened, poetic expression developing from the Scottish tongue.

Finally, there is the general lack of theoretical awareness in Scottish Drama, contrasting so sharply with the creation of Irish Drama. Scotland has frequently produced a high degree of technical accomplishment in the crafts of the theatre, and has developed a

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1 Nicoll p. 251 British Drama 1900-1930

2 Nicoll p. 253 British Drama 1900-1930



distinctive acting style. Only once, at the Glasgow Unity Theatre, was there a tentative gesture towards including playwrights in discussions of this aspect of their craft. When such collaboration was made outwith the Scottish Theatre, between Ewan MacColl and Theatre Workshop, between Barrie and Bridie and English professional theatre, the results were sometimes remarkable.

Some characteristics of Scottish Drama remain which are worthy of comment. The first is that in the course of seventy years, and most particularly since Robert MacLellan wrote Jamie the Saxe in 1937, Scottish playwrights have, with some deliberation it appears, simulated a national heritage of drama. Translations of foreign classics into Scots, particularly those of the eighteenth century, have proved widely popular and strikingly successful in their use of Scots as a language of considerable colour and subtlety. It is as if the nation was making up a dearth of four-hundred years' duration, and once that task is completed, will feel confident enough to tackle the present with all its energy.

Then there is the recurrence, continued to the present day, of features traditional in Scottish culture, the most obvious of which is the use of drunkenness as a device for releasing imagination and emotion from restraint. Munro and Bridie in particular employ this technique to great effect, and in Malloch's Soutar's Water it is specifically identified with a distorting Calvinist ethos which is certainly felt by the aforementioned playwrights and remains surprisingly powerful over the whole course of Scottish drama, possibly contributing even to the satirical flavour of so many of the lightest Scottish comedies.

The other characteristic is the curious self-consciousness of so many of the best Scottish playwrights, particularly Barrie and Bridie, but apparent in many others, concerning the nature of the theatrical medium. Their awareness of its artificiality heightens their sense of artifice; which results sometimes in much craft for little matter, sometimes in gauche coyness, and sometimes in imaginative flights of the greatest theatrical daring. It is in this last possibility that the best of existing Scottish Drama has been created, and that the future may yet produce a playwright of world standing.

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also<sup>1</sup> Unpublished Notes (copyright)

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