

For the degree of Ph.D.

SYMBOLISM IN MODERN ENGLISH DRAMA

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Foreword.

The title 'Symbolism in Modern English Drama' may appear somewhat misleading in view of the scope of this thesis. It has been preferred, for the sake of neatness, to the clumsier, 'Symbolism in Drama written in the English Language', which would in fact be a more accurate description since it includes the Irish and American contribution.

A considerable proportion of this study has been devoted to the work of Ibsen, Strindberg and Maeterlinck, since nearly all subsequent developments must be referred back to them either by way of comparison or contrast.

Quotations from Maeterlinck's work are given in the original, those from other foreign drama in the standard translation. Dates of plays are those of the works' first appearance, whether in production or publication: when relevant, attention has been called to any marked discrepancy between dates of writing and production or publication. When titles of works of reference are not followed by a place name, they are English publications.

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The resurgence of symbolism in modern literature is no accidental phenomenon, nor is it prompted exclusively by the attempt to formulate new techniques. As we know, the symbolising instinct is as old as mankind: symbolism is 'no mere idle fancy or corrupt degeneration: it is inherent in the very texture of human life'.¹⁾ The human mind functions symbolically, Whitehead tells us, 'when some components of its experience elicit consciousness, beliefs, emotions and usages, respecting other components of its experience.'²⁾ And it appears that man has, from time immemorial, felt the need to relate the components of his personal experience, as part of the attempt to understand something of the organisation of the universe itself.

A symbol is 'a sign by which one knows or infers a thing', 'a material object representing or taken to represent something immaterial or abstract'.³⁾ In his study of religious symbols⁴⁾, Bevan distinguishes two main kinds, those behind which we can see, and those behind which we cannot see. The first kind are, essentially, an aid to understanding of the idea represented, it being possible, however, to present the idea in other ways, perhaps in the form of

1) & 2) A.N. Whitehead: Symbolism (1927) pp.73 and 9

3) New English Dictionary

4) E. Bevan: Symbolism and Belief (1938)

abstract statement. The symbol here is a kind of shorthand, or a device by which the idea is brought home in more familiar or dramatic terms. We might instance the symbols of the ship, representing the Church, the cornucopia, representing fertility, the crown, representing Kingshipⁱ⁾.

In Bevan's second category, the idea behind the symbol is so far beyond human understanding that we cannot do without the symbol: no statement of the idea will be better or truer than the symbolical statement. Symbols of this kind are often the legacy of a primitive form of religious expression in anthropomorphic terms, retained in more advanced epochs as symbolical imagery. Modern theology which has discarded anthropomorphism will yet accept, as figures, symbols such as 'the Hand and Eyes of God', or 'the Wrath of God.'

Both kinds of symbols, we might call them the natural and the supernatural, are to be found in dramatic literature, but it is evident that the first kind will be easier to use, and that very special problems will confront the playwright attempting to use the second kind, particularly in the twentieth century.

Let us consider for a moment why this should be so. The Greek and Elizabethan playwrights were able to use supernatural symbols freely: they were relying on the response of an audience still

i) Such symbols frequently arise by a process of metonymy: as with the crown symbol, the whole is represented by one of its parts.

acutely aware of supernatural forces: they could draw on a stock of symbols in general acceptance: they were able to employ, quite naturally, poetic forms in which common life and supernatural life could, without violence, be brought together. None of these conditions applies to-day. It is some considerable time since the verse drama has been considered 'natural': the twentieth century audience is chary of the supernatural, and there is no universally accepted system of symbols still possessing that vitality which makes the playwright's employment of them easy and, indeed, inevitable.

Yet this very lack of a common system has made modern writers acutely aware of the need for such a framework. Civilised man does not believe, as primitive man once did, that symbols can give actual power over the natural forces of life: that, for example, the crowning of a Corn King will ensure fertility for the crops. The power he finds in symbols is a more abstract kind: the power to organise experience, to penetrate into the arcana of knowledge, to express truths, only faintly apprehended by the conscious mind, which may be beyond the reach of intellectual formulation.

The greater the number of people who accept a convention of supernatural symbols, the greater potency, one might even say, 'magic' the symbols seem to hold. When the system disintegrates, as the great Catholic system of the Middle Ages disintegrated in this country, the symbols may still retain something of their ancient magic in the hands of the poets, still being charged with countless supernatural

and emotional associations. But they are, inevitably, more personal to the man who uses them than at the time when they held their place in an universally accepted convention. And the danger is that his use of them will become increasingly esoteric, particularly as the age becomes more scientifically minded and the distance between the poet and his audience stretches till it comes to seem an impassable chasm. This is the kind of process which, as we know, has been at work in this country since the seventeenth century. Many modern writers have found themselves in the position of W.B. Yeats, recognising in themselves a religious instinct which they were unable to release into traditional channels, being forced, instead, to seek out a new system of symbols, or a new mythology.

It is no easy matter to construct a symbolic system which can satisfy, on various levels, both poet and audience. But the attempt to do so we shall find to be a characteristic of modern drama. Serious literature must, after all, be concerned to rise above the particular to the universal: symbols are one means of effecting this process, and, indeed, as we have suggested, certain aspects of human experience can only be suggested by supernatural symbols. The thinking writer needs to trace some kind of coherent pattern in experience, particularly in so disorderly and discordant an age as the present. The break down of religious belief, and the separation of poetry from common life, have thrown him back heavily on his own resources, so that he must face the risks inherent in any attempt to create a new convention. We come to the heart of the matter

when we compare, say, the symbolism of the Greek playwrights, which was largely unselfconscious, with the symbolism of the moderns which tends to be extremely self conscious. The playwrights and poets were very much aware of their dilemma and are frequently prepared to offer critical comments upon it.

Having glanced at the nature of the symbolising process in general, we must now ask what precisely is the nature and function of symbolism in drama. When comparing the function of the symbol with that of the image, C. Day Lewis¹⁾ points out that the image, as used in poetry, may evoke an infinite number of associations, while the symbol is denotative, representing one thing only. Furthermore, he suggests that when two things are being compared by means of imagery there must always be some similarity of quality to point the comparison; whereas a symbol may be entirely arbitrary. Arthur Symons has a similar definition in mind when he says of symbolism that it is 'a form of expression, at the best but approximate, essentially but arbitrary, until it has obtained the force of a convention'²⁾

Now while it may be true that, outside drama, the origin of a symbol may be entirely unlike that of the image - we might instance the fish symbol, with its esoteric origin in the initial letters of Christ's title - yet it will be found that in drama symbolism can be used successfully only when the symbols have, like images, some

1) The Poetic Image (1947) pp.116 ff.
2) The Symbolist Movement in Literature (1899) pp.3-4

quality in common with the theme or idea represented. The possible exception to this rule would be a symbolic drama based on an universally accepted convention, such as the medieval miracle and morality plays, in which certain colours had a recognised symbolic significance. But as we have seen, the modern playwright can only in rare instancesⁱ⁾ rely on universal recognition of his symbols, and, in any case, the most effective kind of dramatic symbol is that which arises naturally and with apparent spontaneity out of action and character rather than out of an abstract idea.

Symbolism will occur in a play if any of its parts, action, character, speech or setting demands to be interpreted on more than one level, so that the play will lose in richness or in meaning if the symbolic implications are lost. Just as action is the principal part of a play, so is symbolism likely to be strongest and most convincing when it is contained in incident, particularly if the symbolic incident seems to be an integral part of the whole action, or, best of all, the climax or turning point of the action. The incidents connected with the wild duck, in Ibsen's play, are of this kind: they work up to a climax, the shooting of Hedwig, which is at once the climax of the realistic action and of all the poetic, philosophic implications pointed by the symbolism.

i) For example, religious drama, addressed to a special audience, such as Charles Williams' modern miracle plays.

Symbolic settings are bound to be less powerful in effect than symbolic action, and unless they are skilfully used they may result in an effect of artificial contrivance which is destructive of the humanity of good drama. It will be found that pronounced symbolism in setting most frequently occurs in the work of writers with a strong didactic tendency: it is also a feature of the age, involving as it does so much mechanical assistance from scene designer, electrician, machinist and so on.

We now come to the vexed question of symbolic character and speech, which inevitably involves the problem of allegory. It will be well at this stage to make clear the sense in which the term is used throughout these studies. What I understand by dramatic allegory is that form in which the rich humanity characteristic of all great drama from the Greeks to Ibsen, has been sacrificed to theory and abstraction. In allegory we have not only symbolic actions, and, generally, settings, but also symbolic characters who are inevitably fixed within thematic patterns, seeming to move on puppet strings rather than with the apparent independence of the truly dramatic character. The humanity of a play's characters need not be weakened by their participation in symbolic actions: indeed, as The Wild Duck shows, such actions may be the means of displaying the characters' complexity. Even when the entire action of a play is symbolic, as in Greek tragedy, or in a modern equivalent, The Family Reunion, the play does not necessarily acquire the stiffness of allegory, as long as the characters are allowed subtlety and do

not seem to have been constructed simply as symbols. But when symbolic characters play in a symbolic action, for example, in such plays of the German expressionists as Masse - Mensch or Gas, then we have allegory, and, as I maintain, a lesser form of drama.

Dramatic speech is so closely related to character that it is impossible to draw hard and fast rules about the amount of symbolic utterances which may be contained in a play without resulting in allegory. The essential thing is the humanity of the character. If the author can make us believe in that, then he can often allow his people to talk in metaphor and symbol without affecting our 'suspension of disbelief'. Shaw succeeds in doing this, in his best work, to a quite remarkable degree.

The humanity of a character does not, of course, depend on its closeness to the daily life we know: Clytemnestra, Hamlet or Millamant are as dramatically real as Candida, Nora or Solness. We are aware of the springs of human passion in them all: they have acquired a seemingly spontaneous dramatic life, independent of theory.ⁱ⁾ In allegory, we are made too much aware of the author's abstract ideas. The most effective symbolism, like the most effective characterisation, is that which carries its explanation with it, and does not require constant pointing and underlining. That is not to say that the full meaning of, say, the sea, in Yeats' On Baile's Strand, should reveal itself to us immediately. We may be subconsciously aware of its symbolic significance, and emotionally affected

i) The presence of isolated symbolic characters in a play does not invalidate the humanity of the play as a whole provided we can recognise the living quality of the central character, e.g. Peer Gynt.

by it, long before we realise intellectually the process that has been at work. Indeed, I suggest that the less we are aware of intellectual effort to understand symbols during the action of a play, the more successful is the playwright's technique. The most complex symbols, such as the Eumenides in The Family Reunion, will appeal both to the emotion and the intellect, but the emotional appeal should be, at least during performance, the stronger, if we are to accept the symbolism naturally.

The art of using dramatic symbolism, then, consists in the judicious balance of symbolic action and human character and the placing of symbolic incidents or speeches so that they seem an integral part of the action and can be understood, by relation to the dramatic context, with which they must have some quality in common. When symbolism is understood in this sense it is clear that Day Lewis' criticism of the symbol as being denotative, need not necessarily apply. The dramatic symbol is really an extension of the image into action, character and setting. It may have all the qualities of an image, with the difference that it is no longer confined to language. We shall see from the following studies how it is often possible to trace the development of a metaphor into symbol during the action of a single play: this is a very common process in the plays of Shaw and Ibsen.

Of the dangers attending on the use of dramatic symbolism, perhaps the greatest is the lure of allegory. Even the masters of the art, like Ibsen, do not always avoid the temptation to allegorise.

Closely connected with this tendency is the bad habit of explaining symbols in dialogue: this generally results from the playwright's failure to establish them soundly in action: Galsworthy's drama may be cited as an example. There is, too, the kind of symbolism which remains poetic, rather than dramatic, again because it is insufficiently rooted in action, and, finally, the esoteric kind, which the playwright has not bothered, or has been unable, to make clear from the dramatic context. Both Yeats and Strindberg, in their different ways, are sometimes guilty of this offence.

There are at least three distinct types of symbolism to be observed in modern drama. With the first kind, the playwright is able to conform most easily with the principles formulated above. It involves acceptance of the realistic convention, which is the standard dramatic form of the day. No symbolism is employed which does not arise naturally out of the realistic context: that is to say, supernatural symbols are not introduced unless so ambiguously that they accord with the demands of the convention.ⁱ⁾ The playwright using such symbolism is not, of course, debarred from creating poetic, or, even, supernatural effects. Rather, if he has the necessary genius, he can raise the apparently ordinary, humdrum or sordid to poetic and universal heights by the judicious placing of symbols which can function on both levels. The great exemplar of

i) A possible example here would be the 'white horses' in Rosmersholm.

this method is Ibsen.

Secondly, we have the playwrights who start from symbols which are primarily poetic or supernatural and attempt to create an action on a level with them. As we originally observed, this is one of the most difficult kinds to handle successfully nowadays, in face of the lack of any common stock of supernatural symbols, or of a general responsiveness on the part of audiences to poetic conventions. Maeterlinck's symbolic drama will be considered, partly because of the influence he exerted in his time, partly to show the dangers inherent in the method. In a later chapter we shall see how W.B. Yeats, at first unhappily influenced by the Maeterlinckian manner, later broke away to a remarkably successful form in which poetic symbolism was given dramatic strength. T.S. Eliot's drama also falls into this category though, as we shall see, he gradually modifies the poetic convention until he approaches the symbolism of the first category in The Cocktail Party.

Thirdly, there is the kind of symbolism with which the playwright allows himself a completely free hand, confining his material neither within a realistic framework, nor a disciplined poetic structure. Such a drama is Strindberg's: the structure is so loose that the audience is given little help in following the symbols by way of relating them to a closely worked out action. This kind of symbolism is most often used to dramatise psychological problems, the state of the unconscious mind and so on. In its freakish

structure, its frequent surrealist effects, its concentration on dream and distortion, this drama has a very modern air about it, and its exponents, such as Strindberg and Eugene O'Neill, have indeed claimed it as the form most appropriate to the twentieth century. Yet it will be seen that the combination of symbols, often of a fantastic, dream-like kind, and fragmentary form is such that it often forces the playwright into didactic exposition, or even right into allegory, which is, after all, one of the oldest forms of all.

In the next section these three main kinds of symbolism will be illustrated from the drama of Ibsen, Maeterlinck and Strindberg.

Ibsen's Symbolism

An examination of Ibsen's symbolism is a necessary preliminary to any survey of later developments in modern drama. Not only does a great deal of modern symbolism derive from his examples but even in that which professedly reacts from, or contrasts with it, a connection can be traced which assists in a better understanding of the symbolising process.

Symbols may perform a variety of functions in drama, although they generally proceed from a basic, poetic necessity for some kind of imagery through which the profounder themes of a play may be expressed. But whatever their purpose, the dramatist's first concern should be to make them dramatically functional. They will be more or less effective according to the skill with which they are placed in and related to the action, given just the right degree of emphasis and no more. Ibsen was very much aware of the difficulty of this problem, particularly in relation to the realistic prose drama. In fact, although poets like Synge and Keats might despise the rigid prose conventions with which Ibsen complied for so long, the discipline which the prose formula exacted was of the greatest value in the evolution of an essentially dramatic form of symbolism.

This gradual evolution of his art as a symbolist will now be traced through the four main groups into which the plays naturally fall:- 1) Verse histories and romances 2) Poetic allegories 3) Prose social plays 4) Symbolic plays of inner conflict.

In the early verse plays, while his technique was still uncertain, he relied mainly on very explicit imagery, reinforced in the action by visions, supernatural omens and dreams, which were appropriate enough to the romantic atmosphere of these plays.

His first play, Catiline, (1850) is a typical example. Only the most obvious kind of symbolism is used, as when the sacred Vestal flame goes out at the very moment when Furia takes an oath of vengeance against Catiline, or when ominous thunder echoes Catiline's declaration for conspiracy. The 'death' symbolism of the late plays makes a first appearance here, but the genesis of the symbol is in this period more crudely and melodramatically explained. Furia's experience in the bricked up tomb affects her sanity, and she comes to look on herself as one who has really died. She regards her escape as a brief 'resurrection', granted her so that she may destroy Catiline and take him with her back to the tomb. The issue of the play, the conflict between the powers of love and hate, is summed up in the symbolic tableau at the close, when the sun rises over the dying Catiline and Aurelia, while the discomfited Furia shrinks back into the shadows. The symbolism is all rather ponderous, and its significance is over stated in an excess of figurative language.

It has been suggested by various critics that Ibsen's real talent was going into lyric verse, rather than drama at this period. Certainly the many lyrics in which he expressed his personal feeling about life and art are constructed round symbols which were to recur in his later plays with supreme effectiveness. The most significant

in the light of his later work, is the long poem On the Heights (1859). It is a dramatic representation of the sacrifices demanded by art. The aspiring poet, on the eve of his wedding, is called away from his home by a mysterious character called The Strange Hunter and taken up into the mountains where the air is more congenial to visionary dreaming. From his hill-top he looks down on the valley below and sees first the destruction of his mother's home by fire and then the wedding procession of his former betrothed. The man is grief-stricken, but the artist shades his eyes with his hand to get a better perspective of the scene. It was the validity of this attitude toward life and art that the later disillusioned artist was to examine in his plays.

In this youthful period Ibsen came under the fascination of Norse legend and folk lore, which was to exercise a permanent influence on his work. This native literature was being brought to public notice at the time by collections such as Landstad's Norske Folkerige (1852-3) and Asbjørnsen's fairy tales, which had appeared in periodical form as early as 1837 and were published in a complete edition, Norsk Folkewenty in 1852. In 1862 Ibsen received an University grant for the purpose of collecting Norwegian folk songs and tales. Through his general reading and research he accumulated a stock of legends which were to provide not only immediate material for the romantic plays, but a symbolic pattern which he later related to his own life¹)

i) The attempt to relate myth and legend to personal or contemporary experience by means of symbols will be found to persist throughout twentieth century drama.

In the first of the Viking plays, The Warrior's Barrow (1850), Ibsen's early reliance on metaphor and simile is very marked. The heroine, Blanka, describes herself as a 'captured falcon', 'ringed' by her love for her old father so that she cannot fly by the 'raven's path' to the land of her dreams, heroic Thule. She covers the warrior's barrow, symbol of the harsh Viking philosophy, with the flowers of art, and tells Gandalf that she will take her blossoms with her to hide the bleakness of the mountains in the rugged North, where the Vikings live. Even in a conventional play of intrigue, such as Lady Inger of Ostraat (1855) the action is slowed down by a good deal of figurative language. The very servants talk in similes:- 'Norway is like a rusty helmet', the nationalist cause is 'like refurbishing an empty nutshell'.

In the lyrical romance, The Feast at Solhaug (1856), legend and fairy tale are superimposed on the action throughout the play. The restless, discontented Margit, visualises herself as the captive maiden of the folk tale, imprisoned in a 'gilded dungeon' by the Hill King. She casts Gudmund Alfson for the role of the fairy tale rescuer and confesses her love for him in this riddling form. All the misunderstandings of the play, in fact, arise from the riddling way in which the characters express themselves. Gudmund identifies himself with a different hero, the harp player who rescues a young girl from the 'neekan's watery lair' and it is Signe, Margit's younger sister whom he pictures as the maiden. On realising the truth Margit threatens him in public, but again through a parable, the story of the sinister 'huldre' who will never let her victim go. Her complacent husband, Bengt, misses the double entendre, but

Gudmund who is an adept in the game, counters with yet another fairy tale. The Feast at Solhaug is a good example of that fondness for talking in parables which became an ingrained habit with Ibsen. In a lyrical play of this kind the method was appropriate, but it was not always so in, for example, the social plays, where the action could quite well be left to speak for itself.

The same kind of technique occurs in another lyrical romance, Olaf Liljekrans (1857). The heroine, Alfild, lives in a world of fairy tales which is the only kind she has ever known. When she first appears we are in fact uncertain whether she is herself a fairy: she is 'fantastically dressed', with garlands on her hair and neck. She seems to belong to the same world in which Olaf experiences magic visions and is told prophecies which are in fact proved true by the course of events. But it is only in the mountains that dreams can survive.¹⁾ When Alfild follows Olaf to the valley she finds a tragic discrepancy between illusion and reality. Other values than romantic ones are in force: Lady Kirsten's law prevails, with its emphasis on materialism and self-interest. This symbolic contrast between mountain and valley remains, as we shall see, a permanent motif in Ibsen's drama.

Alfild's mind works in images. She is quick to draw comparisons, to apply the terms of one world to the situations of another. One of her major disillusionments in the valley is the sight of a funeral, which, as Olaf bitterly tells her, means the 'imprisonment of the body in an earthy tomb'. This image returns to Alfild's mind

1) In contrast the other pair of lovers, Ingeborg and her poet, find the mountain air too strong for their romantic illusions. This contrasted reaction is repeated in When We Dead Awaken, where the 'mountain' mist encourages Irene and Lubek in their dreams, but drives Ulfheim and Maia down to the safety of the valley.

after Olaf has deserted her. She too has experienced the imprisonment of her free spirit: she is dead to the 'glory of the world' in which she had once exulted. When Olaf pursues her to the mountains she tells him that he is wasting his persuasions on a 'corpse': she sets out to climb to the 'ice and snow' of the summit, which is the fitting habitat for the dead. Here again, as in Catiline, the origin of the 'death' symbolism lies in a definite situation, from which a deliberate comparison has been drawn. The image of the 'burnt hall' is made equally explicit. In her jealousy of Ingeborg, Alfild had set fire to Lady Kirsten's hall, which had burned to the ground. When she is confronted by the vengeful Lady Kirsten she defends herself by declaring that she too has been 'burnt down' by Lady Kirsten's cruelty. The whole world, she says, was to her like the festive hall, but just as fire has burned the hall, so has her soul been destroyed by selfish ambition, so that it is withered and dead. The symbols of the 'dead' woman and the 'burnt house' acquired even more validity for the later Ibsen: here, of course, they are only linked to the action by simile instead of being an inextricable part of it, as in a late allegory, such as The Master Builder (~~1850~~).

In The Vikings at Helgeland ⁽¹⁸⁵⁸⁾ metaphors are reinforced by supernatural visions. The 'wolf-hearted' Hjordis actually sees a wolf following her, as a familiar, and her Valkyrie qualities, brought out in simile, are summed up in the climax when her son, Egils, sees her after her death charging through the air on a black horse, a Valkyrie indeed. Similarly in the historical play, The

Pretenders, Bishop Nicholas reappears after his death in the shape of a monk, bearing messages to Skule from Lucifer, the 'oldest Pretender in the world'. He has become literally a 'devil', the term frequently applied to him metaphorically in his lifetime.

A certain unity is given to the rather sprawling action of this play by sustained religious symbols. Haakon thinks of Norway as 'a church still unconsecrated'. He alone can bring consecration with his 'kingly thought' of a united kingdom. Bishop Nicholas acts for Lucifer in his attempt to prevent the consecration and Skule is the reluctant 'pagan' in this crusading conflict. As in Catiline, the play ends with a symbolic tableau, when Haakon steps over the corpse of Skule to reach his throne.

This use of vision is almost Strindbergian, though Ibsen is of course more sparing with his ghosts and demons since he was concerned, as Strindberg was not, with maintaining an appearance of reality in the foreground.

As we have seen, Ibsen made full use of the license which is permitted the romantic playwright, to introduce highly figurative language, supernatural omens and visions, myth, dream and symbolic tableaux, in his first plays. It is significant that when, in 1862, he attempted a different kind of drama in Love's Comedy, a satire on contemporary life, he compensated for the loss of romantic freedom by falling back on excessively figurative language, overcharging the dialogue with extravagant metaphors and similes. This is true not only of the young poet, Falk, of whom it might be expected, but also of the prosaic middle aged characters whom Falk

despises for their humdrum lives, their lack of imagination. All of them elaborate their ideas in flights of fancy on a level with the speech in which Falk tells Svanhild that she is 'a precious new minted silver coin among a handful of dirty coppers', a bird who will be forced into a golden cage, a breeze on which the poet must soar to try his wings. Svanhild replies in kind. Falk is not a bird, she says ironically, but a 'paper poet kite', whose wings are bundles of epigrams beating the air in vain. But despite her irony she falls in love with him, only to renounce him at the end of the play, so that their ideal may be preserved from the corruption of everyday life. Falk leaves her, to 'mount his soaring Pegasus', while Svanhild sighs 'My summer's day is over and the leaves are beginning to fall'. It is all 'taffeta phrases silken terms precise - three piled hyperboles.'

After this apprehensive glimpse into the humdrum modern world Ibsen returned to more tractable material. He brought his study of history to an end with The Pretenders in 1863 and then began the series of poetic allegories, the seeds of which we have already seen in the fables and visions of the early plays.

The second main group of plays, the poetic allegories, begins with Brand in 1866. This Kirkegaardian tragedy, as it has been called, is a study of the human will, of idealism in ruthless action. Brand himself is a superhuman figure, almost an abstractionⁱ⁾, and because the ends for which he toils are remote and

i) This is true of the characterisation as it appears in final dramatic form, even through a great deal of Ibsen's personal experience had gone into the creation of Brand. He wrote in a letter that 'Brand began to grow within me like an embryo... * "Brand is myself in my best moments..." (Correspondence of Henrik Ibsen, Ed. Mary Morison, 1905, p.199.)

abstract, it is inevitable that symbolism should be the means of expression.

A massive symbolism of landscape dominates both action and characterisation in this play. As in the poem On the Heights, the mountains represent spiritual and creative aspirations, the valley the life of human affections and domestic ties which the artist, or, in this case, the man with a spiritual mission, must offer up as a sacrifice to the cause he serves. The choice between life and art was evidently Ibsen's own problem at the time: in lyrics like On the Heights, in the previous play, Love's Comedy, and now again in Brand, he identifies himself with the idealist who must preserve his ideal even at the cost of human suffering.

Such resolution requires immense strength, and it is just this impression of physical and spiritual strength that we get from our first views of Brand, in the opening scene toiling through the mountain snowfields, undeterred by the dangers of fog and glacier, or, later, taking a flimsy boat out into a storm where no other craft will venture. Such actions testify symbolically to a strength which is later revealed in his relations with his family: he will sacrifice his dying mother's peace of mind, his child's life and even his wife's to the creed of 'All or Nothing'. There are no half measures for Brand himself and he has no leniency for compromise in others. To anticipate a phrase from a later play, Rosmersholm, Brand's view of life ennobles but kills happiness. In the symbolic setting this theme is emphasised by the storm he seems to bring with him wherever he goes. When he first meets Agnes and Einar, playing

like butterflies on the edge of a precipice, the clouds lift to reveal the sunshine characteristic of their happy, natural existence. But once Brand has preached to them, the lovers wake to consciousness of their precarious position. The storm clouds gather, and the mountain which was once their playground has become a 'black and beetling brow'. As Brand descends to the valley his spirit seems to contract within him: the world seems dead and windless, a 'stifling pit'. It is rather like a descent into the Slough of Despond, and indeed the entire action might be described as a Norwegian Pilgrim's Progress, with Brand, a fanatical Christian, setting out to combat the sloth and complacency of Vanity Fair, epitomised in the materialistic character of the Mayor. The burden which Bunyan's Christian carries on his back is equally prominent in this allegory, but in a metaphorical way only. It is the burden of his mother's **g**uilt which Brand voluntarily takes upon himself. Ironically, however, as the Doctor points out, Brand is himself a sinner against love, the burden he carries is greater than he knows, for it represents his own **g**uilt also.

Brand and Agnes live their married life in the 'grey mountain prison' of the valley, hemmed in by the precipitous cliffs, deprived of sunshine. This is the climate of the life devoted to 'Duty', far different both from the careless sunshine of Agnes' youth and the bracing mountain winds which symbolised Brand's highest aspirations. Their child dies for lack of sunshine, but Brand himself is dying of 'suffocation'. The various stages in his attempts to regain the 'heights' are represented by the 'church'

symbol which is of central significance in the play. It is also, of course, a natural symbol in view of Brand's vocation, though as Ibsen himself said, Brand's profession is unimportant: he could quite well have been a doctor or an artist: only his idealism is essential. In fact, Brand, like Solness, is a 'builder': he sets out to destroy the old Dale Church, which represents all that he detests in the materialistic valley life, replacing it with a loftier, more spacious building where the soul will be able to expand. But when the day of consecration arrives Brand has no longer any use for the church 'built by man's hands'. He realises that his parishioners will worship the work itself, not the spirit behind it, the man rather than the ideal he stands for. He exhorts the astonished people to break from all human ties as he has done, and to follow him up the mountain-side where, only, the soul can breathe. The rarefied atmosphere of the mountain is, obviously, congenial only to the rare spirit. It is Brand's spiritual home, but the people, when they discover that they are being offered only the prospect of eternal self-sacrifice, turn on their hero, stone and desert him. Brand trudges on alone to the summit, where he meets his greatest temptation, the ghostly appeal of Agnes, to abjure his life's work, so that he may cross the abyss which looms between him and the spirits of his loved ones.

This temptation also he rejects, but, like Becket in T.S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral, he is now brought face to face with a challenge he had not made provision for. His climb toward

the summit has brought him to the Troll church of 'ice and snow' where the Troll girl, Gerd, pays worship. This is the first appearance of the Troll symbolism which was to be a recurring feature of later plays. It is in the Gerd scenes that the action becomes frankly allegorical. She is given a place in the realistic action as a gypsy brat, illegitimate offspring of the unfortunate suitor rejected by Brand's mother in obedience to her parent's ambitions. She is therefore a result of sin against love, and an oblique reminder to Brand of his own debt. But though her origins are placed in the realistic action, her function in the play is on a strictly allegorical level. She is a creature of the mountains, a 'lawless heart', acknowledging only the laws of the Troll world, the 'church of ice and snow'. Brand recognises when he first meets her that she is a part of the 'Triple headed foe' he is out to destroy - the lawless hearts, light hearts and wont-hearts. But he does not see how close to the Troll philosophy he himself may be leaning, in his deliberate attempt to suppress the human qualities of love and tenderness, the qualities which distinguish man from the troll. Gerd appears with a challenge from the world of ice and snow at certain crises in Brand's life. Her taunts turn the scales when he is hesitating over the sacrifice of his son's life and it is she who greets him when he finally takes the path to the summit on which her feet have been from the beginning. She hails him as the crucified Christ and this blasphemy brings home to Brand what Gerd has seen from the first, that in his absolute

reliance upon the power of will he has been aspiring to be something more than human. Gerd's solitary lawlessness is a parody of Brand's pride, just as the church of ice and snow has always been a sinister commentary on the increasingly abstract nature of the churches which Brand refused to have 'rooted in humanity'.

At this last and most potent challenge to the validity of his achievement Brand breaks down. He weeps, and the ice fetters break, as in Hans Anderson's fairy story of the Snow Queen, Gerda's tears melt the ice that has frozen her brother's heart. Throughout the play Gerd has been pursuing a mysterious 'falcon', which Brand identifies with his mortal enemy, the 'spirit of compromise:' at this final moment of enlightenment Gerd glimpses her prey, the 'ugly sprite' and at last scores a hit. The bird of prey, the 'helper and server' of the ice church is destroyed and the collapse of the Troll kingdom is symbolised in the avalanche which sweeps Brand and Gerd to their death, while a voice proclaims 'He is the God of Love.' The breaking of the ice fetters has brought a fuller understanding, but in releasing the pent up cataclysm inevitably destroys those who have been in their different ways, the pillars of the ice church.

Brand has all the obvious qualities of allegory. The settings are symbolic, the action is strictly controlled by the theme, the characters represent certain fixed qualities and remain true to type throughout. The choice of setting is excellent, for the bleak austerity of the mountains perfectly corresponds with the

hardness of Brand's idealism, and the symbol of the ice church, without any annotation from the dramatist, evokes a clear picture of the desolate state which awaits the man who cuts himself off from humanity.

In the next play, Peer Gynt (1867), the Troll symbolism is again dominant, but applied to a very different theme. Peer is the antithesis of Brand. He is quite incapable of accepting the "All or Nothing" creed, incapable of committing any irrevocable action. He is also a more realistic and convincing character than Brand, partly because his roots are in folk loreⁱ⁾ rather than in abstract ideas, partly because he is shown in a variety of moods instead of in the somewhat monotonously exalted mood of Brand. The vagueness of Brand's mission, though possibly inevitable because it simply symbolises Ibsen's own problem, seems to me a weakness in the former play. But there is nothing vague about Peer's trials and errors. He is an egotistical dreamer, out to become an 'Emperor', the hero of every situation in which he finds himself, whether in dream or reality.

Because Peer seeks only to express himself, without regard for the happiness of others, he is naturally attracted to the world

i) Peer is a traditional hero of folk lore, a 'mighty hunter' of Gudbrandsdal who merges with a typical Norwegian character, the daydreamer, a 'bouncer and boaster' always imagining himself as the hero of all the tales he has heard.

of the Trolls, whose motto is 'Troll, to thyself be - enough'.

The Troll symbol occurs rather more naturally in this play than in Brand, because there is no necessity to give it roots in the realistic action. It belongs, simply, to the folk lore which people like Peer and ~~Aase~~ have created, and in which they still partially believe. The mountains are peopled with mysterious and sinister creatures, in the imagination of the simple country folk, and to Peer they are more real than most because he lives so deliberately in the world of fancy. We accept the trolls, the Boyg and the rest because we see them with Peer's eyes: we are looking into his mind, a mind more dominated by fancy than his neighbours', but still a characteristic product of his time and environment. There is not therefore the clash between ordinary everyday life and the inner life of thought which tends to occur in the later plays.

Just as an Irish peasant at a similar point in time might have expected to blunder on the hoarded gold of a leprechaun, so does Peer come upon the troll kingdom, entered traditionally, through a cleft in the mountain fastness. Traditionally again, the trolls inhabit a world run on similar lines to the human world, but admitting narrower laws, the laws of the animal self only. When the animal, sensual side of Peer's nature is dominant, he sees the Green Woman as a beautiful girl, the Troll King's palace as a magnificent court. But when he is commanded to become a complete troll, by losing his sight which represents his higher human qualities, he takes fright. There is a great deal of the troll in Peer, and the

trolls try hard to keep him with them forever, but once he has seen the deformed ugliness which is the truth behind the pleasing illusion, he makes desperate efforts to escape, and is rescued by the sound of the church bells, symbol of all that separates trolldom from humanity.

Already it is clear that the trolls represent the worst potentialities of man, a parody of human behaviour. And this has been done, not by explicit comment, as in the earlier plays, but by bringing out clearly in Peer's behaviour with Ingrid and the *søster* girls exactly that aspect of his nature which finds natural affinity in trolldom. The appearance of the trolls, their deformed animal shapes, also, of course, shows us clearly what kind of creatures they are.

The trolls are one kind of temptation, the Boyg another. The Boyg is an equally characteristic bogie of mountain folk lore: a cold, slippery presence, like a mountain mist, which engulfs its victim but cannot be seen or grasped in attack. It is, again, a natural bogie for Peer to envisage, and, as in the troll symbol, the particular symbolic quality of the Boyg is brought out by comparison with Peer's character. We have already seen in the affair with Ingrid how Peer was reluctant to make any irrevocable proposal of marriage, and yet reluctant to give Ingrid up to any other bridegroom: he solved the problem by evading any permanent responsibility and carrying Ingrid off to be his mistress. He took the roundabout

way, and this is exactly what the Boyg counsels in their terrifying encounter - 'Go round about, Peer!' But for once Peer cannot take his favourite roundabout way: he is up against something stronger than himself, yet strong in his own manner. Once again he is rescued only by the sound of the church bells.

Peer makes one last effort to shake off his bogies, to marry the gentle Solveig, whom he always associates with the symbol of Christianity she carries, her prayer book. But a man is punished for his evil thoughts as well as for his evil actions - this is a favourite theme of Ibsen's - and Peer's experience of trolldom has begotten a goblin child. The child and its mother, the Green Woman, represent the ugliness of sensuality, which Peer cannot drive from his thoughts, even with Solveig. To spare her at least this degradation he leaves her and goes out into the world to make his fortune.

In the second part of the play Peer is set against a background of the outside world. He has become a cosmopolite, rich, successful engaged in dubious business activities in which the bad element cancels out the good. His character is set by this time. He is still the egotistical Peer, searching to be 'himself', still the sensual animal, still the man of half measures, always going 'round about'. The Norwegian symbols of the first part would be out of place in the changed setting, but we see now just how valid these symbols are, for Peer finds that they can be applied quite as well to his European life as to his Norwegian. Chattering apes in the

palm trees, prelude to the amorous interlude with Anita^r, remind him of the trolls: in the inscrutable gaze of the Sphinx he reads the message of the Boyg: the statue of Memnon is the Troll king in different form. The pattern of Peer's life follows closely the pattern of his dreams, until his search for the 'Gyntian self', turning always inwards, leads him logically to the lunatic asylum in Cairo, where he is proclaimed the emperor of people who are 'nothing but themselves'.

When Peer returns to Norway, sobered and disillusioned by his experiences abroad, the inner world reasserts itself. He senses the approach of death in the shape of the Strange Passenger, who is searching for the 'seat of dreaming', and tells Peer that he hopes to find it in his corpse. The symbols take on a sinister, hallucinatory quality. Illumination comes to Peer, just as it is reputed to do in the last moments of a drowning man. He hears the voice of Solveig singing in the forest home where she still awaits her lover and realises, too late, where his true 'empire' lay. The way is then open to remorse and understanding. Common trivial things take on a moral significance. In the onion, which he peels skin by skin, Peer reads the moral that the Gyntian self is a myth: like the onion it has no kernel. The threadballs and dewdrops on his path seem to acquire voices and accuse him of murder: they are the thoughts and feelings which he failed to bring to life: symbols of the stunting process to which he has deliberately subjected his nature.

Peer is moving toward judgement¹). Childhood memories are stirred by the village auction sale, where he recognises the casting ladle with which as a boy he had played at making buttons. Out of this memory his mind creates a nightmare Button Moulder, who embodies the final judgement. Peer has wasted his life, and so he must go back into the common stock and be melted down like a broken button, the worst doom his mind can envisage. All his desperate attempts to prove that he has had a 'positive' self fail. The Troll King repudiates him - he was never even an out and out troll - and the Devil, a sporting figure with a bird catcher's net - has no use for this particular bird. Hell has no place for Peer unless he is willing to be committed to the torment of the flames, that the 'negative' which has been his life may be 'developed' with burning sulphur.

The symbolism here is quite different from that in the first part. It is no longer drawn from the common stock of folk lore but from a highly personal process of associated ideas. It is no longer deliberate dreaming but involuntary dreaming, the nightmare kind in which the process has got out of control. Even here, however, a key to the nightmare is provided. The real casting ladle is introduced before the Button Moulder appears with his heavenly one: the origin of the image precedes the image itself.

i) Ibsen preserves a deliberate ambiguity in these last scenes, so that we cannot say finally whether the action is all in Peer's mind or a visionary scene of judgement, following on his actual death.

We are never plunged so completely into Peer's mind that we lose all contact with the outside world, as happens so constantly in Strindberg's symbolic drama. In fact Peer's salvation comes not from within, but from without; for he may be redeemed by Solveig's faith in him. The Peer who might have been lives in her 'faith, her hope and her love'.

Symbolism is of little account in Ibsen's massive 'world historic' drama, Emperor and Galilean (1873), where he allowed himself a non-dramatic freedom to express his theme. The special quality of a symbol is concentration and Emperor and Galilean is a very unconcentrated play. The main symbols represent the two opposed ways of life, pagan and spiritual, between which the apostate, Julian, hesitates, and their significance is repeatedly made explicit in the long philosophic arguments over which Ibsen spent so much time and labour.

It was in the third main group of plays, the social plays, that the question of a dramatic, functional symbolism, became really urgent. In the setting, action and idiom of the social plays there had to be a close approximation to that of ordinary, everyday life, so that people would appreciate how far from 'ordinary' their everyday life really was. To get the full effect of surprises like Nora's rebellion, Bernick's hypocrisy, it was clear that the background had to be thoroughly familiar and convincing. Extravagant metaphor and symbolic visions were equally inappropriate to this changed setting. If symbols were used - and Ibsen, as a poet,

always felt the need for imagery in some form - then they had to be to a certain extent concealed in the realistic action¹⁾

The first social play, The League of Youth (1869), is, significantly, devoid of any extra-realistic devices, showing how strictly Ibsen had determined to control his new material. Characterisation is revealed only through dialogue, and the dialogue means no more than it says on the surface. The presentation is photographic in its exact representation of external detail.

Pillars of Society (1877), the next social play, is given greater unity by the device of a central symbol upon which the several actions of the play converge. This symbol is the 'coffin ship', the 'Indian Girl' an American vessel in dock for repairs by Consul Bernick's shipbuilding company. Bernick characteristically places the interests of an influential colleague whose ship is also in need of repairs before those of the distant American owners of the 'Indian Girl'. When, as a result, he is faced with the prospect of losing his American business, he decides to take the risk of sending the ship to sea in an unseaworthy condition. Although he is warned by his foreman, Aune, that the ship's foundations are 'rotten', he bluffs his way out of his difficulties by ordering a few surface repairs, a coat or two of paint which will give the exterior a false appearance of seaworthiness.

i) This is the type of symbolism which has been most generally adapted in the drama of this country.

The incident of the 'coffin ship' is an integral part of the action, and can be accepted simply on that basis. But it does in fact function on more than one level. It is, to begin with, a highly representative incident, revealing the full extent of the corruption which ambition has wrought in Bernick's character. His behaviour in the past had been unprincipled, but he had not quite committed himself to a position from which there could be no turning back. The 'Indian Girl' incident shows clearly that he has at last reached this desperate position. The man who had still been capable of feeling remorse for his cowardly behaviour toward Johan, has become the man who is prepared to sacrifice the life of Johan, of Dina and the rest to his own selfish interests. We see too how quickly corruption spreads. Bernick's actions contaminate the honest foreman, Aune, and will involve the workmen under him in responsibility for shipwreck and death. Ironically the catastrophe is brought about by the discovery that Bernick's only son has smuggled aboard the 'Indian Girl': he would have been yet another victim of a process which Bernick has become incapable of controlling, the process of degradation.

Further than this, there is an extended parallel between the 'coffin ship' and the character of the 'pillars of society' in general. They are all alike, Rörörlund, Tönnesen, all of them, in professing a high minded idealism, a shining 'coat of paint' which disguises self interest and callousness, the 'rotten foundation'. In fact the fabric of society rests on these crumbling supports

instead of on 'truth and freedom - the true pillars of society'. All these implications are gathered up and focussed in the central incident of the 'coffin ship' which is, therefore, not only functional and representative, but symbolic of the theme as a whole. It is a good example of the clear workmanlike symbolism to which Ibsen confined himself in the social plays.

A Doll's House (1879) is a more intimate, domestic study than Pillars of Society and Ibsen shows his sensitivity to the changed mood by avoiding any heavy central symbol like the 'coffin ship' which would be inappropriate in such a play. Symbolism is confined to isolated incidents, as when Nora coos over her children, 'my sweet little baby dolls', or when she plays 'Hide and Seek' with them, or when Dr. Rank thanks her for the 'light' she has given him. It is all on the surface of the actionⁱ⁾ rather than an organic part of it, and this is perhaps why Ibsen allows Nora to make the theme so explicit in her showdown with Torvald, accusing him directly of treating her as a 'doll wife', just as her father had treated her as a 'doll child'.

In the next play, Ghosts (1881), the symbolism is at once more functional and more complex. As in Brand the theme is emphasised

i) Because the symbolic touches are so slight they may easily be overlooked in production. James Agate criticised a production in which Dr. Rank's exit lost its significance because the actor failed to bring out the implications of the 'light' incident.

by symbolic backgrounds. The puritanical Alving ~~home~~ is situated in the bleak North: the tragic action is played out against a background of gloom and perpetual rain.. Natural spontaneous happiness cannot flourish here, as Oswald, fresh from the gaiety and sunshine of Paris, soon discovers. When he comes home he is always cold: on his first appearance he wears an overcoat indoors, and when he neglects to wear it outside he catches a chill which hastens the process of his fatal illness. Sunshine comes to represent for him all the freedom he enjoyed in Paris as a man and as an artist. Regina, who also hankers after the warmth and gaiety of a life abroad, is the only creature from whom he can draw the vitality he craves. When his mind gives way he raves, not for the moon, usual symbol of the unattainable, but for the sun, symbol of the way of life the Alving gloom has obliterated. On his dreadful cry the play ends, while, with tragic irony, the sun slowly rises.

The 'sun' symbol is linked to the central symbol of the orphanage by the quality of fire which is common to both, though in one case beneficent, in the other fatal.

The orphanage has been endowed by Mrs. Alving as a memorial to her dead husband. It is part of her effort to whitewash his memory and also, though only she is aware of this, a form of vicarious expiation for his sins. Paster Manders, representative of orthodox opinion, dissuades Mrs. Alving from insuring the orphanage, since, as a 'good work' it would seem to be in the special care of God; insurance would be sacrilege. In fact the sacrilege lies in the

existence of such a building, and Mrs. Alving can no more insure against its destruction than she can insure against the process of cause and effect which ends in Oswald's collapse.

The parallel is maintained throughout. The orphanage catches fire and is burned to the ground. Oswald too is 'burning out'. Everything will burn, he cries, 'There won't remain a single thing in memory of Father. Here am I, too, burning down'.

Once the symbol of concealment has been destroyed, Mrs. Alving gives up her misdirected struggle. But truth comes too late to avert catastrophe. Regina, recognising that her ambitions can never, now, be furthered in the Alving household, goes back to her disreputable foster-father, Engstrand, to preside over his unsavoury 'Sailors' Home'. With her departure Oswald goes to pieces: he 'burns down' completely.

The Sailors' Home is a parody of the Alving Memorial home. Engstrand, with his unctuous imitation of piety, uses Manders as his dupe, playing on the pastor's fear of public opinion and his fatal habit of judging by appearances. Just as Manders had accepted the Alving Memorial at its face value, because he did not wish to suspect what it may have concealed, so he accepts Engstrand's Home, and, in his terror at being accused of responsibility for the fire, agrees to direct the Memorial funds to this dubious object. Mrs. Alving uneasily agrees, though she suspects, as we do, that the 'Home' will in fact be a home for vice, and that Regina is going to her ruin. The first Alving memorial was to have preserved an idealised concept

of the dead man, the second will preserve the memory of all that was worst in him.

This ironic symbol is supremely appropriate, for, as we come to realise in the course of the play, Captain Alving's corruption had grown out of the excessive respectability of his environment, just as the Sailors' Home grows directly out of the Memorial Home. Engstrand's "Home" will mock moral conventions, but it has been made possible by people like Mrs. Alving and Pastor Manders, who set too high a value on convention. Mrs. Alving's character does, of course, develop as she comes slowly to a greater awareness of her own responsibility, and she is not really perturbed when the orphanage burns:- 'It would never have brought good to anyone'. But Manders remains the slave of convention to the end.

Ghosts, like Pillars of Society, is an excellent example of symbols that grow out of characteristic action. There is none of the uneasy relation between symbol and action which results when the symbol has been conceived, as it were, in the abstract, and then fitted into the action later. There is a suspicion of such doctrinaire symbolism in the incident in Pillars of Society when Lona Hessel flings the windows open, announcing that she has come to let in some 'fresh air', a hint of it in Nora's 'baby-dolling' of her children. But the central symbols in Ghosts are rooted firmly, and convincingly, in the action: it is perfectly characteristic of Mrs. Alving to think of perpetuating her husband's 'virtues' in such a memorial, and the only odd thing about Engstrand's Home is that he has not thought

of it before.

In An Enemy of the People (1882) the central symbol is, again, closely related to the mood and background of the play, but it is treated much more obviously as a symbol. The 'enemy of the people', Dr. Stockmann, starts life in the play as a hero; his scheme for developing civic Baths from the waters whose medicinal properties he has discovered is enthusiastically supported by all the business men of the town. But his popularity vanishes when he finds that the water is infected and that, unless major alterations are made, the Baths will be a 'pest house', a 'whited sepulchre'. Like the Orphanage in Ghosts, the function of the symbol is to demonstrate the hypocrisy of the leading citizens. With the exception of Stockmann, not one of them prefers truth to expediency. Burgomaster Stockmann looks on the Baths simply as the source of potential prosperity for the town, and, incidentally, for himself. Like Bernick in Pillars of Society, he is all for patching up the damage and concealing its gravity. The opponents of the Burgomaster's party, led by Hovstadt, editor of a radical newspaper, regard Stockmann's disclosure as a weapon put into their hands to attack the monopoly of the councillors. For them too it is a question of expediency, and when their private interests are threatened they withdraw their support from Stockmann who has become an 'enemy of the people' for his pains.

The wider significance of the Baths symbol is first made

explicit by Hovstadt before his apostasy. The poisoned source he says, is 'the swamp our whole municipal life rots in.' Stockmann agrees, but fails to realise how extensively the rot has set in. When his supporters, one by one, desert him, his eyes are opened to the power of the selfish interests which govern society. At this stage the Baths symbol becomes superfluous, having served its purpose of revealing this corruption. Stockmann discards it. In his public address, ostensibly on the question of the Baths, he abandons what has now become a side issue, attacking, instead, the 'pest house' of society in general. The conflict over the Baths has convinced him that the ultimate source of the 'poison' lies in society's slavish attempt to placate the 'compact majority'. 'Majorities are always wrong' he tells his infuriated audience, and 'He stands strongest who stands alone'.

He ends in splendid isolation, an isolation which he had really occupied at the beginning of the play, although he was not then aware of the abyss which divided him, like Brand, from his fellow citizens. Nothing has changed in the course of the action, except that the Baths symbol has shown up this essential difference between Stockmann and the rest. The symbolism here is more explicit than in any other of the plays: from the beginning the Baths incident is used simply as a testing instrument, and once the ideas which it represents have been thoroughly grasped by Stockmann, the symbol is recognised for what it is and discarded.

We now come to the fourth and last group of plays, beginning

with The Wild Duck in 1884. Ibsen himself realised that he was entering on a new phase with this play. He wrote to Hagel in 1884¹⁾ - 'In some ways this new play occupies a position by itself among my dramatic works: in its method it differs in several respects from my former ones'. The year before he had replied to a request of Lucie Wolf's that he should write a verse prologue for her thirtieth anniversary - 'Verse has been most injurious to dramatic art ... It is improbable that verse will be employed to any extent worth mentioning in the drama of the immediate future ... I myself have for the last seven or eight years hardly written a line. I have exclusively cultivated the very much more difficult art of writing the genuine, plain language spoken in real life.'²⁾

Although it was to the social plays that Ibsen was referring it is not, I think, till The Wild Duck that his attempt to distil poetry from the ordinary becomes of first importance in consideration of his drama. Instead of the simple, denotative symbols of the social plays, which suited the broad, clear themes of that period, we now have much more complex symbols like the wild duck, which function in a way closer to that of the poetic image. That is to say they are more subtle and many-sided, more difficult to pin down because in them is concentrated not only a variety of themes but, very often, the atmosphere, the special 'mood' of the play.

1) Correspondence p. 384.

2) Op. cit. pp.367-8

The wild duck is such a poetic symbol. It has the glamour and strangeness of the unknown: 'no-one knows where it came from, or who its friends were'. This quality appeals to the poet manqué in Hjalmar and Hedwig, even in old Ekdal. To Gina, the practical one, the wild duck is just a bird that people make far too much fuss about.

Because of its special quality the wild duck is Queen of the attic, that dusty lumber room where the clock has stopped and time has no meaning. To Hedwig, brooding on its enchantments, the attic seems like the 'depths of the ocean bed'. To old Ekdal it is the forest where he was a mighty hunter before his disgrace: to Hjalmar it is a world apart from the sharp realities of the real world. Here he can escape from the drudgery of his photographic business and from Gina's sharp tongue. Here, with his admiring father and child, he can play the hero in adventures devoid of danger, taking pot shots at rabbits and pigeons, or worshipping at the shrine of the wild duck.

The wild duck is, significantly, a present from old Werle, part of the atonement he is trying to make for his shabby treatment of the Ekdal's, father and son. He salves his conscience in more practical ways by financing old Ekdal's drinking bouts and, later, by attempting to settle money on Hedwig. But what the Ekdals need more than anything is illusions to live by: those the wild duck partially supplies: drink, for old Ekdal, and Hjalmar's grandiose dreams of an 'invention' complete their fantasy happiness.

Old Werle brings out one of the parallels offered by the wild duck symbol when he tells Gregers that Old Ekdal is the kind of creature who gets one or two shots in him and goes down to the bottom. Gregers fastens on the image. He sees the Ekdals, particularly Hjalmar, as wounded ducks and himself as the dog who will dive into the water and fetch up the bird from the bottom of the ocean bed where it has taken refuge. This is before he visits the Ekdals and discovers the importance to them of the real wild duck, which had been retrieved by Werle's dog, after an inaccurate shot, in just the way he pictures himself behaving with the human prototype of the duck. Old Werle has wounded, but not killed the duck, and Gregers, building up the parallel, is assured that Hjalmar is only 'winged'. He has been forced into captivity, but if once 'light and air' is introduced he will remember the 'wild life' he has forgotten in his prison.

From this stage onwards Gregers sustains the 'wild duck' image in his conversations with the Ekdals. It is perhaps a weakness of the play that he should make the parallel so explicit in his moral fables, when the connection is implicit throughout the action. But it is of course in keeping with Gregers' evangelical character that he should enjoy sermonising in parables, which mystify Gina but immediately suggest to Hedwig that 'he was really saying something different all the time'. Gregers casts himself for the puppet master, who knows the exact relations between all the strings. But his puppets are human beings with a passionate individual life

of their own, and this he fails to take into account. He refuses to admit that the Ekdals prefer their hiding place on the ocean bed. Even Hedwig has been 'stained', as Gregers puts it. When he asks her if she wouldn't like to have real adventures she replies that she prefers to read about them, and engrave pictures like those in the old books in the attic.

8 After alarming Gina and mystifying the family, Gregers puts his cards on the table. He tells Hjalmar outright that there is 'something of the wild duck' in him: he has been trapped in a poisonous marsh, and has dived to the bottom, to die in the dark. The 'poisonous marsh' is, of course, the foundation of deceit on which Hjalmar's marriage has been built. He then absurdly complains of the 'odours of the marsh' which he can smell about him, a slight, which Gina again takes literally. Her reactions are amusing, but they show her good sense, for she distrusts all generalisation and, unlike Gregers, realises that circumstances alter cases. 'Women are all so different' she says when Hjalmar compares Mrs. Sorby's behaviour with hers, to Gina's disadvantage.

When Hjalmar is told the truth about Gina's relations with old Werle he reacts characteristically, with a tremendous show of moral indignation: the real sting, of course, lies in the injury done to his vanity. He accuses Gina in terms borrowed from Greger's vocabulary - the 'mesh of lies' and so on. He insists on old Werle's patronage being repudiated: even the wild duck he would

destroy, did it not belong to Hedwig.

This leads us to another parallel between the wild duck and the characters. The duck is Hedwig's special property, and in her own mind she cherishes a fanciful resemblance between her pet and herself. When Gregers suggests that she should make a sacrifice of the dearest thing in the world to her, she at once thinks of the wild duck. But later, when Hjalmar suspects the worst truth of all, that Hedwig may not be his daughter, and brutally rejects her, the child substitutes herself as the object of sacrifice. She is terrified by the thought that perhaps she doesn't 'belong' to her father at all: she is like the wild duck who has no friends, and whose origin is mysterious. 'I think this will kill me', she says, and then goes into the attic to shoot herself. Her action is instinctive, born of her absolute devotion to her father and of her adolescent emotionalismⁱ⁾

If Hedwig is a fatally wounded wild duck and old Ekdal winged, Hjalmar, we gradually realise, is a creature who would always seek the weeds at the bottom of the ocean. He is, in Gréger's words, not 'wounded by a shot', but trapped in a poisonous marsh, contaminated by an 'insidious disease'. His attitudinizing is dictated by

i) Relling warns her parents that she is at a critical age. Her nature is disturbed and troubled by adolescence like the troubled waters of the ocean bed from which the wild duck has emerged.

his need to be the 'shining light' of whatever circle he moves in. Dr. Relling, the cynic, has made it his business to encourage the 'disease'. He encourages the sottish Molvik to believe himself a demoniac and Hjalmar to believe that his invention is something real and important. When Gregers complains of the poisonous atmosphere engendered by such lies, Relling turns the tables by accusing him of bringing the disease with him. Gina had already pointed out that it was unbecoming in Gregers to talk of 'foulness' when his own room was in such a mess. This is indeed one of the more obviously contrived symbolic incidents. Relling drives the point home by reminding Gregers of his heredity, the hysterical nature which his mother had bequeathed him. This is immediately followed up by the scene between father and son, in which old Werle tells Gregers he has a 'sick conscience'. Relling sums it all up in his diagnosis of Gregers' case: he suffers from 'rectitudinal fever', and, no less than Hjalmar, he lives in a make believe life, worshipping idols who generally turn out to have feet of clay. Hardly a character in the play, in fact, lives anywhere else but in the 'weeds of the ocean bed'. Even Relling has 'something of the wild duck' in him. When he learns that his old love, Mrs. Sorby is going to marry old Werle, he takes an immediate dive into the weeds, going off to drink with the wretched Molvik.

The symbolism of poison and disease grows naturally out of the all-embracing symbol of the wild duck, caught in the marsh. A

separate symbol, standing on its own, is the 'light' symbol. The fact that both Hedwig and old Werle are losing their sight is an integral part of the action: the connection between the two and the suspicions it arouses, is directly responsible for the catastrophe of Hedwig's death. It also suggests yet another way in which old Werle had 'wounded' the 'wild duck' Ekdals by bequeathing to Hedwig this dreadful inheritance. More than this, however, the physical blindness of old Werle emphasises the moral blindness which is a major theme of the play. Hjalmar selfrighteously regards the news about old Werle's approaching blindness as a fit retribution for having 'blinded the eyes of a credulous fellow creature'. But Hjalmar's moral blindness goes deeper than he will admit. Like so many characters in the play he lives in his egotistical world of make believe, blind to the existence of other people in their own right. Even Kelling has wasted the best in himself by setting so low a value on human nature: with him it is a case of the blind leading the blind.

The victimisation of the Ekdals has of course been made possible by this very 'blindness' to what was going on in the real world. It is the two women, Gina and Mrs. Sorby, who face the facts and understand them. When Gregers sees Mrs. Sorby playing, of all things, blind man's buff with Werle's guests, he suspects that she may be playing the same game in earnest with his father. But the ironical truth is that old Werle and Mrs. Sorby have been perfectly open with

Each other. They enter married life 'with their eyes open'.

In view of this symbolism, the choice of photography as a business for Hjalmar acquires tragic irony. Photography needs light, but Hjalmar, the photographer, is shut off from the light in his poky attic. Gregers determines that he will let in the light, which he does with disastrous effect, for too much light will ruin a negative. When Gina is trying to dissuade Gregers from renting the spare room, she says, significantly, that it will not be light and airy enough for him.

The various changes of lighting in the play have their effect on the mood of the characters. When Gregers suggests the sacrifice of the wild duck it is in the evening when Hedwig is most nervous and susceptible to visionary schemes. But the next morning the idea seems absurd to her: the attic is a different place in the bright morning light. It is only when the darkness falls again, so that it is too dark in the 'ocean bed' to see for shooting, that her resolution returns and she finds sufficient light to shoot herself by.

On examination it becomes apparent that almost every incident and speech in The Wild Duck bears a significance which transcends the surface reality of events. Nevertheless the feeling that we are watching real, living people is never stronger in Ibsen's drama than in this play. Although the ending is a tragic catastrophe, the mood of the play is sardonically comic. Hjalmar, with his ridiculous self-dramatisation, old Ekdal, the downright Gina, Hedwig with her sensitive fancies - these all have the authenticity of real

life. Even Gregers, into whose mouth is put the explicit moralising, is, unhappily, a familiar figure, the doctrinaire who tries to govern human behaviour by means of a creed. Understanding of these characters and their actions is not dependent on the symbols: it is merely enhanced and stimulated by the sinister background of the dusty attic, the wild duck, the poisonous marsh disease. The Wild Duck is the finest example of Ibsen's power to distil poetry from the ordinary by means of symbols which are perfectly related to character and background.

The characters in The Wild Duck are extremely individualistic: it is a play of oddities, foibles, eccentricities, which react on one another with fatal result. In Rosmersholm on the other hand, we are back in a world more like that in Brand, a world in which the characters represent certain general attitudes of mind and philosophies. It is not, of course, out and out allegory, as Brand was, but the allegorical implications are kept well in the foreground. This, I think, is what Gordon Craig meant, when he said 'Ibsen's marked detestation of realism is nowhere more apparent than in this play... The words are the words of actuality, but the drift of the words is something beyond this...We are in Rosmersholm, a house of shadows'.ⁱ⁾

The central symbol in the play is the house. Rosmersholm, itself. Rosmersholm represents an ancient tradition of scrupulous

i) G.Craig: A Note on Rosmersholm (Programme to 1907 production)

service: in Rector Kroll's words, it has 'radiated morality and order from time immemorial'. Rosmer is the heir to this tradition from which he can never escape, though when the play begins he is making a determined effort to break with the faiths of his ancestors. Under the influence of Rebecca, he comes to see Rosmersholm as the 'centre of darkness and repression, for 'duty' is the watchword of the Rosmers, and in the name of duty, human happiness has all too often been sacrificed. Rosmer's unhappiness in his marriage with Beata is a case in point. As in Ghosts, this theme is emphasized by a background of gloom. Rosmersholm is a dark, sombre house, in which, as the housekeeper tells us, children never cry, nor, when they grow up, do they ever laugh. Rebecca has noticed that people never laugh much in the district - 'it began at Rosmersholm'.

Rebecca, on the other hand, is, to quote Gordon Craig again, 'the figure of Life'. She is the apostle of emancipation, of a will freed from traditional scruples and fears. She has converted Rosmer to her philosophy by the power of happiness. He admits later that he was never so happy in his life as when Rebecca came to stay at Rosmersholm. Together he and she are to set out on a crusade to spread 'light and gladness', to make all men 'noble men'.

Both Rosmer and Rebecca think that they have broken with the past, But the theme of the play is that, for men like Rosmer, the power of the past is inescapable. The dead 'cling to Rosmersholm'. Ibsen brings out this theme most successfully in his brilliant use of inverted exposition, a technique in which each step forward in the

present action is precipitated by a further revelation from the past. In fact, the tragic conclusion is brought about by the actions of an invisible protagonist, the dead wife, Beata. Various remarks and letters of Beata's come to light in the course of the action and take on a new, sinister significance when once Rosmer has declared his apostasy. The relations between Rosmer and Rebecca, which seemed innocent before, become scandalous, in orthodox opinion, now that 'an unbelieving man is living with an emancipated woman'. Rosmer urges Rebecca to marry him, and then 'Beata will be out of the saga'. He senses the past reasserting itself:- 'I will not go through life with a dead body on my back'.

But when Rebecca arrives at the goal for which she strove so unscrupulously, she finds that it must always be unattainable. She gives her reason in the allegorical form which so much of the conversation takes. She has been 'infected by the Rosmer point of view': in other words, she has acquired a conscience, and remorse for her guilt in the past prevents her marrying Rosmer. The whole secret comes out and Rosmer, stricken by guilt for his own unconscious part in Beata's death, gives up his crusade of 'light and gladness' in despair. For him the loss of innocence means loss of happiness, and it was only his newfound happiness that had made his emancipation possible. Rebecca again sums up the situation - 'The Rosmer view of life ennobles, but it kills happiness'.

By using a technique which makes the movement of the action dependent on revelations from the past, Ibsen has made the theme of

the 'dead hand' perfectly clear. But he chooses to emphasize the theme by introducing a further symbol, the 'white horses' of Rosmersholm. These ghostly horses are seen whenever a death is imminent in the family. They are first mentioned, in accordance with the regular practice of melodrama, where such bogies are common-places, by the old housekeeper, who is well stocked with family lore. Rebecca, whose mind appears to work allegorically, immediately interprets them as 'the bogies of the past - so many kinds of white horses'. Later she defines them as the 'ancestral doubts and scruples' which she had set out to destroy, but which have conquered even her 'proud, free will'. She warns Rosmer that he can only escape from his 'white horses' by plunging into active life. When her secret comes out she attempts to escape herself by leaving Rosmersholm, telling the astonished housekeeper that she has had 'a glimpse of white horses'. The housekeeper's function is similar to that of Gina in The Wild Duck; she takes everything literally, even bogies. Finally, after Ulric Brandel's moral lesson has suggested a way in which Rebecca can prove her real love for Rosmer, the lovers decide to execute justice on themselves. They go 'Beata's way' over the fatal footbridge which Rosmer had been unable to cross since Beata's suicide. Even then Rebecca wonders if their attempted expiation is not another of those 'white horses', ancestral doubts and fears; 'It may be so' Rosmer replies, 'for we can never escape from them - we of the house'. The housekeeper has the last word, as the lovers throw themselves into the water - 'The dead wife has taken them'.

'The white horses' symbolism seems to me a little crude, perhaps because of its unfortunate associations with melodrama. However it is appropriate to the particular background, in which the idea of 'family' and 'the house' predominates. More serious is the sense of strain which communicates itself in the deliberate allegorising of the entire action. Rebecca and Rosmer are strong enough characters to support an implied theme, without it being necessary for them to moralise over their situation in such explicit terms. Ibsen's habit of overweighting minor characters and incidents has become very noticeable in Rosmersholm. It is only too obvious that Rector Kroll represents orthodox, reactionary views, Mortensgaard political expediency, Ulric Br^endel deflated idealism. They are never allowed to speak out of tune, and they are all rather too conscious of the qualities they represent. This tendency is not strong enough to destroy the real passion and humanity of Rosmersholm, however. Only in the last four plays does the tendency become a threat.

In the next play, The Lady from the Sea (1888) the relation between symbol and action is extremely uneasy.

The central situation is Ellida's choice between freedom and responsibility. Freedom is represented by the sea and all its associations, responsibility by the confined inland life beyond the fjord. The physical suffocation which Ellida experiences inland is expressive of the spiritual suffocation resulting from an unsatisfactory marital relation.ⁱ⁾ Her escape from the one is to bathe in the 'sickly waters' of the fjord, from the other to indulge in dreams of her spiritual marriage with the Stranger.

Ellida's affinity with the sea, is made sufficiently clear by the emphasis on her passion for bathing, the fact that her husband calls her a 'mermaid' and the townspeople the 'lady from the sea'. But Ibsen drives the point home by two symbols which are very clumsily fitted into the action. One is Ballested's picture of the dying mermaid, the painting of which seems to be the only real justification for this character's appearance in the play. The other is Lyngstrand's proposed sculpture of the faithless wife, dreaming of her drowned husband. It follows as much too pat a coincidence on the heels of the 'mermaid' painting, and, like the painting, serves no other function than that of illustration, except, possibly, to introduce

i) Ibsen himself experienced this oppression when returning to Norway from abroad. He writes to Bjornson in 1884 'When ... I sailed up the Fjord, I felt a weight settling down on my breast, a feeling of actual physical oppression'. Correspondence p. 386.

Lyngstrand's account of his meeting with the Stranger. And this is itself a somewhat artificially contrived coincidence.

More serious, however, is the unconvincing character of the Stranger himself. In the first place, he is almost bound to be an anti-climax, appearing so late in the play, after such a sinister introduction, and, furthermore, it is impossible to place him satisfactorily. Is he flesh and blood or a symbolic apparition? His function is evidently similar to that of the Button Moulder in Peer Gynt or the Strange Hunter in On The Heights: he issues a challenge which Ellida must answer or remain perpetually frustrated. He is also a judge. In a play like Peer Gynt there would have been no difficulty about him. In this play, however, set against a background of people so real and earth-bound as Dr. Wangel, Arnholm, Boletta, he strikes a discordant note which is never resolved.

Clearly much of his uncanny power springs from Ellida's tortured imagination. We are told that she is a very nervous type, and that her mother was mentally unbalanced. It might then be possible to regard the Stranger as a projection of her own fancy. But a great deal of trouble is taken to provide him with a highly circumstantial background, even to the extent of crediting him with a murder which necessitated his flight from Skioldvik and his subsequent secrecy about his movements. Also, Lyngstrand meets him, not only before the shipwreck, but afterwards, when he visits Ellida, a fact which invalidates the conjecture that he may have been 'flesh and blood' at one time but since the 'drowning' has become a ghostly influence.

The Stranger is, then, real enough, but he is all the same an

alien being. His home is in the far north, Finmark, the land of the trolls. But Ellida always felt that his true home was the sea: sea beasts and birds seemed, when she first knew him, to be his, and her, proper kin. It was this strange affinity which drew them together, resulting in the 'betrothal' symbolised by the throwing of rings into the sea. Her description of the Stranger as he has since appeared to her in dreams emphasises his alien, almost inhuman appearance, but the illusion is dispelled, for an audience at least, when he finally appears in the flesh, a stocky sailor, complete with bushy red hair and beard and travelling bag! Only his eyes, we may be able to persuade ourselves, retain the power which has hypnotised Ellida into believing that her dead child had inherited them rather than his true father's.

In the triangular conflict of wills which follows the Stranger's return, the real human issue of the play becomes clear. It is nothing more than the familiar situation of an unsatisfactory marriage. Since Ellida did not exercise free choice in marrying Wangel - he 'bought' her, as a suitable step-mother for his children - their marriage has been a failure. Ellida's longing for freedom becomes increasingly desperate until Wangel shrewdly offers her freedom of choice between himself and the Stranger. Once she is allowed to exercise her own will, Ellida is released from her obsession and chooses the true freedom which lies in the voluntary acceptance of responsibility.

This is a situation which would have profited from being expressed

in less fantastic terms². Because the 'sea' symbolism is so strained and unreal Ibsen has to clarify it by weighty explanations. Wangel, for example, rationalises Ellida's bogie in the authentic manner of the psychiatrist's consulting room:- 'You think and conceive in visible pictures. Your longing and yearning for the sea - the allurements the stranger possessed for you - must have been the expression of an awakening and growing need for freedom within you - nothing else!

The explanation of this unsatisfactory choice of symbols lies in the fact that the play started from a theory. In his reading of scientific accounts of evolution, Ibsen's fancy had been caught by the idea that human life originated in the sea. In the rough drafts of this play he made such notes as: - 'Has the line of human development gone astray? ... We ought to possess ourselves of the sea...the sea's power of attraction. Longing for the sea. Human beings akin to the sea.'

Such ideas are put into Ellida's mouth in a non-dramatic attempt to give her obsession verisimilitude. 'Men were meant to live on the sea', she says to Arnholm, 'but have taken the wrong turning, - it hounds them like a secret sorrow and regret.'

The Lady from the Sea is, in fact, that rare, almost unique thing in Ibsen's drama, a play in which the symbols have been injudiciously selected. Instead of being closely related to

character and background, as in all the other plays we have examined, they are drawn from a fanciful theory which is fitted into a realistic background only at the expense of harmony between the various parts. Unfortunately, such a failure is more common in some of the drama which followed in his train.

Hedda Gabler (1890) is a particularly fine example of the subtle pervasive kind of symbolism which, because it is never made explicit, is essentially dramatic. It is also most appropriate, in its delicacy, to this delicate analysis of feminine temperament.

At the heart of the play lies the 'pistol' symbol, in which several important themes are focussed. Because Hedda's pistols are a legacy from her dead father, they serve to remind us of a determining influence on her behaviour: the fact that she is 'General Gabler's daughter'.ⁱ⁾ From him Hedda has, no doubt, inherited her arrogance and her craving for power over men's lives. These qualities are intensified by the discrepancy between her old life and the 'genteel poverty' to which she has come in marrying Tesman. 'General Gabler's daughter' is not the person to suffer such humiliation meekly, and it is largely as a result of her refusal to suffer it that the catastrophes of the play come about.

i) In a letter to his French translator, Count Prozor, in 1890, Ibsen explained that he called the play Hedda Gabler because he regarded the heroine as the daughter of her father rather than as the wife of Tesman. Opus. p.435.

Correspondence

But though Hedda has arrogance she lacks courage. She is, in fact, a slave to the opinion of the very people she despises so utterly. The pistol practice with which she whiles away her boredom is exactly the kind of near dangerous amusement calculated to appeal to such a character. She 'fires in the air' to frighten Judge Brack, playing with fire, exactly as she does in her 'duels' of sex with that suave but dangerous gentleman. She may have threatened Eilert Løvborg with her pistol, but she is too much of a coward ever to have put her threat into practice, any more than she could yield to the love which she secretly desired. She only acquires courage to turn the pistol on herself in the end when it is a choice between that and a prospect of permanent humiliation.

A pistol is a particularly appropriate weapon for Hedda, since the qualities associated with it are precisely those we observe in her character. Like the pistol, she is cold, hard, liable to sudden explosions, destructive and potentially fatal. Even her appearance bears out the parallel. Her 'steel gray eyes' are cold and unruffled, her complexion pale and opaque: she moves with deliberate precision. Above all, she is destructive, bringing sterility and death in her wake.

But pistols may misfire, and so do Hedda's schemes. As she herself observes, everything she touches turns ludicrous and mean. When she pictures Eilert as a glorious figure, with 'vine leaves in his hair' he is in reality involved in a drunken brawl. After she

has persuaded herself that she has sent him to a heroic suicide, she discovers that he has been ignobly shot in a quarrel with a courtesan. Like the coward she is, Hedda refuses to face brutal facts. She is only in love with death when she can romanticise it: when Tesman asks her to go with him to his aunt's deathbed she refuses indignantly:- 'I loathe all kinds of ugliness'. But people who play with pistols must be prepared for accidents, and Hedda is, in fact, betrayed by that seemingly innocuous duel with Judge Brack which, like all her games, resolves into a sordid and deadly reality.

The idea of death is kept in the foreground from the start in the illness of Tesman's aunt. Miss Tesman comes to visit her nephew from a 'house of death'. But, ironically, she thinks of Tesman's home as the 'house of life', for she perceives with delight that Hedda is pregnant. The destructive, pistol-like woman has, in fact, conceived life, but her attitude toward it is characteristic. She tries to hide the unwelcome condition as long as possible, and when she finally tells Tesman it is with an irritation she does not trouble to conceal. In the end, of course, she destroys the unborn life along with her own.

Her absolute lack of sympathy with the creative process is contrasted with the femininity of Thea, Eilert's good angel. Thea brings out the best in creative minds like Eilert's, Hedda the worst, even though Hedda is intelligent, Thea rather stupid. The contrast between the two women is emphasised by another symbol, Thea's hair.

Ibsen takes pains to tell us that Hedda has rather thin, though pretty, brown hair. On the first mention of Mrs. Elvsted her immediate reaction is - 'the girl with the irritating hair that she was always showing off.' This is indeed Thea's most striking feature, thick, wavy yellow hair, which sets off her soft, timid face and round blue eyes. She reminds Hedda how in their school-days together, she used to pull the timid Thea's hair and threaten to burn it off. Even then Hedda instinctively disliked Thea: now she has good reason to detest her, because she has acquired the influence over a 'human destiny' that Hedda herself craves, and because she is brave to the point of rashness in deserting her husband to follow Eilert Lovborg. 'What will people say?' is Hedda's characteristic comment.

The 'hair' symbol is associated in nearly all primitive ritual with the idea of fertility, and even the modern mind, such as Hedda's, subconsciously invests it with the same significance. Hedda knows that she has to work hard with her 'personality' to achieve what Thea effects easily and naturally through her femininity. 'Oh, if you only knew how poor I am' she exclaims at one point, 'and Fate has made you so rich'. Then seizing Thea in her arms, 'I think I must burn your hair off after all'. She does not burn the hair off, but she does burn the 'child', the precious manuscript which has resulted from the fertilisation of Eilert's mind by Thea. As she throws the pages into the fire she exults:- 'Now I am burning your child, Thea, wavy haired Thea, the child that is yours and his.'

I'm burning it - I'm burning the child'.

The issue is never clearer than in this scene. Whatever reasons Hedda may give for her acts of wanton destruction, the real reason goes deeper than she knows herself; it lies in her instinctive hatred of natural fertility.

But again the pistol misfires. After Eilert's death, Tesman dedicates his life to re-creating the lost 'child', with Thea as his inspiration. Shut out of the circle of creation, blackmailed by the implacable Brack, Hedda refuses her real chance of 'moulding a human destiny' in bearing a child, and turns the symbolic pistol on herself.

The symbolism in Hedda Gabler is essentially dramatic: it is unobtrusive, functional, and it implies rather than states. Ibsen seems best able to achieve this kind when, as here, the heart of the play lies in characterisation, rather than in a theme which is imposed upon the characters.

We now come to the last four plays which Shaw, in his Quintessence of Ibsenism, grouped together under the heading 'Down Among the Dead Men'. The situation in three of them is identical, the problem of the artist who has made the choice between art and life, and, on looking back, finds that he has failed both as man and artist. The autobiographical element is clear and emphasised by the fact that the problem is expressed in symbols taken from the work of the dramatist's youth. Two of them, The Master Builder and John Gabriel Borkman are elaborations of ideas from youthful lyrics, the poems

Building Plans and The Miner. It is evident that we can expect in these plays, not change and development, but recapitulation: no longer situations determining symbols, but symbols determining situations. One of the most remarkable things about them is, in fact, this exact correspondence with poems written at least thirty years before. Ibsen had posed the artist's dilemma so accurately in lyrics like On The Heights that he could take it up again in his old age and find it unnecessary to alter even the symbols through which he had first expressed it. The element of conflict, which drama requires, is, however, provided by his new doubt about the validity of the choice he had made so long ago. Was he right or wrong to 'go into exile from life' for the sake of art? Has the work which resulted from such an 'exile' proceeded from his highest capacity? And if both life and art have failed, what solution remains? The answer is, in all cases, death, but a glorious death, in which the artist attempts to recapture for the last time his highest aspirations. This is the fixed pattern of the last plays, with the exception of Little Eyolf. The question we have to ask is rather different from that which arose from the earlier plays: it is, not whether the symbols are appropriate to the characters and the background, but whether they are appropriate to the dominant theme.

The symbolism of The Master Builder (1892) seems to have originated in the early lyric, Building Plans, in which the poet dreams, in his garret, of the wonderful buildings he will erect: - (I'll

build a palace in the clouds shall fill the North with light. A turret shall my palace have and a tower of dizzy height'. But the dream ends in catastrophe: the tower was not high enough, and the turret tumbled to the ground.

The master builder of the play, Halvard Solness, attempts to put this dream into execution. In his youth his creative instinct had gone into the noblest form of building - churches with lofty steeples, which he had dared to climb, at risk to his life, to lay the traditional wreath on the weather vane at the summit. In fact, Ibsen implies, he had attempted to live his life in accordance with the austere demands which he recognised in his art. If we think of Brand, which is presumably the kind of work Ibsen had in mind when he makes Solness talk of 'churches with steeples',¹⁾ we remember how arduous the demands of Brand's vocation were: they involved, above all, the sacrifice of love, the life of human affections. This was symbolised in Brand by the death of Brand's wife and child. Exactly the same symbolism is used in The Master Builder and all the late plays. Solness' children die, as a result of the fire which he had 'willed' in order to further his ambitions. His wife, Aline, does not die, in the flesh, but, like Ella and Gunhild in John Gabriel Borkman, Irene in When We Dead Awaken, lives on as a shadow of her former self. She has suffered the 'death of the heart' and the world, for her, has become a tomb.

i) Remembering also that Ibsen had said 'Brand is myself in my best moments'.

This is the fearful price which Solness pays, but, unlike Brand, he is not strong, nor hard enough to accept its necessity. He suffers from a tortured conscience, or, as Hilda puts it, a 'sick conscience'. In his resentment he defies the God to whom he had dedicated his noble churches. On the occasion when Hilda sees him laying the wreath on the church summit, he shouts to the heavens his refusal to satisfy ~~them~~ with further offerings the God who demands such sacrifices. For the last time he hears the mysterious 'harps in the air', the spiritual ecstasy which delights the artist at the summit of his achievement. Instead he devotes his talent to building 'homes for the people': works which will benefit humanity in a practical way, but which do not represent his fullest powers. Thus he is in the ironical position of building homes for others, when he can never possess a home of his own. This is symbolised by the empty nurseries which he even includes in his plans for his new house, as a perpetual reminder of the death of the children. In a desperate attempt to recapture his youthful dreams Solness is building a tower on the new house: other people do not want them, but he will have one on his own, even if he has refused to build steeples on their proper place, the churches.

When Hilda, the 'bird of prey' comes to Solness with her fanatical demand for the 'impossible' she relights the fires which have been smouldering. Hilda is drawn to Solness in the same way that Ellida was drawn to ~~She~~ The Stranger: there is no real human love

between them, only an admiration in common for the same things. She insists that Solness shall build for her the 'castle' which he had jokingly promised her as a child. 'Castles in the air', she says, 'are the finest buildings, especially for a builder with a 'dizzy conscience', for since castles in the air have no relation to real life, there is no necessity to make sacrifices for them. To the ageing, lonely Solness, afraid of the advance of the younger generation, Hilda, herself the epitome of youth, brings fresh strength. The contrast between Hilda and Aline, the one radiant with joy in life, the other a repressed, mournful woman in black, brings home to him the fact that he is 'chained to a dead woman', when, to develop his creative powers to the full he needs abundant life and joy. On the one hand he sees a house which, despite its tower, will be a tomb; empty nurseries; a ghost in black, ruling her life by 'duty' rather than love; homes for the people in the building of which he is already losing his supremacy to the younger generation, represented by Ragnar Brovik. On the other hand is Hilda, with her faith in him as the 'master builder' and her demand that he shall 'do the impossible once again'. Solness knows in his heart that it is impossible for him to repeat the exploit of his youth, but the alternative to Hilda's challenge is shame and lifelong frustration. He accepts the challenge, climbs the tower on the new house to the summit, but in the moment of triumph his 'dizzy conscience' betrays him. Hilda's screams of delight bring on his old giddiness: he

falls and is killed. To Aline, the wife, the fall is a catastrophe, to Hilda, the disciple, who has never loved the man, it is a victory. 'Hurrah for my Master Builder' she cries, and indeed for Solness such a death was infinitely preferable to the 'death in life' of which he had become so acutely conscious when Hilda arrived.

The 'building' symbolism is clear, though perhaps a little too contrived and mechanical, with its 'categories' of churches, towers, houses and castles. Less clear, however, is the symbol of the children's death. This, of all his sins, is the greatest burden on Solness' conscience, for he believes that to fulfil his own vocation he has sacrificed that of Aline. Her sphere, he tells Hilda, was a different kind of building - 'building the souls of little children'. But, in fact, as we learn from Aline's conversation with Hilda, Mrs. Solness blames herself, not her husband, for their death, since it was her uncontrolled grief over the burning of her family home that was responsible for their fever which destroyed them. Aline is resigned to the loss of the children, but not to the loss of her treasured possessions which were burnt in the fire, in particular her 'dolls' which she had loved, ever since her childhood as though they were 'little unborn children'. This appears to signify that Aline grieves most of all for the children who will never be born to her, after the 'death of the heart'. There is also the implication that the pattern of continuity in family life must be rejected by the artist who needs to break out

of the traditional pattern and create his own very different one.

Finally, the Troll symbol. As in Brand, with which this play has many affinities, the troll represents the 'lawless will'. In his agony over the loss of his children, Solness concludes that God has given him a troll to serve him, a troll which will force him to sacrifice all human attachments so that he may be free to build his glorious churches. He discovers that he has extraordinary gifts of suggestion: so often do the things he wills strongly enough actually happen that he comes to believe in his power to affect even such events as the fire. This power he attributes to the troll-like 'helpers and servers' who respond from within his own nature to the opportunities offered by 'devils' without, and he is uneasily aware that the devils who work for him may be 'light or dark', sent by God or Satan. Consequently, he suffers from a 'gaping wound' in his conscience. His troll instincts, his 'helpers and servers' drive him to 'flay the skin' off an ever growing number of victims, in an attempt to heal his own wound. But the pain only grows more acute with every additional sin against humanity. Hilda recognises from the first that Solness must have 'a little of the troll in him', because he forces his will to 'do the impossible'. In this respect

she herself is all troll. But unlike Solness, Hilda enjoys a 'robust' untroubled conscience: she despises his 'dizziness' which prevents him from attaining his deepest desires.

Clearly the troll symbolism in The Master Builder is not an integral part of the action, as it was in Brand and Peer Gynt. It is simply metaphor, a 'manner of speaking'. It seems artificial, and, at times, obscure, because it does not arise naturally from the conditions of the dramatic world in which Hilda and Solness live. It is a language of the mind to which the audience can find the key neither in the background of the play, nor in the evocative quality of the metaphor. Cut off from its sources, as it is here, the troll symbolism can only be made significant by explicit definition, which is exactly what happens as, for example, when Solness tells Hilda: 'All the beauty I have created I have paid for in human happiness. This is the price which my position as an artist has cost me', or 'How can I help becoming a troll? It is the price I pay for all I have created.' The metaphors do not appear to be dramatically welded into the play as a separate entity, though considered in the light of other plays and poems their significance is clear. This is one of many signs that the subjective nature of the late plays tends increasingly to find experience through a less

dramatic form of symbolism¹).

In The Master Builder, however, there was a sustained tension, which meant that such symbolism as was truly dramatic, for example the building symbol, remained dramatic to the end, since on it the eventual climax depended. In the next play, Little Eyolf (1894) the climax comes with the child's death in the second act: after his death the symbols connected with it are no longer functional. They are analysed, discussed, made explicit, but they have lost their truly dramatic quality².

In their attitude to Little Eyolf is symbolized all that is wrong in the relations between Rita and Allmers. Rita is jealous of the place her child occupies in Allmer's thoughts. She resents his intention to devote his life to 'making a man' of Eyolf even more than she had resented his withdrawal to the mountains²), to write his ironically named book 'On Human Responsibility'. Anything that thwarts the demands of her exacting sensual passion is for Rita an enemy which she subconsciously wills to remove. But her love for her child, though temporarily obscured by her passion, is in reality deeper than that of Allmers, who looks on little Eyolf never as an individual human entity, but always as an object for his

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1. It is significant that Maeterlinck found The Master Builder the first modern play in which the characters lived in the world of the soul.
 2. The symbol of Allmers' false idealism and the true idealism of Borgheim, the engineer.

romanticising faculties. He has even given the child the 'nickname' of his half sister, Asta, on whom all his real love is concentrated. Poor little Eyolf is not the child of love, but of passion and self interest. Moreover, his crippled state is a result of his parents' selfishness, and the 'crutch' with which he hobbles becomes for them the symbol of the immense debt they owe to the unloved child. This is brought out in the distaste with which they wince from mention of the crutch, and, supremely, in the climax when they are brought the dreadful news that the child is drowned, but 'the crutch is floating'.

Little Eyolf's death solves no problems: it simply forces them into the open. The horrifying image of the floating crutch and the child lying with open eyes on the river bed proves a more efficacious spur to repentance than his living presence had been. Only such a shock, in which symbols acquire drastic significance, is capable of jolting Allmers and Rita out of their illusions. The way is open to remorse and conversion. Because, as they now realise, little Eyolf has never belonged to them, but has always been 'a little stranger boy' they decide that they can only make appropriate atonement by converting their loveless house into a true home for unwanted 'stranger' children. Through these children they may be able to prove their 'change of heart.'

The instrument of Eyolf's death, and, so, of their conversion, is the Rat Wife. In this character, as in the troll metaphor of

The Master Builder, Ibsen's growing impatience with the conventions of realism is manifested. She is created from a childhood memory, just as the Button Moulder was created from a childhood memory of Peer Gynt's. But whereas in Peer Gynt it was clear that such supernatural characters were externalisations of inner experience, in Little Eyolf the Rat Wife's position remains ambiguous. Even on a realistic level she is a sinister figure, round whom all kinds of legends have grown up. Her name, 'Varg', means 'wolf', and it is rumoured that she has the power to change into a werewolf at will. She certainly possesses the power to lure human beings, as well as rats, to their death: indeed, she is a Norwegian Pied Piper, spiriting away the child-like Eyolf, from parents who have failed to pay their debts.

She is also a 'helper and server' in visible shape, ministering to the dark desires of the subconscious will. It is to these desires that she appeals when she asks Rita if she is bothered by any 'little gnawing things, that keep nibbling and gnawing, creeping and crawling'. 'Gnawing' is precisely the term associated with the effects of conscience, and the little 'rat' Eyolf, is responsible for the pangs his parents endure. Through the Rat Wife, and her familiar, ~~the~~ Wopseman, is projected the death wish, which destroys the child, but not, as we have seen, the symbolic 'crutch'. All this is implied through the dialogue, at the same time that a grotesque parallel between the Rat Wife and Rita is suggested. Both have relied, in

the past, on the power to 'lure' through their sexual charms: both have lost that power, and are now forced to resort to more 'wolfish' means. In the black dog, Mópseman, is concentrated the death wish, which both allures and repels little Eyolf. Through it he finds the peace which life has not given him, and through the realisation of their 'murder' of love, Allmers and Rita eventually arrive at a 'change of heart'.

The Rat Wife symbolism is significant for it shows that by this time Ibsen was finding the law of probability, which operated in the social plays, a law which he could no longer respect. The realm of inner life which he was exploring in these late plays was too complex to be bounded by the four walls of realistic drama. Consequently there was no longer any need to conceal his symbols by burying them in the heart of a realistic action. They could be allowed to function openly in a world where the operating laws were those of the spiritual life.

The theme of John Gabriel Borkman (1896) is, essentially, the theme of The Master Builder in more extreme form. The 'death of the heart', which was confined to one character in the earlier play has by this time become an almost universal condition: the artist, John Gabriel, is as 'dead' as his victims, the two sisters. Solness was not in such a desperate case: the torment inflicted by his conscience was a proof of his vitality, and he was still capable of trying to pursue 'joy in life' with Hilda, the incarnation of life.

But Borkman has got far beyond this stage. He feels no remorse for the suffering he has caused, only chagrin at his failure as an artist. Even when he comes to see where he has sinned he can make no attempt at atonement, for the heart is dead in him.

It is now possible to appreciate fully the skill with which different symbols have been employed in the two plays to represent the process of artistic creation. Since in The Master Builder the emphasis was on 'conscience' the building symbolism was particularly appropriate with its connected ideas of 'height' and 'dizziness'. The higher Solness climbs the more suffering he causes and the 'dizzier' his conscience becomes. He is safe only when on ground level - building houses without towers: once he attempts to climb again his unbalanced conscience betrays him. The building metaphor is eminently satisfactory for this purpose, although it is not particularly suggestive of the nature of the creative process.

In John Gabriel Borkman on the other hand, the emphasis rests more upon the process itself, less upon the working of conscience. As a result the symbols chosen to express the process are much more fully realised. John Gabriel is a miner's son who becomes a 'Napoleon' of finance. He is driven by an irresistible urge to excavate the hidden wealth of the mines for the gratification of human kind. He visualises the 'hidden golden spirits' of the mines waiting impatiently for the sound of the hammer stroke which will release them from their dark prison. They 'sing' under the

blows of the hammer in their delight at the prospect of 'coming up into the light of day to serve mankind'. This is an admirable simile for the creative process which releases 'unborn thoughts and feelings' from the dark recesses of the imagination. It had occurred to Ibsen long before in his lyric The Miner: - 'Myriad voices of the mine Call me to its inmost shrine...Once I loved the earth so fair. But I have forgot the light In a gloom of endless night. What though darkness be my lot, Strike, my hammer, falter not'.

John Gabriel's tragedy is more complete than Solness', for whereas Solness could in some degree satisfy his daemon with 'homes for the people', even when towers and steeples were out of his reach, Borkman's catastrophic failure as a 'Napoleon' cuts him off altogether from his mining activities. He can only pace the floor of the successive 'prisons' in which he is entombed, dreaming of the nebulous future when he will be 'recalled' by a world which needs what only he can offer. Borkman is not a failure in the sense that Solness was: his work has always proceeded from his highest capacity. It is his fatal contempt for humanity, his conviction that, like Napoleon, he is above law and precedent, that has ruined him, depriving him of all power to create.

Borkman is, then, as good as dead, both as man and artist, though he still cherishes a hope that, as the artist, he may yet be resurrected. This idea is brought out metaphorically, as in the troll metaphors of The Master Builder. The gloomy solitude in which

he lives is likened by himself and others, to the solitude of a prison and of a tomb. Weakened by prison air, he lives on dreams and illusions, which the fresh air of reality would, and eventually does, destroy. The contrast between the cold fresh air outside the Borkman mansion and the airlessness within is maintained throughout as a symbol of two opposed attitudes of mind. Gunhild and Ella, as well as Borkman, exist on illusions, and Erhart drives home the unreality of these illusions in his plea for fresh air. The 'rose leaves and lavender' of Ella's rooms is as repugnant to him as the close, suffocating atmosphere of his mother's drawing room. He refuses to live in this airless world, and in fact does escape into the bracing frosty night air, which is as stimulating to him as it is fatal to John Gabriel. Gunhild tells Ella, in a superbly dramatic passage, how she sometimes hears Borkman's footsteps on the stairs, faltering toward escape from his prison, but never reaching further than the hall. When he does at last rouse himself from his prison dreams, Gunhild tells him brutally to lie down again in his tomb: he has been dead too long to hope for resurrection.

The idea of 'coldness', inseparable from the 'death of the heart', is brought out in metaphor and in the symbolic setting. The action is played against a wintry background: driving snow breaks against Gunhild's windows, and she tells Ella that, despite the closeness of her rooms, she is always cold. Ella, who is

dying of an incurable disease, tells Borkman that she can only last out the winter, to which he replies, 'The winter is long'. It is, in fact, a permanent winter: the Borkmans are petrified in ice, so that no forward or backward movement is possible.

The only warmth of the play is concentrated in Erhart, and his charmer, Mrs. Wilton, with her full red lips and sparkling eyes. They are attended by the gay music of sleigh bells, which announces their arrival and departure. They rescue little Frida from the gloomy strains of the 'Danse Macabre' which she plays for the 'caged wolf' and transport her into a world of dance music and sleigh bells, of vitality and movement.

With their escape the realistic action of the play comes to an end: the rest is played out on an allegorical level. The three who are left come to their last reckoning. Borkman acknowledges the crime against love of which Ella has accused him: he is responsible for her loss of capacity to love at all. But his real concern is still for the 'precious metals' rusting unused in their prison. He makes a last attempt to resurrect himself, symbolised by his emergence from the house, his tomb, into the night outside., the 'storm of life'. With Ella to support him, he toils up a hill from which he can see the landscape he had tried to bring to ruller life with his 'prisoned millions'. He had sold a warm heart in exchange for 'the kingdom, the power and the glory', but he now finds his kingdom to be dead and cold, like the

withered fir tree against which he leans to survey the snow covered scene. The land of dreams, which he and Ella had planned in their youth, has become a kingdom of ice and snow. Only the capacity to love can bring it to life again. But Borkman is beyond redemption. He dies of the 'cold', feeling an 'icy-metal hand' gripping at his heart. Gunhild attributes his death to the fact that the miner's son, acclimatised to the darkness underground, could not stand the fresh air above. But Ella knows that 'it was rather the cold that killed him', and she makes the metaphor explicit in her conclusion: 'coldness of heart' has resulted in one dead man and two shadows. The play ends as the 'shadows', Ella and Gunhild, take hands over the dead man.

The icy desolation of this scene conveys superbly the effect of spiritual death, which is the theme, but it is simply a repetition, in allegorical terms, of what has already been implied in the first part.

The 'mines' symbolism, like the 'building' symbolism in The Master Builder, lies at the heart of the play. But it is less functional, since we do not meet John Gabriel until his days as a Napoleon of the mines are over: consequently the symbols are not required to precipitate a tense, forward moving action, nor does Borkman's end come about as a resolution of tension. It is simply a collapse, a long delayed reaction. The most that Ibsen can do to render it dramatic is to express it through metaphors of 'cold'

which have been highly charged with significance throughout the play. As an explanation of the conditions existing within the play this 'cold' symbolism is extremely effective. But it is, by the nature of these conditions, inevitably static and repetitive.

This is also true of When We Dead Awaken (1899), described as a 'dramatic epilogue'. Once again the process of artistic creation is visualised as a painful, difficult process. Rubek, the sculptor, struggles with resistant stone and marble in an attempt to force life out of it, just as Borkman 'hammers' the golden spirits free from the prisoning mine.

But again the process is concluded before the play begins. Rubek reached the summit of his achievement long before, in his youth, when he was inspired by the poetic beauty of his model, Irene, to create his finest work, 'The Resurrection Day'. He suppressed his love for Irene because, like Borkmann, he was afraid to put the 'sensuous life' before the demands of his art. But, unlike Borkman, he soon becomes aware that his art has suffered, not benefited from his sacrifice. Instead of modelling from the soul, he now models from the mind: his 'portrait busts', the equivalent of Solness' 'homes for the people' become increasingly cynical, and this cynicism reaches out to mar even the 'ideal beauty' of his Resurrection group. In a despairing attempt to recapture the vitality which has been crippled within him, he marries a young girl, ~~Maia~~ Maia, who is, as her name suggests, the incarnation of the earth spirits. The play opens

when he and **Maia**, honeymooning at a health resort in the mountains, encounter Irene, a ghost from the past.

Since the determining action is over before the play begins, and the dramatist is concerned only with the spiritual results of that action, it is inevitable that the symbols should, again, be fixed and static. The landscape, as in Brand, is the landscape of the soul. The slow ascent of the mountain is a spiritual ascent, Rubek's last attempt to look on the 'glory of the world' from the pinnacle of poetic imagination. The valley into which **Maia**, rejecting the 'glory' descends with her hunter, is the world of the senses, uncomplicated by ideals and illusions. 'Now we can be the people we really are', cries Ulfheim, as he carries **Maia** down the precipice, and the sound of her song, 'I am free. I am free', drifts up from the safety of the valley as the avalanche overwhelms the visionaries above.

The health resort in the first act is a place to which come the sick in mind and soul, people like Rubek, whose soul is stunted, and Irene, whose mind has broken under the strain of her life. Irene is accompanied by a Sister of Mercy who follows her like a shadow wherever she goes. Although Ibsen is no longer concerned, by this time, with establishing a realistic background, he does imply that the Sister, on a realistic level, is an attendant from a mental home in which, for a time, Irene has been immured. She is on the watch when Irene brings out her knife to murder Rubek and Irene's description of her 'death' is, in effect, a description of the strait jacket

and the padded cell. ~~Maia~~ Maia calls Irene 'mad', and when Ulfheim at the end promises to send helpers to Rubek and Irene to 'take them away', Irene shrinks in horror from a phrase which has, for her, a grim significance. Once again she feels the suffocation of the strait jacket, and begs Rubek to preserve her from a second 'death'.

But the realistic implications are so allusive as to be obscured by the symbolic significance, as was evidently Ibsen's intention. Unlike the 'dead' women of earlier plays such as Aline Solness, Irene is not dressed in black, in 'mourning for her dead life', but in white, the colour of death itself. The description of her appearance suggests a corpse already stiffened in the final stages of death: her white gown hangs in stiff folds, the lines of her pale face are rigid, her arms are crossed on her breast, and her eyes stare sightlessly. She comes to life only in a brief resurrection, and, like a ghost, she casts no shadow: - 'I am my own shadow' she tells Rubek. Black, the colour of mourning, is worn by the Sister of Mercy, who follows the 'corpse' in mourning for the sins against the 'God of love'.

Irene makes explicit the 'death' symbolism. She accuses Rubek of 'murder'. He has killed the 'young living soul' in her, robbed her of her potential motherhood, and even the 'child' born of their artistic collaboration. Ideal beauty has been profaned, on the turn table, in loveless marriage and in the Resurrection work. It is Solness' anguish again: - 'Wherever I look there is nothing, nothing, nothing anywhere'.

The death of the sensuous life is brought out in the contrasted

images of 'blood' and 'cold'. Ulfheim, the hunter, despises the bloodlessness of the invalids who exist on a thin diet of bread and milk. He is the primitive man, relishing the sight of his dogs feeding on raw meat, indifferent to what kind of game he chases - bears, eagles, wolves - even women so long as they are 'fresh with blood in them'. He is shrewd enough, however, to realise the similarity between his pursuits and Rubek's: the one struggles with 'bear sinews' to get the mastery over 'resistant life', the other with the resistant life hidden in stone and marble.

With the hot blood of the 'children of earth' is contrasted the chilliness of Irene, who has emerged from the grave 'cold, but not quite turned to ice'. She and Rubek, trifling with their memories of when they were 'alive', are 'two clay cold bodies playing with each other'. Rubek protests that the 'burning love of earth' is still strong in him, but Irene recognises that they are both petrified in marble, like the statues which have never been brought to life: - 'When we dead awaken - we see that we have never lived'.

At last, in this play, the full value of the sensuous life is acknowledged. Without Irene, Rubek loses the 'key' to his 'casket' of visions. In art, as well as in life, he has contented himself with substitutes. But a distinction is made between the unimagina-
 tive sensual passion of Ulfheim and Maia, and the comprehensive love which Irene and Rubek might have achieved. Although Irene declares that she loved the 'man', not the 'poet', that she would have killed
 him

with her 'sharp needle' if he had made love to her only as an artist indulging his senses, yet she responds, as Maia never could, to the poet's promise to show her the 'glory of the world' from a high mountain. 'So must pure lovers' souls descend To affections and to faculties, Which sense may reach and apprehend. Else a great prince in prison lies'. Rubek's poetic imagination lies in prison, in a 'sealed casket' to which Irene, who might have opened it, has lost the key.

The name 'Irene' signifies 'peace', and it is toward eventual peace that the action slowly moves. The only words spoken by the Sister of Mercy are, significantly, 'Irene' and 'Pax Vobiscum'. The movement is statuesque, rather than dynamic - a series of sculptural groups. Every movement within the groups is precise and weighted with significance. In one scene Rubek is posed in the foreground, crossing a stream which evidently signifies repentance, for he dabbles his fingers in the water in a vain attempt to wash them clean. In the background stands the statuesque figure of Irene, centre of a group of playing children, poignant reminder of her own childlessness. Then the group breaks up. Irene and Rubek take up their positions in a new posture, in fact the very posture which their sculptured figures occupy in the 'Resurrection' statuary. The ascent of the mountain is like the solemn movement of figures in a frieze, petrified in marble. Only at the very last do the figures break out of the sculptured pattern. Vigorous movement replaces the statuesque

processing. A storm blows up, the clouds are driven into the shape of a winding sheet, prelude to the Resurrection Day. Ulfheim and ~~Maia~~ plunge down the precipice, to create a new and vital pattern for their own lives. Rubek and Irene mount the snowfield, above the lowering clouds and are swept away in the thundering avalanche. The frieze crashes to pieces. Only the corner stone remains - the Sister of Mercy, symbol of divine watchfulness. She makes the sign of the cross, and peace descends upon the dead.

With When We Dead Awaken Ibsen had taken the theme of the last plays as far as it could go. The poetic dilemma, envisaged so clearly in his early poems, had received exhaustive analysis. Ibsen had sat in judgement on his own soul, obeying the dictum of his poem, Epilogue:-

What is life? a fighting
 In heart and brain with Trolls.
 Poetry? that means writing
 Doomsday accounts of our souls¹⁾

With so personal a problem it was inevitable that the symbols should be increasingly personal - drawn from his early lyrics, from childhood memories, from the Norse mythology which had captured his youthful imagination. But although it might be expected that this autobiographical trend would result in obscurity it is, I think, true to say that Ibsen's symbolism always remains forceful and evocative. This is mainly because, as in any true image, the quality of the idea

i) Lyrics & Poems from Ibsen. Trans. F.E. Garrett, 1912. p.1

represented is clearly implied in the corresponding quality of the symbol - a snowy landscape signifying coldness of heart, a pale woman in black the death of love, a high steeple or mountain some kind of aspiration. Generally, too, however clear the parallel may be, it is underlined in the dialogue. Ella and Irene explain that they are 'dead' because the love life in them has been blighted: the Rat Wife's sinister implications are implied in her use of key words such as 'gnawing': Solness' dizziness in climbing heights is specifically equated by Hilda with his 'unbalanced' conscience. The explanation may be retrospective, as is often the case in these late plays, but, taken in conjunction with the evocative quality of the symbols, it is enough. In fact, the most serious criticism that can be directed against the 'dead man' plays is that the symbols are made too explicit. It is a result of so much weight being placed upon them and of the repetitive nature of the plays. The last act of John Gabriel Borkman, for example, consists in a fugue-like repetition of ideas already firmly stated. This is even more true of When We Dead Awaken.

To sum up, Ibsen's symbolism in general is of a highly controlled kind. It would obviously be absurd to demand a table of precise meanings, as though the poet worked out the exact equivalence of his symbols with a pair of scales. A single symbol may, as we saw in The Wild Duck, contain layer upon layer of meaning: others, such as the troll symbol, acquire a significance extending far beyond any one play and are capable of bearing a wide variety of interpretations. But they always appear to have passed through

Ibsen's conscious mind, unlike Strindberg's symbols which frequently proceed directly from the subconscious. Moreover, Ibsen takes pains to make his symbols function dramatically, that is, to suggest no more than ^{can be} ~~be~~ implied from their position in the play and the reactions of the characters towards them.

It is true, however, that certain symbols function more dramatically than others. The most successful are those which seem to arise so inevitably out of the action that they require no other explanation than can be found in the action. This is true of Peer Gynt, the social plays, The Wild Duck, Rosmersholm, Hedda Gabler. The function of the symbols in these plays is to draw our attention to the profounder themes which lie behind the behaviour of the characters: the general human tendencies of which these particular people are only representative types. If this can be done by implication and suggestion only, as it is, with a few minor exceptionsⁱ⁾, in the plays mentioned, then our illusion of the play as a deep, independent reality is preserved.

If, on the other hand, a great deal of explicit explanation interrupts the natural flow of the action, we become aware that it is, after all, a conscious, contrived action. The illusion of absolute, independent life is broken. By using symbols which lie

i) For example, the allegorical moralising in Rosmersholm, some of Greger's speeches in The Wild Duck, the explicit treatment of the 'baths' as a symbol in An Enemy of the People.

'behind the action', as it were, Ibsen generally manages to sustain the illusion. But occasionally he over-states the connection between symbol and idea, for a variety of reasons. In the early verse plays it is because his technique is still uncertain: in case his point should be missed he hammers it home with an over abundance of metaphor and symbol. In a play like Brand it is inevitable because the symbols are more important than the people, and cannot be adequately defined by reference to the behaviour of the people. In the last four plays the same sort of situation recurs, although in less acute form. A great many of the characters in the prose allegories are dramatically conceived and executed, Hilda and Solness, for example, or Gunhild and Ella. But since on the whole their lives lie behind them, rather than in front, therefore the burden of explanation falls on argument and discussion instead of on action. As a result the symbolic implications are brought out by less integrally related means, by the troll metaphors in The Master Builder, for example or by the significant landscape patterns into which the characters have been fitted.

Although the social plays do not represent Ibsen's highest achievement, there is no doubt that the discipline they imposed on his use of symbolism was of the utmost value. It resulted in a symbolism at once poetic and dramatic, controlled and yet contriving to appear spontaneous. From this background a great deal of modern symbolism derives, and it is in the light of this background that it can most profitably be examined.

II
b)Maeterlinck

'Le rêve seul intéresse,
Vivre sans rêve, qu'est-ce?
Moi, j'aime la princesse
Lointaine.'

When we turn to late nineteenth century French drama we find a symbolism much closer in kind to that employed by the lyric poets, that is to say, a symbolism which is important less for its function of illuminating or extending the scope of the dramatic action, than for suggesting emotions or mystical states of being which can find no adequate translation into action.

The theory and practice of the symbolist poets was indeed the dominating influence in French literature of the nineties. When Maeterlinck wrote, in Le Tragique Quotidien¹), 'Il m'est arrivé de croire qu'un vieillard assis dans son fauteuil, attendant simplement sous la lampe, écoutant sans le savoir toutes les lois éternelles qui regnent autour de sa maison....que ce vieillard immobile vivait en réalité d'une vie, plus profonde, plus humaine et plus générale que l'amant qui étouffe sa maîtresse, le capitaine qui remporte une victoire...', he was speaking with the voice of his generation. For it was 'la vie intérieure', 'la vie mystérieuse' which was occupying the writers of his time, poets as different from each other as Claudel, Laforgue, Mallarmé presenting an united front

1) In Le Trésor des Humbles (Paris, 1896) p.187

against the tyranny of the world of objects, the bourgeois spirit of materialism which they found in naturalistic literature. Bergson's first work appeared in 1889, the year which saw the publication of Maeterlinck's La Princesse Maleine: the avant garde was grouping round Verlaine and Mallarmé: in 1891 the Théâtre de l'Art was founded, to introduce symbolism to the stage. The power of intuition and the superiority of the ideal to the real was maintained by the symbolists. They quoted Hegel, Novalis, Herbert Spencer's 'the Unknowable'; some of them joined occult societies or dabbled in black magic. Baudelaire, who had declared that the finest work of art is the most artificial and that art is superior to life, was hailed as a forerunner, together with Rimbaud, of the symbolist movement. He seemed, in his insistence on 'pure' art to have anticipated Pater's tenet that 'all art aspires towards the condition of music'. Swedenborg's philosophy of correspondences inevitably appealed to symbolists such as Maeterlinck and provided a background to a new kind of poetry, often obscure, often strangely evocative.

The theory of art's superiority to life was given dramatic expression in the plays of Villiers de l'Isle Adam, who exerted so profound an influence over the writers of his age, not least over Maeterlinck. Indeed, Maeterlinck said at one time that everything he had done he owed to Villiers de l'Isle Adam.

This aristocrat among playwrights found in himself Baudelaire's twin contradictory sentiments: the horror of life and an ecstasy

of living'. These sentiments he set out to express in his dramas through the medium of symbols.

The symbols in Axel evoke a world of mystic ecstasy which could be expressed in no other way: they have, as Yeats pointed out, the fascination of all that pertains to a secret order, which only the initiates can ever fully understand. We may penetrate some distance into the meaning, but, unless we are initiates, no understanding of character or action will reveal to us the complete significance of the instructions which Janus, the mage, gives Axel, the mystic formulae posed in convent and castle, the rose which Sara calls 'the symbol of my fate, this divine, kindred correspondence'. Blake speaks of the twin functions of the symbol which are concealment and revelation: here, however, the revelation is, deliberately, only partial. Clearly, in a play of this sort, there may easily be a fatal lack of integration between symbol and action, since the playwright is almost bound to assume that the action takes place on a lower level than that of the symbol.

This is precisely what happens in Axel. Whenever the forward-
ing action depends on realistic incidents, such as the search for the hidden treasure, the machinery is revealed as clumsy and the plot melodramatic. The action is poised on the brink of bathos in such scenes as that in the cellar when Sara attacks Axel, first with a pistol, then with a dagger, or in the convent scene when we realise that her dramatic renunciation of the veil is motivated by her desire to search for hidden gold. More serious than this is the failure of the action to convey the playwright's true meaning

which was, as Yeats confirms, to suggest that Axel and Sara are punished for their tragic weakness in yielding to the lure of the treasure by being unable to retain their ecstasy except in death. What the conclusion suggests, in fact, is that Axel and Sara, whether they had been weak or not, would inevitably have made their disdainful gesture, dying to preserve the 'ideal moment', and leaving the sordid business of 'living' to their servants.

The fire of the language, the compelling sense of mystery and terror pervading the play, make it easy to understand why Yeats read the French version of Axel laboriously, as if it had been a sacred book, but it is evidently a very dangerous example to follow. There are two separate worlds within the play, one in which the symbols operate, and one in which the characters perform realistic actions, and the transition between the two worlds is not always easy. This, I suggest, is because the symbols are conceived as a poet's symbols, not as organic dramatic symbols, growing inevitably out of the action. They invite us to pause, to contemplate, to lose ourselves in a reverie, rather than to follow the action with greater understanding and excitement.

The majority of Maeterlinck's plays suffer from similar faults to those of Axel, while his symbols, even in their own emotional world, have not always the same power. Though trying to create a 'static drama', a drama in which the life of the soul will be all important, he relies on plots full of violence and frequently more melodramatic even than that of Axel. To such a playwright as W.B. Yeats, the symbolic drama appealed particularly because

it offered an opportunity to restore words, the stock of the poet, to a position of sovereignty. But Maeterlinck, not himself a poet of any distinction, found that words were inadequate to convey the mysteries of which he and his generation were so conscious. The only real communication lay in silence. To speak was to diminish the mystery.

How then was he to convey his ideas in the theatre? Not only were words hopelessly inadequate, but the action of real life was not, for Maeterlinck, 'real', at all, but only as the shadows reflected on the wall of Plato's cave, a favourite image with him. Maeterlinck's theory of 'interior' drama was valuable and significant, but when we examine the plays in which he worked out his theories, and which had such a fascination for the writers of his day, it is difficult to avoid a feeling of disappointment at their thinness and sameness. His drama presents a glittering surface, charged with glamorous associations, but beneath this surface there is little nourishment for the imagination. Symbols are used in a poetic, impressionistic way, to suggest vague emotions rather than to enrich a powerful action: indeed, there is frequently a harsh discrepancy between symbol and action, as there was in Villiers de l'Isle Adam's Axel.

Maeterlinck explains in Le Trésor des Humbles (1896) that there is only one true reality, the life of the soul, and that this life cannot be portrayed in terms of character and action in the traditional way, since the way in which a man behaves does not

necessarily afford any clue as to the nature of his spiritual life. The soul of a prostitute may be as essentially pure and untouched as that of a virgin. Moral judgments, in a drama constructed on such principles, would be irrelevant. This, in fact, explains the curious dénouement of that unsatisfactory play, Soeur Béatrice, where the erring nun, after a life of debauchery, is rewarded with a saintly death which makes nonsense of the standards of behaviour which she has betrayed. It is as if Shakespeare were to announce, at the end of Othello, that Iago is as little to blame for the catastrophe as Desdemona, since he too inhabits what Maeterlinck calls 'les ténèbres de la vie intérieure et générale où toutes les âmes commencent à se ressembler entre elles parce qu'elles n'empruntent plus que peu de choses aux circonstances'¹⁾ Even the greatest Greek tragedy was, for Maeterlinck, unable to convey the true atmosphere of the soul, though he admitted that he could not explain why it was so deficient. But at least in his own drama he would attempt to capture this mystery, to substitute the 'essence' of things for accident and circumstance, to show pure souls, in a setting of eternity, struggling against sinister and indefinable forces, under the shadow of destiny and death. Death is, in his early plays, the chief protagonist²⁾, sometimes an invisible one,

1) Preface to Maeterlinck's translation of ''Tis Pity She's a Whore under the title of Annabella (Paris, 1895) p.xii

2) As Maeterlinck puts it, 'La présence infinie, ténébreuse, hypocritement active de la mort remplit tous les interstices du poème'. Théâtre vol.I (Paris, 1901) p.IV.

sometimes symbolised in such fairy tale characters as the wicked queen or stepmother. No doubt the fact that disease and death were fashionable literary subjects in the nineties had some bearing on this preoccupation of his. Later, when his philosophy of life became more optimistic, the sinister shadows faded from the plays and the lack of powerfully conceived characters and action becomes more painfully apparent.

In his first plays Maeterlinck, like his fellow admirer of Axel, W.B. Yeats, turned to the world of fairy tale for his settings. La Princesse Maleine (1889) was inspired by Grimm's story of Maleen which took Maeterlinck's fancy in an English translation of the tales illustrated, with much Pre-Raphaelite decoration, by Walter Crane. The elements of brutality and romantic fancy in these stories are exaggerated in the play, which had such an effect on Octave Mirabeau, reviewer for the 'Figaro' that he compared Maeterlinck with Shakespeare to the former's advantage. But in La Princesse Maleine Maeterlinck had not yet found his characteristic manner. His plot, far from being freed from the violent external action which he deplored in Elizabethan drama, depends on extremely melodramatic incidents, ending in the strangling of Maleine by her enemies and the suicide of Hjalmar, her betrothed. The symbolism, which is cloudy, lies in the absence of motivation. Maleine is doomed from the moment she comes to the castle: her enemies destroy her without reason. They represent malignant destiny and Maleine, presumably, the soul on its journey into darkness. But the violent circumstances

of the plot obscure the spiritual action which Maeterlinck was seeking to emphasise. Only a sense of inexplicable behaviour on the part of the villains remains.

In L'Intruse (1890) and Les Aveugles (1890) the ideal of 'static' drama is more nearly achieved. In both plays the characters are presented in a state of suspense: they are uneasy and anxious, but cannot explain what they fear. In both, the main protagonists are blind, but in the first, the physical blindness of the grandfather only emphasizes his heightened intuition, his 'spiritual' sight, which enables him to sense the arrival of the unseen visitors, Death, before those of his family who can see with their eyes but not with their souls. Here an obvious symbolism is used, effectively enough, to evoke the most characteristic emotion in all Maeterlinck's drama, that of fear. The climax is the coming of death, as it is in La Mort de Tintagiles, Les Sept Princesses, L'Intérieur, Alladine et Palomides. Mood is all important. It is created by the 'astonished repeating of words', by the presence of sense of some mysterious character, representing, generally, death, and by the absence of any relief from the tragic action. The technique is not so different from that of the good writer of melodrama, who also excels in creating 'frissons' of dreadful anticipation. What Maeterlinck does in such a play as L'Intruse is to isolate the emotion and concentrate it. His death symbol does not invite us to feel and think, but only to feel, and, furthermore, to feel not a complex emotion, but a very simple and

primitive one. He is concerned to evoke sensations rather than thoughts, and in such short plays, of one dominant mood, as l'Intruse and L'Intérieur, he does it very effectively. But in more ambitious plays, in which there must inevitably be some interplay of character and complexity of action, the inadequacy of his symbols is apparent. In Les Aveugles he attempts a more complicated action, for the group of blind men and women, lost in a windswept forest, are sufficiently differentiated to suggest some allegorical intention. Their dead guide, the priest, has for some time been addressing himself only to the women, in whom, it is implied, an intuitive sense of religion, or the supernatural, is stronger than in the men. Some of the group have been blind for as long as they can remember, others have been more recently afflicted. Their state of helplessness and despair demands to be read as an allegory of man's condition, with the sound of the sea in the background representing eternity and the sinister footsteps which approach at the end of the play a new revelation, whether of Christ or Anti-Christ. But, once again, the intellectual content of the play, such as it is, is entirely subordinate to the sensation of fear, evoked by simple emotional symbols; blindness, the noise of wind and sea, the dark forest, the mysterious footsteps.

This is even more marked in Les Sept Princesses (1890), in which a fairy tale setting allows Maeterlinck the utmost freedom to employ his emotional, romantic symbols for a familiar end. The sense of mystery is heightened by a favourite device, that of the

impenetrable barrier behind which the seven princesses lie asleep where their parents cannot reach them. When the Prince, who loves the youngest daughter, finally comes to her by way of an underground passage, it is only to find that she, alone of the seven, fails to wake from her long sleep and is dead. Death is again the catastrophe and meaning of the play. The characters are nameless shadows, in whom we can have no interest, the significance of the long sleep, the fatal delay of the Prince, is no clearer than such things are in less sophisticated fairy tales where we accept them with a more willing suspension of disbelief.

Maeterlinck had perfected this particular manner by the time he wrote Pelléas et Mélisande (1892), one of his most famous plays. The story is in essence that of Paolo and Francesca¹⁾, set in the fairy tale world of Les Sept Princesses and there transformed by methods now familiar, into the fanciful dream, so perfectly rendered by Debussy's music. The voice of Villiers de l'Isle Adam sounds more strongly in this play. Death has become, not a frightening event, but the desired state. The lovers can only preserve their ecstasy in death, and they wander through the shadowy forest, the long corridors of the palace, in search of it. Mélisande comes from the unknown and, with her lover, eventually returns to the unknown: she is 'un pauvre petit être mystérieux, comme tout le monde'. She is first discovered by Golaud in a forest, weeping

1) With echoes of the fairy tale, Rapunzel, as in the scene where Mélisande lets her long hair stream out of her window over Pelléas.

for her lost crown of gold, and is brought as his bride to the castle, surrounded by dark forests, reminiscent of that in Les Aveugles - the forest of life on earth. In the distance, as in the earlier play, lies the sea, symbol of eternity, from which comes an intermittent light, obscured at times by mists: across this sea came the ship which brought Mélisande to the forest. All this suggests that Mélisande must be taken as a symbol of the soul journeying through life. But once more, as in earlier plays, Maeterlinck is content to emphasise only one aspect of this spiritual pilgrimage, its strangeness. Nothing is explained, least of all the nature of the relationship between Pélléas and Mélisande: conduct is unimportant, moral judgments irrelevant. The characters experience 'pure emotions', above all, those of bewilderment and fear. This soul's pilgrimage, is that of the 'nineties' aesthetes: the search for supreme sensations, in a world where art reigns, supremely unconcerned with 'criticism of life'.

Maeterlinck frankly proclaimed his indifference to the drama of flesh and blood when he announced his next three plays as 'trois petits drames pour marionnettes'. These were Alladine et Palomides, L'Intérieur and La Mort de Tintagiles (1894). The situation of Pélléas et Mélisande is repeated, with variations, in Alladine et Palomides, where the young girl, Alladine, betrothed to the old king, Ablamore, falls in love with the young Palomides, himself betrothed to the last surviving daughter of Ablamore, Astolaine. We are informed in the dialogue, though the action affords no particular evidence of it, that the soul of Astolaine is superior

to that of Alladine! Here, indeed, the weakness of Maeterlinck's theories becomes apparent, for since there is, for him, no recognisable connection between conduct and spiritual condition, he has no way of bringing home to us dramatically the superiority of Astolaine, and can only dogmatise. Despite Astolaine's greater gifts, Palomides is irresistibly drawn to Alladine by a mysterious power, stronger than that of the soul. This power transforms the poisonous waters of the underground cavern where they are imprisoned by Ablamore into a radiant light, full of flowers and jewels, so that the lovers, like Pélleas and Mélisande, have no further desire to live, after experiencing such ecstasy. But what is this mysterious power except passion, given a superficial strangeness by the allusive dialogue, in which no such emotion is ever given its proper name, and by the romantic symbols of the underground cavern, subterranean light and so on? Some of the symbols in this play have indeed a bathetic effect. Such a one is Alladine's little lamb, which, like the more familiar one associated with Mary, accompanies her wherever she goes, until, when she loses her first innocence in passion for Palomides, it falls into the moat and is drowned. Even the most ardent admirers of Maeterlinck's work have cavilled at this lamb, with good reason, for any intrusion of humorous fancy is fatal to the kind of romantic dreams created by this writer.

L'Interieur and La Mort de Tintagiles are much more successful plays, the former in particular offering a moving example of that

'static' drama in which two kinds of time seem to operate, that of the world of events, in which disaster occurs, and that of the people inside the house, unaware of disaster, and so happily involved in another order of time. La Mort de Tintagiles is another sinister fairy tale, centring in that favourite symbolⁱ⁾ the door which opens on to the terrifying unknown. Behind the door waits Death, symbolised by the relentless Queen and, yet again, the action is simply an inevitable movement toward the fatal door. It succeeds in the way in which a lyric poem might succeed, in evoking a single, sharp emotion by means of one dominant, poetic symbol.

In Aglavaine et Sélysette (1896), a more complicated intention reveals the dramatic weakness of symbols which promise more than characters or action can perform. Stripped of its symbolic effects - and the ease with which this can be done is a sign of weakness in structure - the plot tells of how Meléandre, in love with Sélysette, discovers a deeper spiritual union to exist between himself and Aglavaine, how these two try to persuade Sélysette into a spiritual menage a trois and how Sélysette prefers suicide to this theoretically ideal solution. A specious sense of mysterious significance is lent to this unlikely story by the symbols of the tower, the golden

i) As Jules Lemaitre commented. 'Ce mur tragique est dans tous les poèmes de M. Maeterlinck; et, quand ce n'est pas un mur, c'est une porte; et quand ce n'est pas une porte, c'est une fenêtre voilée de rideaux'. (Impressions du Théâtre 8 serie Paris, 1895. p.153)

key, the sleeping grandmother and the strange bird which grows daily. We may take it that the tower represents sacrifice and that when Sélysette goes there with the key for which she and Aglavaine, rivals in self sacrifice, have been contending, in pursuit of the green bird, ~~that~~ she attains a new spiritual status in sacrificial death. But these symbols, unlike Ibsen's bird symbol, the wild duck, have not enriched the action, nor is it possible to feel that they have an indispensable place within it. No doubt an admirer of this manner could complain that a poetic play should not be subjected to any analysis of exact correspondences; the effect sought by the poet is the emotional effect which music has for some people. Indeed, we are forcibly reminded of the symbolist dogma that all art aspires toward the condition of music by those ~~three~~ long passages of Maeterlinck's dialogue in which sentences are unfinished, question and answer repeated, as in a dream, and little phrases, such as 'J'ai la clef', hammered out like a musical motif. All this, of course, enhances the dream effect, or, as Maeterlinck himself put it, makes the characters appear like somnambulists who are continually being awakened from a painful dream.ⁱ⁾ The symbols, such as that of the tower and the green bird, are used in much the same way, primarily for emotional effect, but they occupy a world not sufficiently integrated with the world of realistic event and action which

i) Maeterlinck Théâtre (Paris 1901) Vol.I. p.II

is fatally introduced into this play. The discussion at the opening of the play about the details of the crossing and the wedding strikes a curiously commonplace note which renders all the more unconvincing the dreamy speech of Sélysette and the inflated style of Aglavaine's letter. Meléandre's attempt to establish a communal relationship with his two loves demands an ironic treatment, rather than the deadly seriousness with which it is in fact presented, and the high minded reactions of the two women survive no test of probability. Any intrusion of common daylight into Maeterlinck's romantic dreams is fatal, yet there has never been any profoundly satisfying drama from which the ordinary light of day was altogether excluded. Maeterlinck himself seems to have become aware of this about the time of his Sagesse et Destinée (1898), when he reversed his former theories and denied, with vehemence, the idea that life should be measured by the standard of death and that the passive dreaming state of the soul was more significant than the active search for truth and happiness. Sensual enjoyment was now reinstated as an honourable condition and the conception of Destiny as an inescapable threat to human happiness repudiated. This idea is brought out in Les Fiancailles, where the figure of Destiny, a great monster at the beginning of the play, gradually shrinks in size until, at the end, he is small enough to be carried as an infant.

With this change of outlook came a change in dramatic planning, a sharp division becoming apparent between those plays devised as

fairy tales or miracle plays and the more conventional plays with a realistic action. Examples of the former kind are Ardiane et Barbe-Bleue (1899), Soeur Béatrice (1901), Joyzelle (1903), L'Oiseau Bleu (1909), Les Fiancailles (1918) and of the latter, Monna Vanna (1902), Le Bourgmestre de Stilmonde (1919), Le Malheur Passe (1919).

The plays of the second group furnish depressing examples of the commonplace or tawdry themes on which Maeterlinck depends when he renounces fairy tale settings. The plots turn on sensational incidents such as Tatiana's vow of revenge in Le Malheur Passe or the sacrificial journey of Monna Vanna to the enemy's tent by night, and they are worked out in a manner frequently reminiscent of Sardou. The meretricious rhetoric employed by characters such as Prinzivalle in Monna Vanna which is now substituted for the hesitant language of earlier plays, suggests that those early mannerisms may have concealed an essentially second rate style. So do the thin, improbable actions of plays like Le Malheur Passe inevitably cause us to wonder whether the glamorous symbols of the first plays concealed a similar paucity of idea.

The improbabilities are more pronounced in these plays with realistic backgrounds. It may be possible to believe in a fairy tale princess of perfect purity, but when Monna Vanna declares that she has never told a lie in her life, we must surely sigh for a Maeterlinckian Bluntschli to deflate her as the Shavian hero did

Raina when she made the same claim. But the intrusion of a Bluntschli would, of course, be fatal to plays such as Monna Vanna, which depend upon all the sentimental heroics of which Shaw was so ruthless an adversary.

In the fairy tale plays, on the other hand, the more optimistic Maeterlinck of this later phase, often achieved felicitous effects which have won for L'Oiseau Bleu a popular reputation similar in kind to that enjoyed by Peter Pan. But how seriously are these fairy plays to be taken? It is clear that many of the symbols in L'Oiseau Bleu or Les Fiancailles reflect Maeterlinck's philosophic conceptions, for example, that of Destiny, already mentioned, in the later play. There is a simple and obvious conflict between good and bad in these plays, between the power of Light, or Truth, and that of Night, or Chaos, and the ultimate triumph of Truth is never for a moment in doubt. But, the symbols are, effective, largely because they are unrelated to any serious interpretation of human behaviour. Maeterlinck has finally escaped into a world in which children are the protagonists, their experience that of a dream, and their search, the child-like search for the blue bird of happiness. Some of the symbols may be more arbitrary and obscure than others, that of the singing grass which represents scientific truth in L'Oiseau Bleu, for instance, or, in the same play, the trees which represent churches and the animals secular powers. But it is a measure of the play's essential simplicity that even if such symbols

are not understood, they can still be accepted quite easily as part of the language of a child's dream. Nothing need be out of place in a country where animals talk, magic sapphires banish ugly thoughts, and where it is possible to visit the land of one's ancestors and of those as yet unborn.

But in such fantasies as Joyzelle, Ardiane et Barbe Bleu and Soeur Beatrice, where some sort of moral is being drawn from adult behaviour, the symbols function less happily. Joyzelle in particular suffers from a very cloudy morality, more marked in that it appears to challenge comparison with The Tempest, from which play Maeterlinck has borrowed the idea of the enchanted island and the human magician, here called Merlin. Merlin commands a feminine Arielle, representing, so we are told, the neglected power which slumbers in every human soul. Merlin sets out to test the love of Joyzelle and his young son, Lancéor, with the result that Lancéor is deceived by the instinct on which he relies, while Joyzelle, trusting in what we can only conclude to be a superior intuition, evades all the traps laid for her. The final test comes when she has to choose between saving Lancéor's life and preserving her chastity from the assault threatened by Merlin. She chooses to save her lover by submitting to Merlin, but when the time of payment comes, turns her dagger on the old man as he lies sleeping. This is apparently the correct action, for she is applauded by Merlin and Arielle and accepted as the true bride for Lancéor. Joyzelle herself attempts to establish the significance of this symbolic

situation by concluding that true love has the right to destroy all in its way. But Merlin, or, rather, Maeterlinck, evades the issue. Such a course, he tells us, is reserved only for a few, rare souls, such as Joyzelle: it is not to be taken as a Golden Rule. This is a cloudy meaning indeed. Maeterlinck is back in his world of 'essences', demonstrated in the scene where Joyzelle, brutally treated by Lancéor, who has been changed out of recognition by the poison of sensual indulgence, tells him that she loves him not for what he says, not for what he does, but for what he is. But drama cannot afford only to be concerned with 'essences', and we must demand the right to judge characters in a play by what they say and do, particularly when, as here, their actions are so drastic and given such dramatic emphasis.

To conclude, Maeterlinck's use of symbols is essentially that of an impressionist poet, using images vaguely to evoke the cruder and simpler emotions. When he confines himself to a simple, poignant situation, attempting to evoke only a single, dominant mood, he is generally successful, as in L'Intérieur and L'Intruse. When he abandons any attempt to construct a serious action around adult characters, and escapes into the world of L'Oiseau Bleu, he achieves another kind of success, a success however, in which the intellectual significance of his symbols is of small importance. He fails when he tries to use symbols more ambitiously, as in Alladine et Palomides or Joyzelle, for since they are conceived mystically and emotionally they seem frequently ill at ease or

actually out of place in real action which draws some realistic moral conclusion. He relies too heavily on automatic reactions to tried romance words, to glamorous settings, to the very names of his shadowy kings and queens and princesses. It is noticeable that his male characters are insignificant in comparison with the pallid mysterious women, the precocious, doomed children, 'les avertis,' round whom most of his plays centre.

Yet Maeterlinck's historical significance cannot be overlooked. To a generation of playwrights weary of poetic rhetoric but desirous of poetic effect, he suggested a way out, by the use of symbols which would suggest infinite meaning by their very lack of precision. The dream-like effects in which he excelled, the suggestion of people moving and talking like somnambulists, revealing the inner life of the soul: - these were the effects which were to captivate playwrights so different from one another as Strindberg and Granville Barker. His theories of dramatic technique continued to have meaning for the twentieth century after the subject matter of his plays had become outmoded. Maeterlinck never really succeeded in breaking out of Axel's castle, and the doctrine of 'l'art pour l'art' which had held such a fascination for himself and his contemporaries, ceased to be a magic password even before 1914. But his theory of 'interior' drama was to prove of more lasting value, though it had to pass through the fires of Strindberg's tortured mind before it acquired real meaning for the generations nurtured on Freud.

II (c)

Strindberg

'I dream, therefore I exist'.

Strindberg exerts an influence possibly disproportionate to the dramatic value of his plays largely because he expresses so exactly the self consciousness of the age. That obsession with his own personality which might seem unlikely to prove an asset to a playwright was in fact what fascinated the post-Freud generations. Furthermore, Strindberg presented to the psychologists of the theatre a new technique, that commonly known as expressionism, by which mental processes could effectively be dramatised. Certain of Strindberg's experimental devices, such as the circular action of The Road to Damascus, the flash backs of The Dream Play, have become theatrical commonplaces, accepted unquestioningly by audiences unlikely to desire better acquaintance with the plays in which the methods originated.

It is necessary here to distinguish between the term "expressionism" and the term "symbolism" in the sense in which it is employed throughout this thesis. A very exhaustive definition of expressionism is given by C.E.W.L. Dahlstrom in his book Strindberg's Dramatic Expressionism ¹⁾, but like many other writers on the subject he uses

i) University of Michigan Publications. Language and Literature vol.7. 1930

the term to cover not only devices such as distorted settings, a characteristic feature of the technique, but also symbols which arise out of a realistic action. I should distinguish between the two methods by suggesting that dramatic symbols, by definition, must operate on more than one level whereas expressionist devices operate only on a single level: their effect is more direct and generally less ambiguous. Expressionism involves the direct precipitation of a character's thought or feeling into stage pictures, such as the distorted settings of Georg Kaiser's Gas, Elmer Rice's Adding Machine, Strindberg's The Dream Play, together with the use of any devices such as masks, trance-like actions, supernatural visions, which are clearly designed to afford insight into the character's mental processes. It would scarcely be possible to describe the witches in Macbeth as expressionistic, since they represent only partially the inner workings of Macbeth's mind: a stronger case might perhaps be made out for the admission of certain features in Webster's plays, for example, the appearance of Isabella's ghost to Francisco in The White Devil as an illustration of expressionist technique. But expressionism, although not an entirely new technique in the theatre, and indeed of what technique can we say so much, is characteristic of the twentieth century in that it is so deliberately, self consciously used by modern playwrights in their attempt to probe into the complexities of personality, an attempt never given quite such special emphasis till this period. Expressionist devices

may be used for purposes other than that of character analysis: indeed the bold, unambiguous effect achieved by the use of masks and distorted settings has been much exploited by playwrights with a propagandist intention¹⁾. The stage distortions will then be found very often to express the playwright's view of the action he is presenting, but whether they reflect his mind or that of one of his characters, or both, the effect is bound to be more clear cut and limited than the effect created by the more subtle kind of symbol, which can hold an apparently infinite number of meanings according to the mind of the beholder. An extreme expressionist technique generally results in the play taking the form of monodrama, since all the scenes and characters involved are simply a reflection of the character's mind, and have no independent life outside his mind. This is of course a form much affected by Strindberg, indeed perhaps the only form within which he could work with perfect ease.

The study of Strindberg's symbolism is not then, an easy matter, the symbols being presented, as they so often are, within the framework of expressionist drama and so seeming to require a different standard of measurement from that applied to, say, Ibsen's kind of symbolism. Since Strindberg invariably used drama as a means of effecting his private katharsis, he frequently failed to distinguish

i) In particular the German playwrights of the 1914-1920 period, such as Toller (Masse-Mensch), Kaiser (Gas), Hasenclever (Der Sohn).

between symbols which arose naturally out of the dramatic context and had a potentially universal significance and those drawn from obscure or petty incidents in his own life which were meaningful only to him. The situation is further complicated by the fact that his strong, indeed fanatical, religious sense tends all the time to thrust his drama in the direction of allegory, and, as we have already observed, the symbols employed in consistent allegory are bound to have a denotative, inflexible quality which is, unless very skilfully handled, destructive to true dramatic effect. Drama depends, above all, on a feeling of movement and flexibility. So on the one hand we have the danger that symbols drawn from Strindberg's private experience will be used in such a way as to make his drama obscure, and on the other hand the possibility that his fondness for bold expressionist effects and for allegorical implications will result in an over-clear, rigid and didactic drama.

In fact, the apparently difficult, confusing plots of so many of Strindberg's plays can generally be defined in terms of the simple, traditional conflict between God and the Devil for the soul of Everyman. Admittedly, the Strindbergian Everyman is a curious creature and his awareness of the supernatural world uncomfortably close to the hallucinations of a madman, but his experiences are, after all, only the experiences of common humanity carried to their extreme limit. Strindberg attempts to emphasise the universal quality by the Christian symbolism which is central to the majority

of his plays. Many of them are professedly 'morality' or 'miracle' plays, such as Advent, Easter, The Road to Damascus, The Great Highway. Even the early naturalistic plays have in them much of the medieval 'débat', the eternal argument between the vices and virtues, conducted in the soul of man.

These generalisations will now be tested by a consideration of the plays, in which only those affording real illumination on the problem of dramatic symbolism will be examined in any detail. More attention was devoted to the immature or less important plays of Ibsen than will here be afforded to those of Strindberg, since in Ibsen's development the whole story of symbolism seemed to be told: Strindberg's drama furnishes only one chapter.

Like Ibsen, Strindberg began with historical plays, but as early as Master Olof in 1872 the two controlling principles of his later work are already apparent, his allegorical tendency, combined with his desperate need to give himself a measure of relief by externalising in dramatic form his own inner torments. When he first turned from historical themes it was to escape from the tyranny of recorded events into the free world of fairy tale, the world of Lucky Pehr's Travels (1883) where the symbol has become the only true reality. This play is more akin to Peer Gynt than to Maeterlinck's shadowy fairy plays, for, it presents a moral, and one not unlike that of Peer Gynt, to the effect that it is not possible to live without the love of one's fellow men. Strindberg, however,

does not attempt that blend of realistic and fantastic action which gives Peer Gynt its special quality: his is a wholly symbolic action concluding on the optimistic note that he found possible only in such fairy tale settings.

Pehr, in his search for happiness, uses the magic ring provided by his fairy godmother to achieve his desires, becoming in turn rich man, public reformer and Oriental potentate, only to find all his pleasures turn to dust and ashes, while his true happiness, though he does not recognise it, lies in the love of the faithful Lisa, as Peer's salvation lay in Solveig. Peer Gynt's ordeal in the Troll King's palace is matched in this play by the scene in which Pehr is required to sacrifice one ideal after another in order to retain his power as Caliph. His last minute assertion of his better nature results in a magical metamorphosis: the symbols of rank and power, the family tree, the crown and sceptre, are swept away, and the scene changes to a desolate sea shore. This scene corresponds to the last act of Peer Gynt. Death appears here, however, in conventional guise, wielding a scythe: he reveals to Pehr the weakness in his nature which has prevented him from attaining happiness. He has relied too much on himself and must learn that 'One cannot live without one's fellow men'. Peer Gynt realises too late that the search for the Gyntian self has destroyed him, but Pehr discovers his fault in time and in the last act in the church he is redeemed through his newly realised love for Lisa. Strindberg strikes a more optimistic note than Ibsen, but it is

significant that his happy endings, such as that of Lucky Pehr, are generally confined to plays with a fairy tale setting which present an ideal exemplar rather than an examination of life as it is. Ibsen often gave his characters second chances in real life., Strindberg generally only in dreams and fables.

The essence of Strindbergian drama is captured in the situation of the last act when Pehr watches his own shadow step up to the pulpit to deliver a sermon on the nature of reality. Most of the later plays can be reduced to this formula, an allegorical shadow play in which the characters are projections of Strindberg's self, moralising about the state of his soul. The way in which inanimate objects are brought to sinister life in this scene is also typical of Strindberg's attitude toward the world outside him. Any object was potentially a symbol, not necessarily because it had strong imagistic quality, but because, according to his Swedenborgian philosophy, all objects, as well as men, were in the control of supernatural powers who moved animate and inanimate alike as pawns in a mysterious game of chess. So the Fall of the Saint and the humble Broom come to life in this scene to convey a message to Pehr. The similarity with Maeterlinck's treatment of inanimate objects in L'Oiseau Bleu, a later play, is apparent, but it is also noticeable that Strindberg has set his fantastic symbols within a specifically Christian framework: the play begins and ends in the church. Pehr finds happiness only when his father's sin against 'Christmas' has been adequately punished by the Hobgoblin. This peculiar combination of fairy tale and Christian morality play suited

Strindberg very well, and it is not surprising to find him so often returning to it. It enabled him to make symbols out of any material that came to hand and to emphasise, by means of magical transformations the theme of the unreality of appearances which dominates all his thinking. A magic ring, in Lucky Pehr, can transform a winter landscape into an idyllic summer scene but with equal facility a scene of pomp and splendour may be replaced by one of desolation and despair. Sometimes the method is to carry over a symbol from a scene of magic into a more realistic setting, in the form of an image. For example, a cloud of mosquitoes appears in the summer scene as a warning to Pehr that there is always a reverse side to happiness. In the banquet scene Pehr discovers that even riches and good living bring 'mosquitoes' with them, in the shape of sycophantic friends, irksome etiquette, and toothache! The image of the 'mosquitoes' persists in later scenes, though it is, of course, sometimes overlaid by new symbols, such as that humble one of the toothache. The main reason for Strindberg's early admiration for the work of Dickens was the life which that author infused even into inanimate objects and the way in which he harmonised scenery with character.

Some of the freedom he had enjoyed in Lucky Pehr's Travels Strindberg permitted himself in the group of naturalistic plays which followed and in which he never conformed so exactly with the demands of probability as Ibsen had done. Strindberg's so called 'naturalism' is a very different thing from the 'realism' to which the English stage has become accustomed. In the plays from The

Father (1887) to The Link in 1897 there is no comforting detail of everyday routine, no solid background of normality. The characters may exist in this world but they exist in it in a state of terrible isolation: there is no touchstone of simple, common life such as that which Shakespeare could dare to introduce even into his most intense tragedies. Even the minor characters, such as the Nurse in The Father, to whom at first we cling with relief as a representative of the normal world, become themselves inextricably involved in the nightmares of the principal characters. It is, in fact, the Nurse who places the strait jacket over her master's head while crooning a lullaby to him.

Further, the moral criteria to which the characters subject their own actions are in a state of continual flux, since in this nightmare world nothing is ever what it seems, the simplest action may be prompted by the most complex and unfathomable motives and the faith by which a character has lived will sooner or later be shown to be an absurd illusion. In such a play as The Link we begin with a seemingly straightforward quarrel between husband and wife which is so examined from a variety of angles that in the end not a soul in the courtroom, nor in the audience, is able to say where the 'truth' lies. Pirandello was later to elaborate this technique, while keeping within a realistic framework, but Strindberg was very soon to feel the need for a more wholesale method of demonstrating the uncertainty of things. The theme is symbolised, in a realistic setting, in Simoom, where the officer is induced by the hypnotic powers of the Arabian girl to drink sand in the belief that it is

water, hear a wind where there is none and to feel the paralysis of death without any physical cause. Strindberg's characters are perpetually enacting a Simoom - finding sand instead of water, the true and false inextricably mixed, the appearance of things a shifting and deceitful mirage.

It is significant that the apostle of realism, Zola, was not deceived by the apparently realistic surface of the plays in question. In a letter to Strindberg of 1887, he said, of The Father, 'Et votre capitaine qui n'a pas même de nom, vos autres personnages qui sont presque des êtres de raison, ne me donnent pas de la vie la sensation complète que je demande.'ⁱ⁾

It is of course an apposite criticism: the namelessness of Strindberg's characters does indeed emphasize their detachment from the Zolaesque world of reality and reminds us that they are essentially projections of Strindberg's personality. They analyse themselves and each other in an eternal 'débat' which is made dramatic by the extraordinary circumstances in which the arguments are conducted. Strindberg himself maintained in defence of his 'monodramas' that one knows only one life - his own, and in The Road to Damascus, the first of his revolutionary symbolic dramas, he proceeded to investigate that life in his own terms. The first two parts of The Road to Damascus were written in 1898 and the third part did not

i) Quoted in Dahlström op.cit. p.93.

follow until 1904. The three parts form a pattern of the stranger's alternating movement towards and away from the God of the Monastery. The stranger is, of course, Strindberg himself, as are many of the characters in the play, but by reason of the religious associations invested in the central symbols, the Stranger frequently acquires a more universal nature. The curious result is that in this play of vision, fantasy and daydream the central characters often emerge as more convincing types of human nature than did characters such as Laura or Miss Julia in the naturalistic plays. It is at times as though Strindberg had succeeded in creating a new myth from the powerful life of the subconscious or dreaming self which he superimposes on the Christian pattern.

In the first part, the Stranger sets out from the Street Corner on his journey to Damascus, though without recognising the nature of the journey. The Lady, Goethe's 'Ewige weibliche', does recognise the way for what it is, 'this endless way of Calvaries', but she can only help the Stranger when he permits her to. Halfway through, the Stranger comes to the Convent, symbol of the ultimate goal, but he is still unregenerate and must suffer the Curse of Deuteronomy to be laid upon him. He is told by the Mother, a figure into which that of the Lady sometimes merges, that he must go back over his road, which is now clearly visualised as the road of man cursed by God, or the way of the stations of the cross. At each station the Stranger must erect a cross: a winter landscape replaces that of summer: he sees the three bare masts of a wrecked ship which suggest

the crosses of Golgotha. The seventh station is the original Street Corner, at which he again meets the Lady, but this time he is sufficiently softened to follow her into the Church, in which he will 'hear new songs'. He has at last acknowledged the presence of Powers which are working out his destiny, but only to the extent of perceiving their maleficence, and since he will not allow Christ to suffer for him, he must bear the weight of that suffering himself.

After making such a summary, one might be inclined to describe the play as pure allegory, and indeed the allegorical element is dominant, but it differs from the straightforward allegory of the Middle Ages in that Strindberg retains within his allegorical pattern stretches of action which are not of a simple universal kind but of a passionately personal nature. So the Lady, the eternal Eve, at times becomes a very particular Eve, the wife of the Doctor, the one time betrothed of the Confessor, and the situations in which she then figures are clearly drawn from Strindberg's own harrowing experiences with the women in his life. The Doctor represents Guilt, but he is also associated in the Stranger's memory with a particular boyhood incident which we know in fact to have originated in Strindberg's actual childhood. Such particular, personal incidents are treated with the same passionate intensity accorded to the major spiritual conflicts of the play, sometimes indeed with an even fiercer intensity, since Strindberg was never able to keep his personal obsessions from intruding on the dramatic conflicts which his characters suffer. This is only to be expected since, as we have

said, he is not relating, impartially, the trials of Everyman, but suffering them himself and attempting to communicate his own suffering. The main line of the allegory may be obfuscated by the innumerable tiny lines drawn across it in this way, but at the same time that the allegory is made more complex, it is also given a violent life beyond that of the ordinary didactic drama. Like Ibsen's Master Builder, Strindberg tears open his wounds and flays them before our eyes, so that out of his memories and miseries he can build up the pattern of an universal pilgrimage. But he is able to find comfort in the assurance that he is not alone in his torment. He is travelling the way of Paul, 'delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved', and of Job, afflicted by the God who loved him. On occasion the Lady addresses him as Job, and the parallel with the Biblical journey to Damascus is, of course, maintained throughout the play, becoming at times, as we have noticed, the journey of Christ himself to Calvary. Certain leit motifs keep the major theme in view, such as the Funeral March, repeated at intervals until the death scene of Part III when the Stranger dies to his old self and Saul becomes Paul. The pattern is a familiar one, the flight from the dread Power which is finally recognised as the kindly oneⁱ⁾!

Within the main pattern, Strindberg draws his symbols freely from classical, fairy tale or historical sources. In Part I he

i) Cf. Eliot's treatment of the theme in The Family Reunion.

suggests the pattern of which the Stranger becomes conscious in his life by such symbols as the Lady's needlework, at which she works like one of the Fates, sewing and unpicking 'a network of nerves and knots'. When the Stranger retraces his footsteps half way through the action, he is putting into practice the symbolic unpicking of the work. His own obstinacy, a prominent trait in his character, is projected into the figures of the Smith and the Miller's Wife, two Grimm-like ogres who refuse hospitality to the pilgrims. Their motto is 'An eye for an eye', and the Stranger hears even from the Rose Room, symbol of human ecstasy, the sound of their mills grinding outside his window, the mills of God grinding out his soul. Later, at the fifth station, the two symbols are brought together: the mills grind out the panorama of his life while the Lady brings her needlework to a close. Hers is the kindly pattern and though it is discoloured by their unpleasant experiences, the Stranger suggests that it may be dyed rose red, which is to him the colour of happiness. Other characters in this part are used at one time to suggest figures out of Strindberg's real past, at other times as dramatic projections of facets of his own personality. This adds to the confusion, in that, for example, the Beggar is seen at one moment as a sinister grotesque, the next as a kindly and sympathetic character, depending on whether he represents qualities within the Stranger or without. Later, however, he merges into the figure of the Confessor, who is one with the Dominican, making it clear that whatever the Stranger's changing

view of him, his function is essentially benevolent, since the Dominican represents the redeemed and regenerate life.

In Part II the main theme is the attempt to differentiate between the true and the false, good and evil. As we should expect, therefore, the pattern of events is more complex and blurred than in either Part I or Part IIIⁱ⁾. The Stranger follows the false god, Baal, in his study of alchemy, which he hopes will give him power over the whole world by revealing the secret of gold. This is a good example of how Strindberg uses his actual experiences as the basis for a moral fable. He himself had experimented with alchemy at the time of his second marriage, which was also a time of intense nervous strain. This experience he now builds up into a savage presentation of the Faust theme; man seeks to wrest their secrets from the gods and is destroyed by his "hubris". The familiar legend is given a new and curious power by the effect of immediacy which, as we see, comes from Strindberg having lived the experience before he moralises from it - 'One knows only one life - his own'. Less happily, perhaps, memories of the birth of his own child intrude into the formalised birth scene of the play, when the idea of the Nativity, suggested by the presence of the Sisters of Mercy is shattered by the Lady's hint that the child may not be the Stranger's own. This theme of disillusionment is related to the gold symbol in the banqueting scene

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i) Son of a Servant (1913) p.207 'But when is one true and when is one false? And where is to be found the central 'ego', - the core of character?'

reminiscent of that in Lucky Pehr's Travels, when, in a flash, the magnificent dinner table vanishes and the Stranger finds himself a despised prisoner instead of the fêted alchemist. The Beggar draws the appropriate conclusion, - 'Feasts of Belshazzar always end like this'.

Always in the background of the scene, which is to say, at the back of the Stranger's mind, is the Dominican, or Terrible One, who speaks to the Stranger through the humanised projection of himself, the Beggar. One of the Beggar's functions is, indeed, to explain the significance of the symbols which pass before the Stranger's eyes in a nightmare kaleidoscope towards the end of Part II. He is shown the dreaded Smithy and Mill in ruins and the house of the Lady's Parents, a place of great suffering, drowned in the risen Lake of Tears, while the Beggar draws the appropriate moral, that an old sin has been washed away and retribution averted. The Stranger has now come to the point where, like Lucifer, as the Beggar says, he must split into two and drive out his own evil. Once again he visualises his past life, and the scene ends on a note of hope with a glimpse of the Rose Room. The Lady is seen dressed in symbolic white, her green dress, the witches' colour, laid by, an indication that the Stranger may now be able to perceive the good in her, for while he can only recognise the bad he cannot be redeemed.

In Part III he sets out on the last stage of his journey, dressed in conventional pilgrim's clothes. He makes the painful

ascent from the valley to the mountain top, on which stands the Monastery, his goal; here the symbolism explains itself¹).

The purer mountain air brings back his happier memories: the Lady again appears beautiful: finally, pausing at the crossroads, where invalids seek to wash away the stains of life, he crosses the river in which they bathe and for the first time finds it possible to believe and weep.

It is at this stage that the Beggar's prophecy is fulfilled: the Stranger projects the evil within him into the figure of the Tempter, a process which recalls the splitting up of Lucky Pehr into self and shadow²). Formal religious allegory now begins to dominate. The Tempter and the Dominican fight for the soul of the Stranger, like the Bad and Good Angels of the Faust story. Strindberg's Tempter has more than a touch of Goethe's Mephistopheles: his outlook is that of the cultivated cynic, and the Stranger has to struggle to defend his best thoughts from the corroding touch which would abandon him to despair, the 'eighth deadly sin'. Sometimes he is observed rather than protagonist, as in the trial scene, when the cause of sin is traced back as far as the Garden of Eden, the

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- 1) It is the same kind of symbolism as that in Brand, a play which, on first reading, Strindberg described as making a deep impression 'on the primitive Christian side of him' The Growth of a Soul (1913) p.135.
 - 2) This is yet another of the devices which Eugene O'Neill borrows from Strindberg, Cf. the two selves of John Loving in Days Without End (1934).

Lady becoming Eve and the Tempter the Serpent. But the mountain air is as yet too strong for him, that is to say, he is not yet sufficiently detached from personal experiences, not yet ready for the life of abstract speculation. He descends into the valley for the last time, reliving once more his past, but with this difference, that he can at last see purpose even in suffering; it is also part of the design. With this realisation comes achievement: he is received into the Chapter House where he recognises his old enemy, the Doctor, without hate or fear, for he now sees that 'all are guilty', all men are part of one another. His sense of achievement is pointed by the scene in the picture gallery where he is shown portraits of great men who, like himself, have suffered from a conflict between their various personalities - Goethe, Voltaire, Victor Hugo. But the Stranger has acquired singleness of purpose, symbolised by the last scene in the chapel where his old self dies and is buried, while around him the process of new life, pictured in baptismal and wedding ceremonies, continues eternally.

The Road to Damascus is an interesting example of the way in which Strindberg sometimes achieves a symbolic pattern of universal significance, less perhaps by thinking in strictly dramatic terms, than by visualising his personal problems in the terms of a traditional experience. He sees himself at the centre of the Christian stories he dramatises, sometimes as Saul, or Job, sometimes as ~~the~~ Christ himself, but always as a member of the Christian community of souls. Furthermore he is able to introduce supernatural beings

to represent the forces of good which human characters can scarcely represent in the Strindbergian world where 'all are guilty'. This results in a more balanced world than that of the naturalistic plays, where only a narrow segment of experience was presented as though it were the type of all existence. It may be a dramatic weakness that Strindberg can only present good qualities in the form of allegorical or supernatural figures, but at least by introducing such figures he achieves a sense of perspective absent from more superficially realistic work.

This idea can be illustrated from a comparison of the next two plays, There are Crimes and Crimes (1899) and Advent (1899), published together under the joint title, In a Higher Court. Both plays treat the same theme, one naturalistically, the other symbolically, and the naturalistic treatment is decidedly the weaker of the two.

The moral of There are Crimes and Crimes is that evil desires are as much to be condemned as evil actions. Maurice, in willing the death of his child in order to obtain his freedom, is guilty of as real a sin as if he had in fact committed the murder with which he is charged.

In attempting to keep the action on a naturalistic basis, Strindberg involves himself in an exceedingly melodramatic and unconvincing plotⁱ⁾, depending on a clumsy mechanism of police enquiries,

i) Of. Strindberg's treatment of this theme with that of Ibsen in Little Eyolf, where the symbolic action is carefully kept out of the fierce light of common day.

slander, and unbelievable coincidences. Both Adolphe and Henriette, for example, discover that they have in the past directed the 'death wish' against their respective parents, to which sin their present suffering is due. The law of the 'higher court' is represented by the Priest, who is, however, little more than a bystander, offering moral reflections at appropriate moments, while the battle for the soul of Maurice is fought out in a pasteboard world of street cafés and police courts. Strindberg himself warned critics that this play should not be taken too seriously, but it does seem to afford an example of the difficulty he found in placing sufficiently powerful symbols within a fully realistic setting.

In Advent he abandons the attempt to combine realistic and symbolic action, reverting to the allegorical form of The Road to Damascus and Lucky Pehr's Travels. This 'Miracle Play' as it is sub-titled deals with the judgment of God on two sinners, the Judge and his wife, the Old Lady. Having turned human laws to their own advantage all their lives, these two must now submit to the higher law of God, put into operation by God's agent, the Devil, or, as he is here called, the Other One. The form of Advent is closer to that of the medieval miracle than any of Strindberg's earlier work: not only does the Devil appear in person, but the Christ child himself appears to console the innocent grandchildren.

As in Lucky Pehr, much of the dramatic effect in this play is created by the coming to life of inanimate objects. The Judge and

the Old Lady have proved immune to ordinary human opposition, so now all creation takes a hand in contriving their downfall. One of the major differences between Ibsen's drama and that of Strindberg is that Ibsen was able to show radical changes in outlook coming about within the normal patterns of human life: consequently he was able to invest incidents of normal life with the required symbolic significance. But Strindberg can generally represent a change of heart only when supernatural powers intervene: the 'normal' world must first be shaken apart or even destroyed completely. The Judge and the Old Lady are unaffected by the persuasions of the 'good' characters in Advent, but they are seriously alarmed by the sinister sun spot, which to them represents the light they shun, while to the children in the cellar it spells hope and salvation. Even the mausoleum, built by themselves in their own honour, betrays them by emitting a procession of shadows, symbols of guilty deeds in their past, headed by Death with his scythe. The silver, symbol of their ill-gotten gains, refuses to be cleaned, wine glasses are torn from their hands: objects in the court room arrange themselves as the Judge goes in to try and sentence a shadow, which is in fact himself.

Fairy tale material is interwoven with that of the Christian miracle play, as in the scene where the children play with their nameless friend in an enchanted garden, the Old Lady, in the guise of a witch, lurking in the background. The Other One, a pathetic Satan, who has learnt to love the good but is condemned to punish the wicked, draws an analogy between the garden and Paradise, telling

the children that they would have been driven out if they had touched the forbidden fruit, while at the end of the scene the children's playmate is revealed in traditional garb as the Christ Child.

Strindberg's favourite contrast between illusion and reality is cast in the favourite fairy tale mould when the Old Lady, transported to the witches' ballroom, thinks herself the belle of the ball, while really dancing in Hell with guests who are all monstrosities and the Devil the Master of Ceremonies. She can only maintain her own illusion at the cost of supporting other people's: when she mocks at the hunchback who presents himself as the Handsome Prince, he retaliates, and she is forced to recognise ugliness and deformity in herself as well as in others. It is difficult to believe that this scene was not inspired by the Troll palace scene in Peer Gynt, but here the religious allegory is much more explicit, as is usual with Strindberg. Peer's experience, and the form it takes, is peculiar to him, whereas that of the nameless Old Lady, complete as it is with Christ Child and Devil, is her's only inasmuch as she represents the sin of Adam.

The striking resemblance to Peer Gynt is partially maintained by the auction scene, where the Judge is forced to watch while all his goods are given to the poor and he himself offered for sale, though no one will bid for him. Finally he joins the Old Lady, after both have died miserably, in the 'waiting room' of Hell, to receive judgment and punishment. This scene might be compared

with the final scenes of Peer Gynt, where the delicate ambiguity over the nature of Peer's judgment contrasts with Strindberg's consciously didactic pronouncement on the fate of his sinners. The play ends on a simple and devotional note which would not have been out of place in a medieval miracle play. In the rocks and chasms of Hell, the sinners, including the Other One, are given a glimpse of a heavenly tableau, the Nativity, presided over by the Christmas star. Even for the worst of sinners there is hope in the grace of God.

This play is rejected as an expressionist drama by Dahlström,¹¹ despite its many extra-realistic devices, since, as he points out, there is no one ego through which the action flows. Indeed it is much more nearly a simple religious allegory, given those lively and moving qualities with which Strindberg was so often able to endow his allegories, by reason of his own profound conviction that he lived in a world alive with symbolic significance.

Advent was followed by a group of history plays, in which historical material is submitted to the same moralising process, and historical figures take on the same curious resemblance to Strindberg himself. Eric XIV, in the play of that name, was evidently destined to become one with his creator, particularly in the scenes of madness, where Strindberg projects his own obsessions, such as his complex about the unreliability of servants, into the tortured mind of the King. The play ends with a symbolic tableau reminiscent of Ibsen's historical tableaux, with Carl and Johan

turning in opposite directions and the whole tragedy about to start again.

Symbolic tableaux are more prominent in The Saga of the Folkungs (1899); groups of characters, are arranged in such a way as to suggest future conflicts, and sinister omens abound. The medieval setting enables Strindberg to use Christian symbols in a more natural and realistic way, for example the procession of flagellants in the market place, sounding the note of doom which Magnus will be unable to avert even by his Christ-like public penance. The noise of the festive trumpets is drowned by the sound of the Litany, a natural enough incident in such a setting, but carrying an obvious thematic significance. Yet even in a setting which affords him such scope Strindberg still feels the need to introduce completely unrealistic figures. The coming of the plague, for instance, is represented by the Plague Boy with a rake and the Plague Girl, in a black dress with vermilion hands and cheeks, who marks white crosses on the house doors. The method is more akin to that of the moral history play, such as Bale's King John, than Shakespeare's humanised history dramas for which Strindberg frequently expressed admiration.

In the next play, The Dance of Death (1901), he returned to the naturalistic form of The Father, but this time he stresses the terrible isolation in which the characters exist by the symbolic setting of the fortress on the island, 'Little Hell', which is the 'prison' of Alice and the Captain. At regular intervals throughout Part I a sentry is seen passing on his round; Alice frequently

refers to the fortress as her 'prison' in which she is completely cut off from the outside world and the Captain makes joking use of the metaphor when he talks of himself as Bluebeard keeping the fair maiden captive in his tower. He diagnoses his physical trouble as 'calcification of the heart', or 'stone heart', stone like the fortress walls which hold the miserable pair fossilised. The corruption of their characters is projected symbolically into the poisonous air of the fortress, which Curt feels the moment he enters. It comes from the 'dead bodies' beneath the flooring, the wretched memories of the past which cannot die. Two of Alice's children have died for 'lack of light' and the other two have been sent away from the island in a hopeless attempt to save them.

It is clear that by metaphor and symbol Strindberg has deliberately sought to produce the effect of an isolated state,ⁱ⁾ a spiritual hell, from which all possibilities of change have been excluded. Curt, the visitor, analyses the situation: this is hell because both Alice and the Captain have finally lost faith in the illusions which have kept them going and there is only the naked and ugly truth left. When the Captain talks of being in hell, adding that of course he speaks metaphorically, Curt replies, 'The realism with which you have described yours seems to preclude all thoughts of metaphors, poetical or otherwise'. This might also be a

i) Cf. Sartre's drawing room 'hell' in Les Huis Clos, where the punishment of the characters consists in this same isolation, in which they have nothing to do but torment each other.

description of the play, for the metaphors, such as that of the poisoned air, are continually passing over into symbols, while the 'realism' is of such a kind that the total effect is of a vast symbol, the dance of death.

It may seem at first that the symbolic isolation of Alice and the Captain is weakened by the introduction of Curt, an apparently sane and impartial observer, but it is not long before Curt also is drawn into the dance of death. Corrupted by Alice, he makes love to her like a wild beast, and is warned that the dying Captain will, like a vampire, attempt to suck out his life. This process begins in Part I and is continued in Part II, where the scene, although on the surface brighter and more agreeable, is still dominated by the presence of the sentry and the air very soon contaminated by the poisonous slander of the Captain. The dialogue is heavy with metaphor and double entendre and the sense of isolation perhaps more terrifying still when it is seen to extend beyond the limits of the gloomy fortress to the apparently more civilised white and gold drawing room. Even with the Captain's death, hell continues, for his daughter, Judith, has inherited his 'wolfish' qualities and has marked down Curt's son, Alan, as her prey. This transference of the conflict to the younger generation strengthens the allegorical implications of the play: it suggests that we are not to take the preceding action as the study of individual perversions but as a symbol of the perpetual conflict between the sexes, and, further than this, of the indestructible antagonism between man and man.

The Dance of Death is certainly one of Strindberg's most powerful plays and perhaps the best example of how his 'naturalism' is always permeated by symbolic overtones so that an effect of allegory is curiously created. The majority of his plays from this time onwards are, however, cast in a more extreme symbolical form. In Easter (1901) religious symbols again predominate, and by means of violently contrasted moods in the characters themselves Strindberg evokes in a poignant and poetic manner the contrast between all that Good Friday implies and the resurrection of hope and joy on Easter Sunday. The shadow of the dreaded bogie man, Lindkvist, is lifted when once the characters have begun to learn from their suffering and the persecutor, like the Dominican in The Road to Damascus, is revealed as friend and helper. The daffodil, flower of spring, becomes in the end the true symbol of life, but it is noticeable that this is only possible because these people, unlike the characters of The Dance of Death, are saved from the independent and isolated state by their reliance on a higher law.

In the two Maeterlinkian fairy plays, The Crown Bride and Swanwhite, which followed in 1902, it is again the predominance of a Christian morality which makes possible the hopeful endings, taken in conjunction with Strindberg's own happiness at this time, as a result of his marriage with Harriet Bosse, the model for Swanwhite. In a pamphlet called 'Open Letters to the Intimate Theatre'

(Stockholm 1909)ⁱ⁾, Strindberg wrote of the influence of Maeterlinck, 'Pushed ahead by the impression made on me by Maeterlinck, and borrowing his divining-rod for my purposes, I turned to such sources as the works of Geijer (etc)'. He then tells of the sources for the various themes he uses in Swanwhite, the 'stepmother' theme, the 'resurrection' theme and so on, concluding 'for that reason (i.e. that the combination of the various elements was distinctive) the story is my own. But it has also been made so by the fact that I have lived through that tale in my own fancy - a Spring in time of Winter'. How true this is of Strindberg's approach to all creative writing: the story must first be his own before he can invest it with dramatic life. This may also help to explain why such fairy plays have a real poignancy and power on the whole lacking in Maeterlinck's more contrived fancies.

After this pleasant interlude, Strindberg returned to the analysis of his own tormented consciousness in The Dream Play (1902), the second essay in this particular genre. As he tells us in his note to the play, 'one consciousness reigns above them all - that of the dreamer; and before it there are no secrets, no incongruities, no scruples, no laws'. The form of The Dream Play is certainly, as Dahlstrom suggests, typically expressionist in its apparently free rendering of the mind's wandering 'on an insignificant background of reality'. But as in The Road to Damascus, there is here an allegor-

i) Quoted by Edwin Bjorkman in the introduction to his edition, Plays by August Strindberg. Third Series (London 1913) p.4.

ical pattern within which the thought processes are in fact confined. Symbols from Eastern theologies largely replace the Christian symbols of earlier plays - this is a characteristic of the later workⁱ⁾ - but they are clearly enough shown to represent the same ideas and qualities. Divine goodness is represented, not by a Dominican, but by the voice of the invisible Indra and the Daughter of Indra, who takes on human shape in order to experience the suffering of men. Her presence throughout the action lends unity to the play and makes possible a logical dramatic climax when she reascends to Heaven at the end of the dream, sadder and wiser than when she set out on her 'trial'. The moral is reminiscent of that in Prometheus Bound, where even Zeus is shown as capable of learning from experience. The conclusion, indeed, belies Strindberg's own statement in the introduction that 'There is neither judgment nor exoneration but merely narration'.

Many of the symbols employed within the main pattern have, as one would expect, a fantastic, freak-like quality, of the kind used by Salvador Dali in his surrealist paintings. In the background of the opening and closing scenes is a castle, whose apex is formed by a bud in the shape of a crown: at the end of the play the bud opens into a huge chrysanthemum flower, while the castle, bursting into flame, reveals in the far background a wall of human faces, where in the first part there had been a forest of gigantic hollyhocks. Stable litter is scattered at the foot of the castle walls, and the

i) See also The Ghost Sonata.

Glazier informs the Daughter that the castle has grown to the extent of putting out a new wing, because it has been well manured.

Unlike a surrealist painter, however, Strindberg is at pains to explain his symbols, sometimes pointing the way to their meaning by allusion, force of repetition or placing in a suggestive context, but only too often allowing excessive explanation to intrude into the dialogue. The Glazier, for example, tells the Daughter that the flowers grow out of the stable dirt because they do not feel at home there and so they 'make haste to get up into the light in order to blossom and die'. The Daughter suggests that the castle contains a prisoner, who is waiting for her to set him free: a connection is at once suggested between the flowers which reach for the light and human beings waiting for their deliverance - from the body, the state of being human, from some condition in which the idea of the 'stable dirt' plays a prominent part. The moral is driven home in the dialogue between the Daughter and the prisoner in the castle, the Officer, who questions her as to why, if he is a child of heaven, as she says, he must 'keep horses, tend stable and cart straw'. To this her reply is, 'So that you may long to get away from here' and 'It is a duty to seek freedom in the light'.

The apparently fantastic symbolism in the setting is thus shown to represent a perfectly straightforward and comprehensible moral. Palaces of the soul, castles of Everyman, are, after all, familiar enough in medieval allegory. Strindberg brings them to life in a curious way by setting them in the seemingly irrelevant, haphazard and even nonsensical sequences experienced by the dreaming mind.

Much of the symbolism explains itself by its imagistic quality. As the Officer grows old and disillusioned in his hopeless wait for Victoria, the setting becomes autumnal instead of springlike, the blue monk's-hood withers, the petals fall from the roses. But Strindberg becomes increasingly reluctant to let his symbols alone. Rays from a lighthouse illuminate the scene intermittently, and lest the significance of this should be missed, the Daughter explains 'Night and day - night and day'. A merciful Providence wants to shorten your wait. Therefore the days are flying in hot pursuit of the nights'.

The usual distinction between dramatically assimilated and unassimilated or partially assimilated symbols can be made at several points in the play. Of the former type is the shawl which the Portress lends to the daughter, a shawl heavy with experience of human misery, and the twenty-six year old bedspread into which she crochets her own experience, as the Lady worked out the pattern of the Stranger's life in The Road to Damascus. Less satisfactory in the context is the mysterious clover leaf hole, which comes to represent the theme of perpetual frustration when at the end of the play it is forced open to reveal nothing. To the Officer it suggests an actual clover leaf hole which in his childhood meant for him the innumerable pantries and kitchens in which, as the son of a servant, he had felt the consciousness of his social inferiority. This is clearly a symbol drawn from Strindberg's own experience, but it does not acquire in the play the poignant meaning which it certainly

had for him and which we can understand if we think of the incident out of its dramatic context.

At intervals the central symbolism built round the Daughter of Indra merges with Christian symbolism, as in the scene in the law court where the Lawyer, the scapegoat of humanity, is refused a laurel crown and presented, by the Daughter, with a crown of thorns instead. The words of the Litany, 'Lord have mercy upon us' are drowned in the roar of the ocean as the setting changes to Fingal's cave, a transition which effectively points the symbolism of the sea noises in the cave scenes. The winds and waves send up to heaven the cry of mankind for mercy. Fingal's Cave is 'Indra's Ear', the place where human and divine come closest together. The sea is envisaged as the cleanser and destroyer, swallowing up man's frail ships, with their hopeful names, 'Justice', 'Friendship', 'Golden Peace', leaving only the figure heads. At such moments the dramatic action is suspended for long stretches of commentary and explanation, related to the action which has gone before, but not carrying it forward. The dream is explained as the dream of the Poet, that is to say, a daylight dream which carries a message for mankind, if they could but understand it. Such passages reinforce the suggestion already put forward that this 'surrealist' drama is as full of moral allegories as any of Strindberg's plays, and it is the allegory which gives dramatic shape and unity to the play .

Expressionist devices naturally abound as, for example, when

the Master of Quarantine, later visualised as a Keeper of Purgatory, appears as a blackamoor, for black is the colour of mental 'sickness' in the Officer's eyes. But Strindberg's allegorising tendency leads him continually to explain and draw morals from such effects, whereas in 'pure' expressionist drama they are generally left to speak for themselves. If any of the fantastic scenes in the Foul-strand and Fairhaven episodes should have left us confused as to their moral significance, Strindberg seeks to eliminate such confusion in the Fingal's cave episode of the third part, when a kaleidoscope of past events flashes before the eyes of the poet, who comments on their meaning, now revealed to him. And in the last scene, when the Daughter prepares to leave earth by way of the purifying fire, the moral is hammered home. To exist is to suffer, but to suffer is also to purge the mortal nature of its grossness, so that eventually it may be reunited with the divine being.

The Dream Play has been cited as a triumph of the subconscious, but it has been shown that the subconscious in this play is, in fact, strictly under control. The weakness of the symbolism lies less in its obscurity, which one might well expect in a play about the subconscious, than in its over elucidation. The truly dramatic symbol should explain itself. Strindberg uses such symbols, but even when they carry their meaning with them, he cannot resist the temptation to explain them.

During the last phase of his dramatic career he approached more closely to the idea of the self explanatory, imagistic symbol,

in one or two of the 'Chamber Plays' written for the Intimate Theatre at Stockholm. The mood of such little plays as The Thunderstorm (1907) and The Burnt House (1907) is quieter, lower toned than that of earlier work: nostalgic emotions are evoked by a variety of poetic devices, notably poetic images, which occasionally acquire the force of symbols.

The central symbol in The Thunderstorm is the oppressive heat, precursor of storm, which broods over the silent house. The feeling of suspense engendered by the heat is paralleled by the mounting suspense in the action, as the threat to the Master's painfully acquired serenity develops. Here Strindberg succeeds brilliantly in investing common or trivial objects with a sinister or poignant significance, concentrating in them the central emotions of the play. The four red shades drawn over the windows of the mysterious second floor rooms begin to acquire an uncanny fascination as the remarks of characters standing outside the house focus attention on them. To the Consul they suggest stage curtains, 'behind which some sanguinary tragedies are being rehearsed', and later, when the lightning flashes begin, he compares the unknown element in the house with a red thunder cloud. The setting of the house front, behind whose windows silent characters may be observed at crucial moments, held a great attraction for Strindberg at this time. He uses it again, for more complicated purposes, in The Ghost Sonata, perhaps having in mind Maeterlinck's Intérieur, a play creating similar, though simpler effects. The most obvious effect is that

of mystery, the mystery of human lives, which we can only watch from a distance, outside the house, though perhaps, by our detachment, perceiving ironic patterns not observed by those most involved in them.

Something of Strindberg's incorrigible allegorising creeps in to the scene where Gerda, the Master's divorced wife, picks up his thermometer, commenting that it is a good symbol of the instability which ruined their marriage: they were dependent on moods, which changed with the weather. But this is only a momentary relapse. The action continues, in a course parallel to that of the developing storm, reaching its crisis when the daughter of Gerda and the Master is thought to have been abducted by ^{Gerda's} her blackguard lover. But tragedy is averted, mother and child depart, turning off for the last time the lights on the second floor; as the shades are pulled down the Master reflects that now at last old memories have fallen peacefully asleep. From outside the house Starck remarks that the storm has passed over, bringing comforting rain in its course, and finally the Lamplighter appears, drawing from the Master the metaphor 'then reason to light us with its bull's eyes, so that we don't go astray'.

The symbols in The Thunderstorm are, in fact, extensions of images, or images given such emphasis that they acquire symbolic power. The method is poetic, and the effect so. Strindberg is like Maeterlinck in this, that he excels in the evocation of pure emotion from simple, common objects. Maeterlinck unfortunately

did not develop the method of Intérieur, preferring to rely on easier, more glamorous symbols, and Strindberg, as we have seen, only too easily falls into the fatal habit of explaining and theorising. But in The Thunderstorm he does avoid this error, as he does, on the whole, in The Burnt House or After the Fire, where the symbolism is stronger and more vital to the action. Before the pattern of the characters' lives can be explained, the house must first be burnt down, for 'after the fire is out, you can read things in the ashes'. Only when the passions and stresses of the experience are behind one, can their significance be understood. The people in the neighbourhood of the burnt house emphasise, in their gossip, the need that all the characters feel, to discover the secret of life: it was time the house was smoked out. Through this gossip, and the conversation between the Stranger and his brother, Rudolph, the buried secrets of the past emerge and some kind of understanding is made possible. The symbolism is restrained and expressionist devices avoided. Even when Rudolph is shown to have discoloured hands, which he himself accepts as a symbol of his guilty conscience, a realistic explanation is provided in the fact that he is by trade a dyer. Although on a much smaller scale, the symbolism in these 'Chamber Plays' is reminiscent of Ibsen's in his last plays: the determining action is past, and the explanation is sought for by way of images and symbols.

This is partly true also of The Ghost Sonata, although, of course, Strindberg goes much further than Ibsen in the abandonment

of realistic action. As the title suggests, the play is cast in the form of a piece of music, with a number of separate motifs finally blending in the poetic, but not intensely dramatic, climax. The evocation of mystery recalls Maeterlinck, the looking back over past action in an attempt to understand reminds one of late Ibsen, and the use of symbols such as the Japanese death screen in the manner of the Noh plays points forward to Yeats' plays for dancers. But the most striking feature of the play is the presentation of themes which dominated earlier plays without any attempt at a realistic, forward moving action, purely by means of symbols.

The characters live in a nightmare vacuum: the closet and parrot cage replace the fortress of the Dance of Death, and, as in the earlier play, the impression they create is of a state of hell. The first view of the house, through the eyes of those outside it, is a view of silent or motionless people behind windows or on staircases. None appears to have more life than the white marble statue visible in one of the windows, and this first estimate is a fair one, for this is indeed a house of death. The Colonel's wife has become a 'Mummy' spending all her days in a closet and speaking, on the rare occasions when she does, with the mechanical voice of a parrot. This is a piece of pure expressionism, not remotely capable of interpretation on a realistic level. The Colonel himself is an automaton, going out on Sunday nights to inspect his flag, like a 'dead man', as Hummel says. Even the Young Lady, who desires life, has been poisoned by the atmosphere of

the house, and is doomed, though innocent, to die.

All the characters, including Hummel, who has appointed himself judge over them, are bound together by their crimes. The inescapability of punishment is symbolised by the recurring appearance of the Milkmaid's ghost, signifying to Hummel retribution for his worst crime which had resulted in her death. Hummel professes to the Student a benevolent desire to help the people in the house, but his valet reveals that his master cannot suppress his destructive instinct, his last for playing havoc with human destinies 'till the house comes tumbling down'. The Student's adventure in escaping the debris of a collapsing house is clearly related to this image, but it is not explained in Strindberg's usual pointed manner. We are left to infer that the Student is one of the lucky ones who are given a glimpse of the meaning of things without having to suffer the disaster of the burnt or collapsing house. This story, it ~~may~~ may be, is his dream, as the action of The Dream Play was described as the dream of the poet.

The exterior view of the house of the dead is followed by scenes within, emphasising the horror of lives inextricably bound together in a circle of crime. Like Alice and the Captain in The Dance of Death the only occupation of the people at the 'ghost supper' is to torment each other. But the effect, though here more concentrated, is less deadly than that of The Dance of Death since we are not asked to accept this life in a realistic context, but simply

presented with symbols suggesting a concentrated horror. It is the method of the poet, who isolates a single mood, drawing every nuance of feeling from it, but not presenting it as his reading of existence. It is not, I suggest, the method of the true dramatist, *of action and character rather than in terms of* who must think in terms of symbols alone, however powerful or moving their effects.

As the supper proceeds, one illusion after another is destroyed, till the Student has to replace his first idea of the beautiful house, by a conception centering on the Mummy, the petrified woman, in her parrot cage. Hummel tells him that even the Young Lady, whose hyacinths the Student has seen from outside the house, is pining away in this atmosphere of vice. He proposes to tear up the weeds, to give youth a chance, but the Mummy refuses to allow him to act as judge: he is the most guilty, and must submit to his death sentence. Hummel goes into the closet to die: the Japanese death screen is placed in position, sign that the sentence is accomplished.

A poignant contrast to the preceding scene follows in the scenes between the Young Lady and the Student, first in the Hyacinth Room, then in the Room of the Ordeal. The hyacinth, symbol of immortal life, is compared by the Student with the Young Lady's soul; a virginal shape rising out of pure water, which it converts into colour and fragrance. In the midst of the hyacinths which fill the room is the image of Buddha, holding on his lap a bulb, spreading clusters of white flowers. The Student draws the necessary moral

from this symbol, comparing the bulb with the earth and the flowers with the stars. It is the image of the cosmos, and the Buddha waits patiently for earth to grow to heaven. This is a variation on the symbol of the Chrysanthemum in The Dream Play, and again, a meditative Eastern deity dominates. It will later be seen from the plays of W.B. Yeats how these particular symbols hold a special appeal for the playwright whose primary intention is to reflect on and draw conclusions from a perfected action, rather than to show it in the shaping.

Finally, the Young Lady is brought to her inevitable death in the Room of the Ordeal, which seems beautiful but is full of imperfections. Here the favourite type of Strindbergian symbol for imperfection reappears: smoking chimney, untidy chambermaids, insatiable cook. Even the purest soul cannot escape the contamination of 'dirt and untidiness', but must pass through it, before achieving ecstasy. The Young Lady has been immured too long in the silent, vicious house: the hyacinth water has been poisoned. The strings of the harp, from which music had proceeded in the Hyacinth Room, will no longer move. There is a curse on all creation. At last the Young Lady goes behind the death screen and the Student sings her elegy, praying to Buddha for patience. The whole room then disappears, to be replaced by a tableau of Brœcklin's Island of the Dead, a reminder, if such were needed, that we have been watching dead people moving in the hell of their own creation.

The Ghost Sonata is a dramatic poem rather than a play,

constructed round poetically conceived symbols, many of them rich in emotional effects, but having little or no inherent dramatic quality. They do not move the action forward, but concentrate in themselves the only action which is important in the play, the action of the mind: they invite us to pause and reflect rather than heighten our awareness of a significant dramatic movement.

Enough has been said of Strindberg's drama to indicate the power and the weakness of his methods. His allegories are often saved from being undramatic by the vividness of symbols drawn from personal experiences while at the same time his fear that the implication of his symbols may not be understood, leads him into over emphatic and essentially undramatic explanation and commentary. It is curiously paradoxical that a playwright capable of creating such striking and evocative symbols as some of those in The Road to Damascus and The Dream Play should be unable to avoid the temptation to underline them until their effect is undoubtedly weakened. On the other hand, Strindberg has a genius for evoking concentrated emotions and moods through poetic symbols such as that of the daffodil in Easter or the hyacinth in The Ghost Sonata, and that very earnestness, that intensity of belief in a symbolic universe, which sometimes militates against a dramatic effect by leading him to prolix over emphasis, does also help to invest his more independent symbols with an extraordinary power.

III

Symbolism in Irish Drama.

'I made my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies.'

Of all the playwrights considered in this study, the Irish are the most remarkable for what Lady Gregory called an 'incorrigible genius for myth making.' They have supremely expressed 'that haunting awareness of transcendental forces peering through the cracks of the visible universe, that is the very essence of myth.'¹) Within the framework of a living myth, it was felt by writers such as Yeats, symbols might occur naturally and with tremendous potency, for, as a recent critic of Yeats has put it, 'In the myth, passion and abstraction join hands, the individual and the type cohere in a unity of balance.'²) Since the founding of the Irish Literary Theatre in 1899, Irish drama has been very responsive to symbolic influences from abroad, from the Maeterlinckian or Noh plays of Yeats or the Ibsenite dramas of Edward Martyn to the expressionist experiments of Sean O'Casey and Denis Johnston.

Of all these writers, of course, Yeats most ardently felt and

i) Philip Wheelwright, Poetry, Myth and Reality, printed in The Language of Poetry Ed. Allen Tate (Princeton 1942) p.10.

2) P. Ure, Towards a Mythology (1946) p.27.

expressed the desire implicit in so much Irish drama for a 'half mythological, half philosophical folk belief, which the writer and his small audience lift into a new subtletyⁱ⁾. 'All my life' he tells us, 'I have longed for such a country and always found it quite impossible to write without having as much belief in its real existence as a child in that of the wooden birds, beasts and persons of his toy Noah's ark. I have now found all the mythology and philosophy I need.'²⁾

He found the greater part of it in Lady Gregory's collections of Irish legend, Gods and Fighting Men and Cuchulain of Muirthemne of which Yeats said, 'If my small Dublin audience for poetical drama grows to any size, I shall owe it to these two books, masterpieces of prose, which can but make the old stories as familiar to Irishmen at any rate as are the stories of Arthur and his Knights to all readers of books.'³⁾ The history of modern English drama also is marked by attempts, pious but generally ineffective, to revive old legends in dramatic form: indeed, such attempts were characteristic of English poetic drama throughout the entire nineteenth century. And yet no living drama had resulted, for, as Synge tartly puts it, 'Every healthy mind is more interested in Tit-Bits than in Idylls of the King, or any of the other more or less artificial retellings of classical or saga stories'.⁴⁾

i) and 2) Plays and Controversies (1927) p.434
3) Plays in Prose and Verse (1922) p.417
4) The Works of J.M. Synge (1932) Vol.I p.iii

What reason, then, had Yeats and Lady Gregory to think that they could give to the ancient legends a new lease of life, and make them truly dramatic? They pinned their faith on the common Irishman's freedom from bookish tradition and on the passion for oratory and rhetoric which had survived in Ireland long after it had died in England. Andrew Malone indeed accounts¹⁾ for the lack of dramatic history prior to the foundation of the Abbey, by the long tradition of recitation, which had taken the place, for the majority of the people, of representation. As such theories applied most obviously to the unlearned, we find Yeats insisting on a repertoire of peasant plays, or of poetic plays constructed round simple, heroic stories to which an 'uncorrupted and imaginative audience' would automatically respond. Furthermore, the early Irish playwrights were in an unique position in setting out to found a national drama from a wealth of unused material at a time when national feeling was running so high that the old legends, reminders of a free, heroic Ireland, easily acquired a vital contemporary significance. To a people fighting for freedom and lost greatness, the legendary figures of Maeve and Cuchulain, the symbolic figure of Cathleen in Houlihan had a meaning not merely literary and historical, but actual and emotional. The name of Cuchulain was to serve as a modern battle cry in the Easter Rising,²⁾ and, indeed,

1) In The Irish Drama (1929)

2) See Yeats' poem 'The Statues':- 'When Pearse summoned Cuchulain
to his side,
What stalked through the Post Office?
What calculation, number, measurement, replied?'

the danger was not so much that this kind of symbol would remain artificial or lifeless but that it might acquire too independent a life, even to the extent of distorting, for the audience, the playwright's intention in using it. Yeats ruefully accused himself, after the riots over The Countess Cathleen, of forgetting that the symbols he used in the play were for an Irish audience not symbols at all, but living realities. Similarly, O'Casey was astonished at the charges of sacrilege brought against him by patriotic extremists for allowing the banner of the Republicans, treated by him as a symbol, to be actually taken into a public house during one scene of The Plough and the Stars. Here is a situation quite outside the experience of the English playwrights, such as Masefield and Drinkwater, who were experimenting with legendary material. It was a situation with a disconcerting side to it, but nevertheless one which was bound to stimulate the playwright, and to suggest to him that there was a place for his poetic symbols in the living, contemporary theatre. Sometimes, of course, Yeats relied too much on his audience's understanding of mythological allusion, as in the original death scene of The Countess Cathleen which he had to alter because as he explains in his note on the play, audiences 'even at the Abbey theatre are almost ignorant of Irish mythology! But on the whole, when he was not drawing his symbols from the esoteric system which he evolved in middle life, he was able to rely at least on local understanding of his major Irish symbols.

This very advantage brought with it corresponding dangers, for

although it may be true that to be universal it is first necessary to be intensely parochial, it is only too easy, especially when working with symbols, to rely too much on the local audience's familiarity with the native material, forgetting the wider audience which may require more illumination in the dramatic context. Ibsen's trolls are natives of Norway, but their dramatic significance is perfectly clear to an English audience, whereas the nightmare experienced by the actor in Denis Johnston's The Old Lady Says No is a forbiddingly Irish nightmare, only intermittently significant to any other than an Irish audience without the help of the historical notes to the printed version.

A survey of Yeats' drama will reveal an aspect of dramatic symbolism different from any yet examined, though having something in common with foreign techniques, particularly those of the French symbolists and of the Japanese Noh.

After reading some of Yeats' many pronouncements on the nature of drama, the reader unacquainted with the plays might understandably surmise that a drama constructed on Yeatsian principles would be bound to remain an esoteric entertainment for the aristocratic few, as indeed some of it was. All drama worth the name must be symbolic, Yeats declared, since drama is only concerned with moments of intense life, in which the characters are free 'from the bonds of motives and their effects'. Such characters must become 'a symbol of an infinite emotion, a perfected emotion, a part of the Divine Essence' and 'symbols are the only things free enough from all bonds

to speak of perfection'.¹⁾ This kind of remark he repeated throughout his life, from the time when he reviewed Axel, first seen with Mand Gonne in Paris, to the period of his passion for Noh drama and afterwards. Yeats, like Villiers de l'Isle Adam, all his life admired the difficult achievement, the aristocratic gesture. Lionel Johnson's phrase that life was ritual never ceased to haunt the imagination of the poet who, in a preface to a book of symbolic drawings, had announced, 'All art - not mere story telling or portraiture - is symbolic...it entangles...a part of the divine mystery'.²⁾

Into the Irish scene, then, came this romantic writer, steeped in the poetry of the English Pre-Raphaelites and nineties aesthetes, an enthusiastic admirer of the French symbolists, regarding Axel as a 'sacred' book and Maeterlinck, Whistler and Beardsley, in their different ways, as the voices of a new era. But fortunately he turned for his 'symbols of an infinite emotion' to sources to which even an unlettered audience could respond, to Irish myth and history, rather than to the much more tenuous, esoteric material of Maeterlinck or de l'Isle Adam. And, as we have seen, the peculiar political situation then existing conditioned even a drama which began in poetry and ritual, so that it became a part of contemporary life and its symbols acquired a new vitality. It is indeed arguable

1) Ideas of Good and Evil p.160 (1914)

2) A Book of Images Drawn by W.T. Horton (1898) p.9

that for Yeats, throughout his life, the symbol itself remained of greater importance than the human implications surrounding it, despite the subtle psychological realism of many of the plays. This is indeed indicated in the poem, 'The Circus Animals' Desertion', where he begins with a contemptuous reference to his 'circus animals', 'Those stilted boys, that burnished chariot, Lion and woman and the Lord knows what', but goes on to admit that he cared little for the human meaning behind his symbols: - 'And when the Fool and Blind Man stole the bread Cuchulain fought the ungovernable sea; Heart mysteries there, and yet when all is said It was the dream itself ~~that~~ enchanted me'. While of the allegorical intention behind Oisín's wanderings, all that remains is the thought, 'I, starved for the bosom of his faery bride'.

This indeed is the dominant theme of the early plays, the longing for 'the bosom of his faery bride', for an ideal, romantic beauty, which Richard Ellman suggestsⁱ⁾ stems from his frustrated love for Maud Gonne. The Maeterlinckian element is naturally most pronounced in these first plays, where Yeats is absorbed in his dream, expressing his longing, through vague, romantic symbols which could so easily be replaced by any others that carried the same nostalgic associations. The world of the fairies in The Land of Heart's Desire (1894. Last revision 1912) is an adolescent world,

i) R. Ellman, Yeats: The Man and the Masks (1949)

of perpetual May day, contrasted with the homely peasant life in which religious symbols, such as the crucifix, the blessed quicken wood, have lost their power and are associated, in the mind of Mary Bruin with the 'common light of common hours'. 'Fairies, come take me out of this dull world', she cries, but she scarcely knows what she seeks, other than 'the red flare of dreams.'

The country of dreams is represented, as in so much of Maeterlinck, by a fairy child, who promises a permanent extension of childhood, 'Where nobody gets old and godly and grave'. This is a very different symbol of perfection from the Hawk woman of the plays for dancers, who appeals to adult passions and motives, offering to Cuchulain, as it seems, an enrichment of his human personality rather than a loss of it.

In The Shadowy Waters, the rewriting of which occupied Yeats for so many years¹⁾, the chief character, Forgael, seeks an equally vague ideal of beauty, which can have no dramatic expression except through symbols. Echoes of Axel abound in this play. Forgael travels the sea to westward, led by circling birds which symbolise the souls of the dead. He desires love, a 'beautiful, unheard-of kind. That is not in the world', but even when he has succeeded in winning the love of the romantically beautiful Dectora by the power of his harp music (clearly a symbol of the poet's art), he is not content, since Dectora is, after all, only a human woman, who

1) He began work on it in 1897 and it was not produced till 1904

'casts a shadow', and Forgael's longing is for the infinite perfection which can be achieved only in death. And so the lovers sail on to their western island 'where the life of the world leaps upward', still led by the birds of the dead. Their consummation is to be akin to that achieved by Axel and Sara: it was the only kind which the frustrated Yeats seemed able to allow his characters at this period. Yeats is in one way more successful than Villiers de l'Isle Adam, in that he avoids realistic detail, allowing no breath of the mundane world to intrude on the dominant mood of dreamy longing. The single exception, the lecherous, bawdy-tongued sailors, whom he introduced into the later versions, may be a weakness in the context of this particular play, as indeed I think it is, but it is interesting in its suggestion that Yeats was already beginning to feel the need of making even his dream symbols function in a world inhabited by flesh and blood people, an incomparably more difficult task than that of constructing around such symbols a play which is scarcely more than a 'dramatic poem', an extended lyric.

That Yeats was at this time using symbols primarily for lyrical expression of his own longings is further indicated by his significant addition to the legend which he dramatised as The Countess Cathleen (1899. Revised version 1911). He introduces a new character, the poet, Aleel, an unbaptised pagan, who tempts Cathleen with the promise of perpetual love and beauty, as the devils tempt her with gold. Yet the devils seem to inhabit quite another world from the

charming pagan world, presided over by Aengus, the god of love, in which Aleel believes. To Aleel indeed, pagan as he is, is given the power to see Cathleen ascending into heaven at the end of the play. A certain similarity is suggested between the worlds of pagans and devils in the bird symbol which occurs in descriptions of both. The god, Aengus, has birds about his head, while Aleel pleads with Cathleen to come with him to the 'places of the swain', where, as in The Land of Heart's Desire, the immortal dancers in the woods 'know not the hard burden of the soil'. But these birds are romantic and beautiful, whereas the devils are represented by the sinister owl, whose shape they take on at will. In fact, the pagan world envisaged by the dreaming poet is a world untouched by ethical considerations, a limbo, or twilight kingdom, seeming to exist in another dimension from the Christian world inhabited by saints and devils. The Aleel passages sometimes seem dramatically irrelevant: certainly they help to cast a remote, dream-like atmosphere over the serious central conflict, but at this stage Yeats could not do without such symbols. He himself ignored the significance of the poet figure in an explanation of the play's symbolism given to the Irish Literary Theatre in 1899ⁱ), when he said, 'the play is purely symbolic, The two demons are the world, and the gold is simply the pride of the eye, and the peasants we have in our hearts, and the Countess Cathleen is simply a soul or human spirit

i) Quoted in Forrest Reid's W.B. Yeats (1915) p.93

which perpetually makes the sacrifice she made'.

The audiences at the Abbey, however, insisted on reading into this harmless morality play an attack on Irish Catholicism, so bringing home to Yeats the potency, beyond that of literature or dream, which his symbols might have on the stage. Increasingly his later work draws inspiration from contemporary events, but always elevating these events to symbolical or mythical status, bringing past and present together in a rich, poetic pattern. The poem, 'Beautiful, Lofty Things', admirably illustrates this process of myth making from the experience of everyday: Cuchulain, Maeve and the rest find their modern equivalents in 'O'Leary's noble head', Standish O'Grady, 'speaking to a drunken audience high nonsensical words', Maud Gonne, succeeding in looking like Pallas Athene even in a railway station: these living people have become 'All the Olympians; a thing never known again'. Here is an attitude, although of course, intermittently dropped in much of his satirical poetry, diametrically opposed to that of, say, Eliot in The Waste Land, where past is contrasted with present only to point the sordid anti-climax of modern life.

This growing sense of the heroic potentialities in modern life and of the stimulus which an Abbey audience might be relied on to provide must have assisted Yeats to envisage his symbols more dramatically, less as projections of his private dreams. He began to acquire more hold over his material, avoiding misconstruction of his theme in The Hour Glass (1903. Verse version 1922), for example, by using the nameless, timeless types of Philosopher and Fool, while yet

infusing them with sufficient individuality to preserve them from the stiffness of allegory. The Philosopher is not simply a personification of an abstract quality but a man who, while speaking in the first part for all reasoning materialists, is yet capable of internal conflict and of tragedy. Yeats disliked allegory, defining it, in agreement with a German symbolist who had discussed the subject with him, as a form which 'said things which could be said as well, or better, in another way, and needed a right knowledge for its understanding,' while symbolism 'said things which could not be said so perfectly in any other way and needed but a right instinct for its understanding'.¹⁾

When Yeats uses the term 'morality' of The Hour Glass he clearly does not intend to suggest a comparison with the moral allegories of the Middle Ages; rather, as Professor Ellis-Fermor points out²⁾; the play might be called a 'mystery', with the Philosopher as an almost Faustian figure, and the Fool, a fool of Christ, having that familiar acquaintance with angels enjoyed by such humble characters as, say, the shepherds in The Second Shepherds' Play.

In The Hour Glass, then, Yeats succeeds in freeing his symbolic characters from local associations, while protecting them from the rigidity of allegory. On the other hand, in such a play as Cathleen in Houlihan he employs a local, patriotic symbol, the figure of the

1) A Book of Images drawn by W.T. Horton (1898) p.8. Introduction by W.B. Yeats.

2) O.Ellis Fermor. The Irish Dramatic Movement (1939) pp.107-8

old woman who has lost her 'four beautiful green fields' with such skill that it is effective and moving outside its purely Irish associations.

In The King's Threshold (1903), the theme is simply a defence of symbols. The poet, Seanchan, is prepared to starve to death on the palace threshold rather than renounce his right to the place of honour at the King's table. The people in the play who would dismiss his defiance as a quarrel over a straw are forced in the end to recognise the importance of such straws, to realise that for such as Seanchan a symbol is the only thing worth dying for, since the world is eventually dependent on the 'Images of the life that was in Eden' dreamed of by poets. Again, as in The Hour Glass, the simplest, least learned characters are shown as having the truest instincts for the spiritual life: the support Seanchan wins from the cripples helps to force the King into submission. But Yeats was feeling more and more the need to introduce greater realism into the portrayal of these simple types, which were so important to his symbolic patterns, but which were insufficiently differentiated, particularly in dramatic idiom, from the more sophisticated characters with which they were intended to contrast.

This is made clear in the curious history of the play The Unicorn from the Stars (1907), written in collaboration with Lady Gregory on the basis of an earlier play by Yeats alone, with the title, Where There is Nothing (1902). Yeats said of the first version that it had been written in two weeks, to save the theme from a would be plagiarist (George Moore), and, very significantly,

that it had its origin in a single image, the image of 'a brazen winged beast that I associated with laughing, ecstatic destruction'ⁱ⁾ In just such a way might he have described the genesis of a poem like, for example, The Second Coming, and indeed the idea of the unicorn, which is the 'brazen winged beast' dominates the play much as it might have dominated a poem. But Yeats attempts to treat it dramatically, by providing a realistic starting point for Martin Hearne's vision of the unicorn in the lion and unicorn design on the state coach at which he is working and by allowing the symbol to mean different things to the different characters in the play. As a symbol of 'virginal...tireless strength' it calls up in the mind of Father John a vision of an Ireland which could be once again a land of saints, whereas to the beggars the unicorn is simply a political symbol, the antithesis of the lion, and Martin's attempts to communicate his ecstasy are interpreted by them as revolutionary ardour. Lady Gregory supplied the necessary realism, the 'rough life of the roads', which Yeats felt must acquire more importance in his drama if his symbols, even those of so poetic and visionary a nature as the unicorn, were to function dramatically. By showing the futility of the beggars' revolution, in which ideals are forgotten in an orgy of theft, burning and destruction, Yeats is able to demonstrate more effectively the essentially spiritual significance of the symbol. Martin realises before his death that the battle for a regenerated order is to be fought in men's minds, not in the practical

i) Wheels and Butterflies (1934) p.103

world of affairs:- 'My business is not with reformation - but revelation'. Although only partially satisfying as an unified play, The Unicorn from the Stars demonstrates Yeats' growing concern to project symbols dramatically rather than lyrically.

His new mastery over symbolism is well illustrated in Deirdre and the group of plays dealing with the Cuchulain legends. He re-animates these ancient stories with a success markedly contrasting with the comparatively lifeless versions of old legends being attempted by so many contemporary English poets. Poetic symbols are woven into a dramatic texture rich in psychological realism and tragic vitality. In Deirdre (1906) the tragic love of Deirdre and Naisi is made to seem alive and immediate by contrast with the even more ancient tale of Lugaidh Redstripe and his doomed love for the woman 'born of the cold, haughty waves' which is maintained as a parallel to the 'modern' tragedy throughout the play. Deirdre's fiery passion seems remote from the uncanny, supernatural quality of the sea woman, yet at the climax, when she and Naisi take their places at the chessboard, in the very positions of their legendary predecessors, to await their 'high and comely end', they have already moved into the same world of heroic tragedy as that inhabited by those lovers of the past. The ritualistic moving of pieces on the chessboard suggests the fatalistic element in the two love stories, and brings them together in a magnificent climax. Nor is it dramatically improper for Deirdre to be aware of the symbolism in her gesture of defiance, since she lives in a world where ritual is still paramount and where the musicians are already waiting to make

a new lay of her own tragedy.

Ritualism is of course more pronounced in the Cuchulain plays, where Yeats was trying out his first experiments in the ~~Moh~~ manner, with masks, musical refrains and symbolic dances, yet the symbolism in all the plays of the group is dramatic in that it can be grasped by reference to the dramatic context. And this is a considerable achievement in a drama depending so much on literary associations.

Yeats evidently had his system of correspondences in mind when he introduced the characters of Fool and Blind Man into On Baile's Strand (1903. Revised version 1906), although in a later comment on the play he remarksⁱ⁾, with characteristic vagueness, 'I had made the Fool and the Blind Man, Cuchulain and Conchubar, whose shadows they are, all image, and now I can no longer remember what they meant, except that they meant in some sense those combatants who turn the wheel of life'. Yet without any knowledge of Yeats' theories, an audience could easily recognise from the play itself that the Fool, with his fecklessness and curious awareness of the supernatural world, is in some ways a parody of Cuchulain, while the shrewd, materialistic Blind Man is as clearly a parody, or exaggeration of the character of Conchubar. And even if this relationship is not at once perceived, the Fool and Blind Man still have a necessary dramatic function, in providing exposition, ironic comment, and relief from tragic intensity.

i) Wheels and Butterflies p.102 f.

The central sea symbol is brilliantly presented, being kept in our minds from the first action of the play, when the Fool throws the doors open to reveal the sea and to let the witches in, till the final action when Cuchulain goes out to fight the waves. From the first it is associated with the supernatural, not only in the mind of the Fool, but in that of Cuchulain, who boasts of his immortal father from the 'country under the wave' and even in that of Conchubar, who attempts to set up in opposition to the sea symbol the symbol of the domestic hearth, in the sphere of which the 'shape changers' lose their power. The ritualistic scene of the oath taking symbolises the apparent victory of the domestic ideal over the wild power of the sea and all things connected with it. But in the end the sea triumphs, for Cuchulain violates his own instinct when he fights with the young man, and such violation ends in the overthrow of the personality, the madness in which he strikes at the waves, taking them for the real enemy, Conchubar, and so destroying himself. Throughout the action we have been aware that the sea is associated in the minds of all the characters with uncanny powers, outside the control of men, with witches, 'shape changers' and dangerous instincts. There is then a tragic inevitability in the destruction of Cuchulain by that very power which had made him greater than other men, in the very moment at which he attempts to repudiate it. Whether or not we know that in Irish mythology the sea is the home of the god Mananan, or that Freudian psychology regards the sea as an age old symbol of the powerful unconscious, its uncanny significance in the action of the play is sufficiently clear. Here indeed is a symbol poetically

conceived, perhaps, but dramatically projected.

Similarly in At the Hawk's Well (1911), the symbol of the well of immortality explains itself. Water, a familiar symbol of life and potency, is contrasted with the dry stones among which the Old Man vainly searches for a drop of precious liquid. There is futility, but also a kind of heroic splendour, in his lifelong attempt to achieve the impossible, to wrest immortality from the gods, represented here by the Hawk woman: - 'Who but an idiot would praise dry stones in a well? Who but an idiot would praise a withered tree?' Yeats' favourite hawk symbol, representing the lonely, mysterious life of beings set apart from ordinary man, is used here with great dramatic effect, the 'unmoistened eye' of the Guardian of the Well, and her irresistible fascination as a dancer suggesting visually the power of that non-human world which can make a hero of a man or drive him mad, which ~~just as~~ in On Baile's Strand was suggested through imagery. That both these destinies are designed for Cuchulain is implied in the dialogue of the Old Man, who warns him that the curse which falls on 'all who have gazed in her unmoistened eye' may take the form of killing one's own children in madness. Cuchulain fails to drink of the precious water, but he at least enjoys the momentary ecstasy of being seduced from his aim by the charms of the Hawk Woman, whereas the Old Man is simply put to sleep. Cuchulain is, then, more closely associated with the Hawk Woman's world: by virtue of this association he is a hero, but he is also, for the same reason, doomed. Here Yeats approaches very near the spirit of Greek tragedy, in which the

here, by reason of his closeness to the gods, whether as friend or enemy, is destined for a more tragic, if more glorious, life than that of common men. The nature of Cuchulain's future tragedy is suggested, as already noticed, in the Old Man's warning, and also, more ambiguously, in the cries of "Aoife" with which the play ends. This is no doubt a dramatic weakness, since without full knowledge of the Cuchulain legends, an audience cannot be expected to connect the name of Aoife with Cuchulain's tragic killing of his own son, the curse which has been laid upon him. The ending would be even less apposite were it true, as suggested in Birgit Bjersbo's study of the Cuchulain legendⁱ⁾ that Cuchulain's son is born of the hero's encounter with the Hawk Woman, for then the figure of Aoife is entirely extraneous to the drama. But with the exception of this reliance on known associations, At the Hawk's Well successfully presents in dramatic form symbols which carry their meaning with them, as that of the water, or which are made clear by their position in the context, as that of the Hawk Woman.

In The Only Jealousy of Emer (1916-17) the sea is once again the central symbol, the unknown world, out of which emerge the figures of the gods and of men's dream selves. The action is taken up at the point where On Baile's Strand left off, with Cuchulain dead or swooning and Emer attempting desperately to recall him from the

i) The Interpretation of the Cuchulain Legend in the Works of W. B. Yeats (Uppsala, 1950) p.40.

power of the Sidhe. The terror and fascination of the sea are represented by the two immortals, Bricriu, 'maker of discord', with his withered arm and petrifying effect on human affections, and the Woman of the Sidhe, whom Cuchulain recognises as the Hawk Woman of the earlier play. Without a knowledge of the series it is evident that one is bound to miss some of the allusions, but hardly more than one would in a single play of a Greek trilogy, and Yeats, after all, hoped that these Cuchulain plays would be considered as a sequence, although each one can certainly be played as a separate entity.

The Woman of the Sidhe is a more complex version of the fairy who tempted Mary Bruin in The Land of Heart's Desire: she offers not simply eternal playtime but the absolute consummation of passion and oblivion from 'Intricacies of blind remorse'. She offers, in fact, a life characterised by those very qualities which the sea suggests to man: infinite freedom, mystery, buoyancy, with a perpetual, unchanging coldness at the heart. The Woman of the Sidhe would be incapable of making the sacrifice which Emer makes for the sake of bringing Cuchulain to life, and Cuchulain himself, for all the fascination the fairy life has for him, finally recognises that there is 'a folly in the deathless Sidhe Beyond man's reach'. The symbolic sea setting of this play is far more effective dramatically than the picturesque pastoral background of The Land of Heart's Desire, for it carries with it not simply a single association, idealised springtime, but, more convincingly, a variety of associations, chilling and repellent as well as beautiful and poetic.

In The Green Helmet and the earlier prose version, The Golden Helmet (1908. Revised 1910), the sea symbol again predominates, though this time it suggests, in addition to its usual quality of mysterious power, more buoyant, vital and breezy aspects suited to the optimistic vigorous atmosphere of this play, which Yeats described as a 'heroic farce'. The Red Man comes out of the sea 'to try the men of Ireland: unlike Bricriu, in The Only Jealousy of Emer he is not pleased but disgusted by the discord which his challenge creates among the Irish champions, and when Cuchulain saves the honour of Ireland by his light-hearted courage, the Red Man is delighted. It is as if the sea were being shown in its sunniest aspect, on a boisterous day, with the white horses only lazily exerting their strength. The cruel depths are momentarily forgotten.

In this group of plays symbolism is used not only to enhance poetic and spectacular effects, but also to illuminate character and action. The sea symbol concentrates in itself qualities to be observed in various characters and emphasises their fatal significance: the hen's feathers in On Baile's Strand remind us of the domestic life, and of Concu^hbar who has fatally attempted to oppose the claims of this life to those of 'the hawk's grey feather': the dried stones in the well emphasise the futility of the old man's long waiting: the game of chess in Deirdre serves as the means by which past and present are brought together in one heroic moment. Such symbols carry their meaning with them, being, in fact, poetic images which have passed into the sphere of dramatic action and require but a 'right instinct' for their understanding.

¶ But in some of the plays written after this, and in which the action is purely symbolic, Yeats allows his dramatic instincts to be overlaid by his passion for expounding his philosophic theories. Without the touchstone of psychological realism which he had, despite the highly poetic setting, in those earlier plays, he only too easily falls into a habit of playing with his symbols as parts of his system, leaving the dramatic effect to look after itself. The Cat and the Moon (1924) seems to me such a play. The situation is reminiscent of that in Synge's The Well of The Saints where the beggars' choice lies between a state of physical wholeness and one of true happiness, which is shown to be independent of physical conditions. In Yeats' play, similarly, the Lame Beggar and the Blind Beggar are given by the Saint a choice between being cured or blessed. When the Blind Beggar chooses cure, his peaceful relationship with the Lame Beggar is at once destroyed by his own violence: he turns on him and beats him, thus demonstrating that though cured he is certainly not blessed. The Lame Beggar, who has chosen blessedness, ends the play by carrying out the Saint on his back. The action is rather like the skeleton of that which Synge had so richly clothed in flesh and blood. It is indeed that very form of allegory which Yeats so often castigated, since clearly the ending has some kind of significance requiring more than a 'right instinct' for its understanding. Rather, we suspect, we are meant to be familiar with the system of symbolic correspondences expounded in A Vision (1925), a suspicion confirmed by the symbolic refrain on Minnaloushe and the phases of the moon, in which, presumably, some of the play's essence

is concentrated. Yeats himself, commenting later on the play, said that it had grown faint to him, except for a few images, a very characteristic remark. But such explanation as he does provide is more obscure even than the action:- 'Minnaloushe and the Moon were perhaps - it all grows faint to me - an exposition of man's relation to what I have called the Antithetical Tincture, and when the Saint mounts upon the back of the Lame Beggar he personifies a great spiritual event which may take place when Primary Tincture, as I have called it, supersedes Antithetical....I have altogether forgotten whether other parts of the fable have any as is very likely, a precise meaning....'

The spectator, he tells us 'should come away thinking the meaning as much his own manufacture as that of the blind man and the lame man had seemed mine'.ⁱ⁾ But the kind of symbols which he uses in The Cat and the Moon are so forbiddingly the 'intellectual' symbols which Yeats himself distinguished from 'emotional'²⁾ symbols, in which both thought and feeling had a part, that the spectator is unlikely to make much of them without some special knowledge of the system of ideas out of which they were created.

The same fatal tendency may be observed in The Player Queen, begun in 1907 as a tragedy, finished in 1919 as a comedy, and much revised in 1922. Again, this play originated in theory, in an

i) Wheels and Butterflies pp.138-139

2) Ideas of Good and Evil pp.173-174

attempt to demonstrate one of the leading principles of Yeats' thought, that 'a man always tried to become his opposite, to become what he would abhor if he did not desire it'.¹⁾ After wrestling vainly with what he thought at first ~~as~~ potentially tragic material, Yeats suddenly realised that he had been on the wrong track, since this was essentially a play of thought, and tragedy arose not out of thought but passion. The play was then recomposed as comedy, but still comedy of a highly rarefied kind, with human passions refined almost beyond recognition and meaning concentrated in symbols representing abstract ideas, again mainly deriving from that system which was to be fully worked out in A Vision. There is no reason why much of the theory of personality in A Vision should fail to provide good dramatic material: indeed Yeats' interpretation of history in accordance with these theories is highly dramatic, but at the time of The Player Queen and The Cat and the Moon the theories were too much in evidence. The central symbol in The Player Queen is the Unicorn, that fabulous beast which seemingly never ceases to fascinate Irish writers, (cf. Denis Johnston's A Bride for the Unicorn) The unicorn is traditionally a symbol of chastity and of violent strength, only to be subdued by the hand of the virgin. The Queen is, ironically, accused by her people of unchastity with the unicorn and being too undeveloped a personality to come to terms with the situation she gives up her place to the actress, Decima, who has always set her

i) Wheels and Butterflies p.103

heart on the idea of playing the queen. Decima, in fact, yearns for the 'antithetical self', for the terrible union with the unicorn of Kingship, in which the sensual self must be sloughed away, as her's symbolically is, in the loss of her husband. When she goes out to face the angry mob she has succeeded in uniting herself with the image which had for so long evaded her and is more truly the Queen than the woman who was born royal. Much of the theorising on the significance of the symbols employed is put into the mouth of the drunken Poet, who, however, seems to exist in one sphere while the plot, with its curiously automatic and often unconvincing movement, goes forward in another. Symbol and action have not been completely integrated. The weakness of dramatic effect is, however, of quite another sort from that observed in the earliest plays such as The Shadowy Waters: here it is due not to vagueness of intention but to too precise a definition.

The later plays are increasingly concerned with the supernatural world: the central characters are ghosts rather than human beings, such as Dermot and Devorgilla in The Dreaming of the Bones (1919) the spirit of Swift, which dominates the action of The Words upon the Window Pane (1930) or the ghostly silhouettes at the window of the ruined house in Purgatory (1936). Such figures are in a sense symbols, by means of which Yeats is able to convey dramatically his ideas on 'dreaming back', or the nature of the soul's survival, and because these particular ideas are so intensely realised in the poet's own mind, the figures acquire a great dramatic force. 'What is

literature but the expression of moods by the vehicle of symbol and incident', Yeats had askedⁱ⁾ many years before, 'and are there not moods which shall find no expression unless there be men who dare to mix heaven, hell, purgatory and fairyland together...?' The evocation of terror and awe by the ghostly symbols of such plays as Purgatory shows how finely Yeats could handle 'emotional' symbols, when the ideas behind the emotions had been suitably subordinated for dramatic purposes. The feeling of endlessness, which he wishes to suggest in Purgatory, is most powerfully symbolised by the almost simultaneous presentation of two crises: one, in the past, acted out by the ghosts at the window, the other, in the present, when the Old Man, in an attempt to blot out the consequences of that past crisis, murders his own son, whereupon the ghostly hoof-beats recommence and he realises that he is 'Twice a murderer and all for nothing. And she must animate that dead night Not once but many times'. The attempt to 'Appease The misery of the living and the remorse of the dead' has failed, and we are left with the impression that there will be no end to the ghostly repetition of the accumulated tragedies, or, in other words, that the consequences of deeds endure for ever.

In Calvary (1917) and The Resurrection (1931) similar effects are obtained. The sceptical Greek of The Resurrection is at last convinced that a true resurrection is possible when he touches the beating heart of the risen Christ:- 'The heart of a phantom is beating. Man has begun to die. Your words are clear at last,

i) The Celtic Twilight (1893) p.6

Oh Heraclitus, God and man die each other's life, live each other's death'. This is an event, as the Syrian puts it, 'outside knowledge, outside order', just as the ancient Greek legend of Dionysius which is woven into the texture of the play, once represented a kindred divine irrationality. The grouping of characters and ideas is similar to that in The Words upon the Window Pane: the sceptic is confronted with an irrational happening which he can either reject as impossible or accept as a symbol of a whole new world of belief. Yeats has now found symbols much stronger than those of his fairy plays, through which to convey his sense of the supernatural, but he does not take them much further. The symbol is rarely shown as operating in human life beyond the first impact of shock. It is enough for him that it should be the supreme concentration of the mysterious and unknown. Calvary should perhaps be regarded as a dramatic lyric rather than a play, and indeed the dominant symbol, that of the lonely birds, is confined to a poetic refrain, 'God has not appeared to the birds. God has not died for the white heron'. Anyone familiar with this favourite image of Yeats will easily deduce that, as Yeats commented later, the birds are used as symbols of subjective loneliness, the loneliness of Lazarus and Judas, for whom Christ can do nothing. His is the other kind of loneliness, the objective kind, which repels the self-contained Judas who betrays him, and Lazarus, who resents being reborn. But the treatment of the bird symbol is poetic rather than dramatic; consequently, since the action is so slight, we are thrown back, for its understanding, on a reading of the piece as poetry

rather than drama. What remains in our minds is the image of the white heron rather than any one of the characters or incidents.

This reversion to the poet's approach is very striking in Yeats' late drama: it was, of course, facilitated by his dislike for the new realism at the Abbey and his passion for the Noh plays, which were so often constructed round a few poetic images. The King of the Great Clock Tower (1934) was in fact written, so Yeats tells us, in a barren period, 'that I might be forced to make lyrics for imaginary people' and the verse version, A Full Moon in March (1935) was, like its predecessor, constructed in the manner of a dramatic poem rather than of a play. The meaning of the actions is given in the lyrics which are sung or spoken by attendants, ritualistically dressed, playing on drum and gong. The first version has slightly more dramatic complication than the second, since it has three characters instead of two, the King, the Queen and the Stroller. The King, who was eliminated in the later version, is a more human figure than the other two, jealous of his dignity, at the mercy of time, represented by the chimes of the great clock. The other two are symbolic, or, one might say, figures of myth, the Mother Goddess and the Slain God. The Queen makes only one contribution to the dialogue, and this is sung for her by the attendant:- 'O what will come into my womb?'. Her acceptance of the Stroller's love, only after he has been slain for it, is symbolised in her dance before the severed head, and the kiss she lays on his dead lips, a situation which Yeats himself likened to

the dance of the seven veils in Wilde's Salome. The King, who is pictured as the prisoner of time, the only one concerned with detail and motivation, came to be regarded as superfluous by Yeats, and in the revised version A Fall Moon in March he was omitted, leaving only the two symbolic figures, the Queen, 'cruel as the winter of virginity' and the Swineherd, who offers to the virgin goddess 'A song - the night of love, An ignorant forest and the dung of swine'. In this version the Queen herself, affronted by the swineherd's love, orders his execution, reacting after his death in the same way, but this time laying the severed head on the empty throne after she has performed her dance. The symbol of the clock tower, reminder of human time, is replaced in this version by the image of the full moon, emblem of cruel virginity and the Mother Goddess. At the time of the full moon the worshipper becomes the Slain God and 'Child and darling' of the Goddess. Even the slight difference occasioned by the omission of the King from the second version shows how completely Yeats had abandoned any attempt to weld his symbols into any other than a formalised, ritualistic action. His former insistence on the supremacy of the poet's spoken word had been replaced by a delight in the patterns of sound woven by his musicians, in which they were allowed to lose the words. Of these plays it does seem true that 'Players and painted stage took all my love,

And not those things that they were emblems of'.

He himself compared these with his early Plays for Dancers, saying that it was truer of these than of the earlier ones that 'I have

invented a form of drama, distinguished, indirect and symbolic, having no need of mob or press to pay its way - an aristocratic form'i)

The tendency to prefer pure art forms such as dance and music, incidentally reminiscent of Yeats' early admiration of the French symbolists, is carried even further in The Death of Cuchulain (Pub. 1939, written 1936-1939). The sardonic old man, 'like something out of mythology', who introduces the play, comments that where there are no words there is less to spoil. So the climax of the play is expressed, not in words, but in the silent dance of Emer before the heads of Cuchulain and his slayers. The play goes even further than A Full Moon in substituting abstract symbol for human symbol: Emer utters no word, and the heads are represented by black parallelograms, held by the sinister Morrighu, goddess of death and war, who is responsible for the final catastrophe.

Without a previous knowledge of the relationships between Cuchulain and the women, Eithne, Inguba, Maeve, Aoife and Emer, the action of the play becomes almost incomprehensible, though terror and pity may be created by individual incidents, such as the murder of the helpless Cuchulain by the Blind Man for the reward of twelve pennies. Yeats had had so much practice in revising, refining and compressing his work that he had learnt how to obtain the maximum effect from the simplest means. Nothing could be more bloodcurdling than the scene in which the Blind Man feels his way up Cuchulain's body, while the stage darkens and the music of pipe and drum is heard. But unless we know something of the place occupied by the symbolic

i) The Cutting of an Agate (1919) p.2

figure of the Blind Man in Yeats' system, this ending must seem, despite its horrific impact, haphazard and lacking in dramatic logic. It is scarcely likely to be illuminated by the closing refrain, sung by three ragged street musicians to modern Irish fair tunes:- (Are those things that men adore and loathe their sole reality? What stood in the Post Office with Pea~~g~~ce and Connolly?).

There is not, here, the deliberate mystification which Yeats enjoyed in the days of the Order of the Golden Dawn, when he was wont to say of such poems as The Wanderings of Oisín, that there were things in it, under the guise of symbolism, to which he alone had the key. The cause of the obscurity is, rather, the writer's complete familiarity with his much used symbols which makes him weary with the necessity for making them intelligible through their dramatic context. The same may be said of The Heron's Egg (1938) in which well tried symbols reappear, the lonely heron, the Leda-like priestess, warrior and fool. The heron, symbol of subjective loneliness in Calvary, has here been raised to the status of a god, the principle of male power and self sufficiency, worshipped by the priestess who protects the sacred eggs until she is defiled by the assault of common men. As in A Full Moon in March, the sexual act is shown as having within it the seeds of death, and, as in The Death of Cuchulain, the warrior meets his fate at the hands of his opposite and shadow, in this instance, the Fool.

The symbols are not undramatic because too vague, as was the case with Yeats' earliest drama, but because they derive from a closely

thought out system of ideas which the playwright is no longer much concerned to render in strictly dramatic terms. And yet some magnificent dramatic effects are achieved in these late plays; the spirit of drama is there, although the grammar and logic may sometimes be faulty. Surely this is largely due to the unique opportunities which Yeats had enjoyed at the Abbey. He had been given that opportunity, denied to so many modern poets, of testing his theories in a theatre free from rigid traditions and commercial standards. He had enjoyed the response from an audience which, whatever its stupidities, was at least alive to the voice of poetry and responsive to the magical properties of symbols. Even although Yeats turned his back on that audience to pursue a different and stranger kind of drama than any the Abbey was later to know, he was never to lose the benefits which that period of harsh discipline had conferred on him. Here indeed is the supreme example of a symbolic drama, magnificent even in its faults, which was fertilised by a living tradition, deep though its roots may have been in literature and poetic myth.

Moreover, Yeats was greatly stimulated in his early days as a playwright by the kind of plays being produced by his fellow writers for the Abbey. The influence of Synge's peasant plays on his style and approach to drama is well known. Without any of the conscious symbolism of Yeats, Synge achieved in much of his drama the uncanny power of myth, which can often be felt transcending the farcical situations or elaborate intrigues of the plot in a startling and

moving manner. The myth-like effect is largely due, of course, to the simplicity and harsh heroism of the life he depicts. Characters such as Nora, Pegeen Mike and Christy Mahen, the bereaved mother in Riders to the Sea (~~Produced~~ 1904), live in a primitive world which has in it still the qualities of saga or epic. Like Yeats' more consciously heroic figures, the simple people in Synge's plays have that awareness of the ritualistic quality in life which makes it easy for legends to develop even in the course of a realistic modern action. They think and talk in grand exaggerations: everything is a little larger than life as the urban mind perceives it. A 'gallus story' can make a 'playboy of the western world' out of a timid rebel: the sordid quarrel between the old man and his young wife in The Shadow of the Glen (~~Produced~~ 1903) takes on the quality of an epic conflict between the powers of winter and spring. The brooding presence of Nature, which dominates all Synge's plays, emphasises the loneliness and terror of the characters' lives and provides perhaps the only kind of background against which these simple actions could take on the proportions of myth and epic. In Synge the feeling for Nature replaced that feeling for the supernatural which possessed Yeats, but, curiously, by divergent paths, both poets often come to the same end, investing the simple and even sordid with the magical qualities of symbolic action.

In her own way, Lady Gregory too, was contributing to the Abbey feast of myth and folk lore. Apart from contributing the material on which Yeats so gratefully worked, she provided a dramatic output

of a kind highly congenial to Yeats, and, indeed, extremely popular with audiences. In her dramatic world of rich personalities, unlearned notions and simple superstitions, objects and events frequently acquire an almost symbolic significance, but since most of her best plays are comedies, the symbolism is slight and used primarily for comic or fantastic effect. It arises out of the characters' natural way of looking at things, the product of the writer's observation rather than of any strong impulse to symbolise on her part. Symbolic touches, of a more contrived kind, are scattered throughout her plays, without combining into a powerful whole: such a one is the incident at the end of The White Cockade (1905) when Patrick Sarsfield plucks to pieces King James' emblem, the white cockade, but when he realises that his loyalty to the idea has survived the unworthiness of its representative, picks up the abandoned cockades of his comrades, and, holding the pieces of his torn emblem, goes out to fight for a 'dead' King.

Everything Lady Gregory touches turns to Kiltartan gold; Molière, Biblical stories, such as that of Moses in the play, The Deliverer, miracle plays, all are given a cloak of Irish green, a brogue and an Irish outlook. Even the Christ figure of the little miracle play The Travelling Man, has much in common with Irish fairies, carrying as he does a magical green branch from a tree in a garden beyond the Golden Mountain.

The increase of interest in Irish myth and folk lore which such

plays brought about was of the greatest use to Yeats at a time when he badly needed the criticism of a mixed audience, rather than the worship of a cultured élite. The more writers who, like Synge and Lady Gregory, envisaged drama in terms of Irish poetic of peasant life, the less strained and artificial would his own symbols become. In his introduction to a collection of Dunsany's works he gently regrets the fact that Dunsany did not 'bring his imagination into the old Irish legendary world instead of those magic lands of his with their vague Eastern air'.ⁱ⁾ But he goes on to say that Dunsany's writing, which he compares with that of Maeterlinck, delights him with its mysterious quality, its continual theme of the passing of gods, men and cities before a mysterious power. Even more than Yeats' own early work, Dunsany's plays do in fact recall Maeterlinck, with their reliance on exotic, romantic names, Ardaspes, Illanann, Babbulkund, the presence of gods who talk with men, of symbolic rivers and mountains, and even the Maeterlinckian habit of repetition, as in the climax of The Gods of the Mountain (1911), 'The rock should not walk.... Rock should not walk in the evening'. Such plays reinforce Arthur Symonds view of the Irish literary movement as stemming from French symbolism. The epithets he applied to the French symbolists - mystical, romantic, mysterious - can with almost equal truth be applied to Synge, that nature mystic

i) Selections from the Writings of Lord Dunsany (Dundrum 1912)
Foreword by Yeats.

and romantic, though not to Lady Gregory, who must be regarded as the comic genius and historian of the movement.

Much of the significance of symbolism in such drama depends upon the known poetic associations of certain images, such as the hawk, or of their special Irish significance, for example, the birds circling round the head of the god, Aengus, the sea as the home of the gods, the magic properties of the hazel tree.

But another kind of symbolism is to be observed in the Irish theatre, stemming not from the French, but from Scandinavia. It is the Ibsenite kind, which depends on the placing of incidents or objects in such a way that, however bare of associations on their own, they acquire symbolic significance from their relation to the dramatic context. We find it employed, though sometimes awkwardly and sometimes coloured by the Yeatsian kind, in the drama of Edward Martyn, the upholder of Ibsen in the stronghold of the anti-Ibsenites.

Two of Martyn's plays in particular, The Heather Field (1899) and Maeve (1900), suggested a new direction for Irish drama, for these were plays of contemporary life, not that of the peasants, but of upper and middle class people, whose idiom could not, if it were to accord with probability, bear the wealth of poetic imagery and fantastic rhetoric which Synge could quite properly use. Martyn, who consciously modelled himself on Ibsen, sought to reproduce 'those peculiar qualities of poetry coming direct through realism' which he so much admired in his master's work. He accused Yeats

of attempting to parochialise Irish drama in his concentration on crude peasant plays, and in 1914 did actually set up in opposition to the Abbey the Irish Theatre for the production of non-peasant drama in Irish and English and translations of European plays.

That Martyn lacked professional cunning can be demonstrated only too easily from any of his poorer plays, such as his own unaided version of The Tale of a Town (1897) or The Dream Physician (1914) with its curious combination of Strindbergian themes, broad farce and heavy satire. His importance in the scene depends however not on his total output, but on the one or two good plays in which he struck out a new line, and for the purposes of this survey, an examination in some detail of The Heather Field should suffice to show what that line was. In Maeve and An Enchanted Sea (1902) he allows himself a freer hand with poetic dialogue, dream and vision, and, in the latter play, a central character who in his curious sea origin recalls the Stranger of The Lady from the Sea, although Martyn makes more explicit the supernatural associations. These plays are less foreign to Yeats' idea of the drama than The Heather Field, from which supernatural incidents are banished, although a mystical feeling for nature certainly remains.

The heather field, like the wild duck in Ibsen's play, represents at once an ideal, yearned for mode of existence and at the same time qualities in a character, in this instance Carden Tyrrell. Tyrrell is obsessed by 'the master thought of the heather field', just as

the Skdals, in their different ways, are obsessed by the wild duck. The field represents to him the ecstasy which a poetic spirit can find in wild nature; it is an ideal domain where imagination calls up the purest memories and the most poetical visions. It is also visualised, in particular by Barry Ussher, as an external symbol of the wild nature in Tyrrell himself, which 'had to break out again when the novelty (i.e. of domestic life) was over'. 'Some dispositions', Barry says, 'are too eerie, too ethereal, too untameable, for good, steady domestic cultivation, and if so domesticated they avenge themselves in time'.

The symbol is not introduced simply to suggest this parallelism, however; it is strictly functional, in that Tyrrell's rebellion against the domestic discipline imposed by Grace is dramatically conveyed through his hopeless, persistent effort to reclaim the heather field for cultivation. As his fortunes decline, the idea of romantically transforming the heather field, an idea which to Grace and others is sufficient evidence of his wild impracticability, becomes more and more of an *idée fixe*. One is reminded of the master builder's response to Hilda's cry, 'Do the impossible once again'. The outside world of prosaic realism recedes farther from him and reality becomes concentrated in the heather field where he hears 'celestial voices', comparable perhaps with the sound of harps in the air experienced by Sølness in The Master Builder. When Grace complains that his obsession is bringing them to beggary, Tyrrell

retorts 'This simple, barren prose of your mind! It is that, that is driving me mad'. He measures people now by their capacity for recognising in 'the master thought of the heather field' what he himself finds there, and the fact that his young son, Kit, plays there for preference, serves to underline the association in his mind of the heather field with his own idealistic youth. These ideas are skilfully brought together when Kit innocently presents the flowers he has gathered, among them heather from the supposedly reclaimed field. The 'wild heather has broken out again', just as Tyrrell's long suppressed 'wild nature' has broken out, to his ruin, for 'the vengeance of the heather field' means the collapse of his mind under the strain of anxiety and final disappointment. But just as there is beauty in the breaking out of the wild heather, although it means financial ruin for the Tyrrells, so is there a beauty and ecstasy in Carden Tyrrell's mental collapse, when he loses his last hold on the outside world. He is back in the ideal world of his youth, going out with the child whom he takes for his brother, sharer of his happiest times, to greet the rainbow, and as he goes, Barry tells Grace, 'the wild heather has broken out again in the heather field'.

The central symbol is indeed an integral part of the action, touching it at all important points and conveying its meaning through qualities which are immediately comparable with qualities in the central character. It is perhaps a little too clearly pointed, but

on the whole Martyn demonstrated in this play his understanding of Ibsen's methods and achievement.

Although there could be no comparison between the literary achievement of Yeats and Martyn, nevertheless, it might seem, from a cursory glance at the dramatic output of the Abbey over the twenty years or so to the time of O'Casey, that Martyn had triumphed. For in the plays of such writers as George Fitzmaurice, Seumas O'Kelly and Lennox Robinson, the legendary and folk material advocated by Yeats has in general been replaced by realistic contemporary material; the affairs of the middle classes have come to assume importance. Sean O'Faolain, looking back in 1938 over the achievements of the Abbey, expressly castigates¹⁾ such of the 'Cork realists' as Lennox Robinson, who, he says 'is naturalism pure and simple', his characters lacking extra-normal reverberations. The kind of realism more appropriate to the Abbey, he continues, is the lyrical kind which 'arises out of the Irish temperament, and has been consolidated as an Abbey tradition....It is antipathetic to the coolness and coldness of naturalism'.

Yeats himself, praising the early work of Lennox Robinson, had said that the young man should become celebrated, since he did not argue like the imitators of Ibsen, a view which O'Faolain emphatically refutes. But in fact, both views are tenable, not only of Robinson

1) Preface to his play, She Had to do Something (London, 1938) p.14

but of other Irish 'realists', since however strictly they may at times conform to realistic procedure, they are nearly all liable to abandon it at any time and revert to symbolic or fantastic forms, while even in their realistic drama the 'incorrigible ~~Irish~~ genius for mythmaking' is often discernable in the form of images and symbols. As O'Faolain points out, lyrical realism has been a tradition of the Abbey since the time of Synge, and even in the plays which seem to him most coldly naturalistic, the Irish tendency to form images and symbols will generally show itself at some point. For, despite Yeats' prejudice, the use of symbols in the manner of Ibsen by no means precludes a poetic extension of experience: rather, as we have seen, it may facilitate that extension, provided, of course, that the writer has some poetic feeling to convey. It is indeed possible to imitate Ibsen's symbolism for prosaic purposes and in a prosaic manner, but it is also possible, for those who have poetry in them, to follow him in drawing poetic implications out of the most apparently prosaic material. But although Ibsen and Yeats may not have been so far apart from each other as the latter imagined, Yeats' demand for a poetic surface remained insistent, and was, as he considered, not supplied in the later, realistic school of Irish writers. In 1928 we find him writing of a new play, Crossroads, that it had been accepted, despite its logical plan, 'because of its central idea, a seeming superstition of its creator, a promise of a

new attitude towards life, of something beyond logic'.¹⁾ Typical of the kind of drama he fostered is Joseph Campbell's Judgment (1912) in which the protagonists are peasants and the play itself, as Campbell says in the preface, 'a study in suggestion rather than statement'. What he wishes to evoke from the action is a sense of mystery, since art 'is concerned little with dogma, but much with the verities that are mysteries, and that will always remain mysteries, label them how we may'. How many times this cry is heard in the history of Irish drama: it recalls Synge's 'The drama is made serious...not by the degree in which it is taken up with problems that are serious in themselves, but by the degree in which it gives the nourishment, not very easy to define, on which our imaginations live...the infancy and decay of the drama tend to be didactic...The drama, like the symphony, does not teach or prove anything'.²⁾

Campbell, like Synge, believes that the simple, passionate life and way of thought of the peasants makes it possible to concentrate dramatically on 'verities that are mysteries' without becoming artificial or self-conscious. And so he introduces the symbols of the loom and the birth interest, to suggest 'destiny and (of) the wonder and persistent newness of human life'. Only in such a setting would the loom symbol fit in naturally, while at the same time the man working it might have what Synge called 'a popular imagination

1) The Death of Synge (Dublin 1928) pp.17-18

2) Preface to The Tinker's Wedding (1907) Everyman edition of Synge's works. p.33

that is fiery, and magnificent, and tender';ⁱ⁾ Owen Ban, the weaver, is capable of bringing out the symbolism of his own occupation, inspired by the thought of the child soon to be born to his wife:-

'It's a strange thing, Birth, and it's a strange thing, Death. Birth's one thread in the frame, and Death's the thread that crosses it'. The following action provides dramatic illustration of this idea. Owen overrules his wife, Nabla, and insists on offering protection to the persecuted old woman, Peg Straw, going so far as to apply water to her lips on the piece of cloth he was weaving for the expected baby. The symbolism of this action is apparent, but not unduly emphasised, for a still stronger action is to demonstrate the symbol of the crossed threads, when Peg Straw dies, and Nabla, alone in the house, feels the birth pangs coming on her:- 'A wake-house and a child to be born in it! God's ways are strange.'

The idea is sustained in the second act, when the celebration of the wake is interrupted by news of the birth of Nabla's child. Furthermore, we learn from the stranger, who is later revealed as Peg's son, that the birth of an illegitimate child was the beginning of her ruin: birth has led to the sordid death and the burial under a web which was woven for another. The stranger is turned out of the house for his wild behaviour, but the priest is given the last word - 'Judge not' - while the play ends with the prayers for the dead.

This is one of the many plays which illustrate the way in which

i) Preface to The Playboy of the Western World (1907) Op.cit.p.108

Irish playwrights have taken advantage of folk material or peasant settings to use dramatic symbolism of a kind which would clearly be unreal in a more sophisticated background. Realism can be maintained without the loss of poetic freedom. The plays of Padraic Colum provide further examples, although a realistic surface is in general preferred to a more Yeatsian poetic one. Colum extracts symbolic significance of an obvious kind from the fiddle music in The Fiddler's House (First called Broken Soil (1903). To the fiddler himself, and his daughter, Maire, the gift he has is a 'sign of the grace of God', and the lure of the roads, where music is King, eventually prevails for them both over the securer pleasures of the domestic hearth. The theme recalls that of The Heather Field, a similar contrast being pointed between the wild life of the mind and the prosaic life of domesticity: on the one hand is the fiddle, and all it represents, on the other hand the much coveted house with its plot of land. When Maire finally admits the power of 'the music that comes from the far, strange places' she makes over the house to her sister and her betrothed, James, who will see to it that domesticity triumphs by planting a row of trees in front of the house, to hide its bareness. It is worth noticing that a similar theme is treated by Lennox Robinson in The Round Table (1922), domesticity in that play being represented by the round table, which requires eternal dusting, becoming to the heroine the symbol of her frustrated life. But partly because Robinson was a middle class setting, where domestic symbols are

easier to come by than romantic ones, he fails to achieve a symbol as powerful as that of the fiddle to suggest the call of poetry, and the heroine is reduced to dreaming of far places, particularly when she finds herself in a railway station. Furthermore, an extremely unconvincing incident is introduced, no doubt because Robinson felt the need for some strengthening of his theme, when a mysterious stranger climbs in at the window of the suburban house and with her account of her reckless wanderings, fires the heroine to rebellion against her own prosaic lot. This is an excellent example of the much greater difficulty facing a playwright who wishes to introduce poetic symbols into a realistic, middle class settingⁱ⁾. It is, as we shall see, the special problem of the English playwrights, who had not at their disposal that rich folk material available to Irish writers who cared to use it. The nearest English parallel, in theme and treatment, to Robinson's The Round Table is probably Elizabeth Baker's Chains, where a suburban garden is substituted for the round table and the love of faraway places concentrated in the idea of ~~em~~igration to Australia. Neither play possesses a symbol as suggestive of poetic freedom as the fiddle in The Fiddler's House or the heather field in Martyn's play, but, significantly, the contrasted domestic symbols are quite fully realised, since they belong so much

i) Failures such as this reinforce Yeats' criticism of the attempt to distil poetry from realism, without, of course, precluding the possibility of achievement.

more naturally to the setting.

In Colum's play both house and fiddle have equal validity and the importance to the various characters of one or the other is equally convincing. Similarly in The Land (1905) Colum succeeds in investing the bit of land on which the emotions of all the characters centre with so much meaning that it quite easily and naturally comes to represent Ireland itself, Ireland, deserted by the more promising of her young people, who rebel against the tyranny of the old way of life, while the less intelligent, the slow or stupid will 'inherit the land'.

T.C. Murray is another playwright who by the very simplicity and bareness of his country settings frequently manages to invest quite ordinary events with a significance which removes the action from the particular to the universal. The two aged characters in Spring (1917), Andreesh and his sister, Shavawn, seem almost to personify Winter itself by the way in which they are set against a spring landscape in which they no longer have any place, and this is symbolised by the pathetic little incident when Andreesh is held responsible for the death of the spring lamb. A less successful attempt is made in Aftermath (1922) to give a timeless quality to the love story by involving the characters in amateur theatricals, where the heroine plays Deirdre, her two suitors Naisi and Conchubar. More effective, because less consciously literary, is the symbol of the highly bred horse, Pagan, which cannot be controlled by kindness alone, requiring the 'stronger will', which Manning supplies, just

as Grace has been conquered by the practical man while Miles, the ineffectual scholar and poet, has had to put up with second best.

The horse symbol is used again in Autumn Fire (1925), where the old man who prides himself on the strength which has won him a young girl for wife is made to realise his weakness when he is thrown from the fiery young horse he thought he had mastered, a catastrophe closely followed by the parallel catastrophe of his wife's transference of affection to his own son, a young man of spirit, more akin to the young girl. In Michaelmas Eve (1932) the simile recurs as an image, when the wild Moll, child of poachers and moonlighters, is visualised as a 'young colt' and Hugh, metaphorically describing his fiery encounter with her says 'I just chanced to come on the black colt and he tossing his heels to the sky in the young corn'.

Nature symbolism, so important in this kind of Irish drama, helps to raise the action to a poetic level even when it is used as slightly as in Murray's plays. Realism is in no way impaired, since to the characters themselves, although they are by no means the poetically speaking peasants of Synge, such things as the weather, the state of the land, the behaviour of the crops and of animals, are of first importance and naturally tend to build themselves up into symbols. We are reminded of Synge's suggestion that religious art is extinct and has been replaced by 'our quite modern feeling for the beauty and mystery of nature:ⁱ⁾

i) The Works of J.M. Synge (1932) Vol.I p.iii

The Irish feeling for imagery and for the living processes of myth is curiously illustrated in the drama of Sean O'Casey. In O'Casey's first three plays, which still remain his masterpieces, The Shadow of a Gunman (1923), Juno and the Paycock (1924) and The Plough and the Stars (1926), the theme was sufficiently heroic, had within it enough of the qualities of epic or saga, for O'Casey to feel himself able to treat it in a technically straightforward way. His handling of crowd scenes, his mingling of irony, pathos and broad humour testify to the sureness and, indeed, brilliance of his technique, but he avoids any extra-realistic devices and confines symbolism to the simplest touches, such as the abandonment of the treasured banner, the Plough and the Stars, in the desperate street fighting, the extinction of the votive light before the Virgin's shrine as the executioners approach in Juno and the Paycock, or the removal of furniture from the stricken house, corresponding with the breaking up of the family. When these first plays are compared with those from The Silver Tassie (1928) onwards, the control of technique exhibited in the former appears remarkable, and I suggest that it was possible because the material was of such a kind that it easily lent itself to the drawing of wider conclusions, without the need for heavy pointing of these conclusions by the playwright. The Irish rising, though tragic and terrible for those involved in it, was yet of sufficiently small compass to be contained within the limits of a play dealing with one or two families, so that the squabbles and heroisms of the tenement people in The Plough and the Stars, the

disintegration of the family in Juno and the Paycock, can quite naturally be made to seem like a microcosm of the national conflict. These are the people who have created war and remain close to its centre, its personalities, its ups and downs, in a way scarcely possible for an equivalent English crowd during one of the World Wars. In the last scene of Juno and the Paycock, when the son of the house has been killed as a traitor to his fellow rebels, and the only hope for the future lies in the unborn fatherless baby, the tragic falling apart of things is underlined by the removal of the unpaid for furniture, and because the fate of these characters has been so closely allied with the fate of Ireland, we feel that the Paycock's drunken conclusion, though originating in comedy, is yet at the same time the most fitting comment on the tragedy:- 'The whole world's in a terrible state o'chassis'. Similarly, in Act II of The Plough and the Stars the contrast between the petty squabbles inside the pub and the voice of the orator outside, calling for an unity of sacrifice, is at once comic and tragically ironic: it is impossible to escape from the inference that this contrast, on a bigger scale, may help to determine the fate of Ireland.

Unobtrusive symbolism of this kind, often originating in comedy and taking on a tragic significance, testifies to O'Casey's absolute control of his material. With the Silver Tassie, however, came a change. Yeats with his customary shrewd perception, put his finger on the weakness in this play. On rejecting it for the Abbey he told O'Casey that the play had no 'theme', that O'Casey was not 'interested

in the great war". O'Casey indignantly replied, 'Your statement is to me an impudently ignorant one to make, for it happens that I was and am passionately interested in the great war'. But although O'Casey was right in affirming his moral interest in the war, he was wrong, as Yeats saw, in assuming that aesthetic interest was bound to follow. The subject was too big for the kind of treatment he had been able to give the Irish material of earlier plays. To quote Yeats again:- 'The mere greatness of the World War has thwarted you...It is all too abstract after the first act'.¹⁾

O'Casey was indeed now setting out on a new path, attempting to treat dramatically themes so 'big' and 'remote' that some form of technical experiment had to be employed to deal with them. He remained characteristically Irish in that he continued to feel the need of some powerful myth or framework of ideas within which to work, but the framework had to be expanded so that it might contain the abstract problems with which he attempted to grapple in such plays as The Silver Tassie, Within the Gates (1934), The Star ~~Turns~~ Red (1940). The result was that the ideology tended to replace the myth, the symbolic type the complex character, the repetitive statement the dramatic argument.

The first appearance of the silver tassie in the play of that name marks the beginning of the highly conscious use of symbolism

1) quoted in The Irish Theatre - Lennox Robinson (1939) pp 170 ff.

which is to be found from then onwards in O'Casey's plays. The tassie, which is the champion's reward, is the 'sign of youth, sign of strength, sign of victory'. The young men pass it round, exulting in their proud manhood, in the first act: in the last act, when they return, one maimed, the other blinded, it becomes for them a symbol of all they have lost. The crippled Harry renounces the battered cup in these words:- 'And now, before I go, I give you all the Cup, the Silver Tassie, to have and to hold for ever, evermore. Mangled and bruised as I am bruised and mangled...Treat it kindly. With care it may be opened out, for Barney there to drink to Jess, and Jessie there to drink to Barney'.

This is an entirely different symbolism from that of the early plays, in that the characters are now aware of the symbolic situations in which they appear deliberately to place themselves. Similarly, in the expressionistically distorted setting of Act II, a contrived symbolism is imposed on the characters, who are represented as speaking most of the time in somnambulist reverie, a favourite device with the German expressionists. The dialogue is stylised and repetitive; the crouching soldier who quotes from Ecclesiastes is promptly answered by a distant Kyrie eleison from the ruined monastery; the gun, to which the soldiers pay their worship, is placed symbolically opposite the crucifix, inscribed with the words 'Princeps Facis', so crudely ironic in this setting. Such a setting and treatment at once recalls Strindberg, the German expressionists and their followers, and it is not surprising to find O'Casey acknowledging a debt to the

great American expressionist, O'Neill, in the foreword to his next play, Within the Gates: the idea of the front curtain, he tells us, deriving from O'Neill's setting for Mourning Becomes Electra.

The use of such expressionist devices as are employed in both these plays need not necessarily destroy a play's dramatic effect; on the contrary, they may enhance it, if used with skill and restraint. But O'Casey, unfortunately, seems to lose the delicate touch which brought his earlier plays to life when once he adopts wholeheartedly expressionist technique. Characters are subordinated to ideas to such an extent that the things they say and do frequently appear totally unconvincing and unreal: the violent change that takes place in Susie, in The Silver Tassie may be instanced: this change, from the militant evangelist to the promiscuous flirt, is necessary to O'Casey's satirical purpose, but too sudden and crude to be accepted as a natural development in character. The characters must behave in accordance with O'Casey's dominant theme rather than with their own natures: here, incidentally, O'Casey's symbolism differs from that of Strindberg, for Strindberg, whatever his other defects as a playwright, was at least always attempting to be faithful to the true lineaments of character as he saw it.

The automatism of characters and incidents is deliberately stressed in Within the Gates, with its formalised seasonal settings, its Chorus of types appropriate to each season, its repetitive refrains, its nameless characters. Strindbergian echoes abound, such as the recurring appearance of the Dreamer, whose lyrics are taken up and sung

by the Choruses, the underlining of mood or idea by changes in setting, as when the scene grows dark and grey for the chant of the Down-and-Out, and the symbolic costume, as for example, the scarlet crescent on the hip of the Young Woman's black dress. O'Neill's curtain device has already been noted, and it seems as though O'Casey has also borrowed from Mourning Becomes Electra the idea of a rigid walk to suggest rigid character: the two Chair attendants walk with a stiff right leg and stiff left leg respectively. O'Casey has not, however, troubled to give the symbolism a surface appearance of realism. Within the Gates is out and out allegory, nor does it escape the danger to which allegory is always subject, of over emphasis and crudity.

This is even more true of The Star Turns Red, a political manifesto, in which the conflict is mainly ideological, a large proportion of the characters nameless types, such as the Purple Priest and the Brown Priest and the motivation correspondingly simple and, by dint of repetition, embarrassingly obvious. Symbolism of setting is carried here to such a pitch that one suspects a real obsession with theory. The walls of Mack's home are black, and through the window can be seen a silver star, which at the end of the play turns red: on a black cupboard stands a white teapot, which we are to regard, so the stage direction tells us, as a 'symbol of life's necessities': the tablecloth is in the papal colours and the room is dominated by the sketch of a bishop's head to one side of the window, with Lenin's on the other.

In place of the Irish national myth, which his social and

political convictions had forced him to discard, O'Casey had found what has been described as 'parvenu myth', an ideology which certainly provided him with a wealth of symbols, but which was not conducive to the best kind of dramatic writing, being based on rigid theory and destructive of living, organic growth.

This wrong turning, which it seems O'Casey had been compelled to take when the social theorist in him overcame the artist, has been followed, with intermittent exceptions, ever since The Silver Tassie. The social conflict in his later plays is frequently combined with a parallel conflict between the free, natural, fulfilled life and the conventional, cramped, distorted one. To put it crudely, though hardly more crudely than is common in the plays themselves, the young, vigorous, honest characters are politically of the left wing, the hypocrites and the inhibited of the right. The contrast is stressed by the now familiar symbolic devices: the clumsy, automatic movement of the capitalists in Purple Dust (1945), the paralysis of Julia in Cock-A-Doodle Dandy (1949), a paralysis which the Church cannot cure, even in the 'blessed' waters of Lourdes while the characters who have abandoned the church for love of the pagan Cock are full of life and vigour. Even such unequivocal symbolism is insufficient for O'Casey when his obsession rages, and in Cock-A-Doodle Dandy he isolates his leading idea in a supernatural figure. The Cock represents freedom and fertility; he wages a diabolical battle with the 'respectable', while bringing laughter and joy into the lives of the young women who wear his emblem. The Cock makes several appearances in the course of the action, playing

some of his most alarming pranks on the old men, Marthraun and Mahan, who hypocritically indulge in secret the instincts they loudly condemn in public. Loreleen, whose name suggests the siren's allure, is figuratively a daughter of the Cock, and lest we should miss this point O'Casey shows us the scarlet ornament on her hat growing into a cock's crest during a scene of abandonment. The Cock works havoc when the priest attempts exorcism, but allows himself to be led away on a green ribbon by Robin Adair, who, as one of his sympathisers, explains to the others, 'there's no harm in him beyond gaiety an' fine feeling'.

Practically every incident in the play receives a double explanation. A character such as the Messenger may show his nature clearly enough in action and talk, but he must also wear a symbolic badge, a flash of scarlet wings on his coat. Conversely, when horns branch out miraculously on Marion's head, although by this time the dominant symbolism is familiar, she must needs explain 'I've some of th' devil in me, an' th' two fosterers of fear, there, think I wear horns on holy days'.

Of all these late plays, Red Roses for Me (1943) most nearly recaptures the quality of the early days, since here the symbolism is restrained and arises more easily out of the nature of the people and events. The dominant image is the red rose, with its varied associations of beauty, youth, love and freedom. The idea of the rose occurs naturally in the mind of such a hero as Ayamonn, a passionate, sensitive young man, something of a poet and actor. At

the beginning of the play he is seen rehearsing a scene from Henry VI, his imagination stirred by the image of the red rose of Lancaster: he has himself written the song about red roses which is used, very poignantly, at the climax of the play, after his death. It is, then, perfectly convincing that the image should recur at intervals to his mind, so that he may use it in the love passages with Sheila, or in political passages when he envisages Ireland, like the peasant girl of his song, yearning for the 'crimson rose of her youth'. Finally, after his murder in the riots, the image becomes a symbol, as Sheila stands in the churchyard carrying, at last, though too late, a bunch of crimson roses, which she had, figuratively, refused to wear for him earlier, in other words, by submitting to his passion. She had been, as Ayamonn ironically put it, a daughter of St. Frigid.

Even Act III of this play, in which, by the power of music, the sordid scene by the river Liffey, is transformed to a scene of heroic splendour, does not disturb the conviction of real life imparted by the whole. It is perfectly clear that this transformation is only in the mind, just as the seeming miracle in the transformation of the Virgin's statue is no less real to the women who worship her because, as we know, it has in fact been staged for them by an unbeliever. The chorus of these women, children of the Virgin, strikes momentarily a disturbing note, as though we are to be plunged once more into a world of types and symbolic refrains, but O'Casey avoids the temptation, and, on the whole, achieves a dramatic success, in addition to some moving lyrical passages.

Of the younger Irish playwrights with a body of work to their credit, Denis Johnston is closest to O'Casey in his enthusiasm for experiment and his susceptibility to expressionist influences. Johnston allows himself an entirely free hand with his symbolism in The Old Lady Says No (1929) and A Bride for the Unicorn (1933), in the former play relying on the audience's recognition of his Irish symbols, local and historical, and in the latter on a familiarity with the symbols of classical myth and legend. In both plays the structure is of a kind which scarcely helps in the identification of the symbols by an audience not already in some degree familiar with them. The action of The Old Lady Says No takes place in the mind of an actor suffering from concussion, so that past and present, real and imagined events run together in a fevered sequence, which to a non-Irish audience is intermittently incomprehensible, or at least obscure, without prior assistance from the notes with which the printed version has been furnished. Symbols as localised and special as those which Johnston here employs need more than most to be placed in a structure which will point their significance. The combination of loose form and esoteric symbolism is a mistake. Much more effective is the controlled symbolism of The Moon in the Yellow River, which remains perhaps Johnston's greatest play. The central symbol, the power house, represents a variety of things to different characters. To Tausch it stands for civilisation. "And what might can equal electrical power at one farthing a unit?" he demands. This is his faith: he is prepared to die if necessary for the power house because it has for him this symbolic significance. To

Dobelle and Darrell Blake the same symbol represents the corruption of the Irish Utopia which each cherishes in his mind, and Darrell Blake does in fact die as a result of his effort to destroy the symbol. That Blake, even in his fanaticism, suspects the futility of his defiance, is brought out in such remarks as his comparison of himself with the unicorn, the 'lonely, chaste and noble' beast, which is now extinct, and, very dramatically, in the song he is singing when Lannigan shoots him, 'And Li-Po Also died drunk. He tried to embrace a Moon In the Yellow River'. The moon in the Yellow River is the unattainable ideal for which such men as Blake willingly die. For Dobelle, the embittered philosopher who regards simple happiness as his unattainable 'moon', the end of the play brings promise. He is at last awoken to the consolation offered him by his neglected daughter Blanaid; the reconciliation between them is given ^{symbolic} ~~sympathetic~~ emphasis by the news that the baby, whose arrival has been expected throughout the play, has at last been born. As it begins its life, so does a new life open for Dobelle and Blanaid.

Here is a much more valid kind of symbolism than that employed, admittedly in a light hearted spirit, in A Bride for the Unicorn.

The lyrical realism which O'Faolain regards as natural to the Irish temperament is demonstrated, in light hearted mood, in his own play, She Had to do Something (1938). The contrast between the Canon's narrow view of life and Madame Arnold's wholehearted acceptance of experience is emphasised by symbolic devices. Madame Arnold throws open the windows to let in the sun, her scarf catching the light as she cries 'I want there to be poetry in life'. The Canon,

silhouetted in the light, is 'black against the sun': what he wants is 'good behaviour'. Music, in particular the music of *Spectre de la Rose*, is used throughout as a symbol of 'love of life', and this is ^a functional symbol, not merely a decoration, since the central crux of the play is whether the company of ballet dancers, invited to the town by Madame Arnold, shall be allowed to perform there. The apparent victory of the 'respectable', with which the play ends, is foreshadowed in the symbolic scene where the waltz tune, to which Natasha is dancing, is drowned by the march tune and the sound of hymns from the demonstrators outside. When, under the emotional stress of the occasion, the façade of respectability cracks in first one character and then another, the breaking up process culminates in the comic symbol of Arnold's bald head, unexpectedly revealed beneath a wig. Such half fantastic, half serious touches are clearly in the spirit of Irish drama, though here confined within a light, satiric pattern. Lyrical realism is an excellent description for the more serious plays of such writers as Paul Vincent Carroll and George Shiels.

Irish playwrights have still an advantage over their English brethren in the greater ease with which they can introduce the supernatural into their drama, often to produce a symbolic effect. Paul Vincent Carroll takes advantage of the simple faith in the supernatural enjoyed by the Irish peasant classes to stress the nature of his theme in Shadow and Substance (1934). The conflict in this play lies between the authoritarian, aristocratic attitude to life of the reactionary Canon Skerritt and the revolutionary, agnostic

liberalism of the schoolmaster, O'Flingsley. Each way of life has its merits and its defects: neither can equal the simple virtue of the life led by the Canon's servant girl, Brigid, who attempts to reconcile the two deadly enemies, and comes at least some way towards doing it in the moment of her death. Brigid's life is life 'with a blessing on it', and this is emphasised by the supernatural element, for she believes that she is indeed in receipt of the special blessing of St. Brigid, who appears to her and gives her instructions. Carroll maintains a deliberate ambiguity over the nature of the supernatural events reported by Brigid: we may believe them real, or we may believe, as all the characters in the play do, that they are the outcome of a mind temporarily unbalanced and hereditarily weak. But to Brigid at least the divine revelation is genuine, and this gives to her remarks an inspired quality which obviates the necessity for dogmatic repetition of ideas. St. Brigid is an aesthetic symbol to the Canon, to O'Flingsley a symbol of ignorance and superstition. But to her humble namesake she is a symbol that lives. And by means of this central symbol, Carroll is able to bring home his theme that in a world occupied with 'shadows', Brigid has found the 'substance'. In a later play, The White Steed (1938), superstitious beliefs are again employed, less successfully than in Shadow and Substance, perhaps because more consciously interpreted in metaphorical terms by the characters. It seems that a striking feature of the Irish theatre is that even in drama thought of as primarily realistic, the Irish tendency to think imagistically, repeatedly asserts itself, frequently resulting in plays delicately

balanced between allegory and drama of the individual.

This is powerfully illustrated in Howard Peacey's play, Island of Destiny (1932), where the characters, though clearly differentiated as individuals, yet represent the various ideologies and beliefs which divided Ireland at the time of the action. Parallel with the physical conflict, itself sufficiently exciting, runs a mental conflict, which is expressed imagistically in the various discussions at moments of crisis on the meaning of the phrase 'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's'. Indeed, the symbolic idea of Caesar haunts the action. When the young I.R.A.'s burst into the Fitzpatrick house at the beginning of the play, realism is suspended temporarily to allow their chorus of victory: 'Ave, Caesar Imperator! Those not about to die salute you! Salute, Caesar!' The death of Michael Collins is visualised as the murder of Caesar by Maddermost, who prays that Collins' spirit may walk, as did that of Caesar, until Nemesis comes on his assassins, even on Brutus, 'that worthy, generous Republican'. The parallel between the condition of modern Ireland and that of ancient Rome is repeatedly drawn, and helps to increase the universal significance of the Irish action. It does not sound an artificial note, since the play is so skilfully poised between a realistic prose convention and a free, verse form which allows for moments of poetic rhetoric and soliloquy. This makes possible the full poetic note of the close when Lancaster, going out to his death, replies to Moira's cry, 'Where is Hugh going?' 'To Philippi. To meet the Caesar of all Caesars. Ave, Caesar Imperator!' In this kind of ~~realistic~~ poetic symbolism, functioning

dramatically within a framework of realistic events, the Irish excel.

A final example may be noted in the plays of George Shiels, a master of realistic satire, but also an expert in this difficult art of symbolic implications. His two plays, The Rugged Path (1940) and The Summit (1941) maintain a balance in a way which most English realistic playwrights find hard to achieve. There is no rigid allegory in this study of the conflict between the 'mountaineering men', the Dolises, and the peaceable men of the valley, the Tanseys, and yet we are made to feel, by the end of the story, that the conflict is one which affects the whole of Ireland, and, even, perhaps the civilised world. Sean Tansey, the representative of young Ireland, untroubled by the bogies of the past 'troubles', leads the attack on the mountain gangsters who have terrorised the valley dwellers for generations, strong in a unity which their victims do not possess. 'If we stood up to them', says Sean, 'we'd get our own part of the mountain back', and he is supported by the Sergeant, representing the best in the new Irish forces of law, who 'wants to clean up the mountain'. Their crusade against the Dolises, which seems so hopeless at the beginning of the play, is shown to have powers to succeed only when the valley dwellers unite, when the Tanseys and Cassidys, long divided by old civil war enmities, come together and crush Hugh Dolis, who points the moral, 'And maybe you patriots'll soon be killing one another - as you did before - and then the Dolises'll come into their own again.' The idea of the mountain as symbol of lawlessness, menacing innocent men, is

built up without any intrusion of didactic exposition. When the timid master turns on Dolis with the complaint, 'Your method on this mountain of living from hand to mouth has troubled me for five-and-twenty years', Dolis dryly replies, 'It's troubled us for a thousand years', and we can scarcely ignore the inference that we are dealing here with a fundamental problem of human society, not merely with a parochial study in Irish affairs. The mountain comes to loom so large in our minds that we can feel with Michael Tansey, 'Twould take a mountain off my back to be at peace with the world'. And when Liam Cassidy at the very end, disposes of the Dolises and sets village life on a decent basis once more, we have, surely, a sense of relief and, even, exaltation, as if it were the affairs of the world that were being set in order, and honest men everywhere free to breathe in peace.

This ability to deal with the local in terms of the universal, without undramatically stressing the connection is, then, an enduring phenomenon in the history of the Irish theatre, seeming to stem from that 'incorrigible genius for myth making' which may be traced from the open and declared symbolism of Yeats to the concealed symbolism of the latter day Irish playwrights. Yeats did not succeed in founding a school, nor is that necessarily a thing to be desired, but he established a high poetic standard which has had a far reaching if not always obvious, influence on the writers who followed him. Sometimes the Irish instinct for symbolism has led in the wrong

direction, as it did with O'Casey and Yeats when their intellectual awareness of their symbols was uppermost, but on the whole it has proved a valuable instinct, enabling the best Irish playwrights to discern in the local and particular the seeds of the universal, and to convey their vision in writing which so often remarkably succeeds in being realistic, poetic and dramatic at one and the same time.

Partly this has been due to a poetic sense which prefers the 'emotional' symbol to the purely 'intellectual' symbol, thus lessening the danger, always present when symbols are consciously used, of mechanical allegory supplanting the drama of real life. The special circumstances of Irish politics, making possible an awareness of the heroic in contemporary life, have, as we have seen, been an extremely important factor in the fostering of this distinctive Irish drama, and finally, the willingness to learn from foreign models, whether French, Japanese or Scandinavian, has assisted in the technical application of the playwrights' theories. Twentieth century Ireland has created a living mythology, with the result, for the playwrights, that symbolism has come to be a natural and powerful means of increasing the significance of their drama.

Remembering the criticism that the English are always at least a generation behind the times, we should not be surprised to find English playwrights experimenting much more gingerly with symbolism than their Irish or American counterparts. Sporadic attempts to introduce a thorough going symbolism into the English theatre, as in the revues of Anden and Isherwood, have met with little popular success, although receiving their due meed of recognition in the text books of drama. There has been no such spectacular success of experimental drama as Eugene O'Neill's plays enjoyed in America, while the poets have had to work harder to get their audiences than Irish playwrights like Yeats had to do.

But there has, for all that, been an infiltration of symbolism into the dramatic technique of the English playwright. As we should expect, the dominant influence has been that of Ibsen, whose practice of symbolism in the social plays seems to have suggested to English dramatists a way of discreetly heightening the significance of their realistic material without startling or depressing the conventionally minded English audience. As we have seen, such a method can produce a great variety of effects, ranging from the didactic to the poetic: the extent of the range can best be illustrated in English drama from the plays of Shaw. Unfortunately, far too many English playwrights, particularly of the early realistic 'school',

the convenience of symbolism for effective moral propaganda has overshadowed its more subtle potentialities. Although the greatest drama of this country has never been didactic, it is an undeniable fact that the English have a taste for moral elevation in the theatre, and that the didactic element in twentieth century drama has been extraordinarily strong. It has enabled scores of 'problem' playsⁱ⁾ weak in aesthetic value to pass as serious, or even distinguished drama, while the harsh tones of the preacher only too often mar the voices of our most notable playwrights, from Shaw to Eliot.

The use of symbols for didactic purposes is nowhere more apparent than in the plays of Galsworthy, whose method is a cruder version of Ibsen's symbolism in the 'social' plays.

From the first, Galsworthy's tendency to explain his symbols, so that their dramatic effectiveness is vitiated, is painfully obvious. It might be forgiven in the earliest plays, such as Joy (1907), where the hollow tree, in which the young girl hides from the adult world, is so uncertainly conceived a symbol that it requires constant explanation. At one time Miss Beech comments, 'we're all as hollow as that tree', at another she speaks of it as the tree of life, which stands between the girl, Joy, and her mother. But instead of diminishing as his technique matures, the habit of explaining grows on him. In Windows (1922), the appearance of the philosophic window cleaner,

i) To name a few recent examples at random, TERENCE RATTIGAN'S The Winslow Boy (1946), WARREN CHEYAM STRODE'S The Guinea-Pig (1945) WILLIAM HOME'S Now Barabbas (1946)

Mr. Ely, becomes, by force of repetition, symbolic of the theme of the play, which is the apparent futility of human efforts to look through the 'windows' of other people's souls. This is, or could be, quite an effective symbol: just as the windows of the March house mist over and become dirty, despite the regular cleaning they receive, so do people's characters defy the best intentioned attempts to understand and 'clean' them. Mr. March, the humanitarian, tries to make life happier for the girl who has gone wrong, to give her a pleasanter view from her 'window', but his idea of a pleasant view is not, and never can be, hers. We may be reminded of Lona Hessell's symbolic action in throwing open the windows to let in fresh air, but the resemblance ends at the incident, for, unlike Ibsen, Galsworthy seems unable to let the symbol speak for itself. The window cleaner himself must draw constant attention to the parallel: - 'It's 'ardly worth while to do these winders. You clean 'em and they're dirty again in no time. It's like life', and 'There's winders all round, but you can't see,' and, of his daughter, 'Fact is - her winders want cleanin', she 'ad a dusty time in there'.

The symbol is in fact so loosely attached to the action that it can hardly be self sufficient. In The Fugitive (1913) Galsworthy does make an attempt to allow the symbolism of the last scene to explain itself, by rather laboriously preparing the way for it through reiterated imagery. From an early stage in the action the parallel between Clave's position and that of the hunted animal at bay is

brought out by her lover, Malise, who sardonically employs hunting metaphors to criticise her treatment by society. It is then possible for the last scene to be played out without the interference of a commentator: the idea of Clave as an outcast, pursued by the 'pack' is by now so familiar that we easily recognise the ironic significance of the rowdy Derby Day celebrations which provide the background for her suicide. The sound of the view halloa, of John Peel played on a hunting horn, and the mournful notes of 'This day a stag must die' produce a poignant effect which the over elucidated symbol of Windows quite fails to achieve. But the preparation for the symbolic effect has been somewhat heavyhanded. In The Forest (1924) Galsworthy attempts to make his symbolism an integral part of the action by alternating between settings in London and Africa, so pointing the significance of the forest as a symbol of the lusts, greeds and cruelties of the City. He gives an early hint of the comparison he intends us to draw when Tregay, in the first scene, talks of 'Forest thick as the city of London, my lord; fever - cannibals - all the luxuries.' But in case we should miss the connection, it is stressed, yet more forcibly, by Beton, a little further on - 'The life of that forest...is our big city life', while Farrell, at the end of the scene, tells Bastable that Tregay has called his office the 'lion's den'. In the forest itself the passions are shown at their crudest; the deeper the penetration into wild jungle, the thinner becomes the civilised veneer which in the city partially hides the savagery beneath. In the last act, the

forest symbolism is once more stressed by Tregay, who compares Bastable, author of the tragedy, with a tiger, and the play ends with Bastable smiling over his savage victory, 'his fingers spreading and crisping unconsciously like the claws of a cat'.

In this play, because the action in the forest is equally important as that in the city, the two being interdependent, there is less need for the persistent explanation with which Galsworthy elsewhere so often defeats his own ends. But there is all the same a conscious neatness in the drawing of the parallel which is typical of all Galsworthy's work. Symbolic incidents occur too patly, as in A Bit O'Love (1915), when Strangway's wife begs for her freedom from a relationship she finds oppressively irksome almost immediately after Strangway has insisted on releasing the caged skylark against the will of the village girl who keeps it as a pet.

Galsworthy's method then, though recognisably of the Ibsenite kind, is dramatically weak in its over elucidation and contrived effect. A more subtle and poetic use of symbolism is found in the plays of Granville Barker, who, significantly, was one of the most enthusiastic supporters of Maeterlinck in this country, giving Aglavaine et Selysette as one of his first productions at the Court Theatre, and writing in his introduction to an edition of Maeterlinckⁱ⁾

i) Introduction to Three Plays (1911) pp.vii ff.

that the playwright had found a 'perfect method of expression' for his theme, 'the great facts of life; birth, love and death'. The method was symbolism, 'the only way of saying much in little', and Barker adds a warning against attempts to take the symbolism too literally, to work it out as though it were sums in arithmetic. Of Granville Barker's published plays, one of the earliest, Prunella (1904), written with Lawrence Housman, has something of the Maeterlinckian manner in its formalised setting of a Dutch garden, with its musical effects, recurring refrains, and dream like quality. On the one hand is the inhibited life, represented by stiffly clipped hedges, lesson books, and so on; on the other hand the life of the romantic, dreaming self, represented by the moonlight and the statue of the god of love, which comes to life in aid of the lovers. An interesting balance is held, however, between dream and reality: Pierrot may seem at times a purely allegorical figure, the man out of the moon indeed, but he is also a realistic one, leader of a troupe of strolling players, who come to perform at the local fair. Prunella may be a little Dutch doll brought to life by the power of Cupid, but she is also a real girl, capable of growing older and wearier, and of having her heart almost broken. This ability to evoke dream like effects from realistic material is very marked in Granville Barker's drama, and distinguishes his plays from those of Maeterlinck, which are almost pure dream, making them, in fact, more like the late plays of Ibsen, or the Chamber plays of Strindberg.

In The Marrying of Ann Leete (1901), which William Archer found

so difficult to understand, the awakening of the unconscious, dreaming self is again represented, as in Prunella, by the effect of moonlight on a garden, and at the end of the play Ann's gallant advance into an entirely strange and unknown future is given symbolic underlining by her silent ascent of the dark cottage stairs, lit only by the lamp she carries. The symbol of the moonlit garden, contrasting with the conscious daylight world recurs in Waste (1907). (Revised version 1926), and it is noticeable that in the second version Barker makes Trebell deliberately contemptuous of the sentimental effects engendered by moonlight, insisting instead on a sensible, cold blooded arrangement for a rendezvous in Amy's room. Later in the action, the sentiment he has endeavoured to suppress reasserts itself in the most tragic manner. Most powerfully perhaps is the moonlight symbol used in The Secret Life (1923). In the opening scene, set in the loggia of a house by the sea on a summer night, Joan Westbury calls attention to the 'burnt out' moon, going on later to refer to herself in the same terms: she addresses her remarks to the moon as one burnt out lady to another. There is in fact a realistic explanation for this expression, since, as we learn afterwards, Joan has been literally 'burnt out', a fire in her house having sent her to take refuge with the Strowdes, but Granville Barker deliberately withholds the realistic explanation until the emotional effect of the expression has established itself, and this, our first impression, is the true one, since the characters in the play are, so many of

them, 'burnt out' emotionally, in their 'secret lives'. Joan's use of the 'burnt' metaphor in later dialogue is the more effective for the ambiguous nature of its first statement 'Better be burnt out', she says, 'Let God's eye behold me still in my dressing gown and the gardener's boots'. This attempt to strip away the layers of protective padding which conceal the true 'secret life' is the theme of the play: hence the importance of establishing it by a dramatically effective symbol, as Barker has certainly done here. He achieves a similar effect with the symbolic music of Tristan and Isolde, which we hear when the curtain goes up. The attitude of the characters toward this music is, again, ambiguous: they affect to smile at the memory of their romantic youth, when it had been such a passion with them, but they are equally ironic about the successful worldly state from which they can look back at those youthful enthusiasms. In Scene III Joan and Stowde, on the moonlit steps again, discuss the love they renounced in terms of the opera: theirs was a 'Tristan' love, not one for the workaday world. The love for the unattainable, which was what they saw in each other, is romantic, like Wagner's music, ~~but~~, from another point of view 'a symbol of denial...of uselessness...of a sort of death in life'. The opening setting of the play, then, has established motifs which are to run all the way through: they are the more effective for being in the first instance, simply presented, without elaboration or explanation, and allowed to create a strong emotional effect,

from which the playwright can later proceed to intellectual analogies. Barker's trouble as a playwright seems to me not so much that he over explains his symbols in the explicit manner of Galsworthy, but that he draws out his analogies too long: he uses symbols as the starting point for leisurely, subtle variations on themes initially dramatic, but becoming less so as the variations proceed. His conversations are always interesting, but not always as drama. That he has a tendency toward non-dramatic treatment is also suggested by the wealth of detail in some of his stage directions. Again, he is trying to capture the spirit of an action, its 'secret life', by the elaborate descriptions he so often gives us of a play's background, but though we may recognise his intention, we must also recognise that the effect, on the stage, can be only partial. Even in so short and trivial a play as Rococo (1912), extreme care is lavished on the detail of the setting, so that we may understand, from our first view of the ornate interior, that it is 'a mean house, a stuffy house, and the Vicar must indeed have fresh air in his soul if mean and stuffy doctrine was not to be generated there'. The building up of symbolism in setting by accumulation of detail is, indeed, what we might expect in a drama committed to realism on the surface at least. It is characteristic of the English approach, as we may see from the equally elaborate directions of Shaw, Barrie, Milne, and, on occasion, Bridie.

Although he was such an admirer of Maeterlinck, and although he does, as we have seen, often capture the dream like effect in which he believed Maeterlinck to excel, Granville Barker manages to fit his symbols into a realistic pattern much more in the manner of the later Ibsen or Strindberg. The symbol of the burnt house in The Secret Life does, in fact recall the burnt house in The Master Builder, and, even more directly, Strindberg's Burnt House, in which the purpose of the burning out is the same as Barker's, to reveal the true pattern of the inner life. Barker also has a habit of visualising his people, and talking about them in dialogue, as representatives of a way of life. 'There's always Eleanor' we are told in The Secret Life, meaning, 'There's always Eleanor's way of conducting life'. Similarly, many of the characters in The Madras House (1910) and The Voysey Inheritance (1905) so clearly stand for an outlook, a philosophy, that at intervals we begin to regard the action as allegorical. Certainly this is so in The Madras House⁽ⁱ⁾ although Barker, with his subtle touch, generally prevents the allegorical implications from altogether overwhelming the individual and unique.

Unfortunately this cannot be said of the majority of English playwrights when they attempt to use Ibsen's type of symbolism. They

i) For example, the mannequin parade, on which Constantine comments 'Is this the symbol under which you are facing the future?'

are only too easily seduced into the rigid paths of didactic allegory. We have observed this of Galsworthy and to take a contemporary example, it is also true of Priestley, another playwright with a great fondness for metaphor and symbol. When he is using symbols primarily for emotional effects, Priestley is more successful than when he visualises them intellectually. For example, in The Linden Tree (1947), he employs a poignant, if very obvious, symbol in the schoolgirl daughter's playing of the Elgar 'cello concerto. This represents, clearly enough, the union of what was most worthwhile in the past with the hope of the future; the meaning is brought out by the placing of the music and the reactions of the characters to it. Priestley's emotional symbolism is, in fact, frequently of a musical kind, as in Music at Night (1938), where the thoughts and feelings of the characters are conditioned by the nature of the movement being played, or in the last act of Johnson over Jordan, where the singing voice of a girl symbolises divine harmony. But, like Galsworthy, Priestley is too prone to explain his symbols, as he does even in The Linden Tree when Professor Linden expounds to his family the significance of the child's playing. He likes to underline his ideas neatly with symbolic incidents, as in the crash of the globeⁱ⁾ in the catastrophic finale of Home is Tomorrow (1948) or in the black rain and fog which descends on the Welsh

i) Symbolising the break down of his fictitious 'United Nations' organisation.

landscape in The Long Mirror (1940) at the precise moment when the characters are struggling in a fog of misunderstanding and confusion.

When he is not occupying himself with experiments in time sequences or life after death fantasies, Priestley tends to drift toward allegory in his serious drama: indeed, in They Came to a City (1943), the central symbol, the dream city, so dominates the action that it is impossible to interpret the play except in terms of allegory, and a very thin allegory at that, since the city represents only that idea of Utopia likely to occur to the minds of the very ordinary characters in the play, helped out by the author's socialistic theories of what Utopia should be. Priestley resented some of the dramatic reviews which objected that the City appeared to offer 'nothing but hearty communal activities',ⁱ⁾ pointing out that this is just what casual visitors would first notice, and that, furthermore, his characters single out what would appeal to them. But the failure to communicate any more profound idea of the perfect city is, all the same, a weakness in a play attempting to use such an important symbol, and reinforces the idea that Priestley is most adept with symbols used for purely emotional effects. An even more heavy handed use of symbols occurs in Bees on the Boat Deck (1936) where the abandoned boat represents England and the various characters who attempt to salvage her for their own ends, the Fascist, the

i) Introduction to his Three Plays (1943) p.IX

Communist, the scientist and so on, are given only the simplest and crudest of party lines to handle.

Priestley has only once ventured into a more extreme form of symbolism, in the expressionist fantasy, Johnson over Jordan (1939), which, like almost all expressionist plays produced in this country, was received without enthusiasm by the public and the majority of the critics. He uses a much simplified form of Strindbergian dream sequences, interspersed with scenes in the realistic background of Johnson's home. Johnson, in his journey to the Last Judgment, retraces the panorama of his life in distorted form: memories jostle together, true ecstasy being recalled by the simple pleasures of an oldfashioned innⁱ⁾ and the futility of pleasure by the scene in a cabaret where the immaculately dressed habitués wear masks in the likeness of the brute creatures they most resemble, vulture, pig, tiger and so on.

Such an excursion into expressionism is, however, rare on the part of English prose playwrights. In general they prefer to employ symbols well within the framework of realism, and to take pains to make their meaning clear, often with unfortunate results as we have seen. So pervasive has been Ibsen's influence in this sphere that

i) This last act has more than a touch of Barrie about it. Johnson's heaven is represented by the heroes of his childhood, a cricketer, a music hall comedian, the appearance of Mr. Pickwick in a stage coach, his long dead brother and so on.

even the playwrights most famous for their stark naturalism are often found to be pointing a moral by way of symbolic incidents. St. John Ervine, in Jane Clegg (1913), offers a hint to Clegg's character by ^{showing} his little daughter, Jenny, whose resemblance to her father is stressed, wilfully destroying the house of bricks which her brother has been building, a microcosmⁱ) of the central action of the play in which her father brings down the house and home about his ears. Elizabeth Baker, in Chains (1909) gives such emphasis to the suburban garden, in which the hero stifles, while he longs for the spaces of Australia, that the garden becomes by the end of the play a symbol of the narrow, enclosed, unsatisfying life in which he, and so many of his kind, are imprisoned. This kind of slight symbolism occurs in much of the serious drama throughout the period under discussion, even in that commonly classified as strictly naturalistic, for example, that of Galsworthy.

The English habit of using symbols didactically is, of course, nowhere more marked than in the plays of Shaw, particularly in his late ones. But, on the other hand, Shaw is the only English playwright to have evolved a highly distinctive form of dramatic symbolism and to have employed it, over a long period, with a success both artistic and popular. Shaw's is almost unique in the English theatre in being that kind of comic symbolism, often originating in farcical

i) Johnny's remark emphasises this connection:- 'I'm pretending to be mother, and Jenny's pretending to be father. We're building a house with these bricks, but it's no good...Jenny keeps knocking it down'.

incidents, which can take on serious implications at will. The nearest parallel is probably to be found in the plays of Sean O'Casey, another Irishman, who, as we have seen, employed this type of 'comic' symbol to great effect in such plays as Juno and the Paycock.

Some of Shaw's most frequently recurring symbols stem from his conception of the Commedia del Arte, with its fantastic types which are yet embodiments of the most persistent traits in human character. Again and again we find him dwelling on the idea of Italian comedy. In a letter to Charles Rickettsⁱ⁾ of 1907 he writes, 'William Morris used always to say that plays should be performed by four people in conventional costumes, the villain in a red cloak, the father in a bob-wig etc. etc., and I have always loved Harlequin, Columbine, Sganarelle, etc., in eighteenth century Italian comedy and French champêtre painting. If only we could get a few plays with invisible backgrounds and lovely costumes like that in a suitable theatre, with fairy lights all round the proscenium, there would be no end to the delight of the thing'. Ricketts encouraged this enthusiasm, replying that 'Harlequin is Hermes; Proteus, Loti. Pantaloon represents all one's uncles', but Shaw heeded no encouragement, for all his life he was to be occupied with a drama of masquerade, a drama in which people exult in their fancy dress, in which clothes do, indeed, make the man.

i) Letter of 8.7.1907, quoted in C.de S.Ricketts: Self-Portrait (1939) p.143.

This 'clothes' symbolism is one of the most interesting features of Shaw's technique, and by no means as casual, or purely fantastic as may at first appear. Eric Bentley, in his study of Shaw, talksⁱ⁾ of 'The struggle between human vitality and artificial system which is the basis of Shavian comedy'. This struggle is often pointed by the device of symbolic fancy dress. In a very early play, You Never Can Tell (1898), the world of 'artificial system' is represented by Crampton, in his sober, respectable garments and his aching tooth which is so light heartedly extracted by Valentine with a dose of laughing gas. Dolly, the embodiment of 'human vitality' gaily suggests to Crampton that in the dentist's chair he will be relieved of his 'rooted sorrow', and this remark, which seems at first no more than a joke, comes to acquire greater meaning when Crampton, revealed as Mrs. Clandon's husband, is drawn into the free, spontaneous world of the young Clandons, out of his self imposed martyrdom. The character of the Clandon world is delightfully brought out in the fancy dress ball scene with which the play ends. Dolly and Phil lead the way, dressed as Harlequin and Columbine, and the others join in the dance; Bohun, the representative of law and system, even defying the system to the extent of jovially donning a false nose. It is the Feast of Fools, which is also the affirmation of life, for when Bohun points out, 'It's unwise to be born...', the Waiter is given what

i) Bernard Shaw (Norfolk, Connecticut 1947) p.107

is, in effect, the last word of the play, 'So much the worse for wisdom'.

A more obvious symbolism is introduced in The Devil's Disciple (1897) when Dick and Anderson exchange coats, the sceptical rebel putting on the parson's black, while the parson dons the military red. The exchange is forced on them by the plot, but they discover that it has, after all, a profounder meaning for them, since in his new clothes, each is being 'true to the laws of his own nature' as Dick puts it. Again in Pygmalion (1913), changes in outward appearance produce changes in personality: the flower girl in her rags behaves in a 'ragged' way: when these clothes are burned and she is dressed like a lady she begins to behave like one and can eventually play the part of duchess with as much ease as the part of flower girl. Higgins, of course, regards these successive changes as purely mechanical. To him, Eliza is a doll, to be manipulated in various positions by the master hand. But his doll, or 'statue' comes to life in disconcerting fashion, for Shaw was sufficiently optimistic at this stage to believe in the power of environment or 'clothes' to work fundamental changes in personality, or at the least to reveal the buried personality, which is what happens with Eliza.

In Heartbreak House (1919) we have some of the most striking examples of this 'clothes' symbolism. Ellie Dunn's successive disillusionments reach a climax in the apparent discovery that even Hesione's beautiful black hair is false, like the emotions in which

she has trusted. Hector, the romancer, appears at one stage in spectacular Arab costume, symbol of the life of fancy he leads, while in the garden scene of Act III the conventional Mangan starts to take his clothes off, explaining, 'We've stripped ourselves morally naked; well, let us strip ourselves physically naked as well, and see how we like it'. This is followed up by the entrance of Mazzini Dunn in pyjamas, able at last, as he tells the others, to 'feel natural'. In a much later play, Too True to be Good (1932) the method persists: the change in the personality of the Patient is made manifest by her startling appearance in the second act, 'en belle sauvage', her muscles glistening with unguent, her hair flowing loose.

Shaw's fondness for giving his characters fantastic, out of the way professions, is all of a piece with his feeling for the spontaneous improvised life of the Commedia del Arte. On more than one occasion he has expressed himself to the effect that his characters are all harlequins and columbines, clowns and pantaloons. Apollodorus' flight to the Pharos he describes as a 'prodigious harlequin leap', and we notice how many of the characters free of the 'system' practice physically daring occupations, which clearly symbolise their mental adventurousness: we have, for example, Aubrey, the clerical burglar in Too True to be Good, Lina, the woman pilot and acrobat in Misalliance, Q, in Village Wooing, who wants to live 'like an acrobat in a circus', Annajanska, the Bolshevik empress, who has actually been with a circus troupe as a child. Descriptions of characters as pantomime types are

frequent. The chancellor in The Fascinating Foundling is described as a pantaloon: the torture scene of Great Catherine is meant to recall episodes with the pantomime demon, and, indeed, Shaw tells us in the preface to the play that he was fascinated by the Russian Tsars 'who played their Tsarships as eccentric character parts and produced scene after scene of furious harlequinade with the monarch as clown'.

In contrast, the fixed, conventional type of character, often the sentimentally 'romantic' man, is frequently depicted in fantastic 'statue' form. It is no accident that during the dream sequence of Man and Superman (1903) Reebuck Ramsden makes his appearance as the statue of Anna's father: the cold smooth rigidity of marble aptly symbolises the nature of the man. The title of Pygmalion suggests a similar conception, and, indeed, Higgins, as we have seen, regards Eliza as unfeeling clay, raw material for his masterpiece. 'I have created this thing out of the squashed cabbage leaves of Covent Garden,' he exclaims indignantly, when she shows signs of rebelling against the mould in which he would cast her. The pretensions of a man like Higgins are more savagely satirised in Back to Methusaleh (1921), where the young sculptor, now actually called Pygmalion, contrives to create a pair of moving automata which appear human in their crude reflex actions to certain stimuli. But they are only, as the Ancient scornfully puts it, 'works of art. Images', the dolls with which man plays before he grows up. The romantic, artistic impulse and the products of that impulse are both neatly symbolised in this, on the face of it, fantastic episode with Pygmalion and his

creatures. Their names, incidentally, are the sonorously romantic ones of Ozymandias and Cleopatra.

It is interesting to find these symbols coming up in that piece of expressionist fantasy, Passion, Poison and Petrefaction (1909). Adolphus, the reductio ad absurdum of the romantic hero, is saved from death by poison only to be turned into a statue by the effect of the quantities of lime he has swallowed as an antidote. The climax of the action comes when the representatives of law and system, the constable, the doctor and the landlord are all demolished by a thunderbolt, while the statue slowly raises his hand in blessing. It would obviously be absurd to press the significance of this little joke too far, but I think that in reading or seeing it, it is difficult to avoid a curious feeling that there is something behind it, even in its moments of wildest extravagance. And what lies behind it is, I suggest, Shaw's symbolising instinct on holiday. It is the extension to the limits of absurdity of a method which functions with the utmost seriousness in Heartbreak House.

It is indeed very often in the apparently fantastic and ridiculous parts of Shaw's plays that the symbolism most clearly shows itself. And that there really is a symbolising process at work is suggested by the curious effect on us of such episodes as that in Heartbreak House when Hector, still in Arab costume, turns on all the house lights in the midst of the air raid, or when Androcles dances with the lion at the end of the play, or when the acrobatic Lina, in Misalliance, runs out of the house with the unfortunate young man, Bentley, tucked

under her arm. We may laugh heartily at these episodes, but not in the way in which we might laugh at, say, Charley's Aunt. These things are so fantastic, occurring as they do in the midst of dialogue of power and purpose, that we may even feel the playwright is taking advantage of us, is going too far, for some inexplicable satisfaction of his own. Shaw has been criticised, and has criticised himself¹⁾ for allowing his sense of the ridiculous to run away with him, and on many occasions he has excused himself for this failing by pointing out that the average audience could only accept parable and doctrine when the pill was well sweetened:- 'It is by jingling the bell of a jester's cap that I, like Heine, have made people listen to me',²⁾ 'It was as Punch, then, that I emerged from my obscurity'³⁾ and '...my kingdom was not of this world. I was at home only in the realm of my imagination and at my ease only with the mighty dead. Therefore I had to become an actor, or create for myself a fantastic personality, fit and apt for dealing with men...'⁴⁾

But in fact, because Shaw's genius is essentially 'comedic' his mostly deeply felt ideas tend to release themselves, not only in the

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- 1) Preface to Man and Superman: 'But being then at the height of my invention and comedic talent, I decorated it too brilliantly and lavishly.'
 - 2) Florence Farr, Bernard Shaw and W.B. Yeats (Letters from Shaw and Yeats to F. Farr) (Cuala Press: Dublin 1941) p.9
 - 3) Preface to Widowers' Houses
 - 4) Preface to Immaturity

passages of serious dialogue, but also, and with more violent effect, in the fantastic episodes which are, as we have seen, of such a character that they can scarcely be dismissed as pure fantasy or pure farcè. Shaw is of course a master of metaphor, although he delights in satirising the taste for it. 'Images, images, images. I was talking about men, not images', says Zoo in Part IV of Back to Methusaleh scornfully dismissing 'The slavery of the short lived to images and metaphors.' Yet in the same play, we may find many examples of a common process in Shaw's drama, the precipitation of an image, sometimes a very far fetched one, into a real action, which is, of course, symbolic, deriving in the first place from a figure of speech. In Part I, for instance, the eminent statesmen, Burge and Lubin, are shown in the midst of an impassioned political argument. They are behaving, we are told by the infinitely more mature brothers Barnabas, 'like lunatics'. In the following Part the image has been projected into action: we learn that real lunatics, released from their asylums, are now the favourite candidates for Parliament. The same process is at work in Part IV, when cowardice is talked of as 'a great patriotic virtue'. The idea is given visual expression in the monument to Falstaff which dominates the stage at one point. Finally, the image is pointed by symbolic action, when Napoleon, the 'War God of Turania' collapses at the foot of the monument and lies there gibbering impotently. In the playlet, The Glimpse of Reality (1909), Ferruccio is, literally caught in a net, and taken prisoner by Guilia's father, an

incident the special significance of which we could easily deduce even were it not impressed on us by Guilia, when she compares his physical situation with that of his soul in S. Barbara's net.

In a much earlier play, Mrs. Warren's Profession (1898), the same process can be observed, when Frank talks of himself and Vivie as babes in the Wood. This leads to the curious little episode when they play the game of babes in the wood, covering each other with leaves, a situation seemingly quite absurd, and, indeed, unsuited to Vivie's character, but expressing quite aptly the theme of the play, for Vivie does in the end throw off the 'leaves' with which her mother has endeavoured to cover her, to hide from her the harsh facts of her life.

The precipitation of images into seemingly fantastic situations which in fact often symbolise the theme of the play is, then, a characteristic feature of Shaw's technique. Let us now look at the way in which the tendency increases, until in his late plays, the fantasy is given a completely free hand.

Even in the first play, Widowers' Houses (1892), there is, I suggest, a hint of symbolism, and it occurs exactly where one would expect it, in the one scene which does not quite fit into the realistic pattern, that in which Blanche torments the parlourmaid by savagely pulling her hair. Shaw's hostile critics made a tremendous fuss over this scene at first performance: it was considered exceedingly coarse and unlikely, and, indeed, it still has a rather unlikely quality about it, even in the less inhibited atmosphere of

1952. It is there, I think, because it reveals, not only Blanche's innate violence - this would make it a highly characteristic but not necessarily a symbolic action - but also that violence which rages beneath the civilised facade presented by Sartorius, Cokane and Trench, and, furthermore, by the whole society they represent.

The symbolism is not, of course, made much of: Shaw is too busy expounding on social evils in more explicit vein. But it is rather significant that a similar incident turns up in The Philanderer (1893), when Julia, the tigress woman, gets hold of her lover, Charteris, and shakes him violently, again, an unlikely episode but expressive of the violence of sensual passion. Shaw developed a fondness for incidents of this kind¹): the 'animal' metaphor applied so frequently to Julia in this play becomes a favourite with him. The uncontrolled, sensual woman, such as Cleopatra in Caesar and Cleopatra (1899), is not only described in animal terms²) but, in this play, given symbolic appurtenances to stress the connection: when Caesar first meets Cleopatra she tells him that she ran to the desert in pursuit of the sacred white cat, to which Caesar replies 'You are both a girl and a cat'. Cleopatra is surrounded by animal symbols. Here, of course, Shaw is helped by the Egyptian background.

1) Cf. Lina's treatment of Bentley in Misalliance, and Epifania's violent breaking of furniture in The Millionairess.

2) In a letter to Ellen Terry, dissuading her from playing this part, Shaw said, 'She is an animal - a bad lot. Yours is a beneficent personality': Ellen Terry and Bernard Shaw: A Correspondence. (New York, 1931) p.238.

Her woman, Ftatateeta, is described more than once as a tigress; and when she shows herself after the murder of Pothonius, she looks one: Cleopatra offers public sacrifice to Ra, the hawk god; the symbols of her life are violent and cruel, whereas the symbol of Caesar's life is the impassive, godlike Sphinx, by whose agency, all the same, the two are brought together, for the Sphinx is 'part brute, part woman and part god'. Some of her attributes, particularly the feline quality, make her a suitable symbol for Cleopatra, but the whole Sphinx is, as Caesar declares, a symbol of his own genius, since there is 'nothing of man in me at all'.

The dream like quality of the opening scene between Caesar and the Sphinx is a quality which becomes increasingly pronounced in the plays that follow. This is only to be expected, since it is in dream or trance like states that symbols may most easily be released in the fantastic form congenial to Shaw. The fancy dress ball scene in You Never Can Tell has in it something of that state of complete release which comes with a happy dream. The solemn figure of Bohun wearing a false nose crystallises the effect of the whole play. It is one of Shaw's most brilliant exercises in symbolic fantasy and much more effective, to my mind, than the deliberate metaphor and symbolⁱ⁾ of Candida (1895), which might strike one at

i) Most of it is given to Marchbanks, who tends to make symbols out of everything he observes: the poker becomes a 'flaming sword' keeping him from his 'angel', Candida: he came to her like a beggar and she gave him her shawl, and so on.

first glance as a more serious play than You Never Can Tell. The first Roscullen scene in John Bull's Other Island (1904) is another case in point: Father Keegan's intimate conversation with a grasshopper evokes a similar dream like effect to that created by Caesar's conversation with the Sphinx: we are at first doubtful whether this is the real world, or, as Keegan bitterly visualises it, a suspended state, a 'hell', somewhere between earth and heaven. Scenes of trance, prophetic vision, hypnotic states become increasingly prominent from this time onwards. Mrs. George, in Getting Married, speaks with the voice of all woman kind when she goes into her trance:- 'When you loved me I gave you the whole sun and stars to play with...Must I mend your clothes and sweep your floors as well?' The characters present in the scene interpret her outburst variously as 'possession by the devil', the 'ecstasy of a saint', and the 'convulsion of the pythoness on the tripod', but whatever the nature of the trance, its function is to allow a freer flow of symbolism than the life of the conscious self would allow. In Man and Superman, of course, the dream lies at the centre of the play, containing all its symbolic significance, while in Heartbreak House, the action, in itself highly symbolic, is interrupted by ritualistic, trance like utterances, such as that at the end of Act I, when Shotover and his daughters wail in the darkness. Back to Methusaleh begins in what Shaw calls 'myth' and ends with a visionary epilogue spoken by symbolic 'ghosts': To True to be Good begins with the soliloquy of a monster microbe and ends with a prophetic sermon on the end of

the world, the preacher being gradually obscured from view by clouds of billowing sea fog. In On the Rocks (1933) realistic political satire is interrupted by an unprepared encounter between Sir Arthur and the Lady in Grey, who describes herself as a 'ghost from the future', while he is 'a ghost from the past'. This episode, at first allowed to appear supernatural is somewhat ambiguously fitted into the realistic pattern when the Lady in Grey reveals herself as a doctor, and undertakes to cure Sir Arthur of the troubles caused by an 'underworked brain' in her 'sanatorium'. This is almost the line of country worked by Eliot in The Cocktail Party, and indeed, in these late plays, Shaw shows an increasing impatience with the realistic convention, relying more and more on supernatural effects to drive home his symbolism. The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles (1935) is a supreme example of this new method, with its curious assortment of oriental priests and Indian deities in human form, and its climax in the Day of Judgmentⁱ⁾, presided over by an Angel, of whom Shaw says in the preface, 'He has appeared on the stage before in the person of Ibsen's button moulder'. The wheel has come full circle indeed: the playwright who began by shocking audiences with his unflinching realism ends by baffling them with his excursions into the supernatural. The parallel with Ibsen, though

i) Timed for five o'clock, a joke which anticipates Christopher Fry's in The Lady's Not for Burning

of course it cannot be taken for, at least holds good on this point. The oriental flavour persists in *Buoyant Billions* (1949) where Buoyant, the millionaire, uses a room in his house which he has had converted to a miniature Chinese temple, in order to empty his mind for its possession by the Gods.

These instances have been cited to show how Shaw's love of the fantastic is not simply the typical trait of an irresponsible Irish joker but also the means by which he can release the symbols which relate to the poetic, intuitive side of his nature. As he grows older, so does the fantasy take on a more ghostly aspect and the symbols express increasingly Shaw's sense of the numinous.

The resemblance between Shaw's and Ibsen's development is also noticeable in the increased allegory in their later work. As we have seen, the symbolism in Shaw's early plays is lightly and gaily handled. The heavier touch which seems to enter with Captain Brassbound's Conversion (1899) can in that play be attributed to the melodramatic tendencies of the hero; it is quite in character for Brassbound to regard the Atlas Mountains, where he plans to execute his revenge, as a symbol of vengeance itself:- 'The justice of those hills is the justice of vengeance.' No one else in the play thinks of them in this light: their symbolic meaning is confined to Brassbound's mind, although it seems that in planning the play Shaw started from the idea of mountains, since his original title was to have been The Witch of Atlas, the reference of course being to Lady Cicely, as played by Ellen Terry. John Bull's Other Island, though

rich in metaphor and symbolic implications¹⁾, never crosses the border line into allegory, nor, for that matter, does Major Barbara (1905), despite the symbolic incidents with which it is so lightly decorated, Cusins, flourishing his drumsticks in an ecstasy of glee, is told by Undershaft that his drum is 'hollow', as indeed it proves to be when he accepts Undershaft as his ally and the two march off together, the one thundering on the drum, the other playing the trombone, symbols both of the 'gay energy and artistic fertility of religion',²⁾ which for Undershaft is represented by the sign of the sword, for Barbara by the sign of the cross. Such incidents clearly contain symbolic significance without being pressed into the service of allegory.

Heartbreak House is really the first example of an action and setting almost wholly symbolic. The house itself represents a dying culture: the only experience it has to offer is heartbreak. The characters are just maintained on the borderline between human drama and allegory. In Act III, for example, in a discussion on the future of the country they refer to themselves in terms of what they represent: who will save England, Mangan, Hector, Hastings...? Shotover's two daughters are repeatedly referred to as daughters of

i) Larry and Broadbent are so deliberately played off against one another as to suggest that they represent the Irish and English temperaments respectively.

2) Preface to Major Barbara.

the devil, sirens urging men to their doom:- 'Men think the world well lost for them, and do it accordingly'. Hesione offers love, Ariadne, the lure of empire, and, like most of the other characters in the play, they are well aware of their own significance. Mazzini and the burglar are both of the race of Dunns, though one is a thinking Dunn, the other a drinking Dunn: they are both played out, ineffective like all the others, even Shotover, who can give good advice, but finds his 'seventh degree of concentration' in the rum bottle. The allegorical element is pronounced, but the characters are endowed with such strong idiosyncrasies, Shotover in particular, that they manage to convince us of their humanity, while yet suggesting the abstract themes which are embodied in them.

The action hovers between realistic satire and professed symbolism in a similar way. Ellie's motive in marrying Mangan, 'to make the best of my ruined house', is only just feasible on the realistic level, while her 'spiritual marriage' with Shotover is presented explicitly as a symbolic union. The ship like appearance of the interior setting reinforces one of the central metaphors which is taken up in the last act and discussed at length: the ship is England and skilful navigation, of a kind which even Shotover can no longer provide, is needed to prevent her from crashing on the rocks. The air raid at the close is used symbolically: it is 'Heaven's threatening growl of disgust at us useless futile creatures', the 'useless futile creatures' finding in it, to their delight, a 'real' experience, characteristically, an aesthetic experience. 'It is Beethoven'

exclaims Ellie, as Hector turns on a blaze of light, and Randall plays his flute.

It is impossible to avoid the symbolism in this spectacular picture; the civilised inhabitants of Heartbreak House fiddling while Rome burns, Clearly, too, the fact that the only two who behave 'sensibly' are killed has a significance more than just ironic. Shotover and his family may represent a dying civilisation, but Mangan and the burglar stand for the philistine forces which precipitate disaster. The dynamite which Shotover keeps in the gravel pit as a last resort against the forces of evil they would use, if they could, for their own ends, and will, Shaw seems to be saying, inevitably destroy themselves in the attempt. Throughout the play, the gravel pit, with its fatal contents, has been kept present in our minds: it lies at the very door of Heartbreak House, and if the inhabitants have this time been saved, while the burglars perish, we cannot feel that their period of immunity will be long lived.ⁱ⁾

Heartbreak House is certainly one of Shaw's greatest plays, constructed as it is around symbols powerfully enough conceived and projected to create a dramatic unity out of the most complex material, while avoiding the over simplification and elucidation of allegory. In Back to Methusaleh, however, the symbolism is less happy. Shaw

i) Cf. this symbol with Bridie's collapsed floor in Daphne Laureola (1949); like the gravel pit, it yawns at the feet of the civilised while they search for new experiences to pass their time.

is most successful when he deals with the ancient symbols of the Garden of Eden, which stir his poetic impulses, and least successful when he is constructing symbols for the life of the future out of purely intellectual processes. Adam, Eve and Cain, though figures of myth, have more humanity in them than any of the beings encountered after the great extension of life begins, and in the last part, 'As Far as Thought Can Reach' there is little to choose between the 'dolls' created by Pygmalion and the 'dolls' representing Shavian theories of evolution which make up the other characters in the scene. They are all puppets, and their actions crudely symbolic. The She Ancient reads Ecrasia a lecture on the childishness of art: 'Art is the magic mirror you make to reflect your invisible dreams in visible pictures'. But grown people don't need mirrors: they have a direct sense of life. The impulse to convey more 'directly', or explicitly his theories of life tends, in the plays from this stage onwards, increasingly to blunten Shaw's symbols and to make them less dramatically efficient.

A more abstract use of symbols may be observed in The Apple Cart (1929). The characters keep well within the limits prescribed for them by their 'type' names: Boanerges, Lysistrata and so on, and the most powerful symbol in the play, that of Breakages Ltd., never gets beyond the interminable dialogue in which it is imprisoned. The play is redeemed from the crudeness of extreme allegory by the character of Magnus, which is complex and civilised in the best

Shavian tradition, his relationships with the romantic, uncontrolled Orinthia and the sensible, clear headed Jemima recalling Charteris' amorous complications in The Philanderer and pointing to the similar pattern in Good King Charles (1939).

In Too True to be Good little attempt is made to maintain a realistic surface: one fantastic event follows another, so that by the end of the play, when the characters go off announcing their mundane plans for the future we feel that they are in fact 'falling through a void in which they can find no footing', and that the sea fog which billows round Aubrey as he preaches is the true symbol of what their lives are. The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles is frankly allegorical from the start. The cavern of Too True to be Good here becomes a cliff temple, from which the Priest pushed the Emigration Officer into the sea, only to haul him up in a net, clad in a white robe, symbol of the regenerated life, which comes of having 'been through water'. It is as though the symbols of Eliot's Waste Land were being manipulated on an eccentric puppet stage. Fantastic symbolism is given a free hand. The clergyman, who takes part in the great eugenic experiment of the island, was a 'nitrogen baby', which circumstance is taken to explain his pomposity: he has been 'fed on air from his childhood'. The Four Children of Pra and Prola, in their exotic Oriental robes and unscrupulously selfish behaviour, are expressly equated with the ideas of Love, Pride, Heroism and Empire. The Clergyman enters into a polygamous relationship with two of them, Vashti and Maya, but the union is sterile. The ideas

are tried and found wanting, and when the Angel of Judgment arrives 'to weed the garden', the Four Children simply disappear: they have not 'justified their existence'. The symbolism of the Judgment Day is then explicitly interpreted. Human beings must themselves carry out the elimination of the worthless. Pra and Prola, who thought they had given birth to four beautiful children, have proved themselves a madwoman and a fool. They must start again, never forgetting that in the Unexpected Isles, of life, every day is a Judgment Day, a day of wonder.

Although there are amusing and biting passages in this play, it is on the whole depressing, a display of cerebral processes which have engendered no heat or life. Shaw is now content to represent his ideas by symbols unrelated to any dramatic demonstration of human passions.

The Day of Judgment seems to haunt these late plays, increasing the effect of intellectual activity in an abstract void. Even Geneva (1938), a very explicit political satire, ends with the effect on the various representatives of the report of Armageddon, while in Buoyant Billions a single scene in Panama is introduced apparently for the purpose of showing the native's superior faith: he really believes in his god, Hoochlipoochli, and in his devil, Poochlipoochli. The characters in this play are presented unashamedly as symbols of various ways of life: we never pass beyond the barrier of impersonality set up by names such as He, She, Mrs. Secondborn, the Youth, Mrs. Thirdborn and so on.

The dangers that always attend on an intellectual, over conscious use of symbolism are, then, well illustrated from these allegorical plays. But the falling off in the later drama should not be allowed to obscure the brilliance of those plays in which symbols are used with the lightest touch, and proceed from a genuinely poetic intuition. Symbolism of this kind is of necessity rare, since few writers possess that combination of a somewhat 'fey' poetic instinct with a genius for satirical comedy. Shaw's achievement in this genre is unique in the English theatre, and can, indeed, scarcely be paralleled outside it.

The diversity and subtlety of Shaw's symbolism can be appreciated by comparing it with that employed by other playwrights in whose drama fantasy predominates. Of these, Barrie, Bridie and Christopher Fry are perhaps the most outstanding. Although Fry's technique involves special problems connected with the use of verse, his plays are considered here, rather than with the work of other verse playwrights, since the way in which he uses symbols seems to me to derive from the Shavian technique, or at the least, to have a great deal in common with it.

Whereas Shaw, as we have seen, uses fantastic symbols to bring the worlds of imagination and reality together in a dramatic whole, Barrie uses them almost exclusively to separate the real from the imagined world. There is a decided Maeterlinckian flavour in much of his work, his dominant symbol being the 'Never Never land' of

Peter Pan (1904), symbol of a world in which human beings can escape from the limitations and responsibilities of their waking existenceⁱ⁾, pursuing only their dream selves. It may take the form of an enchanted island, as in Mary Rose (1920), or the hardly less fairy like island of The Admirable Crichton (1902), or an enchanted wood, as in Dear Brutus (1917), or a fairy tale experienced in dream, as in A Kiss for Cinderella (1916). This 'limbo', in which children never grow up, young mothers remain eternally young and wishes are fulfilled for the asking, is not even the 'world of the soul' which Maeterlinck was attempting to dramatise in his dream plays. Barrie does not profess to be dealing with 'essences', but only with wishes: it may be in accord with the deepest promptings of his own unconscious self that he continually reverts to symbols such as that of the eternal boy, or the youthful mother, but he does not attempt consciously to extract their true significance, as Strindberg or O'Neill would have done. The unpleasant effect of Mary Rose results, I believe, from the fact that Barrie is in a sense afraid of the power in the symbols he is using, and in attempting to soften it by sentimental effects, in fact emphasises the curious perversion of the mother-son relationship which emerges, despite himself, in the last scene between the ghost of Mary Rose and her son.

There is a discrepancy between the symbols, with their inescapable implications, and the purely fanciful world in which Barrie seeks to

i) Cf. Maeterlinck's L'Oiseau Bleu

establish them, and this frequently results in a sense of evasion. It is not so much that Barrie's world is a so-called 'escapist' world, but that he seems to be seeking to escape himself from the significance of the symbols he is using.

Barrie's fellow Scotsman, James Bridie, allows himself a similar freedom in the use of fantastic dream and vision scenes, but in Bridie's drama such scenes are generally closely related to the problems of adult existence. The weakness of Bridie's technique is that he tends to use symbols as a starting point for discussions or actions from which they are discarded once they have served their purpose of shocking the audience into attention. A case in point is the symbolic figure of the sleeping clergyman in the play of that name: Bridie seems to forget about him by the end of the play. A more central symbol occurs in Daphne Laureola (1949), where the characters in the restaurant sit at tables roped off from a hole in the floor, which is being repaired: they have to walk carefully, being balanced on the edge of disaster, just as the heroine, the Daphne of the title, has to exert her utmost self control to keep her mental balance, and as, it is inferred, must the civilised peoples of the world if they wish to remain civilised. The Pirandellian-~~like~~ study of the nature of reality in The King of Nowhere (1938) starts from an equally effective symbolic situation, when Vivaldi, the man of many selves, first shows himself to Dr. McGilp in his stage make up, with the white face and 'twisted black mouth' of a Pierrot. This is a Shavian touch which suggests at once the nature of the theme to be

developed, and inasmuch as Vivaldi's acting profession is kept in the foreground during the whole play, the symbol does in fact function continuously. Bridie's more serious plays frequently present states of insanity, or suspected insanity, in such a way that they acquire symbolic significance. Is Vivaldi's supposed 'madness' any more than a symbol of the illusions by which mankind lives? The last scene of the play, in the asylum, recalls the Cairo lunatic asylum of Peer Gunt: in both scenes the characters consider that they are being truly 'themselves', and Bridie implies that this is no more than what people like Miss Rimmer and Vivaldi imagine, even in the most fantastic situations, when they are out in the larger lunatic asylum of the world.

Such consistent symbolism is exceptional in Bridie's drama, however. On the whole, he prefers the isolated symbol, which he uses often for shock purposes, as in Mr. Bolfry (1943), proceeding, once he has arrested the attention, to launch his characters into lengthy dialogues and actions which frequently wander far from the original theme. Shaw and Bridie have a great deal in common, their freakishness and fondness for paradox, their love of refurbishing old tales, particularly Biblical ones, and of introducing the devil as a dramatic character, but Bridie's symbolic effects are more casual, less functional than Shaw's: there is nothing in all his drama like the complex and sustained symbolism of Heartbreak House.

In the plays of Christopher Fry, however, a real attempt is made to convey serious themes through fantastic symbols in the Shavian

manner. As already noted in the remarks on The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles, Fry sometimes echoes Shaw's very dialogue; many of his situations have a Shavian flavour: that in The Lady's Not for Burning when the Soldier entreats the Mayor to hang him recalls the court scene in The Devil's Disciple and the scene in Ring Round the Moonⁱ) when the millionaire complains of his inability to lose money is reminiscent of that in Heartbreak House where Mangan explains how money gravitates toward him.

Leaving such resemblances in detail aside, however, the resemblance between Shaw and Fry is most marked in the latter's employment of fantastic or paradoxical situations for the double function of amusing and at the same time symbolising a philosophy, a view of life. As he tells us in the preface to The Lady's Not for Burning, Fry wants us to think of his characters primarily as 'human intelligences in a dance together': he is trying to convey through comedy his feelings that 'the greatest drama is the very fact of being alive at all' and to capture that sensation of seeing the world for the first time which is one of the first functions of poetry.

Acting on the assumption that the wonder of life will best be appreciated when viewed from the verge of death, Fry makes great play

i) An episode considerably expanded from the suggestion in Fry's original, Anouilh's L'Invitation au Château.

with the idea of the character who goes looking for death. In A Phoenix Too Frequent (1946) it is the young widow, Dynamene, who courts death, and is reconverted to life by the amorous Tegeus, the theme being summed up by the serving maid, Doto, 'It's all Fresh to me. Death's a new interest in life.' The position is reversed in The Lady's Not for Burning where it is the man who seeks death and the woman who recalls him, by way of 'the unholy mantrap of love'. Mendip's insistence on being hanged provides the basis for some comic situations, but it is clearly enough meant to symbolise something more serious, that spiritual malaise or death wish that is so common a theme in modern drama¹). Like Shaw, Fry attempts to equate the unhumorous with the desiccated, uncreative character and the humorous with the creative. Thomas and Jennet discover their spiritual affinity through their capacity for reacting to the same jokes in the same way: laughter, says Thomas, 'is an irrelevancy Which almost amounts to regelation'.

Opposed to their 'divine' sense of the fantastic is the pomposity and self centredness of such characters as the Mayor and Humphrey, while through the whole action runs the 'April' motif, suggesting the renewal of hope in Thomas and Jennet with which the play ends.²)

1) Cf. O'Neill's Ezra Mannon in Mourning Becomes Electra and John Loving in Days Without End. As Thomas puts it, 'The indomitable Persephone became ludicrous long ago'.

2) This same connection between springtime weather and the renewal of human hope is brought out in Thor, with Angels (1948), where Merlin comes out of his long winter hibernation to witness the revival of Christianity among the people of Britain.

This motif is brought out mainly in the imagery, but occasionally an image will be precipitated into fantastic situations, much in the Shavian manner, as for example when Nicholas knocks Humphrey down so that he goes 'twinkling like Lucifer into the daffodils' and then has to carry him on to the scene, holding a bunch of daffodils in his hand. The daffodils are for Alison, the incarnation of springtime, but she will have none of them, for Humphrey does not properly belong to the 'daffodil' world at all.

In Venus Observed, the dominant images are autumnal, corresponding with the Duke's decline into the autumnal time of life:- 'The landscape's all in tune, in a falling cadence, All decaying'. Here again the most fantastic situations will generally be found to symbolise the play's leading motifs. The setting in the Observatory keeps in mind the Duke's lifelong concentration on 'Venus': the spectacular scene of the eclipse, which he arranges for his guests as if it were entirely under his control, suggests the 'eclipse' which is about to take place in his own life, on marriage, and, very obviously, the appearance of Perpetua at the very moment when the shadow lifts invites us to consider her as the symbol of life's renewal.ⁱ⁾ Edgar's comment underlines this:- 'God be praised, The sun again; followed as it is by Reedbeck's 'My daughter, it's my daughter, Perpetua'. The most curious incident in the scene when

i) Edgar, in Act II, says to the Duke: 'And between this morning's eclipse And this afternoon you've lost the autumnal look Which was such a comfort to me.'

Perpetua shoots the apple from the Duke's fingers, is so fantastic that it demands to be read as a symbol: Perpetua is springtime, recoiling violently from autumn. From that moment onwards the symbolism in their changing relationship is pointed by similar incidents. The Greek pattern is maintained by the incident of the apple, the setting of Act II, the Temple of the Ancient Virtues, the archery contest in which Edgar bears off the prize from his father, the night scene in the observatory when the Duke instructs Perpetua in the meaning of the stars, Saturn, Venus and the rest. By her position in such a setting, and the constant references to her in mythological terms - a 'rival for Artemis', the 'star which, when it's rising, is called Venus' - she attains a symbolic quality of which she herself seems to be conscious in the night scene when she conforms to the ancient traditions of All Hallows Eve: 'And I am the eight duchesses, And the three housekeepers and the chambermaid Combing their hair. I am any girl: Perpetua Perpetual.. Midnight, the apple^B), and Perpetua Combing her hair, as all the time she was'.

Finally the burning down of the observatory neatly enough symbolises the destruction of the Duke's hope of springtime: after the fire, Perpetua realises that her love is for the young man, Edgar, not the ageing Duke. This concentration of symbolism in the most fantastic and spectacular incidents, so pronounced in Venus Observed

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- i) The apple remains symbolic throughout of the Duke's design on 'Venus'. Even as he escapes from the fire, he remembers to pick up the half-eaten apple and carry it between his teeth.

certainly suggests that Fry, whether consciously or not, has been affected by Shaw's technique, although of course he practises it in verse rather than prose form.

We must now consider the way in which dramatic symbolism has been handled by the poet playwrights: whether it has been of any assistance to them in their special problems and whether any important contributions have been made by them to the formulation of new techniques.

The first problem facing the English poets of this century has been, of course, that of working out a contemporary poetic idiom. In writing for the theatre they have had to contend with many difficulties, not least being the thorny problem of re-establishing verse drama as a popular form in the professional theatre, and this is a problem still unsolved, except perhaps by Eliot and Fry in their recent plays. Poets are bound to feel more than most the need for those supernatural symbols of which we have already spoken, and their special problem has been the difficulty of finding a convention, or, even, a mythology, within which such symbols might function naturally.

Yeats, as we have seen, was helped immeasurably in his attack on this problem by the special circumstances of Irish life. English playwrights like Masfield and Abercrombie had not his advantages. We find them turning from one kind of legendary, historical or rustic background to another in the search for some sort of equivalent to the heroic Irish setting. Masfield, who was on friendly terms with

many writers of the Irish movement, and who much admired their achievement, attempted to emulate it in a West Country setting in The Tragedy of Nan, which he dedicated to W.B. Yeats and which was first produced in 1908 at the New Royalty Theatre, under the direction of Granville Barker. He takes for his subject the life of peasants on a Severn farm, presumably hoping that a free use of metaphor and symbol will seem feasible in such a setting, but it is significant that he places the action back in 1810 and gives a highly rhetorical style to his rustic characters. This is particularly true of Gaffer Pearce, in whose reflections and prophecies much of the symbolism is contained, notably the symbol of the gold rider who blows his horn to lure away the 'little flowers' to their death in the river. The symbolism is not extended beyond dialogue, however, until the closing scene when the sound of a horn is actually heard and proves to be the herald of a 'gold rider' of sorts, bringing Nan compensation for the wrongful execution of her father. As Nan goes out to drown herself, the sound of the horn is heard faintly in the distance, but the connection between the real horn and the ghostly one conjured up by Gaffer Pearce is so arbitrary that the symbolic effect of the close is weak and vague. Symbolism so unsuccessfully projected into action is only an embarrassment to the drama. Masfield is rather prone to confine his symbolism to the utterances of a single crazed or peculiar character, as though afraid of upsetting the balance of his play by letting it go any farther. In Good Friday (1917), for example, the symbolic character

is a 'madman', blinded by the Jews for sin against the Passover, but capable of 'seeing', as they do not, the meaning of Christ's passion as darkness descends on the face of the earth. In Melloney Hotspur (1922), the symbolism is finally separated altogether from a realistic action and confined in the supernatural world of the play, from which the ghost of Melloney and the Man in Armour, symbolising judgment, make periodical excursions into the world of the living. The difficult problem of using poetic symbols dramatically, in a contemporary setting is thus completely evaded.

The background of the Scottish Border country used by Wilfrid Gibson is no more potent than Masefield's Severn countryside to release poetic symbols from realistic material in a natural way. In Lover's Leap (1924), a play set in a Border farmstead, Gibson endows his characters with highly figurative language, which is designed to point to Esther's final symbolic leap from the cliff top. Like Masefield, he concentrates for symbolic effect on one character, in this play, the fanatical Rachel, whose dour prophecies and biblical parallels perform a similar function to the speeches of Gaffer Pearce in The Tragedy of Nan. The religious parallels in particular strike an artificial note. Even allowing that Rachel is the kind of woman to whom quotations from the Old Testament would come naturally, they come too patly for plausibility. At the precise moment when Esther is summoning up her resolution, Rachel comes in with her story of Jael and Sisera, and at the end of the play, after the death of Earnshaw, she is most improbably brought out to the cliff top for the purpose of drawing yet another parallel:- 'Esther, say you? Nay,

Judith in the tent.'

More effective dramatically is the symbolism employed by Lascelles Abercrombie in The Adder (1913), another play dealing with rustic characters, since here the symbol is placed at the centre of the action. Again, however, the symbolism arises from the attitude of an unbalanced mind. Seth, the Methodist charcoal burner, through long brooding on the sins of his youth, has come to regard the adder which he keeps in a basket as the personification of those sinsⁱ): he nourishes the adder with his mind. When his daughter's innocence is threatened by the profligate, Newly, and Seth detects in her a responsiveness which seems to him to be inherited, he answers her demand to be taught about sin by telling her to put her hand in the adder's basket, with the result that she is fatally stung. The symbol is then not merely an embellishment of the action but a determining element in it. Abercrombie has moved further in the direction of dramatic treatment than many other poets of this period, but there is still something a little unreal in the aptness of his simple country people to create symbols out of their imaginations. His characters too often seem aware of the intellectual basis of the

i) Reflecting on his conversion, he says:-
 'My sins, that could not be destroyed, had past
 Into the adder: I was pure as the sun.'

symbolising process, as in The Staircase (1914), when the Woman comments on the new white staircase in the dilapidated room: it is like a white spot in the dirty world of the mind. This particular symbol is not, incidentally, rooted in action as firmly as theadder symbol: it is an extension of a poetic image into dramatic setting, but it never serves more than the function of an image. A more obvious instance of his characters' self conscious use of symbols occurs in The Deserter (1921), where Luther's wooing of Martha is visualised by himself and her as the process by which a spider weaves his thread round the intended victim, or to the ease with which a man may pluck and destroy a dandelion clock. The latter image is precipitated into the action when at the end of the play a child brings Martha the gift of a dandelion clock from Luther. This is typical of a technique which is only hovering on the borderline between poetry and drama proper: the dandelion clock has become more than pure image, but less than a functional dramatic symbol. It is perhaps characteristic that Abercrombie's plays should in general be confined to one act form and that when he wants to develop a grand theme at length, he turns to a different structure, the dramatic poem, as in The Sale of St. Thomas.

The failure of such plays as The Tragedy of Nan to achieve the effects created with such apparent spontaneity by Synge, affords further proof, if such were needed, of T.S. Eliot's statement 'The language of Synge is not available except for plays set among that

same people'.¹⁾

At least, however, these playwrights were attempting to achieve that synthesis of poetry and realism of which Eliot, in the same study²⁾, speaks. The business of poetic drama, he says, is to deal with that 'fringe of indefinite extent of feeling which we can only detect, so to speak, out of the corner of the eye and can never completely focus'. The poet must go as far as he can in this direction, 'without losing that contact with the ordinary everyday world with which drama must come to terms'. He expresses surprise that Ibsen and Chekhov, using prose as their medium, achieved so much of this poetic effect, but he does not go on to consider whether their subtle use of symbolism, at once poetic and intensely dramatic, might contribute to the result he observes.³⁾

A good many poet-playwrights of the early decades of this century were looking for settings more obviously 'poetic' and more traditional than those employed by Masefield or Abercrombie, in which they might, as it were, find their poetic symbols 'ready made', hallowed by long use and venerable association. Following on the much-lauded legendary dramas of Stephen Phillips at the very beginning of the century there has been a stream of verse plays, dramatising history and legend,

1) Poetry and Drama (1951) p.19

2) Op.cit. p.34

3) Christopher Hassall, in his Notes on the Verse Drama (1948) does suggest that the symbolism in John Gabriel Borkman might act as a substitute for verse proper.

some, like Bottomley's Fire at Callart (1939) making use of a modified 'Noh' technique. Only too many of these plays recall Synge's dictum that 'every healthy mind is more interested in TitBits than the Idylls of the King': plays like Hassan, Cophetua, Bottomley's Laodice and Danae¹⁾, Gruach, and King Lear's Wife, the last two significantly plays about characters in another man's plays, have evaded that special synthesis of which Eliot speaks: they have not come to terms with the ordinary everyday world. Drinkwater, who, like so many others, originally joined in the restless search for a fitting symbolic background²⁾, eventually acknowledged drama's demands for the light of everyday, but, being unable to achieve the difficult synthesis, turned instead to straightforward historical dramas, like Abraham Lincoln and Cromwell in which the occasional verse is hardly more than ornament.

In the third decade appeared a new school of poets who might seem at first glance to have come much closer to solving the problem. At least the plays of Auden and Isherwood, Spender and others, seem not to be evading the necessity of introducing the ordinary world into their poetic landscape: they are aggressively contemporary, in idiom and treatment. Auden and Isherwood in particular, with their fondness

1) This play, with its glamorous Asian setting, its queens, princesses and slave musicians, recalls Dunsany's romantic dramas, in which Yeats detected the influence of Maeterlinck.

2) In plays like The Storm (1915) and X = O (1917)

for musical comedy and revue techniques, have a great deal in common with the experimental playwrights of America. They share with them too, that fondness for Freudian and Marxist interpretations of life which often leads to the introduction of Strindbergian techniques in the drama. But in fact, although they show an acute awareness of the 'ordinary everyday world' they generally proceed to divest it of the human quality which alone makes dramatic symbolism live. The dramatic process in their plays seems to have its starting point in a preconceived pattern of symbols, much as a poem is resolved from a pattern of images, and Auden's poems are of course notable for their elaborate developments of imagery.

Auden's first dramatic experiment, The Dance of Death (1933) is composed entirely of symbolic figures, the Dancer himself, the Chorus, the Jewish Manager, the figure of Karl Marx. The meaning of the symbolism is explicitly stated by the Announcer, who tells the audience directly that the play is to deal with the decline of a class, by reason of the death inside them: 'We show you that Death as a Dancer', to which the Chorus responds 'Our death'. The play then proceeds to develop the 'death' motif against a number of different backgrounds, on a pleasure beach, in war, in a night club, in the quiet countryside, ending with the death of the Dancer himself to the pronouncement of Karl Marx, 'The instruments of production have been too much for him. He is liquidated'. The play presents a glitteringly modernistic surface, but the form is one of the most ancient of all, didactic allegory, reminding us of Synge's criticism, 'The

infancy and decay of the drama tend to be didactic',ⁱ⁾ though perhaps leaving us unsure as to whether this particular phenomenon is a symptom of juvenility alone.

In The Dog Beneath the Skin, written in collaboration with Isherwood in 1935, the over elucidation of The Dance of Death is replaced by an obscure symbolism which depends almost entirely on intellectual interpretation. We are given no clue to the meaning of the symbolic 'Dog' in the emotional content of the play, and as we have seen, symbols in the theatre require this support from the logic of the emotions. The character of Francis, who is also a Dog, evidently represents an ideal of kinds, to which the people of Pressan Ambo pay superficial respect, sending out the chosen 'hero', young Alan, on a search for the missing Francis which is conducted in the manner of a pilgrimage. But when Alan returns with his mission accomplished, he is ignored or insulted: the village is deep in preparation for the next war, Lady Iris, who had promised to bestow her hand on the successful 'questor' having given him up for a munitions manufacturer and the Vicar being absorbed in training the local Territorial brigade. This indicates that the Dog represents some kind of peaceful or brotherly ideal to which people pay token respect but no more, while the fact that Alan discovers the object of his search in the humble dog, who has accompanied him in his world wanderings suggests that the ideal is to be sought close at hand,

i) Preface to The Tinker's Wedding p.33 in the Everyman edition of Synge's plays.

perhaps in the individual self. But any such conclusion can only be reached by a process of dispassionate examination: the symbols have to be treated in the manner of a crossword puzzle, demanding analysis rather than instinctive response. Some of the individual scenes in the play are effective in a broadly satirical way, for example the parody of totalitarianism, set in the lunatic asylum of Westlandⁱ), but they do not come together into a satisfying whole and the arbitrary Dog symbolism remains unresolved dramatically.

More successful is The Ascent of F6, which followed in 1936, since here the symbols are used primarily to reveal human personality rather than abstract ideas and there is consequently a better balance between the emotional and intellectual logic of the action. The central character, Ransom, is presented as the lonely, proud man whose fault is to rely too much on the power of will. The course of the action is designed to teach him that 'the human will is from the Demon' and that power was what he sought in the mountain, F6. F6 is a better symbol than the Dog of the earlier play, since from the beginning to the end of the play the action revolves round it, and we are clearly shown that although it means different things to different people - to James Ransom, political power, to Gunn, the prevention of boredom, to Stagnantle, investments - yet all these things have one quality in common: the characters are all seeking some outside compensation for the lack of inner harmony and peace. The

i) Cf. the asylum scenes in Peer Gynt and Bridie's The King of Nowhere.

strongest character, Ransom, invests it with the greatest spiritual significance: in his long opening soliloquy he contrasts it with the valley¹⁾ as representing something beyond human possession; this is why he desires it so intensely. Yet at the same time he dreads encountering the 'Demon' of the mountain, recognising obscurely that what he thinks of as his strength may turn out to be, after all, his greatest weakness. The suspicion is confirmed by the revelation he receives in the monastery, where to each of the climbers the monks' crystal shows 'some fragment of their nature'²⁾. Ransom sees himself as a saviour: when he looks in the crystal he hears a clamour of voices crying to him to 'save', and he is told by the Abbott that he who seeks to govern is inevitably destroyed.

The theme has been so far expressed almost entirely through symbols, but the authors do make an attempt in this play to give them some support in a realistic action. The race to the top of the mountain between the English and Ostnian parties is a practical demonstration of the corruption which attends on the highest ideals; while the successive deaths of the mountaineers, all of whom are credible human characters, come to seem, to Ransom, the tragic

i) Ransom has a good deal in common with Brand; compare the closing scene of this play, when Ransom encounters the Demon with that when Brand encounters Gerd on the mountain top.

2) A device used again by ^{Ronald Duncan} ~~Norman Nicholson~~ in This Way to the Tomb

consequence of his pride, which demands such victims. The death of Gunn makes him visualise himself as one of an 'aberrant group of Caesars', a theme which is echoed by Mr. and Mrs. A, the chorus, 'He has died To satisfy our smug suburban pride'.

Such situations prepare the way for the final scene when, in a state of hallucination, or even, perhaps, after his death¹⁾, Ransom encounters the shadowy projections of his own mind. A chorus of Monks represents the suffering humanity whom he had thought it his mission to save from the 'Dragon' and the various people concerned with the expedition, the mountaineers, backers and so on sort themselves into opposing groups for the chess game which Ransom plays out with the Dragon, now revealed to be his own brother, James. James is defeated and collapses, but Ransom has come to recognise that James' unashamed pursuit of power, which he himself had always despised, is not so unlike what he had sought in the mountain: 'It was not Virtue - it was not Knowledge - it was Power'. Finally, the Veiled Figure at the mountain summit is revealed to be Ransom's mother, as a young woman, and the 'dream' is brought to a close as she croons a nursery song. By this symbolic close Ransom's pursuit of power is shown to have had its source in his desire to be his mother's 'favourite son'. When he defeats James, he achieves his most secret desire, the maternal protection and comfort of which

i) The scene recalls Peer Gynt's encounter with the Button Moulder and the symbolic 'death' scene of The Road to Damascus.

James had seemed to have robbed him. This Freudian interpretation seems to me to weaken the effect of the whole play, being as it is somewhat arbitrarily and casually imposed on the action. The only preparation for the climax comes in the Lakeland scene, when Ransom yields against his judgment to his mother's pleading, but after this scene the theme is lost sight of until it reappears as the climax of the action. The presentation of the symbol is rather too much like the triumphant solving of a problem in algebra: an over-exact, neat answer is provided to the questions posed by an otherwise interesting and promising action.

On the Frontier (1938) is in form and treatment a regression to the technique of The Dog Beneath the Skin: it is in fact a development of the political episodes in the earlier play, set in the same Central European countries, Ostnia and Westland. The characters are once again types symbolic of various points of view and ideologies: the action is laid in a symbolic setting, the two rooms of the Ostnian and Westland families being separated by a line of light which represents the imaginary frontier between the two countries. The allegorical significance of the action is forced on us throughout, the personal element in the love scenes between Eric and Anna being deliberately subordinated to the abstract idea behind them, that love, whether between the sexes or otherwise, admits no frontiers. Expressionist effects emphasize the abstract quality of the action: a chorus of steel workers and a prisoners' chorus is used, much in the manner of Toller's Masse-Mensch, and the villain of the piece,

Valerian, the industrial magnate, is finally destroyed by the storm trooper whom he had himself endowed with power.

With the partial exception of The Ascent of F6, in which they were groping toward a more satisfactory form, the plays of Auden and Isherwood demonstrate clearly the dangers of a symbolic technique when it is conceived primarily in intellectual terms, rather than in terms of character and action. Precisely the same criticism applies to Stephen Spender's Trial of a Judge¹ (1938), a play in which the Strindbergian 'nightmare' effects are even more marked, instructions being given for alternate acts to be played as a dream, the lighting and colours suggesting the illusions and uncertainties in the characters' minds. Far too much stress is given to the abstract ideas represented by the characters, the Judge's Wife, speaking 'for the sake of matriarchy, for the sake of the barren and unhappy', the Judge for the 'uncertain liberal', Petra's Fiancée for the hope of the future, and so on.

Marxist and Freudian interpretations of experience seem only too often to find dramatic expression in symbols which carry scientific rather than emotional associations. We must now consider what effects are obtained by playwrights who use a Christian symbolism, in

1) Christopher Hassall says, very truly, of this play: 'The onlooker's intelligence was often lagging behind his eyes, delayed by the meaning of one line while his sight took in the action which accompanied the next.' *Op.cit.* p.11.

which emotional associations are much stronger.

Any play dealing with religious experience is bound to use some kind of symbolism for expression of the supernatural: the medieval playwrights accepted the traditional symbolism of the Bible, presenting in the form of miracle plays the stories of sacred and divine characters in the confident knowledge that their audiences would accept both the realism and the mystery of the drama without question. It is difficult, if not impossible, for the twentieth century playwright to take up this position: a simple, emotional treatment of Biblical and sacred stories would have a limited dramatic appeal for audiences soaked in the tradition of tragic drama which has persisted in this country since the Renaissance. Tragic drama implies humanity in the characters: dramatic versions of Christ's life and passion are 'mysteries' rather than 'tragedies' and the concentration on purely divine characters, though it may result in religious communication of a high order, is inevitably a dramatic limitation.

Most religious playwrights of this century have accepted this fact, producing 'miracles' rather than 'mysteries', stories of saints and heroes rather than dramatisations of Biblical incidents. The occasional brilliant exceptions, for example, plays by Charles Williams like The House by the Stable and The Seed of Adam (1936), are in general addressed to a rather special audience, congregations in churches, attenders at religious festivals, including no doubt a number of those whom Eliot describes as 'those serious people who

go to 'festivals' and expect to have to put up with poetry¹). But like most modern religious playwrights, Williams tends to intellectualise his Bible stories, introducing into his primary symbolic pattern certain more complex symbols, such as the Flame in The House of the Octopus (1943) or the Negress in Seed of Adam, which obviously demand a more sophisticated response than that required by the medieval miracle play. Williams makes a real attempt to give such symbols sufficient imagistic quality to ensure their functioning dramatically, as, for example, in the dance of Mary and the Negress in Seed of Adam. The whirling motions of the dance, in which the Negress flourishes her pagan symbol, the scimitar, creates an emotional excitement intense enough to make us feel at the end when the Negress collapses crying 'and holy is his Name', that we have indeed been witnessing the triumph of the Virgin over Hell, and, when the Negress acts as midwife to Mary, that Hell itself is a necessary part of creation. Such symbols perform the dramatic function of compression and evocation: when Adam appears²) as Caesar Augustus to command a census of the whole world the emotional impact created by his transformation is sharp enough to stimulate an understanding of the idea behind it; explicit moralising is unnecessary.

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1) Poetry and Drama (1951) p.23

2) Christopher Fry attempts a similar dramatic compression in the dream sequences of A Sleep of Prisoners (1951), where the modern soldiers merge into their Biblical prototypes.

Equally effective, in the same manner as the dance in Seed of Adam, is the scene in The House of the Octopus when the Chorus perform a dance suggesting the wriggling tentacles of the octopus. This dance, with its sharp attack on the emotions, expresses more dramatically than a good deal of the verbal arguments in the play, the horror and power of P'e-l'u, the pagan empire which is seeking to embrace the whole world 'with mental tentacles.' Less dramatically effective is the symbol of the Flame, representing the 'energy which went to the creation and was at Pentecost (as it were) re-delivered to the Christian Church'. Apart from indicating in stage directions that the costume might suggest the symbolism, the Flame revealing the flame coloured lining of his blue cloak only to the Christian community, Williams can find no way of allowing this symbolism to suggest and establish itself: the Flame has to explain his function explicitly, so weakening the dramatic effect.

Williams has undoubted talent for endowing his biblical figures with a fresh unexpected quality, but the nature of his subject inevitably involves a certain remoteness of approach: we may appreciate the effectiveness of his symbolism, but we always remain very much aware that it is symbolism, that the characters move in a purely symbolic world.

A writer using such material is bound to be drawn in the direction of allegory, and in fact many of Williams' plays are purely allegorical, for example The House by the Stable and Grab and Grace (1941). They have one decided advantage over the political and social allegories of such writers as Sean O'Casey in that they do

not have to use the loud and hectoring tone perforce adopted when theories are being exalted at the expense of the individual.

Williams, being concerned with the salvation of the individual, is able to invest even his symbolic figures with a surprising amount of human quality, for example the presentation of Gabriel as the 'old gossip of Heaven' and Grace as an irreverent, whistling boy. Yet can it really be said, as Anne Ridler does of these plays, that the characters are 'both archetypal and particular'ⁱ⁾? It is true that they have endearing and moving qualities: we can feel a genuine sympathy with Man in The House by the Stable as he comes out to the Nativity still stupid and sleepy from his encounter with Hell, but the sympathy goes to him for what he is, a symbol of all humanity; we are prepared for all his actions to be symbolic, as when he fumbles for the jewel round his neck, to give to the baby Jesus or when he *resists* Pride and Hell to the extent of allowing the 'youngish working man' and his wife to sleep in his stable. While, however spirited the delineation of personified abstractions like Pride, Hell and self Respect may be, it can obviously never transcend the fixed limits of allegory.

That remoteness which attends on religious plays is, of course, more marked when the playwright introduces supernatural figures or personified abstractions, like the Flame in The House of the Octopus, the Archangels Gabriel, Rapha^l and Michael in Dorothy Sayers' The Zeal

i) Introduction to Seed of Adam (1948) p.vii

of thy House (1937)ⁱ⁾, the Skeleton in Cranmer of Canterbury (1936)

The drift toward allegory is a general feature of modern religious drama. Ronald Duncan's This Way to the Tomb (1945) begins by telling the story of St. Antony and his three disciples in terms of individual personalities: Bernard is the intellectual, Julian the poet, Marcus the housekeeper and cook. When Antony begins his fast, the disciples react in their different ways, Marcus suffering the most since Antony is now refusing the only service he can offer, the sustenance of the body, while Bernard professes to understand and admire his master's self imposed ordeal. As the fast proceeds, the allegorical element begins to obtrude itself. Marcus becomes himself too weak and ill to accompany the others in their visit to Antony: at this point we realise that he is less an individual than a personification of man's physical needs; similarly when Antony can no longer hear Julian's songs we recognise that Julian represents the emotional or poetic part of man, while Bernard, who supports Antony in his fast, represents his pride. Finally in Antony's symbolic hallucination at the close of Part I, the disciples are specifically presented in allegorical terms, mingling with the pure abstractions, Gluttony and Lechery. Marcus expressly states, 'I am your own body' and Bernard

i) The symbolism is made very explicit in the ending of the play, when Michael exhorts the congregation to regard the cathedral as a symbol of Christ and never to suffer it to fall into decay.

'I am your own Pride'. As Antony rejects in turn the temptations of the body, the senses and the intelligence, each disciple collapses: the vision ends and they reappear as individuals in time to receive the last words of the redeemed Antony, 'There is no death my son'. In the second part, or Anti-Masque, the allegorical element is even more pronounced, the disciples taking their places among a crowd of twentieth century 'types', the Man of Culture, the Woman of Leisure and so on. Julian, the poet, acts as Chorus, Bernard has been transformed into Father Opine, a sceptic stiff with self pride, and Marcus into a humble Postcard Seller who places bread at St. Antony's shrine, moved by a pious instinct he can no longer explain. The tendency to explain the symbols is more marked in this part, where Duncan is dealing with a superficially complicated action: lest we should be in any doubt at the end, the resurrected St. Antony explains 'I can only be St. Antony/ When my three attributes/ body desire and intelligence Make me complete by each/ Confounding their own separate frailty'. In fact, despite the surface originality of the second part, there has been gradual deterioration in true dramatic effect from the first to the second part, in exact proportion to the substitution of the purely allegorical for the human.

Attempts have been made by other playwrights, with varying degrees of success, to maintain the human and particular in the foreground, while extracting through symbols the universal and religious significance of the action. Norman Nicholson, in The Old Man of the Mountains (1945) comes some way toward doing this by setting the Biblical

story of Elijah in a modern Cumbrian background, Mount Carmel becoming Carmel Fell, Elijah an old Cumbrian farmer, Ahab, Mr. Obadiah, a ruthless profiteer who worships money, or Baal, while Elijah worships the unseen God of the fells and the beck. The conflict between the two is fought out in such homely battles as that over the Widow's apple orchard and the miraculous storm of rain at the end is the signal for Martha to rush home to close her skylights and Ruth to take out all her bedding for a good wash. Homely details of this kind certainly lend conviction to the human story, but they are only intermittent effects, since when he wants to bring in the supernatural, Nicholson abandons realism altogether, using a chorus to represent the voice of the Beck and the symbolic figure of the Raven to interpret God's will to Elijah.

Of all the English playwrights concerned with a symbolical drama, T.S. Eliot has shown himself to be the most conscious of the difficult problems involved, and the most assiduous in searching for a satisfactory solution. He began, in Murder in the Cathedral (1935), with a highly ritualistic form, having its contact with the 'ordinary every day world' only in the Chorus of the Women of Canterbury who keep before the mind's eye the ordinary processes of living, but who are not, of course, differentiated as individuals. The primary action remains throughout on a symbolic level, the Four Tempters being treated in the conventional manner of the medieval morality play, and even the Four Knights, who introduce a less orthodox element, being in fact no more than personifications of popular points of view.

Becket himself is treated as a symbol of the saintly way of thinking rather than as a particular person, the historical facts of his career being used primarily as material for the various kinds of temptation which the saint must overcome before he can do the 'right thing' for the right reason. Eliot later came to speak of this play as a dead end, having at most the negative merit of avoiding the ghost of Shakespeare. Like Ibsen and Yeats, in fact, Eliot could at first only work with dramatic symbols inside a setting far removed from the contemporary world, a setting which would allow the utmost freedom for conventional poetical devices.¹⁾ Eliot was only in advance of Ibsen and Yeats in having already begun to perfect a contemporary verse idiom and a flexibility which made possible the sardonic humour of the *Knights* even in so ritualistic a framework.

In The Family Reunion (1939) he set himself the incomparably more difficult task of bringing the supernatural world, which is of course simply taken for granted in the cathedral setting, into the world of 'people dressed like ourselves, living in houses and apartments like ours, and using telephones and motor cars and radio sets'²⁾ Like O'Neill in Mourning Becomes Electra, he took as his basis the Greek myth of Orestes, but unlike O'Neill, he retained the supernatural significance of the Eumenides, attempting to bring together in one

i) Cf. Ibsen's use of symbolic tableaux and supernatural incidents in his early historical drama and the vague poetic symbolism of Yeats' first plays.

2) Poetry and Drama p.26

symbol both the Greek conception of the Furies as avenging deities and the Christian conception of the 'bright angels' which chastise only to redeem. Whereas O'Neill could manage to combine realistic and symbolic effects quite easily by depicting the Eumenides as projections of the characters' own minds, Eliot had to make it clear, by some means or other, that his Eumenides had objective as well as subjective existence: they represent a Christian idea which is not simply confined to the tortured mind of any one character¹), but which functions in the world at large, being in fact the whole meaning of man's existence. If he could project such a symbol satisfactorily in contemporary terms, Eliot would then have risen above the over particularity of O'Neill's 'Freudian case book' while avoiding the remoteness and impersonality which he had come to detect in Murder in the Cathedral.

He attempts to suggest this 'objective existence' by allowing the Eumenides to be actually seen, not only by Harry, the 'elect' but by Agatha, the sympathetic observer 'in the neutral territory Between two worlds' and even by the chauffeur, Downing, who observes 'You soon get used to them. Of course, I knew they was to do with his Lordship, And not with me, so I could see them cheerful-like. In a manner of speaking. There's no harm in them, I'll take my

i) In Scene I Harry replies to Charles, 'It goes a good deal deeper than what people call their conscience; it is just the cancer That eats away the self", and 'It is not my conscience, Not my mind, that is diseased, but the world I have to live in'.

oath'. (Part II. Scene III). Not only do we hear from characters who have seen them, but they actually appear to our view, once in their horrific aspect, once in their kindly one. Eliot must have thought this necessary because it is Harry's changed view of the Eumenides which is the climax and meaning of the play. When he sees them in Mary's presence he is still obsessed by his 'private shadows' and his feeling of guilt finds symbolic expression in the terrifying vision of the hunters, 'their claws distended'. But on the second occasion, Agatha's revelations about his parents have set him free from his obsession: he recognises that he may be, as Agatha puts it, 'the consciousness of your unhappy family, Its bird sent flying through the purgatorial flame'. 'Now I see', he says, 'I have been wounded in a war of phantoms, Not by human beings - they have no more power than I. The things I thought were real are shadows, and the real Are what I thought were private shadows'. But the Eumenides, in their changed functionⁱ⁾, are still real: the only thing that has changed is Harry's 'vision'. And in order to bring out the **force** of the change, which is the turning point of the whole action, Harry must see the Eumenides again, but this time, instead of recoiling from them, as 'sleepless hunters', he is able to face them:- 'And you shall not think that I am afraid to see you, This time, you are real, this time, you are outside me, And just endurable'.

Looking back at this play, Eliot speaks of it as a failure:-

i) Instead of being 'the sleepless hunters' they are now 'the bright angels'.

'But the deepest flaw of all, was in a failure of adjustment between the Greek story and the modern situation'.ⁱ⁾ In particular, the Furies, he came to think, should not have appeared: none of the ways of suggesting their presence in production seems to him to have been satisfactory. And this failure, he concludes pessimistically, was a symptom of the whole. But it seems to me that Eliot is in fact underrating his achievement in this play. Partly by means of the violent actions reported, partly by a succession of striking images, the 'sobbing in the chimney', the 'evil in the dark closet' he succeeds in working up the emotional tension so skilfully that at the moments when the curtains are flung back to reveal the Eumenides, the audience should be prepared to accept even the slightest indication in lighting or background as a symbol of the unseen power which the magic of the verse has already called before the mind. Harry is, indeed, both archetype and particular: his experience is peculiar to himself, but contains within it an universal significance of which we have been made aware, not simply through the intellect, but also through the emotions. The effect created by the Eumenides is not unlike that evoked by the symbol of the sea in Yeats' On Baile's Strand: we are made forcibly aware, in both plays, of an uncanny power in the background, and accept it emotionally before we attempt to analyse it intellectually: this is the basis of all good dramatic symbolism.

i) Poetry and Drama p.30

It might indeed be argued that the nature of Harry's 'conversion' is vague, that like Amy and the Chorus, we may find ourselves debating the practical form his change of heart is likely¹⁾ to take, and feeling dissatisfaction with the ultimate significance of the Eumenides symbol, as a result. But surely the symbol itself has been admirably handled, ~~the~~ discharging its main function of dramatising Harry's spiritual regeneration, even if what follows from that regeneration may seem something of an anti-climax. As Eliot points out, the emphasis does in fact move from Harry to Amy, once the Eumenides symbol has served its turn, so that we are perhaps, as he suggests, left uncertain as to whose tragedy we have been witnessing, that of mother or son. But up to the moment of revelation I should say that the symbolism had been most effectively employed to suggest the ordeal of 'the terrified spirit. Compelled to be reborn': beyond the single moment of revelation it is arguable that no dramatic symbol can go and remain dramatic²⁾

Of the minor symbolism, that connected with Amy is dramatically very effective. One of the major themes of the play, the spiritual death from which Harry is redeemed, is suggested by the atmosphere of cold which clings around her. She is always cold, always aware of the remorseless clock ticking in the dark: sun and light seem to

i) Although Eliot satirises the Chorus' inability to understand a spiritual experience unless it takes the concrete form of missionary work, yet in the next play, The Cocktail Party, he does in fact take pains to render the experience in more actual form, making Celia a nursing sister.

2) Drama is after all committed to 'events', and as Harry tells the Chorus in Scene I, 'All that I could hope to make you understand is ~~not~~ only events: not what has happened'.

have deserted her forever and at the end of the play her death comes in the way she had anticipated:- 'The clock has stopped in the dark'. Mary, the girl just beginning to leave youth behind, is associated with images of late spring. The spring image dominates her conversation with Harry in Scene II, emphasising the motif of painful rebirth which is the theme of the play¹⁾, but it is only slightly extended into the action: for example, the time is a cold late spring, and Mary, at the beginning of Scene II, stands with her arms full of greenhouse flowers, expressing her longing for the true 'windblown flowers' of real spring gardens.²⁾

The most didactic symbolism is that connected with Agatha who acts as a somewhat priggish mentor throughout, an intermediary not only between Harry and the obtuse Chorus, but between the actors and the audience. To her are given sibylline utterances such as that which closes Part I, 'The eye is on this house The eye covers it', and that which follows on the second appearance of the Eumenides, 'A curse comes to being As a child is formed'. Mary is involved in Agatha's symbolic world at the close of the play, when the two women circle round the dead Amy's lighted birthday cake, blowing out candles as they go, till their last words, the prayer for those who seek to end the curse 'By intercession By pilgrimage' are spoken in the dark. Agatha sees the 'curse', which is of course not only the

i) 'The cold spring now is the time For the ache in the moving root
The agony in the dark...'

2) Clearly a dramatisation of the girl with her arms full of hyacinths in The Waste Land and other poems.

course on Wishwood but that on erring humanity, as springing in part from her own frailty, in part from Amy's. Hence the symbolic significance of the scene is clear enough, but its completely ritualistic quality does, like the earlier ones, produce a lyrical rather than dramatic effect. Eliot seems to have felt this, for after the trance like moments, 'beyond character', he generally puts into his characters' mouths bewildered expressions, such as Agatha's 'What have I been saying? I think I was saying that you have a long journey'.ⁱ⁾

These are flaws in what is, finally, a remarkable achievement. Eliot seems to me, in The Family Reunion, to have come closer than any playwright of the century to successful manipulation of supernatural symbolism in a contemporary setting: that he can come no closer is perhaps due to the limitations inherent in the dramatic medium for the expression of such a theme.

In The Cocktail Party (1949), Eliot makes a more determined, but in my opinion, less successful attempt to conceal his supernatural symbols in realistic, contemporary material. The origin of this play, as of The Family Reunion, was a Greek myth, the legend of Alcestis, brought back from the dead by Heracles, as Celia is brought from spiritual death to life by Harcourt-Reilly. Certain of Reilly's traits, Eliot tells us in Poetry and Drama, are borrowed from the character of Heracles, his jocular singing and occasional irresponsib-

i) In Poetry and Drama p.28, he criticises such passages as being insufficiently related to the action, 'too much like operatic arias'.

ility, but the Greek origin is so thoroughly buried beneath the surface of the play that these touches scarcely illuminate, indeed, they obscure, the character.

Harcourt-Reilly's function in the play corresponds with that of Agatha in The Family Reunion and Celia's with that of Harry. Eliot attempts to make the 'mentor' figure even more up to date by casting him as the modern 'medicine man', the psychiatrist, the one person in modern society to whom people like Lavinia, Edward and Julia will take their emotional and spiritual troubles. But realism is decreased rather than increased by the choice of such a character, since as Reilly really represents a priest-like influence, he has continually to behave in a manner decidedly unconvincing in a fashionable psychiatrist. In Act I he might perhaps pass on a realistic level, but in Act II he is only acceptable on the symbolic one. The priest like function of Reilly is made manifest in the phrases with which he dismisses his 'patients', 'Go in peace, my daughter, Work out your salvation with diligence' and in the libation, corresponding with the closing scene of The Family Reunion, when Reilly and his two helpers pray for the souls of those they have been advising: 'Protect her in the tumult Protect her in the silence'. Eliot seems to have made expression of the supernatural theme harder, rather than easier for himself, by this choice of a psychiatrist for his 'mentor'. The relation between what Reilly seems to be and what he is, is bound to seem artificial and contrived, since, as he has continually to point out to his patients, there is a whole world of difference between those who think in terms of 'mental kinks' and

those who think in terms of a 'sense of sin'. We are asked to believe that Reilly combines these two worlds in himself: on one level, the realistic one, he is a dealer in 'kinks', on the other, symbolical one, he is a dealer in 'sin and salvation'. But such antipathetic functions can not be brought together like this without a discord: we are aware all the time of the need to make an intellectual effortⁱ⁾ to bridge the gulf between them.

Similarly, there is an impossibly wide gulf between the 'realistic' character of the two Guardians, Julia and Alex, and their symbolic nature: the one does not grow naturally out of the other. Agatha, in The Family Reunion, may not have been a sympathetic character, but symbolic attributes sat more easily on her pedagogic shoulders. Julia and Alex, on the other hand, are sympathetic in their realistic scenes to such an extent that they refuse to be thoroughly assimilated into the symbolic world of the consulting room. Eliot means us to think of them as symbols of the influence apparently ordinary people can exert in the spiritual lives of others. If they were unconscious of this influence they might be extremely effective symbols, but the fact that they deliberately associate themselves with Reilly as helpers and 'guardians' at once destroys their ordinariness: they become very extraordinary indeed, and by functioning on two such widely separated levels, make us uneasy about

i) The different sanatoria to which he sends his patients are so unconvincing on the realistic level that we are forced to think of them, too deliberately, as symbols.

their individual functions on each.

The turning point of the action in this play, as in The Family Reunion, is the change of heart in one character, the moment of spiritual revelation. Such an experience can only be suggested by means of symbols, but in The Cocktail Party, by trying to avoid a supernatural symbol like the Eumenides, and substituting for it the shock created by unsatisfactory personal relationships, Eliot has made the spiritual change seem unlikely, out of proportion to the events which stimulated it. The moment of change clearly comes in the second scene of Act I during the conversation between Edward and Celia. The characters are all waking to the realisation that they have been treating each other as 'objects', projections of their own egos rather than as separate individuals. This is the root of their spiritual malaise, and as soon as Celia realises that she has in fact been making use of Edward, treating him as a projection 'of something that I wanted - No, not wanted - something I aspired to - Something that I desperately wanted to exist', she apologises to him, to his bewilderment, since from the conventional point of view she is the injured party. From this point onwards, Celia's eyes are opened to her spiritual need. All that Reilly can do in the consulting room scene is to help her to clarify her ideas, to point the direction in which she might go. He is not in any way responsible for her revelation, which, as we have said, arises out of a commonplace amorous intrigue which has gone wrong. The cause seems too small for the magnitude of the effect: hence, I believe,

the difficulty we subsequently have in accepting Celia's heroic martyrdom.

The martyrdom, as reported by Alex in the last scene, is meant as a symbol of the influence the 'spiritually aware' can exert in the lives of others less perceptive. It is, in fact, the theme of Murder in the Cathedral again, but the nebulous results we see in the lives of these characters are, again, out of proportion to the violence of the symbol. Lavinia and Edward have already patched up their lives before Celia's death is reported: they have agreed to 'make the best of a bad job', to become reconciled to 'the human condition'. Celia's death can do no more for them than Reilly has already done. The only conversion apparently effected by her death is Peter's: he is brought to recognise that he has until now only been interested in himself, 'And that isn't good enough for Celia'. But the form his spiritual regeneration is to take is apparently the making of good films instead of bad, a lamentably weak anti-climax.

The Cocktail Party marks an interesting stage in Eliot's development, demonstrating as it does the difficulties involved in fitting supernatural symbolism to a drama of contemporary events. That he has not quite solved the problem here is no indication that he will not, perhaps, triumphantly deal with it in his next play. Since his first excursions into drama with the choruses for The Rock and the Aristophanic fragment, Sweeney Agonistes, he has been seeking always to make his symbolism function dramatically rather than lyrically. In The Family Reunion he came closer to a satisfactory dramatisation

of supernatural symbols than any English playwright of the period, surpassing Yeats, if only in the greater complexity of his dramatic structure.

The problem of dramatic symbolism has been shown to have attracted the attention of nearly all the leading English playwrights of this century. Curiously enough, it has been most nearly solved by those, like Shaw and Eliot, who have been concerned with its most difficult aspect, the extraction of poetic or supernatural qualities from realistic, contemporary material. Shaw in the comic and Eliot in the tragic drama have enlarged the technique of the modern playwright by methods more intrinsically dramatic, though less obviously so than the symbolic experiments of such playwrights as Auden and Isherwood, Spender, or Priestly and others in their expressionist plays. Whether they will have successors is a matter only for conjecture at the moment. Christopher Fry appears to be adapting the Shavian technique to his own special requirements, and some of the younger religious playwrights, such as Norman Nicholson, seem to be attempting Eliot's combination of the contemporary and the eternal. All such experiments are a tribute to the influence exerted by Ibsen's late symbolic drama, and it is perhaps a sign of the innate dramatic instinct of the English that they have chosen to follow such a master rather than the more spectacular, but less dramatic example of Strindberg and Maeterlinck.

Symbolism in American Drama

Of all the drama in English under discussion, that of America has shown itself most susceptible to extreme expressionist and symbolic influences. Strindberg made a greater impact in the American than in the English or Irish theatre, largely by way of the spectacular experiments of his most enthusiastic disciple, Eugene O'Neill.

In a programme note to The Ghost Sonata produced in New York in 1924, O'Neill wrote: "Strindberg was the precursor of all modernity in our present theater.....(and) still remains among the most modern of the moderns, the greatest interpreter in the theater of the characteristic spiritual conflicts which constitute the drama - the blood of our lives today..... All that is enduring in what we loosely call 'expressionism' - all that is artistically valid and sound theater - can be clearly traced back through Wedekind to Strindberg's The Dream Play, There Are Crimes and Crimes, The Spook Sonata, etc." ¹⁾

O'Neill claimed to be, like Strindberg, 'interested only in the relation between man and God', ⁱⁱ⁾ and he set out to examine this relationship in a manner reminiscent of Strindberg, by probing into the hidden recesses of human personality, the self obsessions of twentieth century man, hoping that from his psychological analyses would result that 'Mystery - the mystery any one man or woman can feel but not understand as the meaning of any event - or accident -

i) O'Neill: 'Strindberg and our Theater' Program of Provincetown Theatre No. 1 1923-4 (New York City). Quoted in full by T.H. Dickinson in Playwrights of the New American Theatre (New York 1925) pp. 100 - 102.

ii) Quoted by J. W. Krutch in his introduction to Nine Plays by Eugene O'Neill (New York 1932).

in any life on earth'.ⁱ⁾ This 'mystery' he proclaimed, was what he wanted to realise in the theatre: - "The solution, if there ever be any, will probably have to be produced in a test tube and turn out to be discouragingly undramatic".ⁱⁱ⁾

From such statements as these, it is clear that O'Neill, like Yeats, Eliot and even Shaw, needed some kind of symbolism which could express in dramatic form his vision of the supernatural, of the 'relation between man and God'. In the latest phase of his career he turned to traditional Christian symbols to effect his purposes, but the greater part of his drama was written from an agnostic viewpoint and for an audience which, as O'Neill believed, had lost belief in a supernatural world. He makes this plain in his notes on Mourning Becomes Electra (1931), when he asks himself, 'Is it possible to get modern psychological approximation of Greek sense of fate into such a play, which an intelligent audience of today, possessed by no belief in gods or supernatural retribution could accept and be moved by?'ⁱⁱⁱ⁾ The method he in fact used in this play was to superimpose on the Greek religious myth the modern 'Freudian' myth, substituting sexual symbols for religious symbols and making sex the driving force of the action. The Greek idea of Fate becomes the modern idea of heredity, the Furies are the repressed desires which, recoiling on themselves, torment the Mannons from within. All the symbolic effects in the play are used to point the contrast between the free, natural sexual life

i) New York Evening Post, 13th February 1926.

ii) Ibid.

iii) 'O'Neill's Own Story of Electra in the Making'. New York Herald Tribune 8th November 1931.

represented by the South Sea islands and the unnatural, inhibited sexual life represented by the tomb-like Mannon house. It is continually implied throughout the play that the only kind of spiritual harmony which a human being can hope for will be achieved by way of a fulfilled sexual life, while the suppression or distortion of the sexual instinct makes for a 'death in life'. The inhibitions of Ezra Mannon are described in such metaphors as 'Something keeps me sitting numb in my own heart - like a statue of a dead man in a town square' and 'You were always like the statue of an eminent dead man - sitting on a chair in a park or straddling a horse in a town square'.

The pattern of O'Neill's plays is curiously like that of a pagan fertility cult though without pagan unselfconsciousness. In fact, the conflict in many of his plays lies between the powerful natural forces of sex and reproduction, and the suppressing, perverting forces of modern 'civilised' life. The problem is very much a contemporary one, and, as we shall see, still remains a subject of first importance for the contemporary American playwright.ⁱ⁾ One of the most constantly recurring symbolic figures in O'Neill's drama is that of the Mother Goddess or Earth Mother, in modern guises. Such a one is the prostitute in Welded, to whom Cape says, 'You're a symbol of love revenging itself upon itself', and, more clearly, the two women in The Great God Brown. While still an unmarried girl, the heroine, Margaret, visualises herself as both wife and mother to Dion: - 'Dion is the moon and I'm the sea. I want to feel the moon kissing the sea... (more and more strongly and assertively until at the end she is wife

i) Cf. Tennessee Williams' treatment of the problem in A Streetcar Named Desire (1947).

and mother)....And I'll be Mrs. Dion - Dion's wife - and he'll be my own Dion - my little boy - my baby!' After his death she calls to him, 'My lover! My husband! My boy! I feel you stirring in your sleep, for ever under my heart'. O'Neill himself described her as 'the descendant of the Marguerite of Faust - the eternal girl-woman... properly oblivious to everything but the means to the end of maintaining the race'.ⁱ⁾

In the same play is a character even more clearly depicted as a Mother Goddess. Her very name, Cybel, is symbolic of her function, which is further pointed by the symbolic settings of her room; in her youth the wallpaper suggests 'a blurred impression of a fallow field in early spring': later it is a more lavish pattern in which 'crimson and purple flowers and fruits tumble over one another in a riotously profane lack of design'. Stage directions demand that she should possess 'the deep, objective calm of an idol' and chew gum slowly like a sacred cow, 'like an unmoved idol of Mother Earth'. Dion actually addresses her as 'Old Sacred Cow' and 'Miss Earth', and at the end of the play it is she who pronounces the epitaph: - 'Always spring comes again bearing life'.

The vulgar, raddled façade which Cybel adopts for her less perceptive clients - represented by the mask she wears - is a symbol of the debased modern conception of the function of sex, an idea which, as we have said, obsesses O'Neill. Nina, in Strange Interlude (1928) is another of his symbolic women whose natural instincts for sex and maternity have to struggle for outlet in a world dominated by male conventions. At the end of Act VI, when she at last seems to reach

i) New York Evening Post. 13th February 1926.

fulfilment, she voices in soliloquy the triumphal cry of a Mother Goddess: - "My three men.... I feel their desires converge in me.... to form one complete beautiful male desire which I absorb... I am pregnant with the three! ... Husband... lover... father!" Her philosophy is one with which O'Neill often seems to concur: all life was 'created in the birth-pain of God the Mother': the idea of God the Father is alien to the natural order of things.

In the next play, Dynamo (1929), the mother figure merges in the most curious way with the symbol of the dynamo, which represents for Reuben Light the maternal comfort he craves: - it is 'a great, dark mother! ... that's what the dynamo is! ... that's what life is!' The dynamo is compared with 'a massive female idol', the exciter set 'like a head with blank oblong eyes above a gross rounded torso'. Reuben is killed by the power of the electricity he worships in an extraordinary scene, suggesting a twentieth century setting for the ancient ritual of the Mother Goddess and the Slain God. A less extreme form of the same symbolism occurs in Mourning Becomes Electra, where Christine Mannon, with her flowing, chestnut hair, in her green dress, the colour of fertility, seems on her first appearance, with her arms full of flowers, like an Earth Goddess lost in an alien world.

Whether the 'mother' symbolism which dominates O'Neill's drama bears any relation to the matriarchal conception of society in America is a matter for conjecture, but it is

certainly true that American playwrights since O'Neill have been irresistibly drawn toward the depiction of abnormal sexual and parental relationships.ⁱ⁾ In dramatising such conditions, they naturally tend to use Freudian symbols and, very often, modified versions of Strindberg's technique, which as we have seen was designed expressly for such a purpose.

Maternal symbols are frequently superimposed on, or merged with, nature symbols in O'Neill's plays, as one would expect from his conception of sex as a great 'natural' deity. The almost mystical feeling for nature which emerges from some of the plays recalls Synge, with whom, in fact, O'Neill has on occasion been compared, but O'Neill's treatment of nature symbols is of course far more deliberate and selfconscious than Synge's ever was.

In as early a play as Anna Christie (1921), a nature symbol, the sea fog, is identified with the release of sexual force from the debasing influences of urban life. Anna, the prostitute, recovers her feminine pride when the fog cuts her off from land: - 'I feel as if I was - out of things altogether', she says, and 'It makes me feel clean out here -'s if I'd taken a bath'. In Desire Under the Elms (1924) the predatory sexual passions which rage in the play are supposedly symbolised by the great elm trees in the setting; 'there is a sinister maternity in their aspect, a crushing, jealous absorption They brood oppressively over the house, they are like exhausted women resting their sagging breasts and hands and hair on the roof'. More effective, because integral to the action, is the 'island' symbol of Mourning Becomes Electra: in this play the state of grace is expressly equated with a state of sexual

i) For example, Sidney Howard's The Silver Cord (1926), Lillian Hellman's The Children's Hour (1934), Arthur Miller's All My Sons (1947).

freedom, and the South Sea islands, home of a primitive 'uncivilised' people become in the minds of the characters the 'Blessed Isles', even the 'Garden of Paradise'. The natives on these islands have learnt the secret of happiness, as Brant explains, because 'they had never heard that love can be a sin'. Orin's abnormal passion for his mother, whom he worships and desires, finds outlet at one time in a dream of the island:- 'I only felt you all around me. The breaking of the waves was your voice... The whole island was you'. When Orin and Lavinia actually visit the islands Lavinia is released from her repressions. Speaking to Peter of her experience there she says, 'It made me forget death... There was something there mysterious and beautiful - a good spirit - of love - coming out of the land and sea'.

O'Neill frequently visualises the sea as a symbol of sexual power: it is a much more specifically Freudian symbol for him than it was for Yeats. The sea shanty, Shenandoah, in Mourning Becomes Electra, is the key to the play, expressing the 'hopeless sea longing' of those who have cut themselves off forever from all that the sea represents. Similarly, in The Great God Brown, the moon and the sea represent the male and female principles respectively. The play opens and ends by moonlight: Margaret, in soliloquy, visualises herself as the moon and Dion the sea, and at the end, when she holds the mask of the dead Dion in her arms, 'the moon rests in the sea'.

Having looked at the symbolic pattern most characteristic of O'Neill's drama, we must now consider the methods by which he fits his symbols into the dramatic texture of his plays, and estimate the

1) Cf. the relationship between Abbie and Eben in Desire under the Elms, Reuben and Mrs. Light in Dynamo. The Ubbin of 1918.

success with which he does so.

It should first be observed that O'Neill is a playwright of the emotions rather than of the intellect: he is at his best in dealing with simple people like those in the early sea plays, or with people driven by fatal passions, like the Mannons, and least successful in dramatising abstract ideas or creating complex, intellectual characters. Secondly, he has only a limited command of language, again being at his best with simple colloquial idioms, such as the negro idiom in The Emperor Jones (1920) and All God's Chillun Got Wings (1924), at his worst when he attempts a more pretentious 'literary' style, such as that used in parts of Strange Interlude and in Lazarus Laughed (1927). He is well aware himself of this limitation, though he tends to regard it less as a personal failure than as a symptom of the age for which he writes: of Mourning Becomes Electra he said: - 'It needed great language to lift it beyond itself. I haven't got that. I don't think that great language is possible for anyone living in the discordant, broken, faithless rhythm of our time. The best one can do is to be pathetically eloquent by one's moving, dramatic inarticulations'ⁱ⁾ One is reminded of Yeats' criticism of the typical realistic play which 'fills one's soul with a sense of commonness.... It cannot become impassioned, that is to say, vital, without making somebody gushing and commonplace..... Well bred people, when moved, look silently into the fireplace'ⁱⁱ⁾

Many of O'Neill's experiments, such as his use of mask in

i) A.H. Quinn: - History of American Drama from the Civil War to the Present Day Vol. II (1937) - p.258 Letter of 10th February 1932.

ii) Discoveries (1907) pp.88 - 110 in The Cutting of an Agate (1919)

The Great God Brown or soliloquy in Strange Interlude are an attempt to cope with this particular problem, revealing the passions in a play about 'well bred people'. The vast amount of symbolism in his plays, particularly in the settings, is also partly due to his need to heighten and extend the significance of the spoken word, 'one's moving, dramatic inarticulations'.

Because, as we have said, he is most successful in plays of strong action, about simple, passionate people, it follows that his symbolism will be most effective when it is kept in the background, and not allowed to introduce ambiguities or intellectual complications into that action. It takes an Eliot to handle successfully complex symbols such as that of the Eumenides in The Family Reunion. When O'Neill attempts to place at the centre of his action, a symbol heavy with all kinds of intellectual subtleties, such as the 'laughter' symbols in Lazarus Laughed he fails disastrously. Infinitely more effective is the 'island' symbolism of Mourning Becomes Electra which is of a simple, emotional kind.

Before surveying the plays in order, it is first necessary to say a word on the special facilities in the sphere of stage design which were available to American playwrights such as O'Neill. One of the most striking differences between English and American drama in this period is the much greater use of symbolic or expressionist settings in the American theatre. Here again the influence of Strindberg and his German imitators was of the first importance. In the early years of the century, when English playwrights and producers were seeking increased realism, the American theatre was

witnessing productions of such experimental plays as Andreyev's The Life of Man and Wedekind's Frühlings Erwachen,ⁱ⁾ while a host of adventurous young stage designers were only waiting an opportunity to exercise their talent on an indigenous symbolic drama. Failing that, they were prepared in the meantime to experiment with symbolic settings for the classics: in 1921, for instance, an expressionist production of Macbeth was given in New York, with distorted settings designed by Robert Edmond Jones and a symbolic motif formed by three enormous silver masks gleaming in a darkened stage. The example of cinematic techniques also encouraged experiment with scenic design in the theatre. Here again the Americans have experimented on a bigger scale than the English: the style of such films as Orson Welles' Citizen Kane and The Magnificent Ambersons has undoubtedly had an effect on theatrical experiments like Thornton Wilder's The Skin of Our Teeth (1942) and Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman (1949).

O'Neill was one of the first to recognise the potentialities of the modern theatrical medium; also, it must be said, to be seduced by them, only too often, into spectacular experiments which proved essentially undramatic, for example, Lazarus Laughed. An excess of experimental ardour is a recurring vice of O'Neill's: but when this ardour is under control, his use of symbolic settings, light, music and so on is seen to be one of the most characteristic and effective features of his technique.

i) Both produced in New York in 1917.

ii) Such as Robert Edmond Jones, Norman Bel-Geddes, Herman Rosse.

iii) Detail of 1921 production of Macbeth designed by Robert Edmond Jones. (See Macbeth, New York, 1921, p. 100.)

From the first, O'Neill was attracted by the content and technique of Strindberg's drama. He tells us that as a young man he 'read about everything I could lay hands on: the Greeks, the Elizabethans - practically all the classics - and of course all the moderns. Ibsen and Strindberg, especially Strindberg'.ⁱ⁾ Quite consciously he set out to form a dramatic technique which would incorporate features of the foreign drama he admired: - 'I've tried to make myself a melting pot for all these methods, seeing some virtues for my ends in each of them, and thereby, if there is enough real fire in me, boil down to my own technique'.ⁱⁱ⁾

In the early one-act sea plays, the occasional symbolic effect seems to have its source in the playwright's desire to extract poetic quality from commonplace material. O'Neill indeed claimed on one occasion:-ⁱⁱⁱ⁾ 'the poetical (in the broadest and deepest sense) vision, illuminating even the most sordid and mean blind alleys is..... my concern and justification as a dramatist'. But since he was dealing in these plays, for the most part, with inarticulate, illiterate seamen, the poetical effect of their 'dramatic inarticulations' had to be heightened by symbolic overtones in the action. The fog in Bound East for Cardiff (1916) seems to descend on the ship like a satanic Fate which will prevent Yank from reaching his long sought haven: it even seems to penetrate the fore-castle, bringing death in its wake. Through the mists Yank has a swift glimpse of 'a pretty lady dressed in black' before he dies, and close on his death comes

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- i) B. H. Clark: - Eugene O'Neill: the Man and His Plays p. 41 (1933)
- ii) New York Evening Post. 13th February 1926.
- iii) Letter of 26th March 1925. Printed in I. Goldberg's Theatre of George Jean Nathan (New York 1926) p. 158.
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the cry, 'the fog's lifted'. A similar effect is created by the fog in Anna Christie, although in this play no poetic overtones are sufficient to redeem the melodrama of conception and treatment.

In Beyond the Horizon (1920) he attempts to make the symbolism more forcible by arranging the action in a pattern of alternating exterior and interior scenes, the outdoor scenes suggesting the lure of the sea and of all unattainable illusions, the indoor scenes the 'common light of common hours', to use Yeats's phrase. This symbolic pattern, suggestive of Strindberg's 'circular' patterns, was later to be used effectively in Mourning Becomes Electra, but in 1920 O'Neill was still uncertain in his technique. Beyond the Horizon drew from St. John Ervine the criticism, 'one of his long plays occupies six acts when three would do'.

Although O'Neill's tendency to symbolise was apparent from the first, it was not till the appearance of The Emperor Jones in 1920 and The Hairy Ape in 1922 that he began to win fame, sometimes of an undesirable kind, as an experimental playwright in the vanguard of modern developments. Charges of imitating the German expressionist playwrights, particularly in The Hairy Ape were inevitably brought against him, and we find him in reply defending his originality, not for the last time in his career. In a letter to B. H. Clarkⁱⁱ⁾, he maintained:- 'the first Expressionistic play that I ever saw was Kaiser's From Morn to Midnight, produced in New York in 1922, after I'd written both The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape. I had read From Morn to Midnight before The Hairy Ape was written, but not before

i) Introduction to the 1923 edition of The Moon of the Caribees
O'Neill lamely retorted:- 'I imagine the symbolism I intended to convey by the alternating scenes would be apparent even from a glance at the programme'. B.H.Clark: Op.cit.P.91

ii) Op.cit.p.114

the idea for it was planned. The point is that The Hairy Ape is a direct descendant of Jones, written long before I had ever heard of Expressionism, and its form needs no explanation but this. As a matter of fact, I did not think much of Morn to Midnight, and still don't. It is too easy. It would not have influenced me'.

In fact, of course, O'Neill had learnt his lessons from the master of the German expressionists, Strindberg himself, and it was probably true that he could acquire little more of value to him from the German school. The Emperor Jones is a good example of expressionist technique as distinct from symbolic: the vision scenes in the jungle represent an attempt directly to objectify inner experience by way of pictures on the stage. We, the audience, are given, by way of these stage pictures, a glimpse into the negro's terrified mind: the impact of the experience is immediate and even violent: the more subtle processes of symbolism are not involved, but the play remains, for all that, one of the best things in its kind, and one of the most completely successful plays that O'Neill ever wrote.

The Hairy Ape is a less fortunate venture. Here O'Neill certainly approaches closer to the Germans than he was ever after to do; one is left with the impression that the intellectual pattern came first, and the action was then fitted into it. Yank was conceived as a 'symbol of man who has lost his old harmony with nature and has not yet acquired a spiritual way'.ⁱ⁾ The idea is

i) New York Herald Tribune. 16th November 1924.

iii) There is only one instance of this in the history of drama.

stressed by the symbolic attitudes which he takes up at intervals,ⁱ⁾ and by the formalised mechanical background against which he is placed. The sailors in the ship scenes are no more than harsh voices, suggesting the dominant idea of 'steel', and in the satirical Fifth Avenue scene Yank is confronted with a procession of robots, having 'something of the relentless horror of Frankenstein in their detached, mechanical awareness'. Robert Edmond Jones, who produced the play in 1922, stressed the mechanical element by the distorted settings, for which O'Neill had of course given explicit instructions, and by using stylised masks for the Fifth Avenue procession.

Although it has effective theatrical moments, the play lacks even the single fully human figure which alone could have preserved it from the contrived effect of intellectual allegory. That O'Neill may himself have suspected this weakness is suggested by the vehemence with which he defended his characters: - 'I personally do not believe that an idea can be readily put over to an audience except through characters. When it sees 'A Man' and 'A Woman', just abstractions, it loses the human contact by which it identifies itself with the protagonists of the play the character of Yank remains a man and everyone recognises him as such'.ⁱⁱ⁾ This is wishful thinking rather than a description of the play as it stands.

He is hardly more successful with his attempt to introduce symbolic incident, rather than symbolic setting and characters, intoⁱⁱⁱ⁾

- i) In Scene IV, for example, he is shown sitting in the attitude of Rodin's Penseur.
- ii) 'Eugene O'Neill talks of his own Play and Others', New York Herald Tribune, 16th November 1924.
- iii) There is only one character, that of the nameless Woman, who is clearly meant to have symbolic significance. See p. 290

Welded (1924), a play showing strong Strindbergian influence. The husband and wife in this play are alternately attracted and repelled by each other in the manner of Strindberg's people. The staircase of their apartment is meant to represent the attraction which draws them together, while the door represents the way of release from a bond which in certain moods seems repellent.

This symbolism is indicated, though very lamely, in the first act, when Cape attempts to lead Eleanor to the staircase, ignoring the knock which has just sounded at the door. She hesitates, 'irresolutely like a hypnotised person torn by two conflicting suggestions'. Finally, she opens the door, to the accompaniment of recriminations from Cape which are evidently designed to point the significance of her action. In the next act another staircase appears, this time owned by the man who wants to take her from her husband. It too is a symbolic staircase, as Darnton makes clear when he tells Eleanor that she can only prove her emancipation by climbing the stair alone. But Eleanor can bring herself to go no farther than the bottom stair: she recognises the hopelessness of her attempt to break away from Cape, returns to him and then discovers, in the last act, that the fatal door of their home 'opens inward'. This discovery, we are to believe, 'makes everything simple for them', and the play ends in 'serenely unquestionable' harmony.

This is not the kind of symbolism which seems to grow naturally out of a convincing action: the very fact that there are two symbolic staircases would prevent such an effect. O'Neill was not yet able to make his symbolic situations function naturally. He was

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much more successful in such plays as All God's Chillun Got Wings and Desire under the Elms where the symbolism is confined to setting and to the repetition of a symbolic motif in the imagery. The apparently impassable gulf between negro and white man, which is the theme of the former play, is dramatically emphasised by the symbolic street background. One side of the street is occupied entirely by whites, the other by blacks; the crowd falls into black and white lines outside the church gate at the wedding of Jim and Ella at which he is dressed entirely in black, she in white. The Congo mask which hangs on the wall of their home is used in a similar way, to symbolise the alien life which Ella comes to dread and hate: as she gives way under emotional strain the mask is treated expressionistically, seeming to swell to abnormal proportions as a result of the shrinking in the room which is accomplished by a change in lighting. In Desire under the Elms the symbolism of setting, already mentioned, is so much less forcible that it is hardly likely to make itself realised in the theatre, except in the hands of an imaginative designer.ⁱ⁾ The dialogue, however, is skilfully invested with symbolic overtones. The characters use nature images to express their feelings: Cabot has 'snake's eyes', a 'Mule's grin': he is 'damned like an old bare hickory tree': Eben's first love, Min, is like Mother Earth herself: 'her eyes kin wink like a star she smells like a wa'm ploughed field'. The hard ideal pursued by the patriarchal Cabot is crystallised in the 'stone' imagery which is given the emphasis of symbol. It contrasts with the 'gold' image which represents to Eben's

i) The extent to which O'Neill depends on the stage designer to realise some of his more nebulous effects is typical of American theatrical technique.

brothers a rich and happy life, while to Cabot, easily won gold is sinful. His God is a hard, Old Testament God, who speaks to him in the language he understands: when he comes upon rich land with 'nary a stone' he hears God's voice saying, 'This haint wuth nothin' t'Me. Git ye back t'hum'. For Cabot, God is in the stones:ⁱ⁾ for Simeon and Peter the stone walls which Cabot has so painfully built up are a prison. When they make their bolt for California, to the 'Golden Gate Golden West! - fields of gold!', they rejoice at the thought of 'the stone walls ... crumblin' and tumblin''. This kind of imagery is natural to the characters and it helps to increase the thematic significance, the conflict between the grim, puritanical New England way of life and the passionate pagan life which Abbie and Eben wrest for themselves, at the cost of their eventual destruction. O'Neill has found here the right setting for his dominant symbolic pattern, and succeeded, as he had hoped to do, in giving 'an epic tinge to New England's inhibited life'.ⁱⁱ⁾

Symbolic settings are skilfully used again in Marco Millions (1925), where O'Neill compresses Marco Polo's wanderings into three scenes, representing three Eastern civilisations. The same silent types, ruler, priest, mother, children and so on, are grouped in characteristic patterns in each scene, only the local colour changing from one to the other. The first represents

i) 'When ye kin make corn sprout out o'stones, God's livin' in yew.. God's in the stones!'

ii) Letter to G.J.Nathan 26th March 1925. Printed in The Theatre of George Jean Nathan by Isaac Goldberg (New York 1926).

Mahomedan civilisation, with its gorgeous throne and mosque in the background, the second, Indian, a Buddhist temple replacing the mosque, and the third Mongolian, a scene centering round a snake charmer and an idol made of cloth and felt. The reactions of the American travellers are identical in each scene: they learn nothing from their wanderings. The symbols here perform an essentially dramatic function, enabling an action which might otherwise sprawl in an ungainly fashion, to be compressed into taut, sharply satirical episodes. The ending of the play is equally effective. The triumph of materialism over the spiritual life which is a major theme of the play, is neatly pointed in the banquet scene when the guests gradually disappear behind the piles of food with which the table is loaded. Finally their voices too are drowned by the clatter of knives and forks, and the one word to emerge through the din from Marco's speech is the repeated 'Millions'.

Marco remains throughout a thoroughly human character, much as Peer Gynt remains human, despite the symbolic situations in which he is placed. The same can scarcely be said of the characters in The Great God Brown (1926), largely because the changing of masks which is the principal technical feature of the play reminds us too insistently of the abstract qualities Dion, Brown, Margaret and Cybel embody. Yeats' best drama demonstrated that the use of mask need not necessarily destroy the humanity of a play; that it was, in fact, a question of degree, of knowing when to stop.

i). For example such a play as At the Hawk's Well.

O'Neill in this play does not know when to stop. The use of masks to symbolise divided personality is clear enough in the first part, when the interest is focussed on the clash between Dion Anthony's ascetic self, represented by his real face, and the 'Bad Boy Pan' in him, represented by the Dionysiac mask. The contrast between Cybel's real nature and that which she is forced to present to the world is also clearly, and effectively conveyed by the taking on and off of her mask, the 'rouged and eye-blackened countenance of the hardened prostitute'. But after Dion's death, when Brown steals his mask, the constant changing of the two masks then employed draws too much attention to the mechanics of the device. The dramatic unity of the character tends to be lessened by the continual shifting among the 'Pan', 'Mephistopheles' and 'Anthony' constituents of his personality. Emotional self-identification with the characters is made more difficult by the demands made on our intellectual understanding of the symbolic process. The mask is sometimes used deliberately to emphasise the purely symbolic nature of a character: for example, in the prologue, Margaret wears a mask which is 'an exact, almost transparent reproduction of her own features, but giving her the abstract quality of a girl instead of the individual Margaret'. In effect, such a distinction would scarcely be perceived in the theatre, as O'Neill afterwards admitted,ⁱ⁾ but the tendency toward personified abstractions is marked throughout the play and, indeed,

i) In a letter to B.H.Clark (Quoted in Clark Op.cit.pp.159-160) he wrote, 'In Brown I couldn't know beforehand how the scheme would work out. They were too realistic there, and sitting way back in the theatre you couldn't be sure if the actors had on masks or not.'

affirmed in the climax, when Cybel tells the police officer that the name of the dead Brown is 'Man'. Characters as symbolic as these can only be involved in symbolic actions: it is obviously futile to look for a realistic development of plot in such a play: in fact, it is almost pure allegory. This is so particularly in the second part, in such scenes as that in which the Committee men solemnly carry Brown's mask in funeral procession, or when Margaret weeps over Dion's mask.

Curiously enough, although he had done all in his power to emphasise the abstract ideas behind the play, we find O'Neill writing of it, 'It was far from my idea in writing Brown that this background pattern of conflicting tides in the soul of man should ever overshadow and thus throw out of proportion the living drama of the recognisable human beings.'ⁱ⁾ The symbolism had evidently got out of hand, bringing O'Neill further in the direction of allegory than he had intended to go.

In the later plays O'Neill's use of symbolism becomes more obviously prompted by his need to come to terms with religion, to find symbols more potent than the nature symbols of his earlier drama to represent a supernatural world. He had become profoundly aware, like Yeats, of 'the sickness of today as I feel it - the death of an old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfying new one'.ⁱⁱ⁾ In Lazarus Laughed (1927) he turned for the first time to a sustained religious symbolism, falling

i) Letter to the New York Evening Post 13th February 1926.

ii) B. H. Clark Op. Cit. pp. 165 - 166.

at once into the error which always threatens the religious playwright, that of creating characters and action so remote from ordinary human life that they fail to stir our passions in the highest degree. The remoteness is of course stressed in Lazarus Laughed by the unrestrained use of symbolic masks not only for the principal characters, but for the elaborate choruses also. O'Neill believed that in using masks for his choruses he was achieving a dramatic compression which would have been impossible without them: ⁱ⁾ the masks were to be conventionalised and twice as large as life, so that the audience could recognise their implications at once. But again, of course, he overdoes it: there are far too many permutations and combinations of 'types' ⁱⁱ⁾ for his full effects to be grasped during the progress of the action. Lazarus Laughed demonstrates the danger of relying too much on the potentialities of the theatrical medium to realise symbolic effects. There are some dramatically effective settings, such as the violent purple and red motif in background, costume and masks in Tiberius' palace, which suggests that 'the imperial blood in his veins had been sickened by age and debauchery'. The symbolic presentation of Lazarus and Miriam, he growing younger throughout the action, while she grows older, is a clear enough effect, and there are many of this kind. But O'Neill needed a central symbol to represent the supernatural power which Lazarus has received from Christ, and which sustains him throughout. And in making Lazarus' 'divine laughter' this symbol,

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- i) Ibid. pp. 159-160. 'I think I've suggested the presence and characteristics of mobs (by means of masks) without having to bring in a lot of supers'
- ii) The situation is made still more complicated in that certain characters such as Caligula and Pompeia, wear 'half masks', contrasting sharply with the personality revealed in the unmasked face.

he weakens the effect of the whole play, placing impossible demands on the ability of the actors besides making a crucial symbol out of what should have been only a subordinate effect. The laughter is meant to represent 'a triumphant, blood-stirring call to that ultimate attainment in which all prepossession with self is lost in an ecstatic affirmation of life'. It has spectacular effects on the people who hear it and who often join in, to express their conversion, so that we may have a full chorus laughing in unison, a difficult enough feat in itself and extremely lame and unconvincing as a symbol of the Christian way of life. Abstractions dominate in this play: Lazarus is only half human, his remoteness from the other characters being emphasised by the fact that he alone wears no mask. Miriam, first presented as his wife, ages rapidly until she comes to look like his mother: in fact there is no real human relationship between them: he is simply a symbol of mankind redeemed from death, she of Woman, 'dreaming on the child forever in memory at her breast'. Lazarus' semi-divinity is further suggested by the halo of light in which he moves and by his increasingly youthful appearance: we are told at one point that he is 'in his middle period, more comprehensive in his symbolism, the soul of the recurring seasons..' He repudiates any form of personal relationship, even with Miriam, telling Pompeia that he loves her as Woman, to her understandable fury, and denouncing 'that immortal ego - hood, the holy lantern behind which cringed our Fear of the Dark'. The moral which finally emerges is that man must

will his own annihilation, 'to become again the essence of the giver'. Once the playwright starts to think in terms of 'essences' rather than of character in action he is dooming his creations to an undramatic existence, in which argument, statement, reiteration replace organic growth. This is what has happened in Lazarus Laughed. Despite its spectacular surface effects and violent incidents there is no real dramatic movement, only repetition in various colourful settings of the central theme, 'There is no death'. With such a hero as Lazarus true dramatic action may indeed be impossible, but O'Neill does all in his power to underline the impossibility.

In Dynamo, which followed in 1929, he substituted for Christian symbols an even less convincing 'modern religious symbol', the power of electricity, which is visualised by Reuben Light as a mystical power proceeding from the sea, 'the source of all life' so being curiously synonymous with the maternal force which has been his own 'source of life'. It is his dead mother whom Reuben eventually identifies, in his distracted mind, with the symbolic dynamo, but we cannot write off this symbolism simply as a manifestation of Reuben's mental disorder: it is deliberately used to represent the abstract idea of maternity: Ada's mother, Mrs. Fife, is described in the same terms: she is 'big and warm she really makes you think of a dynamo somehow'. The reliance on symbolic settings, particularly in the crucial Power House scenes, betrays the same kind of dramatic weakness already observed in Lazarus Laughed: a significant setting may very well reinforce an idea, but it should not be asked to contain the whole meaning of the play. When it is so treated, as in Dynamo,

the audience may well be forgiven for missing the intended theme, man's search for a satisfying religion, and see instead only an extremely unconvincing study in hysteria, expressed through fantastic symbols.

A very much more successful use of symbolism occurs in Mourning Becomes Electra, where O'Neill benefits from the restraint imposed by his Greek 'theme pattern', and also, I think, from the suspension of his attempt to bring the supernatural into his drama. As we have said, he starts from the assumption that the modern audience has no belief in the supernatural, setting out to interpret the Greek legend for them in terms which they can understand and accept, the terms of modern psychology. Although the exclusion of the supernatural may prevent the play from reaching the heights of the greatest tragedy, it enables O'Neill to do supremely well what lies within his power to achieve, and that is, not supreme tragedy, certainly, but tragic drama of a high order.

The 'island' symbol which lies at the heart of the play is made an integral part of a realistic action much more in the manner of Ibsen than of Strindberg, though Strindbergian effects also occur in the play. It is a less complex symbol than, say, the wild duck, since it stands for a single theme throughout, but it is manipulated with some of the skill observed in Ibsen's technique.

The islands are real islands, which have been visited by the clipper captain, Brant, and are later visited by Lavinia and Orin, — with decisive effects on their characters. But they come to be associated so strongly with the way of life they represent that they

effectually symbolise it for all the characters, even for those who have no first hand knowledge of them. They represent the release of the sexual instinct from the unnatural conventions of civilisation.ⁱ⁾ Brant talks of them as the 'Blessed Isles' and plans to elope there with Christine after Ezra's death. Even Ezra, the most rigid Puritan of all the Mannons, has before his death a vision of 'some islands' where he and Christine might rediscover happiness: - 'I'm sick of death', he says, 'I want life!' Orin reads of such an island, which he identifies with Christine, but when he actually reaches the island with his sister, it serves only to drive him further back into himself, since release from repressions is only possible for Orin through his mother: now that he regards himself as her murderer the island way of life, once passionately desired, only intensifies his feeling of guilt and brings out the Mannon side of his character. On Lavinia the effect of the island is exactly opposite: she is, as she thinks, released from her repressions by the 'good spirit - of love - coming out of the land and sea'. In the days before she had discovered Brant's liaison with her mother she had been fascinated by his talk of the 'Blessed Isles', which later she rejected in her wounded pride and jealousy as 'cheap, romantic lies'. Freed from inhibiting jealousy by Christine's death she again allows herself to feel the island fascination, and returns from her

i) An anticipation of this symbolism occurs in a very early play, Diff'rent (1920). Caleb, home from a voyage in the Pacific, explains to the inhibited Emma, 'I wish you could see them islands, Emmer .. then you might see .. Everything is diff'rent down there....it's purty there all the time....'

voyage a 'different person', a living renewal of her mother's personality. The island symbol is used to precipitate the tragic climax, when Lavinia cuts herself off from Peter by lying about her relationship with one of the island natives: thus it remains at once a part of the realistic action and a symbol of the major theme from the beginning of the play to the end. This is an excellent example of functional symbolism, seeming perfectly natural, although quite deliberately employed, as O'Neill's note makes clear:-

'Develop South Sea Island motive - it's appeal for them all in various aspects - release, peace, security, beauty, freedom of conscience, sinlessness etc. - longing for the primitive ⁱ⁾ and mother symbol ... make this Island theme recurrent motive.' The theme is kept continually in mind by the mournful notes of the sea shanty, Shenandoah, of which O'Neill wrote 'use this more - as a sort of theme song - its simple sad rhythm of hopeless sea ⁱⁱ⁾ longing particularly significant - even the stupid words have striking meaning in relation to tragic events in the play'. It is entirely appropriate that the one scene set away from the Mannon house and grounds should be on Brant's ship: in fact, O'Neill visualised this scene as the centre of the play, 'emphasising sea background of family and symbolic motive of sea as means of escape and release'.

The contrasting symbol is the house itself, representing the respectable Puritan façade which conceals suppressed desires, often perverted and ugly. Again, O'Neill took pains to maintain the

i) This and the other notes quoted on the play were published in the New York Herald Tribune 8th November 1931 under the title, 'O'Neill's Own Story of Electra in the Making'.

ii) In the last scene, when Seth sings, 'Oh Shenandoah, I can't get near you, Way-ay, I'm bound away', Lavinia picks up the words, 'I'm not bound away, not now, Seth. I'm bound here - to the Mannon dead'.

and all the Mannons. But this appearance is more than characteristic: its symbolism becomes apparent in the third part, The Haunted, when Lavinia returns from the islands in her mother's colour of green, the physical resemblance to Christine being stressed in every possible way. By this means the theme is suggested, while at the same time, it becomes possible for O'Neill to introduce the 'ghost' of the dead mother without abandoning his realistic surface. Lavinia is a walking reminder of Christine: she is herself her mother's 'ghost'. The inevitability of the tragic climax can also be suggested by symbolic costume. Before Lavinia has consciously given up her attempt to win happiness with Peter, she has unconsciously reverted to the Mannon characteristics: dressed in the symbolic black, her movements stiff and wooden, she has lost the battle before she will acknowledge it to herself.

Minor symbolic motifs all reinforce the central theme. The closing and opening of the house shutters, by careful placing at moments of crises, comes to represent the alternation between natural instinct and acquired attributes to which the Mannons are subject: similarly the attitude toward flowers in the house comes to represent more than character: it stands for a whole way of life.

Some of these symbolic effects, notably the costume, and the exaggerated facial resemblance 'like a mask' which all the Mannons bear to one another have a Strindbergian quality which is perhaps

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- i) When Lavinia throws off her inhibitions, she discovers in herself her mother's love of flowers. Seth comments: - 'There she be, picking my flowers again. Like her Maw used to - on'y wuss'.
 - ii) Their stiff, military gait is another symbolic trait, representing the rigidity of their minds and their unnatural self control.

a little too contrived and artificial. But on the whole the symbolism in this play is brilliantly handled: an excellent example of the way in which, when poetry is not forthcoming, symbols of poetic quality can make some kind of compensation, giving to the action that 'added depth and scope ... more distance and perspective' for which O'Neill was striving.

After this dramatic success, it is rather disappointing to find O'Neill returning, in one of his last plays, Days Without End (1933), to a rigid, allegorical form. His personal need for a more comprehensive religious symbolism was no doubt responsible for this reversion to what is, essentially, the conventional medieval formula of the morality play. Specific Christian symbols dominate. The hero, John Loving, is subject to the same conflict as that treated in The Great God Brown: the Christian and Mephistophelean constituents of his personality are continually at war, but in this play the 'devilish' part of him is personified in a stage figure, the masked 'alter ego' who stands at his side throughout.ⁱ⁾ As with The Great God Brown it is difficult for an audience to make full emotional response to the suffering of a central character who is always split up into parts. The dramatic treatment of Loving's dilemma recalls Strindberg's allegorical presentation of the same problem in The Road to Damascus, a play with which O'Neill was of course familiar. In both we have the devil personified, in both a 'priest' figure who wages war with the devil for the hero's soul: the Stranger's journey

i) The situation is similar to that in Werfel's Spiegel Mensch (1920), but at the time of writing the play, O'Neill seems to have had Goethe's Faust in mind: Mephistopheles and Faust were, he considered, one and the same person.

to salvation is visualised as the road to Damascus, John Loving's as a 'rocky road full of twists and blind alleys'. Finally, the Stranger achieves salvation in the ritualistic death scene in the monastery, while John Loving is redeemed in the church, his satanic self falling dead at his feet, in the shadow of the cross.

A revolution in O'Neill's symbolic pattern has certainly been effected in this play. The stoical pride which gave a kind of heroic life to characters like Lavinia Mannon is here presented as an attribute of the devil, while the longing for maternal cherishing, the 'warm dark womb of nothingness' so typical of earlier heroes is shown as a fatal weakness. The only way by which John Loving may become a 'whole man' is to surrender himself to God, and accept without rebellion the disasters of his life.

The weakness of Days Without End is the weakness of any allegorical drama, but there is no doubt that O'Neill benefited in some ways from the discipline imposed on his technique by the necessity of conforming to a firm symbolical pattern. He remains, however, an extremely erratic playwright, at times allowing himself a freedom in presentation which results in the rambling wordiness of Strange Interlude or The Iceman Cometh (1946), at times allowing a symbolical pattern to dominate at the expense of his characters' humanity, as in The Great God Brown and Lazarus Laughed. His symbolism is most effective when, as in Mourning Becomes Electra it is used to reinforce and heighten

the significance of a strong, passionate action, and to compensate for his lack of truly poetic language. The most distinctive feature of his technique is perhaps his symbolical treatment of 'spectacle'ⁱ⁾, a treatment which involves all the special resources of the modern theatre, and which was certainly one of Strindberg's most important legacies, not only to O'Neill, but to the American theatre in general.

A great many later experiments with symbolism derive directly or indirectly from O'Neill's example. Such plays as Elmer Rice's The Adding Machine (1923) and John Howard Lawson's Processional (1925) were written for a theatre made conscious of the new technique by the production of native plays like The Hairy Ape in addition to experimental plays from abroad. The Adding Machine is a competent adaptation of expressionist methods to American conditions. The horror of a mechanical civilisation, a favourite theme with American writers, is neatly symbolised in the adding machine, which represents the limits of the unfortunate Mr. Zero's aspirations, even in heaven. The treatment is frankly allegorical,^{the} characters all being symbolic, nameless types, placed against expressionist backgrounds. The supernatural and dream elements which are a feature of the play and, again, derive from Strindbergian and German expressionist drama, can be paralleled in countless of the experimental plays from the second decade of the century onwards. Paul Green in a

I) Which includes setting, costume, music and other background effects.

play such as In Abraham's Bosom (1924) gives us a glimpse into his hero's mind by introducing the ghosts from the past which have always haunted his life: Kaufman and Connelly use a surrealist dream sequence for the satire of Beggar on Horseback (1924): Arthur Miller, in the more recent Death of a Salesman (1949) intermingles scenes from the present with those from the past in a nightmare kaleidoscope, highly reminiscent, in method, of A Dream Play.

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of the American trend, however, is the reliance on stage effects, setting, music, ballet and so on for symbolic implications. Music and dance have played a large part in the serious American drama since the days when young designers like Kenneth MacGowan and Norman Bel-Geddes sought to convert the contemporary theatre to the 'synthetic drama' advocated by Wagner and Gordon Craig.

In the preface to his play, Processional (1925), John Howard Lawson explains that he has tried to present his tragic theme by a 'vaudevillesque technique', since, 'It is only in the fields of vaudeville and revue that a native craftsmanship exists'. The violent discordancy which is his theme is suggested by the exaggerated colours of his 'vaudeville type' drop curtains, representing the various backgrounds to his scenes and throughout the play the mood of the current action is emphasised by the jazz music played by the miners on strike. The dominant tune is

1) This scene clearly recalls the ghost scenes of The Emperor Jones: it is a device to which Green is much addicted.

'an unvarying blues tune' which carries the true mood of the play, in contrast to the comic opera effect of the stylised costumes worn by the Sheriff, politician and so on. A suggestion of the 'mother' symbolism observed in O'Neill's drama enters in the scene set in the Labor Temple, when Philpotts comments on the degrading orgies inside the temple: this is how the 'mother image' is treated in modern times, reduced to the status of a prostitute, just as the temple, built as a tribute to American working men, has been reduced to a derelict shelter for the victims of capitalist persecution.

A similar type of symbolism occurs in Marching Song (1936) where the setting is a derelict factory, inhabited by the waifs and strays of the city. Some of the incidents that occur in this setting take on a significance out of proportion to their importance in the plot, so building up the symbolic effect that Lawson is trying for. For example, we learn from the dialogue of Rose and Joe that as children they had escaped from the squalor of their homes to sit and dream together in an old sunken barge which became in their imagination a ship to take them to a different world. Rose suggests that Joe should salvage the barge, a task which he tells her is impossible. Immediately after this dialogue a new arrival carries in wood which he has taken from the barge to patch up his miserable room. Rose points the moral: - he's 'building something with it. It's rotten wood, but he's using it. It's no time to dream, got to build with what you got'. By the end of an action composed of such

situations, the factory has come to seem the symbol of the oppressed, and when the lights of the city go out at the climax, it seems natural that Lucky should regard this apparently prosaic failure in electricity as a symbol of the down and outs' rebellion:-
'We've stopped the power 'cause it's us that made it'.

The plays of William Saroyan furnish more extreme examples of the reliance on stage effects, particularly music, for the expression of theme. It is worth noticing that Saroyan's plays enjoy considerable popular success in America, not merely the 'succès d'estime' which comparable experiments, like C.E. Webber's Right Side Up (1951) have acquired in this country. In My Heart's in the Highlands (1939) the bugle music played by old MacGregor has a revolutionary effect on the characters who hear it, at one point bringing the listening crowd to its knees, weeping and singing in chorus. In some indefinable way, it is suggested, the music represents what is right in the world, and when it is silenced, at MacGregor's death only the ghostly strains being still heard in the distance, Johnny's comment provides the climax of the play, 'I'm not mentioning any names, Pa, but something's wrong somewhere'. In The Time of Your Life (1939), the phonograph music which the customers in Nick's 'honky tonk' turn on at intervals, is meant to symbolise certain truths about character: when Kitty Duval enters, the stage directions inform us that 'her reality and rhythm (are) a perfect accompaniment to the sorrowful American music, which is her music, as it is Tom's.

i) What seems to be a comment of American on the use of music in the plays of Saroyan (1939) is that it is a symbol of the American spirit.

Which the world drove out of her, putting in its place brokenness and all manner of spiritually crippled forms'.

It might seem that a large part of this symbolism would be unlikely to get further than the stage directions, though no doubt the music would still have a dramatic function in suggesting the emotional mood of a scene. But Saroyan does his best to ensure that his meaning will come over by sheer force of repetition. When the 'bad' character, Blick comes into the restaurant, the 'good' characters find themselves unable to continue with the dancing, singing and playing of the phonograph by which they express their 'goodness'. When he goes out the music strikes up again and Nick concludes, 'I've got a good joint. There's nothing wrong here'. At the end of the play the death of Blick releases the tension into the inevitable musical forms; the 'marble-game goes into its beautiful American routine again - flag, lights and music'.

Saroyan's predilection for dream sequences, marked in such plays as Subway Circus (1935), suggests that Strindbergian influences have penetrated into his work, particularly as the dream symbols are so often of a fantastic, surrealist character. Strindberg's stage directions for dance and music in Miss Julie are certainly recalled by Saroyan's instructions for the production of Subway Circus:- 'Certain parts are pure ballet, certain parts are pure theatre and his general fondness for ballet and operatic forms. Saroyan's characters frequently 'reveal'

i) This seems to be a feature of American technique. Marc Blitzstein, in The Cradle Will Rock (1937) even uses operatic technique for conveying socialist propaganda.

themselves by their physical actions, by fantastic feats of ingenuity or daring, which, like the bugle music of My Heart's in the Highlands or Harry's dancing in The Time of Your Life, are meant to indicate their vitality, their freedom from the hypocrisies and inhibitions of the 'respectable'. In this he is very like Shaw, and indeed it is with Shaw that he claims dramatic kinship, saying, 'if it matters which of the writing men I have felt close to, and by whom my writing has been influenced, that man has not been Ernest Hemingway⁹, as Mr. Edmund Wilson seems to feel, but George Bernard Shaw¹⁾'. The resemblance does not extend as far as language, of course. Saroyan is diffuse and repetitive, his dialogue and action being so slight that he is perhaps constrained to give undue weight to his emotional symbols.

The Shavian technique of projecting serious ideas through fantastic, or even comic symbols, seems to have had more following in the American than the English theatre, judging from the popularity of Saroyan's drama, and from the number of plays in which the 'vaudeville' technique referred to by John Howard Lawson is employed for serious purposes. Of these, Thornton Wilder's The Skin of Our Teeth (1942) furnishes an excellent example, purporting as it does to be 'A History of the World in Comic Strip'. Mr. and Mrs. Antrobus and Sabina are human and indeed comic figures, despite the weight of significance they carry, representing as they

i) Preface to Hello Out There, printed in Razzle Dazzle (1945) p. 22.

do, the whole human race. Wilder has a light touch which at the same time conveys a wider meaning: when the dinosaur is left out in the cold in the first act, the situation is treated in as homely a way as though the ordinary household cat were involved: it is an oddly, human situation, and at the same time, of course, symbolic of the end of an era in the history of the world. Similarly, the eldest son of Mr. and Mrs. Antrobus is at once a recognisably human 'juvenile delinquent' and the symbolic figure of Cain, ancestor of all killers.

The humanity is preserved by the comic situations and dialogue, and this is a lesson from which many symbolic playwrights could profit, as indeed Eliot seems to have considered, judging from his attempt to blend comedy and symbolism in The Cocktail Party.

Wilder is an adept at this kind of semi-humorous treatment, as Our Town (1938) also demonstrates. Like many of Saroyan's characters, the people in this play are extremely simple, small town citizens, whom we are meant to visualise, however, as symbols of eternal human nature, involved as they are, not in any complicated theatrical intrigues, but in the fundamental processes of existence, birth, love and death.ⁱ⁾ Such apparent simplicity might well have resulted in the most tedious kind of allegorical homily, but Wilder avoids the danger by the

i) The simplicity of plot is of course emphasised by the bareness of the stage setting, the lack of any continuous theatrical illusion, to which our attention is constantly drawn by the stage-manager.

little idiosyncrasies with which he endows his characters, so that we can accept ~~Crover~~'s Corners as a real town in New Hampshire and yet also as a microcosm of human life itself. The method is the reverse of that employed in The Skin of Our Teeth, where the function of the symbols is to compress world history into dramatic compass: here their function is to extend a small and simple action to universal proportions.

The predilection for visualising characters as types of the human race is pronounced in American drama, methods varying from the rather crude allegorising of a playwright like Philip Barry, in such plays as Hotel Universe (1930) and Liberty Jones (1941), to the expressionistic treatment employed by writers such as Paul Green in Johnny Johnson (1936) or Irwin Shaw in Bury the Dead (1936). Arthur Miller in Death of a Salesman (1949), achieves a clever and effective blend of realistic dialogue and characterisation with symbolic incidents, lighting and scene patterns, very typical of the modern American technique. Willie Loman and his wife and sons are unique individuals, but at the same time representative of the sterility produced by certain conditions in American life. When Willie goes out to plant seeds by flashlight just before his suicide, the action is realistic in its revelation of his unbalanced mental condition, but it also crystallises the idea of sterility, the failure to achieve anything worth while, which has been a dominant motif in the play. 'Nothing's planted', he cries in despair, 'I don't have

a thing in the ground'. This is true not only of his garden, but of his life: his career has proved an empty mockery, his sons, in particular the beloved Biff, have come to nothing. The false ideal which has formed his outlook on life is symbolised very dramatically in the dream figure of Uncle Ben, which emerges from the darkness at intervals to remind his unsuccessful brother that fortunes are to be made, by walking into the 'jungle': the 'jungle is dark, but full of diamonds'. Lighting and music are used to symbolise states of mind, a gay tune calling up the happy memories of the past, while the green light which forms a leaf pattern on the set, represents the true ideal of fulfilment which eludes Willie to the end.

Symbolism of this kind recalls Ibsen's late drama in which symbols performed the same double function of revealing hidden processes of the mind and the dominant theme of the play, remaining rooted in a realistic action while conveying some of the fantastic quality of dream.

The use of symbols as an extension of poetic images is more common in American prose drama than in English. In fact, there has been very little verse drama of distinction at any time in the American theatre. The verse plays of Maxwell Anderson are occasionally embellished with symbolic effects, as for example in Winterset (1935) when the rumble of thunder in

i) Again, this incident has a realistic basis, since it is clearly shown as emerging from Willie's own mind.

mid-winter emphasises the sinister fatality of events: it is 'Mister God, beating on his little tocsin', while the savagery of Trock at the end of the play is matched by the storm raging outside. An equally obvious symbolism is pointed in Wingless Victory (1936), where the victory won by the Malay princess, Oparre, in her tragic death, is as 'wingless' as the figure head of the ship which carries her. Sometimes Anderson seems to be trying for a symbolism which remains elusive and uncertain, as in Candle in the Wind (1941), of which he says in the preface, 'The story of a play must be the story of what happens in the mind or heart of a man or woman. It cannot deal primarily with external events. The external events are only symbolic of what goes on within'. It seems that he intends to symbolise the power of the 'inner life' in his choice of setting for the first and last scenes of the play, the corner of the Versailles gardens, where imagination and desire win their triumph over materialistic power. In these 'gardens of the past' the American spinsters escape in imagination from the tyranny of the Germans who occupy Paris, and here too Madeline waits for her lover, Raoul, convinced that 'if a woman waits and wishes there, her lover will turn and come'. But the symbolism is very slight, hardly more than a play of fancy and certainly not strong enough to transcend the harshness of the external events. A similar, rather nebulous symbolism is hinted in the prologue to Key Largo (1939) when a parallel is drawn, by way of the song, 'Au clair de la lune' sung by Victor, between the

Spanish mountains and 'the mountains of the moon'. The song does not make sense, but is poetry: similarly the Spanish war, in which the young Americans are engaged, no longer seems to make sense but nevertheless represents an ideal which is worth dying for. This theme is carried forward into the main part of the play, where King, who deserted from the Republican army, is faced with the identical choice he had refused to face in Spain when he returns to America.

The symbolism, then, is negligible in Anderson's drama as we might well expect, since his plays are so rhetorical and heavily decorated with imagery. He lacks one of the principal ^{-al} motives for employing symbolism, the need to find a substitute for the rhetorical verse forms which most modern playwrights no longer find sufficiently vital for the expression of contemporary themes.

There is, however, a good deal of poetically conceived symbolism in the prose drama, often used to extend and heighten a commonplace or sordid action. Robert Sherwood, in The Petrified Forest (1935), for example, successfully implies a parallel between the petrified life of the Arizona desert and the spiritual petrefaction of his hero, the over refined, sensitive but futile poet, without actually falling into allegory. Similar effects are often achieved by Clifford Odets, though in the play, Golden Boy (1937), the hero's alternation

between two ways of life, one symbolised by his violin, the other by the boxing ring, has a somewhat contrived air about it. Such virtuosity on the human plane lacks plausibility and the symbolism therefore seems artificial.

Of the younger writers, Tennessee Williams' plays furnish perhaps the best example of this process. Sometimes the symbolism is too nebulous to make its effect outside the written page, as in the little one act play, Moony's Kid Don't Cry (In American Blues, 1948), where we are told that the child's hobby horse 'looks like the very spirit of unlimited freedom and fearless assault', or in The Long Stay Cut Short (1948), where the scene is dominated by a rose bush 'the beauty of which is somehow sinister looking' but whose dramatic significance is never made clear.

Generally, however, Williams' symbolic patterns are clear and forceful, although somewhat tediously repetitive. Like O'Neill he is continually casting his action into Freudian patterns: in one of his fantastic dramas, The Purification (1948), for instance, the power of sex is represented by water: sterility by the dry heat which broods over the trial scene, only ended by a rainburst when the two men have killed themselves in an act of purification. The Rancher sees a vision of Elena, carrying the symbols of what he had found in her, a cactus and a cross trimmed with artificial flowers, while to her brother she appears as Elena of the Springs, the incarnation of fertility, in a white

robe, carrying white flowers.

The contrast between sexual fulfilment and sterility is the dominant motif of most of his plays. In A Streetcar Named Desire, the symbolism is slight, hardly more than symbolic imagery, as when Stanley plays sardonically on Blanche's name, 'Sister Blanche is no lily', or when Blanche describes the relationship between Stella and Stanley as the 'rattle-trap street-car that bangs through the quarter'. It is on such a street-car, of course, that Blanche herself has travelled to her sister's home in the ironically named 'Elysian Fields': this point is strongly made at the beginning. A more potent symbol is the memory of the ancestral house, 'Belle Rêve', the loss of which assists in bringing about a development in the plot, while also conveying symbolically the plight of a woman who lives by dreams; she says pitifully that she and Stella 'have to go on without Belle Rêve to protect us'. Blanche's love of pretty things and flowers, which separates her from the brutal Stanley and his friends, is given slight symbolic emphasis in the scene in which she confesses her past to Mitch while the sound of a flower seller's voice drifts in through the window, 'Flores para los muertos'.

By touches of this kind, Williams attempts, not altogether successfully, to lift his sordid story out of the mere melodrama into which it might so easily fall. He was more successful in The Glass Menagerie (1945), where the central symbol, the glass

unicorn, is rooted much more firmly in the action than was the symbolism of A Streetcar Named Desire. The glass animals which the sensitive, crippled Laura collects clearly symbolise her own nature: like them she is fragile, ethereal and easily broken. When she shows Jim her favourite, the unicorn, he comments that it must be 'lonesome' in a menagerie where all the other animals wear horns, so unconsciously commenting on Laura's own condition. For a moment Laura seems to be released from her dream world as she dances, for the first time in her life, with Jim, and the importance of the occasion to her is emphasised by her reaction when the unicorn is knocked flying and its horn broken off. Now it is 'just like all the other horses', she says; 'Maybe it's a blessing in disguise'. But when Jim tells her that he is engaged to another girl, Laura retreats into her private world again, handing to him the disfigured unicorn as a 'souvenir'.

This symbolism, although so delicate, is remarkably effective on the stage, even when it is not emphasised by the symbolic lighting for which Williams gives instructions in his stage directions.

But like so many American playwrights Williams has a weakness for more spectacular effects. So in Summer and Smoke (1948), where his theme is again a study of sexual aberrations, he abandons the realistic setting of A Streetcar Named Desire for a highly symbolic multiple set, on one side of the stage the house of Alma,ⁱ⁾ representing the inhibited life, on the far side

i) The symbolism of whose name is repeatedly brought out in dialogue.

the doctor's house, dominated by a huge chart of the male anatomy, and in the centre a public drinking fountain in the form of a stone angel, whose hands form the cup from which the water flows. The angel represents, we are told, Eternity. Alma is an angel in whom the spring of life, or sex, has found no outlet. She refuses at first to acknowledge the importance of Buchanan's symbol, the anatomical chart, while he is equally sceptical of the spiritual belief she upholds. By the end of the play their positions are reversed, Buchanan finds that crude sexual indulgence is not enough: Alma finds that she has underestimated the power of sex. Her desperate determination to find some kind of fulfilment, however inferior to her ideal of love, is symbolised in the last scene when she offers one of her sleeping tablets to a strange young man as he takes a drink from the fountain. He accepts the offer with a joking, 'Thanks, angel', and as they go off together, Alma 'faces the stone angel and raises her hand in a sort of valedictory salute'.

This kind of Freudian symbolism, projected into stage settings, is clearly reminiscent of O'Neill's symbolic drama, and illustrates the strength with which this particular tradition has established itself in the American theatre. It might almost be O'Neill rather than Tennessee Williams speaking, in this note on The Glass Menagerie, 'Everyone should know nowadays the unimportance of the photographic in art: that truth, life or reality is an organic thing which the poetic imagination can represent or suggest, in essence, only through transformation,

through changing into other forms than those which were merely present in appearance. These remarks are not meant as a preface only to this particular play. They have to do with the conception of a new, plastic theatre which must take the place of the exhausted theatre of realistic conventions if the theatre is to resume vitality as a part of our culture'.

VI
Conclusion.

To recapitulate, the widespread practice of symbolism in modern drama is a manifestation of that artistic need to synthesize the temporal and eternal, the particular and the universal which is not, of course, confined to modern times but is perhaps more consciously felt today to be one of the artist's greatest problems. The break-down in an universal system of symbols and of a culture which made possible the natural use of poetic techniques has forced the playwright to seek out new methods by which he might satisfy the requirements of dramatic form while at the same time conveying those wider implications and profounder meanings with which all serious art must ultimately be concerned.

That the pressure of the modern realistic convention has been by no means an entirely pernicious influence, these studies have sought to demonstrate. The most distinguished of the playwrights under consideration, Ibsen, Yeats, Shaw, Eliot and O'Neill, have all at some time, in greater or less degree, submitted themselves to the discipline of realistic surfaces, finding in the ensuing struggle between form and content what Yeats called 'The fascination of what's difficult'. That the struggle was a rewarding one is well shown by such plays as The Wild Duck, On Baile's Strand, Heartbreak House, The Family Reunion and Mourning Becomes Electra. None of these could have been written if their authors had not become aware, in some instances by a long process of trial and error, that the strongest

dramatic effects were achieved by an action from which the 'ordinary everyday world' was notaltogether excluded and by characters which stood up to certain fundamental tests of psychological realism.

The very act of submitting to such a discipline helps the playwright to avoid some of the dangers attending on the use of dramatic symbolism. The two chief dangers, as this thesis has attempted to show, are, firstly that the playwright may use symbols as a means of escape into vague, lyrical dream worlds; secondly, that he may force his dramatic action to conform with an abstract, theoretical pattern of symbols. The weakness of both kinds is that they forfeit the special advantages of dramatic form which is powerful in proportion to the number of points at which it touches the life experienced by the audience in the theatre.

The first kind of symbolism, which we have seen operating in the drama of Maeterlinck and the early plays of Yeats, exploits the emotional associations of symbols in the manner of a lyric poem rather than in that of a play. The potentialities of dramatic characters in action are not fully explored; the audience is served with an appetiser instead of a full meal. The problem of combining the everyday with the eternal is not being faced at all, with the result that the playwright only too easily slips into a subjective or esoteric symbolism which can find no adequate outlet in the action.

This kind of symbolism is less common in the twentieth century theatre than the second kind in which the action is forced into a

preconceived symbolic pattern, the intellectual rather than the emotional burden of the symbols being allowed to take first place. The dominant patterns are frequently Freudian or Marxist in character, stemming from the symbolic drama of Strindberg and the German Expressionists: they seem to inspire in the playwrights who employ them an impatience with the traditional methods of revealing character through action. Instead, more direct methods of externalising inner experience are sought, an altogether new emphasis being given to one of the subordinate parts of drama, spectacle, which is used very deliberately for symbolic purposes by playwrights like Strindberg, O'Neill, and O'Casey. It might seem that such a technique is extending the limits of dramatic form, since it does, after all, rely not on extra-dramatic devices, but on the peculiar resources of the theatre; setting, lighting, music and so on. And, in fact, when used with restraint, such visual shorthand does, in my opinion, constitute an extension of form. The loss of verbal imagery which serves so important a function in poetic drama, is to some extent compensated for by symbolic stage pictures and sound effects in the best plays of writers like Strindberg and O'Neill. But once spectacle is elevated from a subordinate to a leading function in the drama, even for the most serious purposes, the playwright is misusing his medium. Stage effects will become obtrusive, setting up a barrier between the audience and that life on the stage in which they should feel they are participating.

The great weakness of the Strindbergian method, particularly in the hands of writers with propagandist intention, is that it tends to dehumanise, substituting symbols for living characters. The attempt to find a short cut to the emotional response of the audience very often by-passes it. Such plays as The Road to Damascus, The Great God Brown, Within the Gates, for all their surface air of modernity, are constructed on the same basic principle as the medieval morality play and suffer from the same lack of emotional complexity.

Certain national tendencies have been observed in these studies of the Irish, English and American drama. In general, it may be said that the Americans have most thoroughly assimilated the Strindbergian technique, using theatrical resources in an arresting and often effective way, but tending all the time toward an allegorical drama in which too much is explained, not enough left to the imagination of the audience.

In contrast, Irish playwrights have a decided talent for investing their action with symbolic overtones while preserving it from the rigidity of allegory. The success with which they employ such a technique is no doubt in part due to that Irish poetic instinct which attracted Edward Martyn toward the late symbolic drama of Ibsen rather than the social plays. But as we have seen, it is also in large part due to the special circumstances of their national life. They were not faced with the same problems which confronted English and American writers: an urban, mechanical civilisation had not yet destroyed, in the

people whom they put into their plays, a sense of the symbolic ritual functioning in everyday life. Nationalist feeling encouraged a response to heroic gestures on the part of the ordinary theatre-goer without which Yeats' legendary plays might have remained comparatively lifeless and artificial. These playwrights were able to draw some of the qualities of genuine myth out of contemporary material, or, conversely, to treat ancient myths as though they still had a contemporary significance. The result is that a large proportion of their drama is permeated with a symbolism which is poetic without being self conscious and consequently undramatic.

In the English theatre, the dominance of the realistic prose convention has given rise to many interesting attempts to circumvent it on the part of playwrights unable to accept its narrow limitations. A good many of these, such as Granville Barker and Galsworthy, have tried to extend the convention by concealing symbols within a realistic action in the manner of Ibsen's social plays. Ibsen had used this technique so brilliantly in the period of Pillars of Society and Ghosts that the majority of his early audiences would have been surprised to learn that there was, in fact, any symbolism present. Few, if any, of his English admirers have been able to attain to this degree of skill: the limitations of a close realistic structure seem to have encouraged a tendency toward over-explicit, undramatic symbolism in English drama rather than the sternly disciplined technique which those same limitations helped Ibsen

to evolve. The minor playwrights who have attempted to substitute a symbolic for a realistic convention have not been notably more successful, much of their symbolism, such as that of Masefield and Abercrombie, remaining on the border line between poetry and drama, while a good deal of it has been confined to drama of very limited scope or appeal, such as the dream plays of Barrie or the religious plays of writers like Williams and Duncan. Yet though there may not have been a wealth of major successes on the same level as those of Shaw and Eliot, there have been minor individual triumphs, while the interest shown in the potentialities of dramatic symbolism throughout the period has helped to prepare for the reaction against the less fruitful forms of prose realism which seems to be in evidence today. English playwrights have on the whole shown commendable caution in their attitude toward the more spectacular symbolic techniques of Strindberg and Maeterlinck. That they have not often been able to achieve the apparent spontaneity of Irish dramatic symbolism must in part at least be attributed to the greater intractability of their material. Shaw and Eliot have, as we have seen, made the most interesting contributions to the evolution of new techniques, the one through an apparently carefree fantasy, the other through a powerful synthesis of the traditional and contemporary.

It is, of course, no accident that the finest results have been achieved by the poets or those possessed of strong poetic feeling. In the first place their poetic instinct impels them toward some form of extra-realistic expression, while

endowing them with that understanding of the imagising process which is necessary for the practice of truly dramatic symbolism. For the dramatic symbol is essentially the projection of an image into the sphere of action and character. And just as the poetic image should ideally produce its effect without holding up the flow of the poem, so should dramatic symbolism produce its similar effects - crystallisation of theme, evocation of mood and so on - without interrupting the flow of real life which the action must seem to suggest.

But unless the poets have grappled with the difficulties inherent in dramatic form, in particular, as we said at the outset, recognising the need to satisfy the audience on as many levels as possible, no amount of poetic sensibility will assist them to project their images into satisfactory dramatic symbols. Of all the playwrights here considered, Ibsen most surely combined poetic and dramatic talents, with the result that he was able to bury his symbols in dramatic action as convincingly as the images in his early lyrics. Shaw and O'Neill were both endowed from the start with strong dramatic talents and a weaker, though undeniable, poetic instinct, while with Yeats and Eliot the position was exactly reversed. But whatever the disposition of their talents, it was only when they acknowledged the claims of 'real life' on the drama that they were able successfully to manipulate dramatic symbolism. By 'real life' is meant, as already suggested, not a painstaking reproduction of realistic detail, but the creation of characters

in whom the audience can recognise a common humanity, characters who have contact not only with the poetic and supernatural worlds but also with that of the ordinary and everyday.

Peer Gynt is such a hero, despite the fantastic situations in which he is placed, and, significantly enough, it was in this play that Ibsen first succeeded in making his symbolism function naturally and dramatically. Given a touch of the common man, a certain waywardness or idiosyncrasy which suggests that they exist independently of their author's ideas, characters may be cast in the fantastic Shavian mould or the heroic mask of Yeats and still be as 'real' as the Noras, Bernicks and Alvings of Ibsen's 'photographic' plays.

Once our belief in his characters has been commanded, the playwright may introduce symbolism into his action without affecting their lifelikeness, provided always that it is the appropriate symbolism for the context. Whether the action of a play be as ritualistic as that in The Family Reunion or as superficially realistic as that in Mourning Becomes Electra, the symbols will only function naturally if they bear that easy, indeed inevitable, relation to the action which in poetry we expect an image to bear to its context. In the austere exaltation of The Family Reunion we can accept as right and natural the living presence of the Eumenides, while in O'Neill's version of the story they must be disguised as symbolic portraits before they become equally convincing in his very different

dramatic world. If the symbol arises naturally out of the action it will be self-explanatory and the characters will be able to react to it without selfconsciousness, but when the relation is ever so slightly wrong, as I believe it is in, for example, The Lady from the Sea and The Cocktail Party, then the playwright will be forced into undramatic explanations, which will make his characters unduly selfconscious and consequently less convincing theatrically.

It is, then, evident that symbolism functions in drama very much as verbal imagery does, requiring a similar combination of poetic and dramatic talents in the playwright before it can seem as natural and unobtrusive as it must be to succeed completely.

It offers to the modern playwright a way out of the dilemma in which he is placed by the break-down of poetic traditions and at its most subtle is capable of extending dramatic form to its farthest limits.

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