

Abstract

This study examines, with special reference to the theme of the spiritual progress towards Reality, some of the directions in which dramatic form has been developed during the last hundred years.

The Introduction specifies the elements which I consider essential to dramatic form, and explains what is meant by the term "experience" and how the selection of material has been made.

Experiments in Form

The first part of the thesis considers in detail some of the experiments which religious experience can be translated into dramatic form.

in

Modern Symbolist Drama

The second part of the thesis, in which the presentation of such experiments in dramatic form is seen, is divided into three chapters. Chapter 1, to involve a number of difficulties; the attempted solution of these by development of new techniques is examined.

Thesis submitted

by

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for the Degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

This study examines, with special reference to the theme of the spiritual progress towards Reality, some of the directions in which dramatic form has been developed during the last hundred years.

The Introduction specifies the elements which I consider essential to dramatic form, and explains what is meant by the word 'symbolist' and how the selection of material has been made.

The first part of the thesis considers in detail some of the methods by which religious experience can be translated into dramatic terms. The traditional presentation of such experience through recognizable, individual characters is seen, in Chapter 1, to involve a number of difficulties; the attempted solution of these by development of new techniques is examined in two subsequent chapters under the general headings of allegory and dream-play.

One aspect of the theme of spiritual progress is found to be particularly intractable as dramatic material and this, the 'moment of vision', is the subject of Chapter 4, where its treatment in the novel is also briefly considered. The literary movement of Symbolism was based on a belief in this state as a means of making contact with a spiritual Reality and in the ultimate aim of art being to create such an experience. In the light of this, Part II examines the dramatic theory and practice

of two symbolist writers who attempted to perfect dramatic form in order to evoke a spiritual response.

The Conclusion summarizes the most notable ways in which the symbolist experiments have modified the general conception of dramatic form.

Introduction.

NOTE

Quotations from the French are given in the original; for plays in other languages recognized translations are used.

Dates in the text are approximate dates of completion of plays, and in the footnotes, of the editions consulted.

Since most of the plays are not divided into Acts and Scenes, page references only are given in all cases.

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Introduction

Contents

Il est certain que le domaine de l'âme s'étend chaque jour davantage. Elle est bien plus près de notre être visible et prend à tous nos actes une part plus grande qu'il y a deux ou trois siècles.

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1. M. Maeterlinck, 'Le Réveil de l'âme', Le Trésor des Humbles, 1896, p.29

Introduction

Il est certain que le domaine de l'âme s'étend chaque jour davantage. Elle est bien plus près de notre être visible et prend à tous nos actes une part bien plus grande qu'il y a deux ou trois siècles.¹

Literary **form** may be described in its widest sense as the shape in which the author's vision is cast, for the purposes of criticism separable from the basic idea but inevitably conditioned by it and often so completely fused with it that the two are indistinguishable. The boundaries of the literary genres are only loosely defined, those of drama being particularly flexible, but there are certain fundamental characteristics of each form by which it is possible to make a general classification. Although drama may sometimes verge on the dramatic poem or even on the novel, there are definite elements which a work of art must have if it is to be a play and not some other literary piece.

What then are the fundamental characteristics of dramatic form as we know it? Drama may be briefly described as a representation, by living actors before an audience, of a significant aspect of human experience, using words as the medium of communication. Even if a play is written only for the 'theatre of the mind', its structure must still be

1. M. Maeterlinck, 'Le Réveil de l'Âme', Le Trésor des Humbles, 1896, p.29

governed by conditions imposed by the physical presence of actors and the response evoked from an audience, for essential to drama is the direct visual presentation of action, as opposed to the narration of novel and epic. Action implies personal agents with distinctive qualities of character and thought, and usually also that conflict in which lies the peculiar dramatic intensity. Drama is distinguished from mime and dance by the use of the spoken word, with gesture and movements only as supporting elements, and since this is in part a visual art, spectacle is also a basic element, though this may mean only the sight of the actors and their movements. Action, character, words and spectacle are, in short, the four essential requirements of drama and each must be present in some measure in every play.

Dramatic experiment involves new conceptions of the proportion of the basic parts within the whole and of the different emphasis that can be placed on these and on subsidiary elements. These conceptions appear to be inevitably affected by the spirit of the age in which the drama is written, as more obviously they are by the technical conditions of the theatres of the time. Elizabethan drama, for example, clearly reflects the vigour and richness of that age, while Restoration comedy points to the polished artificiality of its period. If dramatists do not produce the new synthesis of basic elements to reflect and fit the needs of the new age, the drama is a sterile and lifeless thing. The products

of the mid-nineteenth century English dramatists illustrate this point, their work being, in the serious field, attempted imitation of Shakespeare, and in the lighter, feeble reflection of the French 'salon' comedy. When the impetus to new efforts came, principally from Ibsen, two lines of development were discernible and dramatic forms were created which reflect aspects of the modern period as clearly as do the contemporary forms in architecture, music and painting.

The naturalist drama, of faithfully observed detail in action, setting and characterization, is the expression of a self-conscious, analytical age, and though the extreme attempt at photographic reproduction of 'the slice of life' was soon abandoned as the impossibility it was, its influence is still felt in the realistic social problem play and the 'proletarian' drama of today. This kind of drama, with its emphasis on man and his society, is an indication of the spiritual condition of an age in which the old religious order has to a great extent been overthrown and man has become his own god. Whatever profound comments on important ideas these plays make, they make them always, within certain human limitations, with eyes turned solely to this world and its situations.

The non-realist or symbolist drama, on the other hand, often reflects the search for a deeper meaning in life. Many fundamentally religious people, deprived of a firm orthodox creed by the spiritual chaos of the society in which they live, yet knowing from personal experience that there is a reality

beyond that perceived by the senses, have looked into themselves and attempted to express their own inner vision and to relate this to the world that science has documented. This inward-turning has produced some of the most startling formal developments in both novel and drama.

Symbolist drama is a term loosely applied in modern criticism, referring in its widest sense to all non-realist plays and in its strictest sense to those plays which reflect the beliefs of 'symbolisme'. It is according to the latter definition that the selection of material for this study has been made, in the belief that the beginnings of the modern tendency towards a conscious spiritualization of literature may be traced to the French 'symbolistes' of the late nineteenth century. By Baudelaire and later by Mallarmé and his group was expounded the belief in the existence of a more meaningful world behind that of appearances, a world of which ours is but the symbol, and in the possibility of art leading man to a direct contact with this spiritual reality, which is central to much modern literature.

The influence of French 'symbolisme' on modern drama has perhaps been under-estimated, for although this was predominantly a poetic movement, its adherents, stimulated by Wagner's insistence on drama as a composite art-form, made dramatic theory a focal point of discussion. In Maeterlinck and Verhaeren they could claim two successful dramatists, and in

Villiers de L'Isle Adam's Axel (1872) they had a play which seemed to express the essence of the symbolist ideal, in its renunciation of the external world for spiritual experience alone. Yeats's attitude to this play is illuminating and probably reflects that of the French poets:-

It did not move me because I thought it a great masterpiece, but because it seemed part of a religious rite, the ceremony perhaps of some secret Order wherein my generation had been initiated.¹

Maeterlinck declared that he owed all his literary work to the influence of Villiers's plays and discussions, and there was a certain amount of truth in Remy de Gourmont's histrionic statement that,

Villiers de l'Isle Adam has opened the doors of the unknown with a crash and a generation has gone through them to the Infinite.²

If Villiers' influence in discussion and writing was considerable, that of Arthur Symons was more extensive, for it was largely through this one man that symbolist doctrines were familiarized in England. It was by Symons that Yeats was personally introduced to Mallarmé and his circle, and by his books that Eliot's attention was drawn to writers whom he acknowledges to have affected the course of his literary development.

1. Preface to Axel, translated by H.F.R. Finberg, 1925

2. Quoted by Yeats, op. cit. p. 8.

Symbolist drama is then, according to my definition, a kind of religious drama, but one in most cases unrelated to any orthodox religious belief. One might justifiably call it pure religious drama, for it is concerned with the essential religious experience, the response of the human soul to a spiritual reality.

The difficulty inherent in this subject is that it centres on a belief in a direct contact with Reality in a moment of spiritual insight in which all conflicts are resolved, an indescribable experience incommunicable except to those who have known it themselves. Eliot is probably the writer who has most nearly defined this 'point of intersection of the timeless with time',

the unattended
Moment, the moment in and out of time,
The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
While the music lasts.

The moments of happiness - not the sense of well-being,
Fruition, fulfilment, security or affection,
Or even a very good dinner, but the sudden illumination.
We had the experience but missed the meaning,
And approach to the meaning restores the experience
In a different form, beyond any meaning
We can assign to happiness.¹

No direct description of this experience is possible in any form of art, and one of the most interesting aspects of

1. 'The Dry Salvages', Four Quartets, 1944, pp.32-33 and p.28

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symbolist drama is the attempt to make the movement of vision central to a dramatic theme. The intractability of the material has produced altered conceptions of the part in drama of the basic characteristics - action, character, speech and spectacle - and of the importance of subsidiary elements. Some dramatists have maintained that the result of their experiments was a new form of drama - Maeterlinck, Strindberg and Yeats for example made this claim - but in many cases the experiment was simply a renovation of existing forms.

The symbolist belief in the existence of a spiritual reality with which man can make direct contact is reflected in the drama in two principal ways. Certain dramatists, identifying the moment of spiritual vision with the ultimate aesthetic response, have directed their efforts to the production of a pure art-form designed to lead an audience to this direct contact, and their work is supported by a good deal of non-dramatic writing in which they outline their aims; the outstanding experiments in this kind will be considered in Part II. Here the emphasis is on structure and technique, but the more usual reflection of symbolist belief is in the choice of the theme of man's search for spiritual meaning and his response to ultimate reality. In Part I examples are chosen to illustrate three general methods of presenting this theme, firstly the direct and more traditional method of showing characters in their progress towards spiritual illumination and salvation, making the spiritual voyage of discovery,

secondly, the development of the journey-image into an allegorical play and thirdly, the method of looking within the self and attempting to project individual spiritual experience into stylized figures. These obviously cannot be strict groupings, (a dream-play, for example, might have definite allegorical tendencies), but in each case the most outstanding feature of the experiment determines its place in the scheme.

Since the aim of this study is to examine methods of treating a particular theme, there has been no attempt to consider all the plays of each writer, particularly as some dramatists, notably Ibsen, Hauptmann and Strindberg, have experimented both with symbolist drama and with realistic plays concerned with society and its problems. The material is not presented chronologically, except where there are discernible influences, for my purpose is not to trace the history of the symbolist movement in drama but to see, from certain representative examples, in what directions dramatic form has been developed in order to express a theme indicative of the spiritual atmosphere of the modern age.

Chapter I

The Theatre of Character.

PART ONE.

At first sight, the most obvious way of presenting the theme of spiritual discovery and progress seems to be through a character, or a number of characters, absorbed by spiritual passion in the way that, for example, Othello is obsessed by a jealousy that

Affairs are now soul size
The enterprise
Is exploration into God.

(Christopher Fry)

a great difficulty is experience in this kind of

difference between a passion such as jealousy and the fire of one consumed with longing for a spiritual ideal. For where passions such as jealousy, hate, love, and ambition necessarily involve other people and are directed towards them, thus being well-suited to dramatic treatment, the spiritual passion is a purely individual desire for someone or something supernatural. Conflicts with other people, and outward actions, are therefore only by-products of a wholly inward experience. The real conflicts and passions are all worked out within the mind or spirit; the question is, is there any way of presenting these convincingly in dramatic form, or, in other words, is drama a suitable medium for this kind of expression?

Success will surely depend on the degree to which the audience is made to identify itself with the character, and stress will be on methods of presenting a convincing and sympathetic

Chapter I

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At first sight, the most obvious way of presenting the theme of spiritual discovery and progress seems to be through a character, or a number of characters, absorbed by spiritual passion in the way that, for example, Othello is obsessed by a jealousy that determines the outcome of the play. But there is a great difficulty in the treatment of a purely spiritual experience in this (kind of) traditional way, and it lies in the difference between a passion such as jealousy and the fire of one consumed with longing for a spiritual ideal. For where passions such as jealousy, hate, love, and ambition necessarily involve other people and are directed towards them, thus being well-suited to dramatic treatment, the spiritual passion is a purely individual desire for someone or something supernatural. Conflicts with other people, and outward actions, are therefore only by-products of a wholly inward experience. The real conflicts and passions are all worked out within the mind or spirit; the question is, is there any way of presenting these convincingly in dramatic form, or, in other words, is drama a suitable medium for this kind of expression?

Success will surely depend on the degree to which the audience is made to identify itself with the character, and stress will be on methods of presenting a convincing and sympathetic

person. The plays selected as examples illustrate different types of central character, from those with whom spiritual experience is naturally connected, the priests and the artists, to ordinary men in the street, recognizably modern characters.

Equally important is the necessity for a dramatically forceful presentation of the inner experience in outward terms. The fact that such experience is so subtle, and impossible to describe exactly, means that various techniques of suggestion must be developed. Symbolism, visual and oral, is a way of adding depth and significance to the picture given; much weight is thrown on discussion; dialogue has rich implications, and heightening is found to be best achieved by the suggestive powers of poetry.

as against the more familiar modern titles of the dramatic, generalizing kind - The Pillars of Society, Look Back in Anger.

grand is in many senses an Aristotelian tragic hero. He is a man like ourselves but of a noble and powerful nature; the satirical portraits of the village dignitaries serve to show how far he towers above them in moral and spiritual strength. The errors leading to his death, and the deaths of all his family, are the result of a flaw in his spiritual

Translated by F. E. Garrett, Everyman Edition, 1915.

Ibsen's Brand (1865)¹ is the study of a character's progress towards enlightenment, his pursuit of a spiritual ideal with its inevitable conflicts with life. This theme is explored through a fully rounded central character, whose problems arise from the peculiarities of his own personality and yet have a universal significance. Brand belongs, as do so few modern plays, to that type of drama where the interest centres on a highly individual character, a hero, a man in some way or other removed to a loftier position than that occupied by the general run of men. The title indicates its affinities in this respect with Macbeth, Hamlet, Dr. Faustus, Samson Agonistes, as against the more familiar modern titles of the symbolic, generalizing kind - The Pillars of Society, Back to Methuselah, Look Back in Anger.

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vision, which is so fully the expression of his character. The character and vision are explored by a variety of methods, and there is no event, character or speech in the whole play which does not have some bearing on this central theme.

The first act sets Brand's character and the nature of his idealism clearly before us, and achieves this by an unusual method in which for the whole of the act there is no forward-moving action, either external or internal. Brand is contrasted with three different types of people, representing attitudes to which he is opposed; we are, as it were, shown a set of pictures, with a commentary on each from Brand, who in his final soliloquy sums up what we have seen and defines his own mission in relation to it:-

Which stumbling spirit seems to roam
Most wildly lost to peace and home?
The giddy mind that flaunts a wreath
While precipices yawn beneath.
The sluggish mind that crawls along
With use and custom, right or wrong.
The mind distraught, whose dizzying flight
Makes foul seem fair and wrong seem right?
On, to the battle! Fierce defiance
To this unholy Triple Alliance.¹

Much of Brand's character is revealed in the short first episode where he is contrasted to the ordinary people among whom he is to work out his ideal; when his comrades fail before the dangers of a mountain journey, Brand's fanatical strength of will and lack of sympathy with others' short-

1. p.36.

comings are clearly indicated. The bleakness in both his character and creed is stressed when he is confronted by the warmth and gaiety of the young lovers, who bring with them the only glimpse of sunshine in the play. Einar refers to Brand as an 'icicle' and when the carefree mood has been driven away, Agnes says 'How cold the wind is!'

Contrasting characters are used throughout the play to point to Brand's strength and weaknesses. The function of the dignitaries in this respect has already been noted, while Agnes and the Doctor both illustrate aspects of Brand's failure by living a truth that he learns only in his last moment. The function of some of the characters is to reflect certain aspects of Brand's nature by an exaggeration that amounts at times to caricature. The obvious example is the parody of his intolerance and narrowness in the converted Einar, while the Mother with her fanatical love of money shows that Brand's will-power and obstinacy is a case of 'like mother, like son'. So too the mad Gerd, with her ravings of an ice-church, reflects Brand's adherence to a comfortless creed, her mental instability appearing as an exaggeration of his spiritual flaws. Gerd's relationship to Brand, revealed by the Sheriff in the fourth act, not only contributes to the theme of heredity and guilt, but also stresses this likeness to him. Thus the main characters have a definitory function in relation to Brand, though all, with the exception of Einar, are ~~fully rounded~~ credible individuals.

The first act illustrates another method by which Brand's character is presented, the method of symbolism. Weather imagery is much used, for Brand's character has been conditioned by an upbringing in a bleak northern atmosphere where one 'saw no sun at all, From fall of leaf till cuckoo-call.' It is introduced as a poetic device, with no suggestion of realism, for when Agnes and Einar appear the scene changes from a winter's storm to a clear summer morning. The light image is connected with Agnes throughout, but though Brand calls 'Light, Agnes! If you can, bring light!', she cannot find it for him but only for herself. Not until the end, when Brand acknowledge his need for warmth and tenderness, does the thaw begin:-

O, I yearn in all this blindness
 Yearn for light, and sun, and kindness;
 Sacred peace, instead of strife,
 Summer in my wintry life! ¹

Weather is, incidentally, important to the action - in the storm that results in Agnes' joining Brand and their remaining in the village, in the harsh winter^s, causing the death of their son, and in the avalanche that brings Brand's own death.

Closely connected to this is the landscape symbolism of mountain, valley and fjord. Brand is drawn to the mountain-tops, a location that Ibsen in an early poem On the Heights (1859) established as fitting for the poet, or man of ~~terrified~~ ^{Keen} sensibility. A clear distinction is maintained

1. p.221.

between the valley as the area of outward action and the mountain as the setting for meditation. The ice-church up in the mountains is an appropriate symbol for what Brand offers as alternative to worship in the ramshackle village church, for it has not only Brand's bleakness but also his majestic grandeur.

It is partly by direct explanation and partly through these same symbols that the nature of Brand's ideal is made clear in the first act. The journey over the snow-field illustrates Brand's attitude to his spiritual voyage; while the peasants grope in mist and darkness, as the ordinary men do throughout the play, Brand alone is prepared to find a way out and with a ruthless determination gain his objective. He goes straight-forward, ignoring human frailty, walking over thin ice, though the peasants warn him that 'that's more than a man can.' The journey image is maintained through the play in the repeated 'road' symbol - 'Choose! You stand at the parting ways!'

At the end of Act I, Brand's character is fully drawn and the nature of his ideal suggested; the remaining scenes define the vision in terms of action, exploring its relation to ordinary life in a fairly realistic movement, interspersed with more imaginative episodes. Every event in the play either defines or is the direct result of Brand's idealism; thus the second act translates the mission into a deed of mercy, while the third and fourth acts show the more unfavourable aspects, the imposing of the ideal on mother, son and

wife, with no leniency to himself or others. There is a great deal of tense dramatic conflict in this study of the relation between life and ideals, with a series of bitter sacrifices, and tragic irony in Brand's misinterpretation of the Doctor's advice.

Although much of Brand's spiritual progress is presented in this realistic way, with each of his actions committing him more closely to the doctrine of the will, there are attempts also to explore his spiritual experience directly, that is to say, by projecting on to the stage his unspoken thoughts and inner vision. The clearest examples of this are in the last act where Brand, having been stoned by the mob and obviously in a state of near collapse, is subject to hallucinations. As he lies in the snow, he is overcome by despair and it seems as if an unseen choir sings of his failure:-

Thou thine all hast dissipated;
Still He finds it nothing worth;-¹
Thou for earth-life wast created!

He longs for the 'days of peace and days of rest' that he might have had with Agnes if he had sacrificed his ideal; this temptation to want the comfortable life is offered to him by the figure of a woman resembling Agnes. In this encounter he is tempted to deny that his vision was worthwhile, and to withdraw all his claims, but he stands firm and

1. p.212.

rejects the way of compromise. Only in the moment of death does he recognize where his failing has been and the knowledge comes to him as a voice out of the avalanche, crying 'God is Love!'

There are other parts of the play where it seems as if actual characters are only figures of Brand's imagination. At his own moment of choice, when he must sacrifice either his mission or the life of his son, one of the villagers appears, accusing him of abandoning his charge:-

'Tis you that dragged me from the deep;
Now, see if you dare let me slip.'

Agnes appears to be unaware of this person's presence, taking no part in the conversation and looking in terror at Brand's face, all of which suggests that the man is intended to be a spokesman of the inner conflict. Similarly in the next section, Agnes seems not to notice Gerd's arrival nor her suggestion that Brand is making an idol of his son and by his departure making way for forces of evil.

Gerd is altogether a complex character; sometimes simply the village idiot-girl, sometimes a figure of Brand's imagination, sometimes charged with symbolic significance, she is important to the minor themes of guilt and heredity and of social improvement, and, moreover, is involved in the climactic episodes of the play. In the final scene, she again voices Brand's innermost thoughts, but as a definite person whom the

Dean and Sheriff have watched following him and on whom they have commented, 'Well, he and she are just a pair'. In fact it is Gerd who points out Brand's great flaw by putting into words what he had himself **been** only half-conscious of:-

Gerd. Thou art greatest, first of men!
Brand In my madness half I thought it.¹

Gerd's identification of Brand with Christ is the culmination of a series of Biblical parallels and references, which has gradually made clear to the audience the flaw in this philosophy of the will. Brand walking on the ice, braving the stormy fjord, abandoning his mother, leading his five thousand, invited an inevitable comparison, and in that comparison he was found to lack the one thing essential to the Christian life - the love and compassion he was to know of only at his death. He has attempted 'more than a man can', has set up his will as the will of God and has relied on it for his strength and support. Only by that destruction of self-will which all mystics know can salvation be achieved; in the symbolic destruction of the ice-church, the falcon, which Gerd has mentioned each time that Brand showed signs of compassion, is seen to be as 'white as any dove', and enlightenment comes in the knowledge that the will of God is love.

The life of love is illustrated in the play by Agnes, whose spiritual progress offers contrast and complement to Brand's. Where his is an intellectually conceived ideal,

1. p.219.

hers is an intuitive vision, giving her strength and insight. Brand describes her as she experiences this vision:-

'Tis as though some voices sung
 To her ear from the void air ...
 Listening sat she in the boat
 As **the** weltering waves it smote;
 Listening to the thwart she clung;
 Listening, from her forehead clear
 Shook the wild sea spray that glistened...
 'Tis as if the sense **to** hear
 Changed, and with her eyes she listened!"

This vision comes at a crucial point in the action, for it is as a direct result of it that Brand remains in the village. It is however not only dramatically appropriate but also conveys very suggestively the quality of this particular experience. Agnes makes various attempts at describing the indescribable, speaking first of a great and beautiful world waiting to be created, and then continuing:-

Within
 Smoulder powers, I feel them glow:
 I can feel floods overflow,
 I can see a dawn **begin!**
 For the heart extends its bounds,
 Grows a mighty world and great, -
 And again the voice resounds:
This the world thou shalt create! -
 All the thoughts that shall be thought.
 All the deeds that shall be wrought,
 Breathe, awake, no more lie dumb
 As the hour of birth were come;
 And I see not, yet divine,
 A great Presence, from above
 Looking down on me and mine
 Full of sorrow and of love.²

This is Agnes' moment of vision, and she does not speak in such a way again until her final triumph of sacrifice and

1. p.55.

2. p. 55-6.

love when she uses similar terms to describe her sense of liberation. It is one of the most suggestive recreations of the moment of vision in modern drama, seeming all the more effective since it is a focal point of the plot and not simply included for its own sake. It is an attempt to show a character actually in the experience, as in The Family Reunion, not merely describing something that happened elsewhere, as, for example, Cuthman does in Fry's The Boy with a Cart or as Brand himself describes an ecstasy felt in the depths of loving sorrow for his child:-

What was it, if it was not prayer?
 What was that sweet, ecstatic swoon
 That music wafted through the air
 As of some far-off melody
 To which my rapt soul went in tune?
 Prayed I? and was I soothed thereby?
 Talked I with God?¹

Thus it is by a variety of techniques, including direct explanation, symbolism, external action and thought-projection, that the spiritual experience of a life-like and sympathetic central character is conveyed. For Brand, in spite of the hard and bleak quality in him, is a sympathetic and admirable person; one cannot but be moved by the power and grandeur of his single-mindedness and the nobility of his final submission. It is because one admires him and feels him to be a 'real' character that one accepts and shares his experience, as one does with any great tragic hero. The fact that a secondary

1. p.136.

2. Surge in the Cathedral, 4th Edition, 1938, p.94.

character, stimulated by his ideal and through love of him, also achieves enlightenment helps to universalize the experience and, incidentally, provides an interesting comparison with a later experiment along similar lines. For Eliot in Murder in the Cathedral (1935) offers an original form of spiritual drama in which there are several levels of religious experience and in which the main movement towards enlightenment takes place not in the central figure, but in the group of spectators forming the Chorus.

If we ask where the truly dramatic interest of Murder in the Cathedral lies we cannot say that it is Thomas Becket, in any movement of his life or mind, or even in his death. 'A man comes home, foreseeing that he will be killed, and he is killed,'¹ - this is Eliot's summary of the outward action, and it is full enough. What is more, the potential mental conflicts of this action are largely undeveloped; like Brand, Becket is tempted in his 'strife with shadows' to long for ways of life that he could have had by abandoning his ideal, but there is in fact very little strife: - the first temptation comes 'twenty years too late', the second is almost 'forgotten' and the third is 'expected'. Even the subtle and startling fourth temptation does not occupy Becket for long:-

Now is my way clear, now is the meaning plain;
Temptation shall not come in this kind again.²

1. 'Poetry and Drama', On Poetry and Poets, 1957, p.80.
2. Murder in the Cathedral, 4th Edition, 1938, p.44.

Becket is indeed, as the Chorus says early in the play, 'secure and assured of [his] fate, unaffrayed among the shades.' After this there is no dramatic conflict at all in Becket's mind, nor can there be since his 'whole being gives entire consent' to the course of events.

The murder, for all its dramatic possibilities, is not presented as a tragic event. The audience knows the outcome and has been forewarned that,

For a little time the hungry hawk
Will only soar and hover, circling lower
Waiting excuse, pretence, opportunity¹
End will be simple, sudden, God-given.

This neglect of the story's dramatic possibilities is quite deliberate and is related to the fact that Becket's character is undeveloped and almost stylized. Becket is a representative figure; his story is chosen as framework because of his association with the cathedral for which the play was written, but the treatment of him suggests that any other martyr figure would have served Eliot's purpose.

One idea central to the play, and stressed in the image of the turning wheel and the references to the pattern of destiny, is the recurrence of events and experiences:-

from generation to generation
The same things happen again and again.²

Becket's function is to represent the eternal martyr and saint, the one who in any generation witnesses to the existence of a

1. p.23

2. p.24

greater reality,

who has become the instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, and who no longer desires anything for himself.¹

The reason for the Knights' direct address to the twentieth century audience is in part to suggest the possibilities of such experience in our own day. But it is in the constant parallels to the life of Christ that Becket's function as representative figure is made most clear. Becket's ride to Canterbury is unmistakably likened to Christ's entry to Jerusalem: - the people,

receive him with scenes of frenzied enthusiasm
Lining the road and throwing down their capes,
Strewing the way with leaves and late flowers of the
season.²

The temptations, Becket's declaration before his own death, 'Now is the triumph of the Cross', the sermon relating the sufferings and witness of the martyrs to the Passion, and the many verbal echoes of the New Testament are as explicit as the similar references in Brand, but they are introduced for an entirely different reason. Ibsen used them to point to a flaw in an individual character, while Eliot draws on them to stress symbolic significance.

Becket dominates the play, even when he is not on the scene, but as an embodiment of an idea rather than as a human being. He is, as far as dramatic form will allow, as much a personified

1. p.49

2. p.15

symbol of the spiritual vision as is the veiled sister in Ash Wednesday. The really dramatic action of the play lies in the movement of the Chorus towards acceptance of evil and knowledge of good; in this respect, the original title, Fear in the Way, though less arresting than the final one, points more clearly to the central theme. The way is the spiritual voyage of discovery, as throughout Eliot's poetry, and it is the women of Canterbury who are afraid, - never for one moment does Becket show any sign of fear.

In the final Chorus, the stages of the way to the 'blessings of God' are summarized:- 'the loneliness of the night of God, the surrender required, the deprivation inflicted',¹ the very stages by which the women have progressed from their initial fear and desire to remain as they were, 'living and partly living', to the 'joyful consummation', a conclusion revealing the irony in the Chorus' early statement that,

For us, the poor, there is no action,
But only to wait and to witness.

In this hymn of praise also, the Chorus acknowledges itself as 'type of the common man', and its journey is the way of every man towards the revelation of reality, a revelation clothed for the purposes of this play in terms of Becket's martyrdom.

At its first appearance the Chorus expresses its awareness of the compulsion towards this experience - 'we are forced to

bear witness'. The images suggest spiritual barrenness, 'a waste of water and mud', but there is now a feeling that something is about to happen - 'destiny awaits for the coming' - the coming of the Archbishop, the coming of Christ ('Shall the Son of Man be born again in the litter of scorn,'), the coming revelation. In Ash Wednesday's terms, 'This is the time of tension between dying and birth.' But there is a pull back towards the safe anonymity of everyday existence - 'Leave us to perish in quiet', 'We do not wish anything to happen', and a great fear, 'a fear like birth and death', a fear that develops into despair:-

What is the sickly smell, the vapour? ...
Sweet and ~~do~~ying through the dark air
Falls the stifling sense of despair,

as in Ash Wednesday, -

The same shape twisted on the banister
Under the vapour in the fetid air.¹

Here ^{begins} ~~being~~ 'the loneliness of the night of God' - 'God is leaving us, God is leaving us, more pang, more pain than birth or death', and there is no sign of the Spring - 'not a stir, not a shoot, not a breath'.

Only when the Chorus has been able to accept suffering and evil in all things is it possible for it to make 'the surrender required':-

1. III, Ash Wednesday, 1930, p.18

By the final utter uttermost death of spirit,
By the final ecstasy of waste and shame.¹

The Chorus has taken its 'share of the eternal burden', but before the moment of glory the deprivation is inflicted:-

The horror of the effortless journey, to the empty land
Which is no land, only emptiness, absence, the Void.²

The death to self involves the loss of personal fear and the acceptance of responsibility for the 'instant eternity of evil and wrong'. The Chorus knows, as did the wise men in Journey of the Magi, that it can never return to the 'soft quiet seasons', but the cry for purification develops into a hymn of praise for the revelation, - 'Thy glory is declared even in that which denies thee'.

This is true 'drama of the soul', in which the function of outward event is simply to stimulate the inner spiritual progress. If the outward action is relatively unimportant, so to a greater degree is character development. There is no attempt to create interest in any of the characters as individuals; we have seen that Becket is hardly more than a stylized figure; the priests are a kind of reasoning extension of the Chorus, and the Knights simply represent a set of attitudes. The only characters with whom we can identify ourselves are the women of Canterbury, not in any sense of their being individuals, but as having recognizable human emotions and responses. In identifying ourselves with the Chorus, we share the voyage

1. p.68

2. p.71

of discovery, its dramatic conflicts and sudden illumination. The process of identification is achieved solely by the emotional power of the verse, with its choric rhythms, echoes of the liturgy and vivid, sensuous imagery.

Eliot has attempted, through his Chorus and by the use of symbolism and certain technical devices, to point to the play's relevance to twentieth century life. This suggested a challenge: could not this spiritual theme be made even clearer to the modern audience both by creating 'characters of our own time living in our own world' and by adapting theatrical forms with which it was familiar? Thus in Eliot's three 'middle' plays, The Family Reunion (1939), The Cocktail Party (1949), and The Confidential Clerk (1953)², we have no historical saint but an ordinary landowner, society woman and secretary of our own time, and in place of the obviously 'religious' play, based on the form of Greek drama, something which appears to be a modern comedy of manners, with a box-office title, mystery 'plot', and a good deal of theatrically effective humour.

All the plays deal with the same basic theme of spiritual awakening and the working out of one's salvation in terms of daily life; the specifically Christian implications of Murder in the Cathedral giving way to psychology, with only the faintest references to anything 'religious'; in each a central character, - Harry, Celia, Colby - chooses Becket's way of strict devotion to a spiritual ideal, while subsidiary characters with varying

degrees of awareness illustrate other possible and necessary reconciliations to ordinary life. The difference between the plays is not one of idea or outlook but of varied emphasis and of experiment with dramatic techniques for a more effective statement.

Helen Gardner has pointed out¹ that there are three different dramas in The Family Reunion, Amy's drama, indicated by the title but never in fact played, the aunts' and uncles' drama of 'detection, of crime and punishment', and the central drama of Harry's spiritual movement, the only one to be completely worked out.

Harry returns to his family home after eight years' absence, but this is the only move he makes in the drama his mother prepared for him:-

Harry is to take command at Wishwood
And I hope we can contrive his future happiness.
Do not discuss his absence. Please behave only
As if nothing had happened in the last eight years.²

It is precisely this last request that cannot be fulfilled, for a great deal has happened to Harry, not simply as external events but in his own sense of inward movement:-

people to whom nothing has ever happened,³
Cannot understand the unimportance of events.

Amy's insistence on preparations for the future serves

1. The Art of T.S.Eliot, 1949, p.139 ff.

2. The Family Reunion, 1939, p.21

3. I bid. p.28.

only to heighten Harry's preoccupation with the past, for it is by understanding the relation of his own identity to certain facts about the past that he comes to know himself and be freed from the sense of sin and guilt:-

When the loop in time comes - and it does not come for everybody -
The hidden is revealed, and the spectres show themselves.¹

Harry's spiritual illness is treated in terms of modern psychology as a guilt-complex, just as in The Cocktail Party psychology is half-substituted for religion. Harry is described as a nervous person, suffering 'from what they call a kind of repression', and also 'rather psychic'. His marriage to a similarly unstable woman was the worst thing possible, a woman 'always up and down', 'excited', 'irresponsible', who 'wouldn't leave him out of her sight'; when she is swept overboard in a storm his desire to be rid of her is fulfilled and his relief so great that he becomes obsessed by the idea of actually having killed her himself. It is this guilt which must be removed if he is to find his way in life.

On the psychological level, then, Harry's guilt is exorcised when he sees that his own life is part of a pattern for which he is not responsible and that love is after all possible for him. Briefly, the background is that his parents' marriage was loveless, the mother 'forcing sons on an unwilling father', who plotted to kill her but was prevented by his sister-in-law,

1. The Family Reunion, 1939, p.18.

Agatha. He and Agatha discovered their love for each other in the months before Harry was born and it was by Agatha's intervention that the unborn child was allowed to live:-

I did not want to kill you!
 You to be killed! What were you then, only a thing called
 'life' -
 Something that should have been mine, as I felt then.¹

It was, however, a life in which everything was arranged for the boy by a possessive domineering mother,- 'even the nice things were laid out ready, and the treats were always so carefully prepared', so that when it came to having a wife chosen for him, Harry rebelled, and by an act of defiance committed himself to the same kind of loveless marriage as his parents. His father's murderous wishes are repeated in him, so that the sudden death ~~seems~~ to have been his own deed. Just as Agatha had saved him and made possible his physical birth, so now by helping him to understand the facts and revealing her love, she helps in his spiritual rebirth. The wheel has turned, the pattern is complete, the sin has 'come to consciousness' and so to 'expurgation'.

Thus Harry's journey of self-discovery is described in psychological terms as Colby's in The Confidential Clerk is translated into terms of a search for outward identity. In both cases the result of the acquired knowledge is an abandonment of ordinary life for dedication to the life of the spirit, a

1. Ibid. p.104.

2. Ibid. p.16

3. Ibid. p.19

conclusion pointing back to the deeper implications of the preceding action.

In The Family Reunion the emphasis at the spiritual level is on the value of human relationships in the achievement of vision and the working out of salvation. Without Agatha, Harry would not have been able to find the truth about himself, either on the outward or inner planes. It is through communion with each other, through a complete relation of love and understanding that for both of them vision is achieved; their's is as Harry says, 'a common pursuit of liberation'.

Before Harry's arrival, Agatha is set apart as being more spiritually advanced than the rest of the family: Amy says,

Only Agatha seems to discover some meaning in death
Which I cannot find.¹

and

Agatha means
As a rule, a good deal more than she cares to betray.²

Agatha alone sees the deeper implications in Harry's return to Wishwood, and she is unperturbed by the strange behaviour which the rest of the family have to attribute to tiredness. It is at her encouragement that Harry tries to describe his experiences, and he realizes that Agatha probably has the means of helping him:-

1. Ibid. p. I think I see what you mean,
Dimly, as you once explained the sobbing in the chimney
2. The evil in the dark closet, which they said was not there,

3. Ibid. p.103

1. Ibid. p.16

2. Ibid. p.19

Which they explained away, but you explained them
Or at least, made me cease to be afraid of them.¹

When Harry is next alone with Agatha, confidences come easily and he is unafraid of revealing his fears. He describes the stages of his 'descent into hell', tells of how he had hoped to find peace at Wishwood but now feels that here must be the hidden clue:-

The shadow of something behind our meagre childhood,
Some origin of wretchedness.²

As Agatha fills in the pieces of the puzzle, releasing her own sense of guilt, Harry sees the truth about his obsession. In the shared moment of liberation, in the attainment of a 'different vision', time does not exist; the ecstasy and suffering of the past are gathered into the present moment, - this is 'the loop in time':-

I was not there, you were not there, only our phantasms
And what did not happen is as true as what did happen
Oh my dear, and you walked through the little door
And I ran to meet you in the rose-garden.³

The pursuing fates are no longer evil tormentors, but 'bright angels', powers for good revealed through Agatha, who takes their place and speaks their message:-

Accident is design
And design is accident
In a cloud of unknowing.

-
1. Ibid. p.33
 2. Ibid. p.100
 3. Ibid. p.108

O my child, my curse
 You shall be fulfilled:
 The knot shall be unknotted
 And the crooked made straight.¹

Agatha and Harry are united in a complete spiritual union which time and place will never be able to break:-

Shall we ever meet again?
 And who will meet again? Meeting is for strangers.
 Meeting is for those who do not know each other.²

Here Eliot presents the fulfilled relationship, a union without which the vision could not have been achieved; in The Cocktail Party he explores intimate friendships which seemed to promise completion but were in fact only starting-points, as Mary's momentary contact with Harry was only a beginning. One of the central questions of this play is,

what is the reality
 Of experience between two unreal people?³

In Peter's account of his feelings for Celia, the validity of a one-sided relationship in the spiritual progress is examined. Peter says 'I thought we had a great deal in common and I think she thought so too,' but Celia shows later that he was for her only an ordinary acquaintance, a 'rather conceited' one, to whom she gave no reason to suppose that she cared for him. To Peter, however, this friendship has given glimpses of reality:-

1. Ibid. p.110
2. Ibid. p.111
3. The Cocktail Party, p.42

those moments in which we seemed to share some perception,
 Some feeling, some indefinable experience
 In which we were both unaware of ourselves.
 ... I have been telling you of something real -
 My first experience of reality.¹

The fact that this way is not true for Celia does not destroy
 the reality of the experience for Peter; similarly Celia's
 unreciprocated feeling for Edward is the starting-point of
 her spiritual progress:-

I have thought at moments that the ecstasy is real
 Although those who experience it may have no reality.²

In The Confidential Clerk Eliot develops this further,
 showing two people drawing near to each other, breaking apart
 through a mistake and later realizing the value of this mom-
 entary contact. Colby speaks of the spontaneity of certain
 relationships:-

It can't be done by issuing invitations;
 They would just have to come. And I should not see
 them coming.
 I should not hear the opening of the gate.
 They would simply ... be there suddenly,
 Unexpectedly. Walking down an alley
 I should become aware of someone walking with me.³

It seems as if Colby and Lucasta are to make such a contact,
 and although misunderstanding arises, the experience has
 shown the way to a lasting relationship:-

And perhaps - who knows? -
 We might become more necessary to each other,
 As a brother and a sister, than we could have been
 In any other form of relationship.⁴

1. Ibid. p.41
2. Ibid. p.123
3. The Confidential Clerk, p.54
4. Ibid. p.103

Eliot's interest in the achievement of spiritual vision through personal relationships, a theme much used also by Ibsen¹, suggests a comparison with a very noticeable trend in the recent productions of the commercial theatre, where personal relationships are upheld as the only meaningful and worthwhile aspects of an unstable, lonely and godless world. The central theme of a number of contemporary plays is the attempt to destroy loneliness and establish a true relationship, regardless of social pressure, tragedy often consisting in the succumbing to moral conventions; this partly accounts for the frequent appearance of homosexuality as a dramatic theme, since it offers so obvious a conflict with social morality. A character in Tennessee Williams' The Rose Tattoo, speaking to the representative of the supreme religion of personal relations for which modern man has substituted a purely human relationship, says:-

Father De Leo, you love your people but you don't understand them. They find God in each other. And when they lose each other, they lose God and they're lost. And it's hard to help them.

But Eliot's position, like that of all the ~~symbolists~~ symbolists, is different, since human relationships are upheld, not as an end in themselves, but as a means by which a greater reality can be perceived. So, in The Family Reunion it is something beyond Agatha that Harry must seek, - 'this is not to do with

1. cf. Brand and Agnes, Peer Gynt and Solveig, Solness and Hilde, etc.

Agatha, any more than with the rest of you'; it is only 'a clue, hidden in the obvious place' that he has found through this communion, but there is a definite Being still to be served:-

It is love and terror
Of what waits and wants me, and will not let me fall.¹

Similarly, Celia finds that her search is for something beyond human love - 'I'm frightened by the fear that it is more real than anything I believed in', and admits a sense of failure 'towards someone, or something, outside...' She repeats Agatha's image of the treasure hunt, applying it to her relationship with Edward:-

even if I find my way out of the forest
I shall be left with the inconsolable memory
Of the treasure I went into the forest to find
And never found, and which was not there
And perhaps is not anywhere? But if not anywhere,
Why do I feel guilt, at not having found it?²

The power of The Family Reunion lies almost wholly in the intensity and conviction with which the attainment of a complete relation is conveyed, for there are a number of fatal weaknesses both of dramatic technique and of theme. The failure in the theme is to make convincing the future to which Harry is called, a spiritual future perfectly suggested by Agatha's image of the 'bird sent flying through the purgatorial flame'. The mistake is in the attempt to translate this into

-
1. The Family Reunion, p.115
 2. The Cocktail Party, p.122

positive terms as 'a care over lives of humble people', made worse by the aunts' and uncles' persistence in believing that this is to be the life of a missionary:-

I never said that I was going to be a missionary.
I would explain, but you would none of you believe it;
If you believed it, still you would not understand.
You can't know why I'm going. You have not seen
What I have seen. Oh why should you make it so ridiculous
Just now?¹

There is indeed something rather ridiculous about Harry's departure in his chauffeur-driven car, just as there is something slightly unsatisfactory and unconvincing about the details of Celia's missionary career. The problem is better tackled in The Confidential Clerk, where Eggerson simply suggests that Colby will 'be thinking of reading for orders'.

There are three technical aspects of The Family Reunion that can hardly be described as anything but ridiculous - the attempt to present the Eumenides visually, the use of the aunts and uncles as a stylized Chorus, and, worst of all, the expiatory ritual consisting of a weird procession round a lighted birthday cake by two respectable mature women. It must be noted that these faults appear far worse in production than in reading, and point simply to a lack of theatrical experience. Eliot himself has commented amusingly on his mistake with 'those ill-fated figures, the Furies' and has admitted the mistake with the Chorus which requires characters

1. The Family Reunion, p.125

to speak sometimes as individual types and sometimes collectively.¹ It is the same fault of jarring transition as in Agatha's ritual with Mary.

Little advance in characterization has been made, the only full character being Amy; this results in a loss of emphasis for it is not clear whether the theme is the 'tragedy of the mother or the salvation of the son'. These technical details are dealt with more successfully in the next experiment.

The surface story of The Cocktail Party is more neatly designed than that of the earlier drama for now Eliot 'tried to keep in mind that in a play, from time to time, something should happen';² discussion passages are balanced against quickly moving, amusing small talk, and the spiritual movements towards salvation against the drawing-room comedy interest in illicit love-affairs and a marriage on the rocks. But the surface story is not simply light relief, for it both illustrates and widens the implications of the spiritual theme and is also the means by which the inner action is started; thus, for example, the cocktail party with all its triviality is a contrast to the deep and meaningful world of the spirit, the seemingly shallow 'society' characters prove that appearances can be deceptive, and a marriage in which the partners 'took

1. cf. 'Poetry and Drama' op cit. p.84

2. Ibid. p.85

2. Ibid. p.112 and p.161

each other for granted' becomes the basis of a theme of self-exploration:-

Edward To what does this lead?
Unidentified Guest To finding out
 What you really are. What you really feel.
 What you really are among other people.
 Most of the time we take ourselves for granted,
 As we have to, and live on a little knowledge
 About ourselves as we were.¹

The discovery of self involves acceptance of the kind of life to which one is called, and this play examines the various ways in which vision can be related to ordinary life. In The Family Reunion, this aspect had only been mentioned, by Agatha:-

We must all go, each in his own direction
 You, and I, and Harry.

and her prayer at the end is for

those who depart
 In several directions
 For their own redemption.

Here four people, roughly corresponding in degrees of spiritual awareness to Harry, Agatha and Mary, Colby, Lucasta, Sir Claude and Lady Elizabeth, and even to Becket, the Priest and the Chorus, gain knowledge of themselves and begin to work out their salvation in the light of this knowledge.

Celia is the saint-figure, specifically described as such², and her progress is traced from the moment of spiritual awakening to her death, which like Becket's is relatively

1. The Cocktail Party, p.27

2. Ibid. p.112 and p.161

unimportant, the climax being in the choice of the way:-

That way, which she accepted, led to this death.
And if that is not a happy death, what death is happy.¹

Her spiritual awareness begins when she discovers the truth about her relationship with Edward. She questions the validity of the spiritual reality she had known through him, but cannot believe that it was a false experience:-

You see, I think I really had a vision of something
Though I don't know what it is. I don't want to forget it.
I want to live with it. I would do without everything
Put up with anything, if I might cherish it.²

Like Harry, she is haunted by 'a sense of sin', of failure 'towards someone, or something', but being a more stable person she can explore her situation ^{obj}effectively:-

I don't imagine that I'm being persecuted;
I don't hear any voices, I have no delusions -
Except that the world I live in seems all a delusion!³

In order to atone, she chooses the life of dedication to a spiritual ideal, knowing instinctively that an 'ordinary' life is no longer possible for her. She undergoes in this world 'the process by which the human is transhumanized' and pays 'the highest price in suffering'. On the surface level, her way involves that 'care over lives of humble people' of which Harry spoke, and her death by crucifixion makes the same

1. Ibid. p.161

2. Ibid. p.124

3. Ibid. p.116

2. Ibid. p.104

identification as the Biblical parallels in Murder in the Cathedral.

The secondary characters witness this martyrdom ^{as} and the women of Canterbury witnessed Becket's and it is through them again that Eliot attempts to give a more general significance to the experience. More time is spent on Edward and Lavinia's self-discovery and their reconciliation to everyday life than to Celia's progress, precisely because for the majority of people this is the 'good life':-

They may remember
The vision they have had, but they cease to regret it,
Maintain themselves by the common routine,
Learn to avoid excessive expectation,
Become tolerant of themselves and others,
Giving and taking, in the usual actions
What there is to give and take.¹

They too have to acknowledge sin and bear the burden of guilt, but theirs is no spectacular future - 'the consequence of the Chamberlayne's choice is a cocktail party'², a social round shared now in a spirit of acceptance and mutual tolerance.

Another journey of self-discovery begins at the close of the play when Peter recognizes the truth about his friendship with Celia. Lavinia and Edward have learnt so much that they in their turn can help others:-

This is where you start from.
If you find out now, Peter, things about yourself
That you don't like to face: well, just remember

1. Ibid. p.123

2. Ibid. p.164

That some men have to learn much worse things
 About themselves, and learn them later
 When it's harder to recover, and make a new beginning.¹

Peter's way is to be that of doing well his work in life, even if that work can never be of the highest quality, an idea to be developed at greater length in the next play.

The other group of characters is composed of the 'guardians' whose function it is to direct the seekers and even to manipulate events in order to bring about the 'happenings'. The guardians have proved more of a stumbling-block than any other of Eliot's creations, possibly because he has made his symbolic beings such lively and recognizably contemporary human characters that any spiritual function they fulfil appears incongruous. There seems to me however to be a very skilful blending of the two levels in these figures, ^{better than} ~~showing a great advance~~ ~~on~~ the purely symbolic Eumenides, or the almost completely human Eggerston of the next play.

To make the central guardian of the soul a psychiatrist, with just a suggestion of the priest about him, is an apt comment on modern life, and I feel that in Harcourt-Reilly, Eliot has made his most successful attempt at uniting many levels of significance in a symbolic ~~but~~ credible contemporary figure. The attitude of the other characters towards this man helps to make clear his position and function. As an 'unidentified guest' at a cocktail party, he seems to the host an

1. Ibid. p.158

ideal person on whom to pour out all his troubles - 'its
easier to talk to a person you don't know' - but the conse-
quences of approach to the 'stranger' are more than he bargained
for:-

I knew that all you wanted was the luxury
Of an intimate disclosure to a stranger.
Let me, therefore, remain the stranger.
But let me tell you, that to approach the stranger
Is to invite the unexpected, release a new force,
Or let the genie out of the bottle.
It is to start a train of events
Beyond your control.¹

The sense of being in someone else's power grows also in
Lavinia, who feels that 'Somebody is always interfering'. This
power seems at first to be evil; Celia says that Reilly 'must
be the Devil', and Lavinia asks:-

Are you a devil
Or merely a lunatic practical joker?²

Similarly she decides that Julia 'is the devil', though only
in the sense that she is a 'dreadful old woman' who 'always
turns up when she's least wanted'. This makes an interesting
comparison with Harry's view of his pursuers as evil spirits,
particularly as the opposite idea is suggested simultaneously;
thus Edward speaks of his 'Good Samaritans' and Celia directly
introduces the central idea:-

It may be that even Julia is a guardian.
Perhaps she is my guardian.³

1. Ibid. p.24

2. Ibid. p.104

3. Ibid. p.61

None of the seekers ever knows the full extent to which Julia and Alex have acted as guardians, though their intervention is frequently suspected, and Reilly remains a mystery even after his power for good has been acknowledged; but as Julia says 'if you know him already, you won't be afraid of him.'

The audience knows more about the guardians than the other characters do, and their gathering at the end of Act II makes clear their part in the process by which the others have been 'stripped naked to their souls'. Their libation is the key to the meaning of the whole play, revealing as it does their power in the action and making clear the direction in which the seekers must go, as they speak 'the words for the building of the hearth' and 'the words for those who go upon a journey', and suggest that for Peter the words may be spoken later. It is a far more successful ritual action than that of The Family Reunion, since it arises as a perfectly natural toast to the future, in keeping with the cocktail party atmosphere, and recalling Celia's toast to the guardians in the first act.

Eliot's private trick with Reilly¹ gives to the more perceptive, or better informed, members of the audience a further clue to this character's function. As Heracles brought

1. 'I was still inclined to go to a Greek dramatist for my theme, but I was determined to do so merely as a point of departure, and to conceal the origins so well that nobody would identify them until I pointed them out myself.'
'Poetry and Drama', op cit. p.85.

back Alcestis from the dead, so Reilly literally brings back Lavinia to Edward and saves them from being dead to each other; he reclaims Celia from the death of the spirit, and reveals the truth about her so that she is alive to Peter in a new sense. I doubt however whether the play gains anything at all from this touch of pedanticism, for since the point is so well-concealed, it does not carry out what is presumably its function of widening the horizons by reference back through the centuries, a process more obviously, if with some strain, carried out in The Family Reunion.

It seems that the best approach to Reilly is to interpret him in whatever way is most significant to oneself - as psychiatrist, as priest, as 'a god in the machine'¹, - and it is this comprehensiveness that I feel constitutes Eliot's triumph here. Similarly, response to Julia and Alex depends on the amount of importance one has attached to the ministry of more ordinary people in one's own life, just as in The Family Reunion,

the character of our response to the central moment of the transformation of the Furies ... will depend partly on the degree to which the problem of personal relationship has already become for us a matter of reflective as well as practical concern.²

If, as I have suggested, the confusion with Julia and

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1. Eliot's own term, in 'Comments on The Cocktail Party', World Review, Nov. 1949, p.21
 2. Maud Bodkin, The Quest for Salvation in an Ancient and a Modern Play, 1941, p.36

Alex lies in their being too familiar as theatrical types ('we're all very typical', says Julia), the fault is repeated in the next play, The Confidential Clerk. Here Eggerson is undoubtedly a guardian figure, the man who is called in to sort out difficult problems, who sits in the position of authority, is appealed to for directions and admitted to be rather mysterious, ('there's a lot I don't know about you, Eggerson',) and wiser than most, ('I think we all made the same mistake - All except Eggers. '), but the same incongruity that many people find in the amusing old busybody as a spiritual director appears in this retired clerk pottering among his marrows, beetroot and peas.

None of the other characters is as credible or likeable as those in The Cocktail Party; Colby is weak beside Celia, while Sir Claude and Lady Elizabeth are worse drawing-room comedy eccentrics than Julia. But none of them is redundant, as were two minor figures in The Cocktail Party and several in The Family Reunion; Eliot has now mastered the techniques of dramatic economy so that each character is essential to the working out of the main theme.

There is a noticeable economy too in the time spent on slow-moving discussion passages, which are now reduced to three fairly short conversations. The spiritual action is worked out at the same time as a swift surface story of mistaken identities, the truth about self being discovered simultaneously on the outward and inner planes.

Although Colby is like Celia in being the most spiritually

sensitive person, 'something so different from the rest of us', his way is not so much her way of atonement as Peter's way of reconciliation to a job in which he can only be second-rate. The 'sense of sin' which dominated the earlier plays is now a sense of failure to oneself for having abandoned 'the one thing worth doing'. The decision to be a church organist is equivalent to Harry's following the 'bright angels' and Celia's choice of the 'terrifying journey', but Eggeron suggests that the time spent at Joshua Park will only be short:-

I don't see you spending a lifetime as an organist.
 I think you'll come to find you've another vocation.
 We worked together every day, you know
 For quite a little time, and I've watched you pretty
closely.

Mr. Simpkins! You'll be thinking of reading for orders.¹

This retreat then appears to be equivalent to the sanatorium of The Cocktail Party, a quiet place in which strength is given to face the rest of the journey and the decisions as to its outward form ^{are} ~~all~~ made. It reminds one of Little Gidding, that place of dedication in which Nicholas Ferrar 'grew to a full Resolution and determination of that thing and course of life he had so often wished for and longingly desired'.²

The central 'garden' image is a more obvious link with

1. The Confidential Clerk, 1954, p.132
2. Quoted by Helen Gardner, op cit. p.177

3. The Confidential Clerk, p.7

3. Ibid. p.51

Four Quartets and also with 'the garden where all loves end' of Ash Wednesday. It was used in The Family Reunion to suggest the moment of vision, being made more effective by actually setting the experience in a garden, on 'a summer day of intense heat',:-

I only looked through the little door
When the sun was shining on the rose-garden:
And heard in the distance tiny voices
And then a black raven flew over.¹

This functioning on both planes of outer and inward reality is retained in The Confidential Clerk, where a very full and sustained use is made of the image. At the outward level, Eggerson's suburban garden is a place of peaceful activity and satisfaction and Colby's window-boxes are to be a temporary substitute:-

He's expressed such an interest in my garden
That I think he ought to have window boxes.
Some day, he'll want a garden of his own.²

It is Eggerson's frequent mention of his garden that suggests the image to Colby and Lucasta, in their discussion of spiritual experience:-

You've still got your inner world - a world that's more
real.
That's why you're different from the rest of us:
You have your secret garden; to which you can retire
And lock the gate behind you.³

This picks up a similar image used by Sir Claude, and relates

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1. The Family Reunion, p.107
 2. The Confidential Clerk, p.9
 3. Ibid. p.51

their discussion to the experience he had described:-

And when you are alone at your piano, in the evening,
I believe you will go through the private door
Into the real world, as I do, sometimes.¹

The garden image is then explored at great length as a symbol for the spiritual life; Lucasta thinks hers is a 'dirty public square', Colby's is more real to him than the outside world, but it is a place in which he is alone and that he feels would be more meaningful if it were shared. The image is I think over-developed, so that some of the statements are rather naïve, for example, 'If I were religious, God would walk in my garden' and,

your garden is a garden
Where you hear a music that no one else could hear,
And the flowers have a scent that no one else could smell.²

How very much more powerful than this statement is the suggestion method of The Family Reunion, and Burnt Norton,

Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged,
And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,
And the lotus rose, quietly, quietly,
The surface glittered out of heart of light,
And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.
Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty.³

This raises the question of which method better conveys the spiritual experience in dramatic terms, the poetically

1. Ibid. p.41

2. Ibid. p.52

3. Four Quartets, p.8

suggestive or the philosophically discursive. The four plays show Eliot's movement from complete reliance on poetic effect in Murder in the Cathedral, through 'a long period of disciplining his poetry, and putting it, so to speak, on a very thin diet in order to adapt it to the needs of the stage'¹, to the almost total absence of 'poetry' in The Confidential Clerk. (I use here Eliot's distinction between the 'verse', which 'can say anything that has to be said', and the 'poetry' needed at the 'point of intensity'²).

The poetry of Murder in the Cathedral is wholly successful in conveying the experience and dramatizing the progress of the spirit. States of mind ~~were~~^{are} conveyed through powerfully suggestive images, such as the vivid sense images by which fear and horror are expressed:-

I have seen
 Grey necks twisting, rat tails twining, in the thick
 light of dawn. I have eaten
 Smooth creatures still living, with the strong salt taste
 taste of living things under the sea.³

The poetry is functional too at the outward level, giving necessary information about time and place often at the same time as suggesting spiritual atmosphere:-

Since golden October declined into sombre November
 And the apples were gathered and stored, and the land
 became brown sharp points of death in a waste of
 water and mud,
 The New Year waits, breathes, waits, whispers in darkness.⁴

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1. 'Poetry and Drama' op cit. p.85
 2. Ibid. p.74
 3. Murder in the Cathedral, p.67
 4. Ibid. p.11

But, as Eliot says, this kind of poetry was a 'dead end' from the point of view of dramatic exper^{iment}~~iments~~, being suited only to the particular circumstances for which it was written. In The Family Reunion, then, he attempted 'to find a rhythm close to contemporary speech, in which the stresses could be made to come wherever we should naturally put them, in uttering the particular phrase on the particular occasion'.¹ His achievement in this direction has been well examined by a number of critics, so I intend only to comment on the way in which these developments in poetic technique are related to the essential spiritual experience.

The dialogue of The Family Reunion draws on a great deal of highly poetic imagery which 'characters of our own time living in our own world' would not normally use.

The images connected to the central experience can be divided into two groups, those arising from the myth, - for example, the curse, phantoms, hunters, - and those related to Eliot's work as a whole, to his general fund of imagery. The rose-garden, singing and sunlight images have already been mentioned; 'the unwinking eye' and the 'putrescent embraces on dissolving bone' recall Ash Wednesday, the many creatures moving without purpose 'in flickering intervals of light and darkness' are the same as the 'strained time-ridden ^{faces} forces' in

1. 'Poetry and Drama' op cit. p.82

the flickering half-light of Burnt Norton's tube-train journey, while the pursuing feet, the turning wheel and 'the noxious smell untraceable in the drains' are some of the many echoes of Murder in the Cathedral. Nature imagery is dominant, and in keeping with the country house setting, and as in the earlier play, it often has the double function of conveying external and internal atmosphere:-

The spring is very late in this northern country,
Late and uncertain, clings to the south wall.¹

Some of the images are suggested more particularly by the outer setting, the empty hospital, the smell of disinfectant and 'the cancer that eats away the self' being related to Amy's illness and death, as the operating table image in The Cocktail Party reflects the clinical atmosphere of the second act. For the most part, however, the images used to convey spiritual states are traditionally 'poetical' rather than 'contemporary', in other words, nearer to those of Murder in the Cathedral than to those of the later plays.

There are, furthermore, certain episodes in which lyrical poetry conveys intense experience as it did in Murder in the Cathedral. The emotional atmosphere of the momentary contact between Harry and Mary is created by the change from colloquial rhythms to:-

The cold spring now is the time
For ~~the~~ ache in the moving root
The agony in the dark

1. The Family Reunion, p.46

The slow flow throbbing the trunk
The pain of the breaking bud.¹

This device is repeated in the moment of Agatha's union with Harry, and it is significant that she repeats the question Harry had asked after the first lyric, - 'What have we been saying?' For in fact both episodes have interrupted the play's movement, taking the action away from the sphere of drama into the lyric's world of pure emotion, so that, immediately afterwards, each character must try to explain in dramatic terms the meaning of the experience, - 'I think I was saying that ...'. These two passages illustrate very well my contention that the intense moments of spiritual experience have in themselves no dramatic possibilities, being states of unity and pure emotion, which, in the literary field, lyrical poetry is best fitted to recreate.

Since Eliot was at this point concerned with avoiding all poetry 'which could not stand the test of strict dramatic utility,' The Cocktail Party treats the spiritual theme in a more philosophical way, 'with such success, indeed, that it is perhaps an open question whether there is any poetry in the play at all.'² This is not to say, however, that the play could equally well have been written in prose, for the rhythmical patterns, the easy transitions from light conversation to significant statement and the peculiarly lucid

1. p.59

2. 'Poetry and Drama' op cit. p.85

The Confidential Clerk

now I know who was my father
 I must follow my father - so that I may come to know him
 ... I want to be an organist
 It doesn't matter about success -
 I aimed too high before - beyond my capacity.¹

Among the plays, The Cocktail Party is, I feel, Eliot's greatest achievement, containing his best dramatic verse and presenting his spiritual theme most clearly and in significant contemporary terms. The Confidential Clerk, though having the most theatrically effective surface story, seems to me to show a decline both in the quality of the verse and in intensity of experience, a criticism I would apply also to his latest play, The Elder Statesman. Here, though the central theme of spiritual release obtained by facing the facts about oneself and the past is characteristic, and though the interest in the spiritual power of personal relationships is maintained, the ideas are so far translated into worldly terms and the verse is so refined of all poetry, that a very ordinary psychological play is the result.

It is, however, in the two early plays that the real quality of the spiritual experience is best conveyed, in those plays, in fact, where the most powerful poetry is to be found. Murder in the Cathedral relies entirely for the creation of intensity on the emotional rhythms and imagery of the Chorus, while the most effective passages of The Family Reunion are lyrical rather than dramatic. Is it perhaps only by means of

1. p.129

highly emotional poetry that intense spiritual experience can be conveyed on the stage? Or is it that,

such experience can only be hinted at
In myths and images?¹

In all the plays, but particularly in The Family Reunion, Eliot shows concern about the difficulty of communicating this kind of experience, - 'I do not know the words in which to explain it,'², 'This is what matters, but it is in unspeakable, untranslatable'.² One approach to the problem, unsuccessful dramatically as this play demonstrates but extremely powerful in Four Quartets, is Agatha's advice to Harry:-

Talk in your own language, without stopping to debate
Whether it may be too far beyond our understanding.³

But 'talk' does not communicate the essential experience, as the later plays prove; for that,

There is only one way for you to understand
And that is by seeing.⁴

On this belief modern writers in general have based their explorations of spiritual experience; a later section attempts the assessment of various dramatic experiments with the moment of vision, referring also to its use in other literary fields.

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1. The Cocktail Party, p.161
 2. The Family Reunion, pp.112 and 30
 3. Ibid. p.29
 4. Ibid. p.57

'Artist' Plays

One of the major sources of interest in the plays so far considered is the conflict between the spiritual ideal and the claims of everyday living; this conflict is intensified in the type of play where the central character is an artist or craftsman, and the theme his attempt to fulfil an artistic mission. Here the writer presents the spiritual theme in terms of his own experience, so that the spiritual figure, often as in Brand only a thinly-veiled self-portrait, is replaced by an artist. The journey is, however, still essentially the same, involving the same process of self-discovery, the same conflicts in the self, and between self and society, and resulting in a very similar fulfilment. This identification has already been illustrated in Eliot's The Confidential Clerk, where Colby's search, though parallel to Harry's and Celia's, is for truth to an artistic vision.

Ibsen's The Masterbuilder (1892) reconsiders, more than twenty-five years later, the ideas which were central to Brand, and the fact that the interval had been occupied with the social dramas and their realist techniques means that a comparison between the methods of the two plays can be very illuminating. The theme of The Masterbuilder, as of Brand, is the relation of life and ideals, presented through a fully-rounded character in a particular set of circumstances; after the realist period,

however, the religious reformer has been replaced by a master builder, the wild fjord country by a small town, the symbolic mountains by man-made spires, and a conversion to God's will by a renewed faith in an artistic ideal. As in the earlier play, however, the ideal controls the action, and all the characters serve to define some aspect of it, so that there is nothing in the play which does not add to the picture of the central character and his ideal.

Whereas in Brand the action took place over a number of years, the stages towards enlightenment gradually being revealed, in The Masterbuilder time is limited to twenty-four hours and only the final conversion is shown. The method of retrospection, perfected in Rosmersholm, is used to trace the earlier progress, so that the audience makes, with Solness, the journey back into the past in order to understand the present. Since in realistic drama it is only by words that this process can be conveyed to the audience, a number of discussions are necessary; thus, the pattern of the play is a series of talks between Solness and other individuals, varied with very short passages of more general conversation.

The discussions of the first act serve principally to reveal Solness' character in relation to his work. The early sections stress the unpleasant aspects, already hinted at by his employees in the short introductory passage. His talks with Kaja and with Brovik illustrate his selfishness, his fear of competition and the ruthless use of people for his own ends,

regardless of their feelings. These discussions deal with the present situation, with only a few references to the past, and they show enough of Solness' character to give point to his self-examination in his talk to the Doctor. In this directly analytical passage, many more details are added to the unpleasant picture, but such is Ibsen's skill that one is drawn, as in Brand, to admire the power of the man in spite of his obvious faults. The Doctor is exactly the same kind of steady, normal adviser as his counterpart in Brand and makes a similar contrast with the central figure.

Only in the discussion with Hilde is the other side of Solness' character shown. She brings a picture of him as he was ten years ago, at the height of his youthful idealism, a picture, as she believes, of his 'real, live self'. The movement of the play from this point is a double line of her discovery of how he has failed towards, and his renewal of faith in, this real self.

Hilde describes the moment at which the master builder reached the heights of his achievement; she shared his triumph and ecstasy as he climbed the tower and recalls it now for the mature artist, who has compromised and lost his strength in fear and vanity. What follows in her account almost certainly never took place - it was a young girl's daydream - but its essence is faith in the Solness who was then, and in his power to achieve even greater things. Ibsen's incorporation of this daydream element into a realistic framework, as a

crucial motivator of the action, is an interesting development on the use of a symbolic character such as Gerd.

The discussions of the second act make clearer the details of Solness' life during the ten years, showing the effect of his character on his marriage and on his work. As she hears the story, Hilde is able to point out the absurdities in the myth he has built round himself, and so lead him to recognition of the truth, which is marked by his action of recommending Ragnar and by his decision to climb the tower. The last act shows that Solness' new faith is still uncertain and that he is still taking refuge behind the guilty feelings towards his wife, which her confession to Hilde has shown to be quite unfounded. But there can, I think, be no doubt that his death, caused by Hilde's hysterical joy, is as triumphant as Brand's, or as Rubek's in When We Dead Awaken, for it is death met in attempting the highest claims of the artistic ideal.

It is a magnificent achievement to reveal inner experience in this realistic way, with no unlikely dialogue or actions, and to sustain interest throughout the long explanatory passages. In contrast to Eliot's 'modern' plays, with a realistic framework around many imaginative and stylized elements, this play is completely realistic in technique, the spiritual discovery being translated entirely into outward terms.

The theme of When We Dead Awaken (1899) is more or less identical, but treated very differently, for here Ibsen has

abandoned the creation of full human characters in favour of figures who are little more than vehicles of ideas, and are almost projections of a single mind in the 'dream-play' convention. Whether or not this is to be attributed to the unfinished state of the play or whether Ibsen really was developing Expressionist techniques, cannot be definitely concluded, but the Strindbergian Sister of Mercy, mad Stranger Lady, and health resort setting add weight to the latter interpretation.

The closeness of the theme to that of The Masterbuilder justifies its place in this study here rather in the dream-play section, for Rubek is an artist at just that point in his career which Solness had reached; the ruthless practice of his art had destroyed the happiness of many and salvation comes to him through a woman who recalls his former idealism.

The method is again that of revelation of the past through discussion, and there is even less outward action than in The Masterbuilder. The two ideas of 'deadness' and 'awakening' worked out in Rubek and Irene are reflected in many aspects of the play, one of them being the absence of outward movement. Rubek sits quite still through most of the first two acts, in sharp contrast to the vitality of Maia and Ulfheim, and he speaks, as Irene says, with 'deathly, icy coldness'. The deadness of his marriage is apparent in the opening scene, which recalls the atmosphere of the Solness household, though now with the vital roles reversed. Irene

appears first as a silent figure of death, and speaks of herself as dead and of having killed her husbands and children. Death is mentioned frequently in many connections, from the absurd bear-killer and the shooting of his dogs, Maia's threatened jump over the precipice and Irene's deadly knife, to Irene's direct explanation of the images:-

The desire for life is dead in me, Arnold. Now I have arisen. And I look for you. And I find you. - And then I see that you and life are dead - as I have lain.¹

Similarly, images of 'awakening' run through the play, closely associated with the 'Resurrection' statue, and draw particularly on light and sunrise, until both ideas are gathered into the climax, where before their death together Irene and Rubek move 'through all the mists, and then right up to the summit of the tower that shines in the sunrise'. The reference to the tower joins the significance of this death to that in The Masterbuilder, as the avalanche, and the sister's blessing, recall that in Brand.

Rubek has been brought to life by love of one who embodies his former artistic ideal, and she in turn is renewed by his love; they accept their fate joyfully even though earthly life is no longer possible:-

Then let two of the dead - us two - for once live life to its uttermost - before we go down to our graves again!²

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1. H.Ibsen, When We Dead Awaken, translated by William Archer, London, 1900, p.157
 2. Ibid. p.158

Irene seems to me to be almost wholly a symbolic figure, with only a few human touches, in, for example, her attitude to her modelling experiences. Her life as it is revealed in the discussions exactly reflects the progress of Rubek's artistic vision, from its early ecstatic inspiration to its divorce from life so that it became simply a soulless show, and then to its death, and its resurrection through a renewed love of life. It is the same line of development as in The Masterbuilder, and in both there is undoubtedly a strong vein of autobiographical implication. The churches, houses and castles that Solness built have been likened to the three phases of Ibsen's dramatic development, and similarly, the gradual adaptation of the Resurrection statue from a masterpiece to something 'the mob and the masses' can admire, and the moulding of double-faced portrait busts concealing faces of 'all the dear domestic animals,' can hardly be mistaken for anything but references to Ibsen's own work.

Certain dominant themes, such as the guilt at having sacrificed other people to an artistic ideal, seem in the later plays to express Ibsen's own feelings at the end of an artistic career, and in this play, particular stress is given to the inevitable sacrifice of 'happiness in indolent enjoyment'. Maia and Ulfheim are able to go down to the warm valleys, singing 'I am free as a bird', but for the artist and his love it is a lonely struggle over the snow-field and death in an avalanche.

This theme of the artist's inability to live a life of ordinary happinesses is much explored in Hauptmann's work, particularly in the plays written under Ibsen's influence. The early realistic play Einsame Menschen (1891) has the by now familiar triangle of writer, emancipated soul-mate and wife unable to satisfy her husband's artistic needs. John Vockerat's suicide is not, however, a triumphant return to faith, but an act of despair before the incompatibility of life and ideals. The subject is treated poetically in Und Pippa Tanzt (1906)¹, and with something of the manner of When We Dead Awaken in Gabriel Schilling's Flucht (1912).

One of the most interesting presentations of the theme is in Die Versunkene Glocke (1896), a tragedy of incomplete faith, where the artist is pulled back from realization of his ideal by the claims of loyalty to home and family. It is of particular interest to this study, not only because of its experiment with poetic techniques but because the artistic vision is specifically related to a spiritual experience, expressed in images of church-building, (as in Brand), and sun-worship.

Heinrich, the master bell-founder, is in despair because of the 'faulty handiwork' of his latest creation. This, like Ibsen's statues and buildings, is probably an autobiographical detail, referring to the failure of Hauptmann's Florian Geyer earlier in 1896. After the depression has been overcome,

1. cf. p. 113 foll.

inspiration returns with new strength, and Heinrich determines to leave all comfortable worldly pleasures and dedicate himself to the making of

a chime

Such as no minster in the world has seen.
 ... All the church-bells on earth it shall strike dumb.
 All shall be hushed as through the sky it rings
 The glad new Gospel of the new-born light.¹

In this work he is for a time both 'happy and a Master', pursuing his ideal regardless of the world and its rewards, but eventually he finds himself unable to sacrifice all, and cries, 'Cursed be my work'. Henceforward there can be no peace or fulfilment for him:-

He who has flown so high,
 Into the very Light, as thou hast flown,
 Must perish, if he once fall back to earth.²

Thus, through compromise and an incomplete faith, his ideal has perished, and only in death is there any hope.

This bald outline of Heinrich's progress gives no idea of the poetic quality of the play and its imaginative framework, where spiritual states are suggested in symbolic settings and the theme expressed in fairy-tale terms.

When Heinrich has struggled out of the gulf of despair into which he had fallen with his inadequate bell, he finds himself in a beautiful fairy wood, where spirits sing and dance, and sweet music fills the air. This opening scene, with its distant echoes of A Midsummer Night's Dream, and its wonder

1. The Sunken Bell; The Dramatic Works of Gerhart Hauptmann, Vol.IV, p.159

2. Ibid. p.207

and enchantment, suggests very potently the atmosphere of poetic inspiration, and it is a sharp contrast to the homely realistic cottage to which Heinrich is made to return by the anxious villagers. The contrast between these two states of mind is strengthened by the use of mountain and valley symbolism, again as in Brand. These symbols are used not only in the settings, but in much of the dialogue to suggest the quality of Heinrich's work:-

the bell that sank into the mere
Was not made for the heights - it was not fit
To wake the answering echoes of the peaks!
... 'Twas for the valley, not the mountain-top!¹

There is a similar division into realistic and imaginative in the characters, half of whom are ordinary villagers and the rest traditional German fairy folk. Of the latter the most important is Rautendelein, a golden-haired Lorelei maiden, with whom Heinrich becomes infatuated. She clearly represents the poetic inspiration, or spirit of beauty, and her function is parallel to Pippa's in the later play.² When she appears to Heinrich after his period of despair, he recognizes her as the inspiration of his work:-

... I surely know thy face.
Somewhere, but where, or when, I cannot tell,
I wrought for thee, and strove - in one grand Bell,
To wed the silver music of thy voice
With the warm gold of a Sun-holiday.
It should have been a master-work! ... I failed.³

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1. Ibid. p.127
 2. cf. Bh. 2, p 113 foll.
 3. Ibid. p.103

Rautendelein is attracted to Heinrich, as Pippa to Hellriegel, and descends to the valley to save him from the death of the soul. She has power to open the eyes 'to the most hidden mysteries of earth and air' and, with the traditional fairy-tale kiss, she awakens Heinrich to his moment of vision:-

Mine eyes were blinded. Now, they're filled with light,
 And, as by instinct, I divine thy world.
 And, more and more, as I do drink thee in,
 Thou dear enigma, I am sure I see.¹

... Then fades the light! ... Here now the air grows chill.
 The see~~r~~ dies, as the blind man had died.
 But I have seen thee ... seen ... thee ... !²

For as long as Heinrich lives with Rautendelein the vision is clear and the work goes well, but once he wavers, the church is burnt and Rautendelein given over to the Nickelmann. This water-sprite, traditionally fond of music, dance and song, often puts into words Heinrich's desires for the world, and thus when the bell-founder has succumbed to these, his inspiration is sacrificed to this tempter. When Heinrich dreams of his failure, it is the Nickelmann who speaks to him of the guilt he has incurred through leaving his wife, and so the pull back to the world is started.

These two figures are, therefore, extensions of Heinrich's inner experience, as are the lesser fairy-folk, the Woodsprites, who, in their unwillingness to work, suggest the artist's aversion⁷ to the drudgeries involved in creating. Ruling over

1. Ibid. p.139

2. Ibid. p.140

the supernatural creatures, and providing food for them, is Wiltikin, one of the legendary wise women who were by tradition handmaids to the upper gods and revealers to men. The villagers consider her a witch, but she shows much knowledge of Heinrich's problem and is a kind of presiding deity. It is she who reveals the truth of his situation to Heinrich at the close of the play, and it is she who prepares the death potion for him. Her function in many respects resembles that of the guardian figure Wann, in Und Pippa Tanzt, though the traditional witch is perhaps less powerful a conception than the mysterious 'mythological character'.

All the realistic characters are made to stress the wide gulf between themselves, the ordinary people, and Heinrich, the artist. Magda, his wife, can give him love, but not understanding of his work; to her his cracked bells sound 'pure, and clear, and true' and she is incapable of recognizing his sense of failure, for the bell must be a masterpiece, since she heard,

The Vicar tell the Clerk, in tones that shook,
How gloriously 'twill sound upon the heights!¹

The Vicar, Schoolmaster and Barber are stylized figures representing religion, learning and material interests. Like the village dignitaries in Brand, they emphasize the superior vision of the artist, and in the long discussion of Act III, the nature of this personal vision is defined, and contrasted with the Vicar's orthodoxy. In Heinrich's hymn of praise to

1. Ibid. p.127

the Nature which inspires him, the identification of the artistic ideal with the spiritual is complete. The religion he describes is that which John Vockerat upheld:-

I certainly don't believe that God looks like a man, and acts like one, and that he has a son, and so on.

We can have a religion without believing such things. Whoever seeks to know Nature seeks to know God. God is Nature.¹

Thus, plays have been considered in which the spiritual voyage of discovery is presented in specifically Christian terms, (Brand and Murder in the Cathedral), in psychological terms, (Eliot's 'middle' plays), more esoterically as the artist's pursuit of the ideal, and finally, in terms of a religion of natural beauty. In spite of these different viewpoints, certain common methods of treating the theme and of meeting its difficulties have appeared, and these may be considered in relation to the basic elements of drama, character and action.

Each play has shown the spiritual progress of a central character, either a fully-rounded 'real' person with individual traits or, as in When We Dead Awaken, The Sunken Bell and Eliot's plays, a type-character who is little more than the embodiment of an idea. Our response to characters such as Brand and Solness involves a recognition of the universality within their individual experience, an emotional identification, while with the type-characters it rests on an acceptance of

1. Einsame Menschen; The Dramatic Works, Vol.III, p.158

the ideas they embody, in other words, an intellectual appreciation. Of the two methods the emotional is undoubtedly the more effective, both in conveying the quality of the experience and in creating dramatic tension.

Most of the minor characters in these plays are intellectualized types and in the treatment of them some of the more startling developments have been noted. The Masterbuilder is the only play we have considered in which all the characters are individual human beings, in the way that, for the most part, Shakespeare's characters are; in the others, minor characters often simply represent an idea, emphasize aspects of the central figure's character by stress or contrast, or are projections of that character's thoughts and feelings. The subsidiary figures in Brand illustrate all these functions, while the fairy creatures of The Sunken Bell show the extremes of the method.

This suggestion of the method of the Morality plays, involving a loss of emotional interest in characterization and an increased intellectual appeal, indicates one of the ways in which it is possible to dramatize inner experience.

Certain symbolic characters, such as Gerd, ~~Will~~ikin and Harcourt Reilly, function on several levels of significance and have proved to be not wholly intelligible to the theatre audience, while even Eliot's 'contemporary' characters are, with the possible exception of Amy, theatrical, drawing-room comedy types from whom discussion of spiritual matters some-

times seems incongruous. Eliot hoped to 'turn away from the Theatre of Ideas to the Theatre of Character', believing that the 'essential poetic play should be made with human beings rather than with ideas',¹ but his own plays clearly belong to the former category.

Some of the plays, Eliot's in particular, illustrate the method of conveying the nature of the spiritual experience through exploratory discussion, a method which does not necessarily assign a play to the category of 'Theatre of Ideas', as The Masterbuilder demonstrates. The discussions in both kinds of play serve the same purpose, of reviewing the past in order to show the character's gradual understanding of himself. Some of the plays, therefore, open almost at the spiritual climax, the outward action being very slight and the dialogue richly suggestive.

What outward action there is in these plays often represents the inward movement; there are symbolic journeys, particularly from the valleys to the mountains, suggestive settings to convey spiritual states, and victorious deaths by martyrdom or in the struggle to reach the heights. These actions are meant to imply something other than they outwardly represent, and in The Sunken Bell this is true of the whole of the surface story. The traditional tale of the fairy with a human lover and their inevitable separation and destruction is only the

1. 'Comments on The Cocktail Party', World Review, Nov.1949, p.22

cover for the deeper spiritual meaning of the artist in love with his vision, and of his progress and failure. There is, therefore, in this play a strong allegorical element, allegory being, in simplest terms, a symbolic narrative. The allegorical process is an intellectual one, and thus, in action as in character, a tendency towards intellectualization may be observed.

The two most interesting developments noted in these plays are the attempts at projection of inner experience, and the introduction of allegorical elements, and both have been explored more fully in plays specifically occupied with the problems they present. The following sections examine certain plays in which the spiritual progress is described by the allegorical method, and some experiments with the direct projection of thoughts and feelings, using the techniques suggested by Strindberg in his 'dream-plays'.

Chapter 2

Allegory

- do not forget that an allegory is never quite consistent except when it is written by someone without dramatic faculty, in which case it is unreadable.¹

Allegory is one of the natural methods of expressing spiritual truths. Though an exact description of spiritual experience is impossible, an approximation may be made by talking in terms of material things more easily picturable. Thus, the religious mystics have spoken of their experience as a journey towards a country or city, a quest for some greatly desired object or a search for union with a lover, accounts which are obviously not literally true but which bear some essential resemblance to the real experience.

I suggest that allegory may be defined as a special kind of symbolism, namely a symbolic narrative, for in such works as are generally considered to be allegories, for example the Divina Commedia and The Pilgrim's Progress, whatever incidental symbolism there may be, it is the narrative which carries the central symbolic meaning.

Literature offers many examples of spiritual allegory, but it is not a method of expression one naturally associates with drama, for there seems to be a fundamental incompatibility between the intellectual, impersonal stylization of allegory

1. G.B.Shaw, The Perfect Wagnerite, 3rd Edition, 1913, p.30

and the emotional identification with the character's actual experience which is central to drama. Nevertheless, certain modern dramatists seem to me to have attempted a reconciliation of allegory with dramatic form and to have experimented with a type of play where the spiritual meaning was conveyed symbolically in the sequence of events. This chapter will attempt to assess how far such a reconciliation has been achieved. Examples have been selected to illustrate the types of allegory mentioned above, and in some cases a detailed interpretation is offered, since one of the problems of this kind of play is that it tends to be either over-simplified or tortuously obscure and therefore not always rightly understood on both its levels.

1. The Quest for the Magic Object or the Mysterious Land

One of the few modern plays with which the word 'allegory' has been often associated is Maeterlinck's The Blue Bird (1908)¹ though most critics have not been quite so convinced as Henry Rose that it is 'an allegory of Man's search for spiritual truth'.²

This is a high claim to make for a play whose subject is completely in the fairy-tale tradition; so apparently simple and straightforward that it has delighted millions of children and been produced throughout the world primarily for their enjoyment. The famous first production at the Moscow Art Theatre was designed for the child audience, 'naive, simple, light, full of the joy of life, cheerful and imaginative like the sleep of a child',³ yet Stanislavsky directed his players not to forget 'the seriousness and the mystic solemnity of the work'.⁴

Indeed, **no** adult member of the audience can miss the seriousness, the philosophic and moral import of at least some

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1. Translated by Alexander Teixeira de Mattos, 22nd Edition, 1911. References are to this text rather than to the French, since it was in this translation that the play was produced on the London stage fifteen months before it was performed in France.
 2. On Maeterlinck: or Notes on the Study of Symbols, 1911, p.28
 3. Cited by Oliver M. Sayler, The Russian Theatre, 1923, p.37
 4. Ibid. p.37

of the scenes, of the Graveyard episode or the Palace of Happiness. Furthermore, almost everyone has attached some symbolic meaning to the object of the search, and audiences at the Haymarket Theatre were encouraged by the producer in a programme note to consider the blue bird a symbol of Happiness. This interpretation caught hold of the public imagination;

There'll be blue birds over
The white cliffs of Dover ...

is only one of many examples of the symbol in popular currency.

If, then, the blue bird is symbolically interpreted as happiness, the children become almost automatically representative of human beings in general, and the narrative line of the play is assumed to be an allegory of man's search for happiness. Most critics considered this an adequate interpretation, but those who were fully aware of Maeterlinck's philosophy and his knowledge of Swedenborgian correspondences were at pains to prove that the blue bird must stand for something more than happiness and that in the play as a whole there was indeed a 'mystic solemnity'.

I do not think it necessary to examine, as one critic does,¹ every symbol of the play with reference to the Swedenborgian correspondences, for if a spiritual allegory is intended, the necessary pointers to the interpretation will surely be found within the play.

The crux of the matter lies in the interpretation of the

1. Florence G. Fidler, The Bird that is Blue, 1928

central symbol. The blue bird as the object of a fairy-tale quest appears to be Maeterlinck's own invention, though two popular seventeenth-century fairy tales by the Comtesse d'Aulnoy suggest a possible influence. In one tale, entitled L'Oiseau Bleu, the Prince Charming is transformed by the wicked fairy into a blue bird; the tale of Princesse Chéry tells of the quest for a green bird which can reveal any secret.

The basis of Maeterlinck's spiritual belief, as outlined in Le Trésor des Humbles, is that one mysterious spirit flows through all the universe and all creation; what some have called 'the greater reality', 'the Anima Mundi', or 'the Immanent Will' Maeterlinck chooses to call 'le Grand Secret', and like all symbolists, he believes that it is possible to perceive something of this Great Secret in moments of vision.

With this in mind, it is impossible to miss the implication of the Oak's statement in the Forest Scene,

I know that you are looking for the Blue Bird, that is to say, the great secret of things and of happiness.¹

This, together with the fact that in the extra scene, added in 1910, Maeterlinck seemed to kill the idea that the blue bird was simply happiness by presenting all the ordinary happinesses of human life with the blue bird not to be found among them, seems to point unmistakably to the interpretation of the blue bird as the 'grand secret', the greater reality,

1. The Blue Bird, p.131

truth, the Supreme Being, which is certainly the source of happiness, but much more besides.

With the blue bird, then, as the symbol of the great secret, the play becomes an allegorical presentation of man's search for the greater reality, as it were a dramatic and non-Christian counterpart of The Pilgrim's Progress. The whole area of spiritual experience is represented and the significant steps towards the goal are shown in eight major scenes. The occasions on which the blue bird is seen represent the brief flashes of illumination, the moments of vision, but these can never be sustained for long. Any attempt to express reality in human terms, to cage it within the mind, can never be successful and so, just as the human being can never understand reality, the blue bird is never caught.

The first act can be interpreted as the awakening of the soul to spiritual reality and to the need for spiritual progress. On the surface level the action is extremely amusing, with the sudden appearance of the ugly fairy, her unreasonable anger and complete disregard for human conventions, and with a large dose of the usual tricks of magic, all very cleverly welded to the deeper meaning.

The first stage in spiritual development is the awareness of the existence of another reality, represented here by the sight of the rich children's party, something quite unlike anything Tylityl and Mytyl have ever seen before. It recalls

the many biblical references to heavenly feasts.

As soon as a man becomes aware of this reality, he has no choice but to go forward towards it. The fairy represents this impulse, telling the children 'you will have to go and find me the one I want ... I must absolutely have the blue bird'.¹

The children, who together represent the human being in its male and female aspects find that this new perception upsets all their conventional ideas of the way life should be lived, and that the way to set out is not necessarily through the door.

The traditional talisman by means of which all the magic events are brought about may signify understanding, or the power of spiritual perception. Its first function is to reveal the truth about one's physical environment and the nature of one's life so far,

'Who are all those pretty ladies?'...

'Don't be afraid; they are the hours of your life and they are glad to be free and visible for a moment'...²

The power of the diamond to reveal the soul of things suggests also that type of mystic experience in which one can 'at once see even the inside of things'³, the experience, reached by other means, that Aldous Huxley describes in The Doors of

1. The Blue Bird, p.23

2. Ibid. p.33

3. Ibid. p.31

Perception. Spiritual perception is the only possession man has to guide him in the quest, 'There, I give you all I have to help you in your search for the Blue Bird'.¹

Those Animals and Things which are to accompany the children in the search symbolize the earthly needs, both physical and mental, of humanity. When the ultimate goal is reached, these things will no longer be necessary - 'all those who accompany the two children will die at the end of the journey!'

The five Things - bread, sugar, milk, fire and water, symbolize man's physical needs, as well as perhaps certain basic spiritual needs, while the Dog, as in Les Aveugles², symbolizes instinct and the cat, so often the enemy of instinct, Reason. Thus the cat appears as a force for evil in the play, since so much of spiritual experience is incompatible with human reason. It is the human reason which tries to cling to the physical things of life, when the spiritual way demands the unreasonable casting away of all things earthly:-

The Cat You have heard - that the end of the journey will, at the same time, mark the end of our lives ... It is our business, therefore, to prolong it as much as possible and by every possible means ... if he finds the Blue Bird he will know all, he will see all and we shall be completely at his mercy.³

So, on the spiritual as on the superficial level, the first act equips the voyager for his quest. The most powerful

1. Ibid. p.31

2. See 645,211.

3. The Blue Bird, pp.53-4

member of the party is Light, who has been thought to symbolize the highest in human consciousness, the soul, that part of man which is illuminated by the eternal Light. But to me Light seems here to play the part of faith; she seems to be the greatest enemy of the Cat and it is noticeable that when Light is not present the children are afraid. They act always under her orders, and it is she who will be able to 'put aside those veils which still conceal from us the last truths and the last happinesses'.¹

The visit to the Land of Memory, which is the second stage in the journey, represents the search for Truth in the experience of past generations. The Fairy says 'it is just possible that the Blue Bird may be hidden in the Past' and it seems as if the children do find it there - 'Oh he's blue, blue, blue as a blue glass marble ...' But the glimpse of truth which the experience of others can give us is only a very small part of the great truth - 'But the bird is no longer blue! ... He has turned black', and after this guidance from others, the voyager is again left alone to find his own way through life - 'I feel so frightened and so cold', says Mytyl.

The three central scenes, in the Palace of Night, the Palace of Happiness and the Graveyard, each contain an attempt to suggest by visual means the quality of the moment of vision. In each case, the scene is transformed to a great beauty, and

1. Ibid. p.200

an 'ineffably pure, divinely roseate, harmonious and ethereal brightness'.

In the Palace of Night, the children experience all the sufferings of mankind and learn to bear the 'burden of the mystery' in that stage which Keats called 'purgatory blind'. The experience is inevitable to those who make this spiritual journey; as Night says 'There is no way of escape', and Tytyl - 'I must see everything ... Light said so'. The baser elements are afraid and try to avoid this experience, and the pull of earthly things and worldly behaviour (in Night) is almost too strong to be resisted -

Listen to me, my child, and believe me; relinquish your quest, go no further, do not tempt fate, do not open that door ...¹

Mother Night is very aptly the guardian 'of all Nature's secrets', since it was from Night that all natural things proceeded. In this scene man feels 'all the evils, all the plagues, all the sicknesses, all the terrors, all the catastrophes, all the mysteries that have afflicted life since the beginning of the world'; it is Keats's 'vale of Soul-making'. A passage from one of Keats's letters offers an interesting side-light on this scene:-

I will call the world a School instituted for the purpose of teaching little children to read. I will call the human heart the horn book read in that school. And I will call the Child able to read, the Soul made from the School and its Horn book. Do you not see how necessary a World of

1. Ibid. p.1.

Pains and troubles is to school and intelligence and makes it a soul. A Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways.¹

It is when one reaches the depths of suffering and spiritual alienation, the Dark Night of the Soul, the 'abyss to which no one dares give a name' that a victory is won and a vision of the great reality is achieved. Tytyl, helped only by the dog, his instinct, faces the abyss, when,

the key has hardly touched the door before its full and wide leaves open in the middle, glide apart and disappear, suddenly revealing the most unexpected of gardens, unreal, infinite and ineffable, a dream-garden bathed in nocturnal light, where among stars and planets, illumining all that they touch, flying ceaselessly from jewel to jewel and from moonbeam to moonbeam, fairylike blue birds hover perpetually and harmoniously down to the confines of the horizon, birds innumerable to the point of appearing to be the breath, the azured atmosphere, the very substance of the wonderful garden. (pp.113-5)

This is probably one of the best attempts in modern drama to suggest the spiritual atmosphere of the moment of perception. The unexpectedness of the garden's appearance after all the preceding fear and barrenness exactly parallels the suddenness of the moment of vision - 'suddenly revealing the most unexpected'. The rightness of this scene was so widely felt that the illumination of a garden has now become a well-known symbol for spiritual vision. The scene had a profound influence on Eliot and echoes of it are to be found particularly in the Four Quartets and The Family Reunion. The meaning of Burnt Norton is greatly illuminated by this scene, where the refer-

1. The Letters of John Keats, ed. M. Buxton Forman, 4th Edition. Rvd. p.335.

ences to children and birds, and the echoes of the actual words and staccato rhythms ('Come quickly ... they are here ... Quick let us go out this way! This way ... this way ...')

'Quick now, here now, always.'
 'Go, go, go,' said the bird,
 Human kind cannot bear very much reality.'
 'Go' said the bird, 'for the leaves were full of
 children,
 Hidden excitedly, containing laughter.'¹

But this is only a brief moment of vision, for 'human kind cannot bear very much reality', 'and the captured birds die - 'you did not catch the one that is able to live in broad daylight'

An interesting point in this scene is the fact that the stage is taken up almost completely by 'basalt steps ... which rise gradually toward the back'. The stage-directions indicate that there is some symbolic meaning in these steps. The children gradually climb the steps as they open the doors, until they eventually stand on the third step before the final door. Here again Keats's poetry seems to offer a useful comparison:-

If thou canst not ascend
 These steps, die on that marble where thou art ...
 One minute before death, my iced foot touch'd
 The lowest stair; and as it touched, life seem'd
 To pour in at the toes ...

Thou has felt
 What 'tis to die and live again before
 Thy fated hour; that thou hast power to do so
 Is thine own safety; thou hast doted on
 Thy doom ...
 'None can usurp this height', returned that shade
 'But those to whom the miseries of the world
 Are misery, and will not let them rest'.

1. Four Quartets, p.8

2. 'The Fall of Hyperion', The Poetical Works, Oxford, 1939, pp.510-511

There is a similar transformation in the Graveyard scene, where the unexpected and sudden reversal is extremely effective. Man is completely alone in his encounter with death; all physical and mental consolations fail before the great mystery. The experience is more than a realization that 'there are no dead'; it is an acceptance of the fact of death, and in that acceptance, a glimpse of reality:-

Then, from all the gaping tombs, there rises gradually an efflorescence at first frail and timid, like steam; then white and virginal and more and more tufty, more and more full and plentiful and marvellous. Little by little, irresistibly, invading all things; it transforms the graveyard into a sort of fairy-like and nuptial garden, over which rises the first rays of the dawn. The dew glitters, the flowers open their blooms, the wind murmurs in the leaves, the bees hum, the birds wake and flood the air with the first raptures of their hymns to the sun and to life.¹

The meaning of the Palace of Happiness scene is quite explicit, with the 'Luxuries of the Earth' being abandoned for the true Happinesses, both small and great. The Luxuries of the Earth are 'dangerous and would break your will. A man should know how to sacrifice something to the duty he is performing'. The smaller joys are the natural ones of being well, the happinesses of the home and of the countryside; the greater ones are those of being good and just, of Fame, of thinking, of understanding, of seeing what is beautiful, and greatest of all, of Love. But the Blue Bird is not in this Palace - 'we are very happy, but we cannot see beyond ourselves'; and the knowledge gained here is only one stage on the 'road for which

1. The Blue Bird, p.212

men have been seeking ever since they began to dwell upon the Earth'.

The transformation scene here is not to a garden but to 'a sort of cathedral of gladness and serenity, tall, innocent and almost transparent'. It is not a vision rising from nothingness, but a change in what already exists. It represents that kind of vision which is not sudden illumination, but gradual understanding - 'We have not moved: it is your eyes that see differently ... We now behold the truth of things'.

The two scenes of The Forest and The Kingdom of the Future are less well executed and their symbolism is of a limited kind. The Forest scene was the one [chosen to be] deleted by Maeterlinck in order to make room for the Gardens of Happiness, and this seems to indicate that it is of only secondary importance in the main scheme. I think Henry Rose is probably correct in suggesting that the Forest represents orthodox religion and the Trees the various churches. Trees and groves are traditional symbols for religion and the Swedenborgian correspondence for tree is 'Knowledge of Truth in the Church'. It is perfectly consistent with Maeterlinck's philosophy, witness Les Aveugles, that the children should not find the blue bird in the forest and indeed should be harmed and opposed in their search by the various trees.

The Kingdom of the Future was one of the most popular scenes with the audience but this again is of secondary import-

ance in the main scheme. This scene seems to be the only one where the surface meaning is allowed to predominate, and what symbolic meaning there is is made quite explicit. It is significant that everything about the future is 'of an unreal, intense, fairy-like blue' except the columns and keystones, which are of white marble. This perhaps suggests that all we think of the future can be only conjecture, except for those permanent truths which are the foundations of human knowledge.

The final scene, the Awakening, shows the relation between the spiritual quest and everyday life. The uninitiated are incapable of understanding the behaviour of the visionary - 'What are you talking about? ... For sure, either you're ill or else you're still asleep'. One's attitude to one's surroundings has completely changed - 'It's just as it was, but it's much prettier ... everything has been painted and made to look new' - and one looks at other people in a new light - 'I haven't changed my face since last night ... Why do you stare at me in that wonderstruck way?'

The blue bird is now seen, even in the most familiar things but 'he's not quite blue yet, but that will come'. An attempt to share the vision is successfully made and as 'the two children look at each other without speaking' we are reminded of Maeterlinck's theory of spiritual communication - 'dès que nous avons vraiment quelque chose à nous dire, nous sommes obligés de nous taire'.¹

1. Le Trésor des Humbles, 1896, p.11

But this moment of vision, like all the others, fades as suddenly as it rose and the play ends with a cry of faith - 'Never mind ... I will catch him again'.

Man is now able to recognize that his vision can never be more than partial - 'But those which are quite blue, you know, do what you will, you can't catch them ...'

This reading of the play is much the same as that given by Florence Fidler, to whom Maeterlinck said in a private letter that she was very rarely mistaken in her interpretation. If we conclude, therefore, that Maeterlinck intended his fairy play to be on one level a spiritual allegory, we may find it disturbing that so few people have viewed it as such. Even Yeats, whom one would have expected to be the first to see a symbolic meaning in the play, did not take it seriously,-

I thought it very bad, but that it might have a popular success in the wake of Peter Pan. There were great things, an excellent cat and dog who quarreled always, and a delightful personification of sugar but my chief impression was of a rather meretricious pantomime. The audience was delighted for they had expected a masterpiece and boredom. I have not read the play and so do not know if it is as poor as it seemed, a mere libretto for the scene painter with here and there a pretentious piece of traditional poetry.¹

This criticism spotlights a major weakness in the play. Yeats, whose dramatic theory was completely opposed to extravagant spectacle, saw that The Blue Bird relied almost entirely on such spectacle for its theatrical effect.

The conventional function of setting and scenic effect

1. The Letters of W.B. Yeats, edited Allan Wade, 1954, p. 541-2

is primarily to locate the play and, at a more developed stage, to ^{stress} ~~show~~ atmosphere and mood and even to symbolize aspects of the theme. Setting is thus normally a secondary element supporting the plot. But the whole movement of The Blue Bird depends on scenic effect, the action being motivated by a magic transforming diamond. Furthermore, each climax of the play, both on the surface and **spiritual** levels, is in the form of a tableau, so that there is a series of what might be called visualized 'peripeteiai'. We have noted that this can be very effective theatrically, but we may question whether it is dramatically legitimate for scenic effect to carry almost all of the spiritual and moral meaning of the play. The play is in fact a set of pictorially presented ideas, more or less unrelated to character or dramatic action. For example, the idea that there are no dead is presented in a tableau, by the transformation of the graveyard to a beautiful garden. There has been no development towards this idea, nothing in the children's experience that would lead them to such a discovery. In other words, there is no attempt to relate the ideas to a dramatic **progression** of character; the characters are indeed undeveloped and presented simply as types. Nor is there any dramatic development from scene to scene; on the surface level of the story there is no reason why the scenes should be presented in any particular order, since the experiences are unrelated to dramatic development; it is in fact the allegorical level which determines the narrative line.

This seems to me another reason for believing that the spiritual meaning of the play was uppermost in Maeterlinck's mind. Though the scenic effects dominate the play and determine its form, they are not there simply to delight an audience; they are the pictorial representation of spiritual experience. That Maeterlinck wrote the stage directions with no idea of how they would be carried out appears from Stanislavsky's discussions with him:-

At the beginning we spoke a great deal about the play itself, of the characteristics of the parts, of what Maeterlinck himself wanted in the play. And here he expressed himself definitely and in an extraordinary manner. But when the discussion reached the problems of the stage directions, he grew confused and could not imagine how the thing could be done on the stage.¹

It seems then that the spiritual meaning determined the form of the play, calling for visual suggestion of indescribable experience. But the pictorial aspect so dominates the play that it threatens to conceal rather than elucidate the spiritual meaning, as it appears to have done for Yeats. The most delicate treatment of the play is necessary if it is not to be a 'meretricious pantomime'.

More than anything else we must avoid theatricalness in the external presentation of The Blue Bird, as well as in the spiritual interpretations, for it might change the fairy dream of the poet into an ordinary extravaganza.

In this regard, the play is all the time balancing on the edge of a knife.²

1. Constantin Stanislavsky, 'A Visit to Maeterlinck', My Life in Art, 4th edition, 1945, p.502
2. Stanislavsky, cited by Oliver M. Saylor, op cit., p.36

A further criticism of The Blue Bird is that the subject-matter of the surface story is not elevated enough to carry the spiritual allegory. The essential likeness to the spiritual quest is there in the fairy-tale, but a play which starts with an ugly fairy in a wood-cutter's cottage has unsuitable emotional associations. Such an opening prepares one for pantomime, not for spirituality of any kind. It is not, however, the fairy element itself that is at fault, it is the particular type of fairy-tale used. Other dramatists, for example, Ibsen, Hauptmann and Yeats, have used fairy material most successfully for spiritual dramas, and the reason is that these writers, far from using the pantomime kind of fairy-tale, draw on the fairy material of national legend and folk-tale, fairy lore that is part of the spiritual heritage of the people, able to evoke emotions of wonder and spiritual fear.

This point is best illustrated from Yeats's work, for he and his colleagues of the Irish Dramatic Movement had their material from and wrote for people to whom fairies and supernatural beings were still very real.

To many an Irish spectator the surface story of such a play as The Land of Heart's Desire (1894) is real and probable, and no doubt Yeats' himself half-believed in the possibility of a young bride being stolen away to fairy-land. But the emotion created by the surface story does not conceal the deeper implications always present in Yeats' treatment of fairy material, which offered him so perfect an expression of his con-

cept of the poetic imagination and of himself as visionary. The justification for considering The Land of Heart's Desire a spiritual allegory is, then, that on one level it is simply the traditional story of the stealing away of a young bride to fairy-land, and on another a study of the poet or visionary forsaking the world for 'the bewilderment of light and freedom' of the spiritual life. The same story is treated allegorically by Edward Martyn in Maeve, where there is a strong vein of political allegory, and J.M. Barrie's Mary Rose offers an interesting comparison as a straightforward treatment of the theme.

The deeper meaning of The Land of Heart's Desire, implied in the prefatory quotation from Blake, becomes clear in the development of the spiritual conflicts. The conflict between the ordinary life, 'the common light of common hours', and the life of dedication to vision, 'the red flare of dreams', is suggested first of all in the setting, with the sharp distinction between the bustling activity of a peasant kitchen and the quiet reading figure of Mary Bruin, standing by the door which leads to the 'vague, mysterious world' of the fairy wood, and it is developed in the opening conversation where Mary's dreamy nature is contrasted with that of the other characters. The conflict reaches its climax in the necessary choice between earthly love and love of the vision, the presentation of this being the most poetically and dramatically effective part of the

of sustaining a spiritual theme, the fairy figure who appears in it is awkwardly and unconvincingly presented. Writing a part for Florence Farr's young niece caused Yeats 'some discomfort', for he 'knew nothing of children'¹ and the result is that some of the emotional atmosphere created by the verse is destroyed by this unsympathetic figure.

Similar to the revival of fairy and folk-tales as dramatic material is the interest in Greek myth shown by a number of modern writers² in their search for a universally meaningful field of reference, both developments undoubtedly being influenced by Wagner's belief that dramatic material should be found in myths accessible to the whole community. But there are few communities now so closely bound as the Irish ~~were~~ early in this century, and few, if any, with such a wealth of legendary material in common use. Few dramatists these days are concerned with a specifically national literature, it being only in times of trouble that plays have had a particular local significance in recent years; the German Expressionist movement, and the Paris theatre during the Occupation produced the latest examples of 'community' plays. For the most part, dramatists now write for the international theatre and consequently look for more universally suggestive material. Although most of this has been found in Greek mythology, one modern story has

1. Autobiographies, 1926, p.345

2. Among the dramatists, notably Eliot, O'Neill, Sartre, Anouilh and Giradoux.

proved to have possibilities as legendary material - Christopher Columbus' adventurous search for the New Land.

Louis Macneice, in an appendix to his radio play on this subject, writes:-

Columbus became a legend first in his own mind, and to all romantics since ... One thing that seems to be agreed about Columbus is that, whether or not he was a first-class navigator, he was a man of one idea with an almost mystical faith in his mission.¹

Columbus' single-minded dedication to vision is the theme of a unique dramatic creation, Claudel's Le Livre de Christophe Colomb, in which the story of the discovery of America is simply a framework for the spiritual voyage of discovery with all its hardships, errors, disillusionments and triumphs. The sea-voyage has been used perhaps more than any other image to suggest the spiritual life. The Seafarer, The Ancient Mariner, The Flying Dutchman and Moby Dick are familiar examples, and many more could be given from the symbolist writers; Baudelaire and Mallarmé used the image in some of their most influential poems, and it is one of the most significant symbols in the work of both Yeats and Eliot.

There can be no doubt about the allegorical interpretation of this voyage, for the opening prayer makes a clear statement:-

Car ce n'est pas lui seulement, ce sont tous les hommes, qui ont la vocation de l'Autre Monde et de cette rive ultérieure que plaise à la Grâce Divine de nous faire atteindre.²

1. Christopher Columbus, 1944, p.90

2. Le Livre de Christophe Colomb, 35th edition, Paris, 1935, p.43

I have deliberately avoided calling this work a play, for it bears very little resemblance to the structure usually thus denoted. Columbus' life is presented as a story read from a book, with short numbered sections representing the chapters of this life-history and a narrator explaining points to the audience. The work illustrates the lengths to which technical experiment has sometimes been taken in this century, and if it is more spectacle or enacted narrative than true drama it is undeniably very effective on the stage as an interpretation of spiritual progress.

Of the great number of experimental devices in this work, I wish to concentrate on the two most notable - the Chorus as illustrating Claudel's theory of dramatic music, and the use of the film-screen for visual extension.

In a lecture on 'Le Drama et la Musique', printed as a preface to Christophe Colomb, Claudel, while admiring Wagner both as dramatist and musician, criticises him for not carrying out his theories and for making the dramatic element subservient to the musical. He proposes therefore to re-examine the question, to see what use a dramatist should make of music and he offers Christophe Colomb as an example of his theories in practice.

Claudel attributes much of his dramatic theory to the influence of the Japanese Kabuki theatre which he visited often during his diplomatic term in Japan. There he found music used,

as he thought, truly dramatically, 'ayant en vue non pas la réalisation d'un tableau sonore, mais la secousse et le train à donner à notre émotion par un moyen purement rythmique ou timbre, plus direct et brutal que la parole'.¹

For Claudel, then, dramatic music is simply the primitive rhythmic beat of drum, guitar, lyre or even hammer -

Ce coup unique et caverneux répété d'abord à longs intervalles, puis plus fort et plus précipité, jusqu'au moment où l'apparition effroyable et attendue vient nous tordre les nerfs, suffit sans orchestre et sans partitions à nous placer dans l'ambiance voulue.²

This emotional intensification is the essential purpose of the beaten instrument in Japanese drama, and Yeats, in adapting the Noh form, makes use of it in the same way. But Yeats admits song as a dramatic element, which Claudel will not do, for,

il y a entre l'atmosphère de la parole pure et celle de la musique une différence presque douloureuse et le passage de l'un à l'autre³ a pour effet de détruire complètement l'enchantement...

This view is interesting in the light of recent attempts, notably by the producer Joan Littlewood, to revivify drama by including song in what is believed to be the Elizabethan method. Her productions often exploit the destructive effects of the change from spoken to sung word in prose drama, though on the other hand, Yeats' plays show that in poetic drama, where

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1. 'Le Drame et la Musique', Le Livre de Christophe Colomb, 1935, p.21
 2. Ibid. p.22
 3. Ibid. p.19

the spoken word is at a high level of intensity, the change to song is a natural development.

The use of music to intensify emotion has not been confined to symbolist drama; Tennessee Williams' A Streetcar Named Desire is only one example of the successful use of the device in a realistic play. But one must remember that the whole problem of music in drama has been radically altered by the invention of the gramophone, which has removed the necessity for the physical presence of musicians on stage or in an orchestra pit. A musician may, however, have other work to do in a play than simply to produce background music, and Claudel, looking to the Japanese theatre, stressed certain functions of the musician which are not in fact strictly musical.

He notes that in the Japanese theatre the musician is almost one of the actors, since he follows the play very closely and punctuates the text at various times with the beat of his instrument, thus commenting audibly on the action. Audible comment is not confined to the musical instrument but extends to the voice of the musician or group of musicians. In the Kabuki theatre, a number of musicians may sit in a kind of box at the side of the proscenium, from which they give audible expression to the emotions roused by the play:-

À côté de la voix articulée il y a la voix inarticulée, le grognement, l'exclamation, le doute, la surprise, tous les sentiments humains exprimés par de simples intonations et confiés à ces témoins officiels là-bas, accroupis dans leur

petite loge. Quand nous sommes empoignés par le drame, nous sommes reconnaissants à cet anonyme qui pousse des cris à notre place et qui veut bien se charger d'exprimer nos sentiments par quelque chose de moins conventionnel que des applaudissements ou des sifflets.¹

This has little connection with music, except in so far as the voices are of those who may also strike the instruments, but to Claudel these inarticulate sounds are a form of music, and the intermediary function of such musicians leads him directly to the concept of a dramatic Chorus.

The Chorus for Claudel is a group not of commentators or counsellors but of interpreters of feeling, expressed not in song or simple speech but in ritual chant, the addition of words to the rhythmic beat of the instrument,-

Toute voix, toute parole, toute action, tout événement détermine un écho, une réponse. Elle provoque et propage cette espèce de mugissement collectif et anonyme comme la mer des générations l'une derrière l'autre qui regardent et qui écoutent.

C'est là ce que j'appelle le Choeur ... ce même choeur tel que l'Eglise après le triomphe du Christianisme l'invita à pénétrer dans l'édifice sacré et à se faire intermédiaire entre le prêtre et le peuple, l'un officiant et l'autre officiel. Entre la foule muette et le drame qui se développe à la scène, et, si je peux le dire, à l'autel, il y avait besoin d'un truchement officiellement constitué.²

This identification of drama with religious ritual and of the function of the Chorus with that of the Church choir points to Eliot's experiment with Chorus in Murder in the Cathedral. In some aspects of its function this Chorus is

1. Op cit. p.24

2. Op cit. pp.34-5

The prayer which follows stresses the spiritual significance of the theme and, as it were, invites the audience to participate in a religious ritual, with the Chorus consenting on its behalf, and in the next section, the Chorus accompanies the symbolic representation of the coming of the Holy Spirit with a chanted anthem.

This identification of the Chorus with the Church choir is not made again until the end of the first section, when the discovery of America, presented in tableau form, is accompanied by the chanting of the Te Deum, another interesting comparison with Murder in the Cathedral. In the second part, Christophe's experience of the Dark Night of the Soul has as its background the Chorus' chant of the De Profundis, and the final spiritual victory is reflected in the triumphal hymn of praise.

The Chorus takes part in the action in a variety of ways. It establishes itself early as the mouthpiece of public opinion, - 'Nous sommes la posterité! Nous sommes le jugement des hommes!' - and within the general body are the two sides, Defence and Opposition, who conduct a miniature court-scene in which Christophe is tried by these elements both in public opinion and in his own conscience.

It is often the function of the Chorus to give expression to Christophe's inner conflicts, as in the scene in his home, or in the later temptations. Similarly, when Isabelle is at prayer, the Chorus speaks as the voice of God, or Saint James,

or simply as element of her own soul leading her to a particular revelation.

On a more matter-of-fact level, the Chorus takes part in crowd scenes with its members speaking as individuals, as in the recruitment scene or the sailors' revolt; Claudel deliberately attracts attention to the device, -

L'Explicateur Et voici Christophe Colomb en Espagne. (Au Choeur) Ces messieurs que vous voyez sont des soldats et des savants. C'est vous qui êtes chargés de parler à leur place, s'il vous plaît.¹

In 'Le Drame et la Musique', Claudel comments on the way a Japanese musician suggests the coming of a storm, and he uses his own Chorus for the same purpose. In the storm scene, the theatrical illusion is destroyed, perhaps in order to stress the unrealistic aspect of the work, by presenting the Chorus as a set of unruly actors, -

(Pendant toute la scène qui précède, le Choeur n'ayant rien à faire s'est livré avec animation à toute sorte de conversations particulières. Ça et là on voit des gens qui chantent à mi-voix et des groupes qui commencent à répéter les scènes suivantes.)

L'Explicateur Je prie ces messieurs et dames du Choeur de vouloir bien se montrer un peu moins turbulents et plus discrets ...²

This is a far cry from the idealistic view of the Chorus as spiritual mediator and of the play as religious ritual, and it is only one example of the divergence between Claudel's theory and his actual practice. **Another** is to be found in the

1. Christophe Colomb, p.72

2. Ibid. p.137

second problem considered in 'Le Drame et la Musique', that of décor, which Claudel feels should be as suggestive to the eye as music to the ear. A painted backcloth and fixed setting are for him barriers to the progress of imagination, and looking for a way of presenting vague, suggestive and mobile images, he arrives at the idea of using a film-screen,-

Pourquoi ne pas utiliser l'écran comme un miroir magique où toutes sortes d'ombres et de suggestions plus ou moins confuses et dessinées passent, bougent, se mêlent ou se séparent? Pourquoi ne pas ouvrir la porte de ce monde trouble où l'idée naît de la sensation et où le fantôme du futur se mêle à l'ombre du passé?¹

This is a slightly different use of the screen from that already explored in Expressionist drama, in Sorge's Der Bettler, for example, or Toller's Hoppla!, but in fact Claudel does not in Christophe Colomb use the screen in the way he suggests, that is as a backcloth, a road 'ouvert au rêve, à la mémoire et à l'imagination'.

The first use of the screen is perhaps something of a development of this idea, with its symbolic presentation of the descent of the dove to the turning globe, but elsewhere it is used for the entirely different purpose of revealing a character's thoughts. Section Eleven, 'La Vocation de Christophe Colomb' illustrates both the advantages and drawbacks of the device; Christophe is **at** home with his family, reading the story of Marco Polo, elements of which are portrayed on the screen as they penetrate his mind, the more

1. Ibid. pp.36-7

striking aspects standing out particularly clearly. This is perhaps a justifiable, if unnecessary, device for revealing mental impressions otherwise unrepresented, repeated even more effectively in Isabelle's prayer in Section 15. Her mind strays to the events of recent months, with those things which have most affected her appearing several times, until, when she achieves concentration, the screen becomes transformed to a kind of stained glass window depicting St. James, to whom she makes her prayer.

But the earlier section shows how soon this becomes merely a clever trick, -

A un certain moment, la mère regarde son fils. Alors on voit aussi la mère sur l'écran. La soeur vient lire par-dessus son épaule. Alors on voit la soeur aussi sur l'écran.¹

This double action, mimed three-dimensionally on stage and pictured in black and white immediately behind, distracts the attention and, far from invoking dream and imagination, occupies one in technical speculation. The device is further explored when the characters themselves become conscious of the screen. Christophe stands before it and asks 'Où sommes-nous?'. The reply is that he is inside his conscience and, watching the figures on the screen, he asks, -

Qui sont ces Éthiopiens chargés de chaînes?

Le Cuisinier L'esclavage a disparu du monde et c'est toi qui l'as rétabli.²

1. Ibid. p.56

2. Ibid. p.155

The major fault in this device is that it mixes two different types of visual appeal. The visual aspect of a stage presentation is very different from that of film, and to expect an audience to accept both conventions at once is to involve it in a confusion of response.

Something of the same error is to be found in the representation of the dove, a symbol which would surely be effective enough in the name of the hero and in the frequent references to it by the Chorus, without its appearance on the screen and certainly without a flock of real doves flying over the stage.

This kind of confusion is apparent throughout the work, which is in fact a hotch-potch of techniques. Dance, Choral chant, tableaux, film, narrator are legitimate elements only if they serve the central purpose of the theme and do not appear to be there simply as experiments. But the fault with Christophe Colomb is that there is no unity of tone; from the solemn ritual of the opening there is a descent to burlesque in the false ending and the childish behaviour of the Chorus, and then a swing back again to solemnity in the vision of heaven.

The same extravagance appears also in Claudel's desire not to let the audience miss the significance of the allegory. This fault is particularly noticeable at the end of the play where, instead of allowing the audience to discover for itself the universality of Christophe's experience, Claudel likens

him to Jonah, to Christ on the Cross, to Christ in the wilderness and on the stormy sea, to Elijah, to John; his entry into heaven is associated with Christ's journey to Jerusalem, with His Resurrection, and with the return of the dove to Noah after three days.

In spite of the many technical faults, there is great power in this work, attributable in part to the emotional beat of the choral chant and in part to the fitness of the Christopher Columbus story as a 'modern' and universally significant spiritual allegory.

2. The Search for the Ideal Lover

I can see nothing plain; all's mystery.
 Yet sometimes there's a torch inside my head
 That makes all clear, but when the light is gone
 I have but images, analogies,
 ... But when the torch is lit
 All that is impossible is certain,
 I plunge in the abyss.¹

Sometimes I have actually sublime feelings; when the tremendous event takes place, and the ocean of light is pouring from the hot golden pitcher.²

These quotations, references to that spiritual experience which I have called the 'moment of vision', come from two symbolist plays written within the same decade by writers of very different national and dramatic backgrounds. Yeats's The Shadowy Waters and Hauptmann's Und Pippa Tanzt are in many ways dissimilar, but they are alike in that both are experiments in presenting aspects of the spiritual life in terms of a love-quest for the ideal woman. We may possibly see this as the secular equivalent to the mystics' account of their experiences in terms of the search for a divine lover, as in St. Bernard or Richard of St. Victor, and certainly these plays bear comparison with the medieval courtly love allegories.

The fact that these two dramatists should see their

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1. W.B. Yeats, The Shadowy Waters Collected Plays, 1953, p.152. All references are to the 1911 acting version.
 2. Gerhart Hauptmann, Und Pippa Tanzt, Dramatic Works, ed. Ludwig Lewisohn, 1914, Vol.V, p.188

experiences in similar terms is not surprising in view of the likeness between their philosophies. Both distrusted institutionalized orthodox religion, evolving personal systems of direct communication with reality based to a large extent on Platonism and the philosophies of the East; Hauptmann could well have said with Yeats, 'the mystical life is at the centre of all that I do and all that I think and all that I write'¹. Furthermore, they attached great importance to dream states and trance, both as a source of artistic inspiration and as a means of communicating with a spiritual reality. To Hauptmann,

the thought-dream [Denktraum] is the greatest human power, the condition for the greatest human nobility, in its greatest effect, the divine word;²

Yeats speaks of the symbols appearing in the mind 'between sleeping and waking' as 'the greatest of all powers'³. Both believed that this type of dream represented a momentary contact with the world-soul, an idea which finds support in Jung's theory of the collective unconscious.

Any one who has any experience of any mystical state of the soul knows how there float up in the mind profound symbols, whose meaning, ... one does not perhaps understand for years. Nor I think has any one, who has known that experience with any constancy, failed to find some day in some old book or on some old monument, a strange or intricate

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1. The Letters of W.B. Yeats, 1954, p.211
 2. Ausblicke, p.44. Quoted by J.J. Weisert, The Dream in Gerhart Hauptmann, 1949, p.14
 3. Ideas of Good and Evil, 1903, p.64

image, that had floated up before him, and grown perhaps dizzy with the sudden conviction that our little memories are but a part of some great memory that renews the world and men's thoughts age after age ...¹

Such speculations on the significance of dream-vision occupied both Yeats and Hauptmann throughout their lives and a great part of their prose writings is concerned with this subject. What is of importance to us here, however, is the relation of this belief to their dramatic work and its influence on both form and content.

Hauptmann was far more concerned than Yeats with the use of dream as a dramatic device and with the problem of dream presentation on the stage. This aspect of the subject will be studied more fully in the later chapter on the dream-play², but it must be noted here that in both The Shadowy Waters and Und Pippa Tanzt an attempt is made to present visionary trance.

It is impossible to assess the extent of the influence of dream on the content of their plays, particularly as there is a sense in which all art is a product of dream activity. We may, however, see two particular ways in which dream affected their choice of subject-matter. In the first place, the theme of a number of their plays, as of the two we are considering, is the response to the spiritual being they had themselves become aware of in dream-states; secondly, many of their plays are based on actual dreams, either their own or

1. Ibid. pp.112-113

2. cf. p.133 foll.

other people's, or on symbolic images seen in dreams. Thus, for example, J.J. Weisert quotes an account of a dream described by Hauptmann to a friend, which may well have been the inspiration of his play:-

I cannot help connecting a dream with Pippa, which Gerhart Hauptmann once - it was in 1893 - told me: about a girl who enchanted all the men around her by her graceful dancing, and there were rough fellows, and old men, as well as men of the world, until finally they joined hands for a carmagnole [Schunkelwalzer], formed a circle around the object of their devotion, and sang in a terrifying erotic madness ...¹

Und Pippa Tanzt was written in October and November, 1905, and at that time Hauptmann spoke of having had the subject deeply rooted within him for many years. Similarly, Yeats pondered on The Shadowy Waters for over ten years, working on many drafts before the published 1900 version, and reshaping the play for the stage as late as 1911. Thus, as products of minds of a very similar bent, these plays, with so deep a hold on their authors' imaginations, suggest a worthwhile comparison, especially since one is the work of a poet who, though largely responsible for the success of an experimental theatre, was nevertheless always more poet than dramatist, while the other was by an established playwright, Germany's leading modern dramatist in both the realist and symbolist fields. The fact that he became internationally famous for a group of realistic social plays which were not his major work

1. The Dream in Gerhart Hauptmann, p.69

is one of the many likenesses between Hauptmann's dramatic career and Ibsen's. The experience gained from the writing of such plays left its mark on his later work and accounts for much of the difference in technique between his play and The Shadowy Waters, whose author never for one moment considered writing anything but a drama 'remote, spiritual and ideal'.

One obvious feature of both plays is an obscurity of meaning only to be removed by a natural or acquired sympathy with the dramatists' poetic conception of life. It is therefore essential for every critic to make clear what he feels the play is about. Yeats' play is the more easily interpreted, since his symbols are of that traditional kind which he believed to have a peculiar power through having been long associated with the 'great memory'. I think it true to say that once the central symbols have been mastered little remains obscure in Yeats' work as a whole.

Of The Shadowy Waters Yeats several times wrote in his letters that he wished 'to make it a kind of grave ecstasy', and a quotation from Per Amica Silentia Lunae throws light on this statement, -

for the awakening, for the vision, for the revelation of reality, tradition offers us a different word - ecstasy.¹

By what means then does Yeats present the exploration of his response to such a revelation of reality?

1. Per Amica Silentia Lunae, 1918, p.22

The poet-visionary is represented as the captain of a ship sailing through the 'waste places of the great sea' in search of an Ever-living woman, ship, sea and woman all traditional romantic symbols for aspects of the spiritual life. He is guided by grey birds who appear from time to time and promise him 'unheard-of passion', 'some strange love the world knows nothing of'. These birds, ancient symbols for the souls of the dead, are the witnesses to the existence of another reality; they represent the spiritual guardians that many visionaries are aware of, (Eliot embodies them very differently in The Cocktail Party), and while for many they are simply a vague idea, to Yeats they were real presences:-

The thought was again and again before me that this study had created a contact or mingling with minds who had followed a like study in some other age, and that these minds still saw and thought and chose. Our daily thought was certainly but the line of foam at the shallow end of a vast luminous sea ...

I longed to know something even if it were but the family and Christian names of those minds that I could divine, and that yet remained always as it seemed impersonal. The sense of contact came perhaps but two or three times with clearness and certainty, but it left among all to whom it came some trace, a sudden silence, as it were, in the midst of thought or perhaps at moments of crisis a faint voice.¹

The captain's particular power lies in a magic harp, passed on to him by these guides, with which he can enchant all listeners. This 'old harp of the nine spells' is the gift of poetry entrusted to Forgael and it is by this means that for him spiritual vision is to be achieved:-

1. Ibid. p.51 and p.53

that old harp of the nine spells
 That is more mighty than the sun and moon,
 Or than the shivering casting-net¹ of the stars,
 That none might take you from me.¹

The queen Dectora becomes for Forgael the ideal woman he seeks, that is to say, the poet momentarily achieves vision. There is subtle psychology in the poet's subsequent doubt of the vision because he has himself induced it in poetic trance, but in accepting the vision and cutting all ties with the world, the poet dedicates himself to the life of the spirit.

It is possible to interpret this play as a monodrama, with all the figures representing certain aspects of one character's mind in conflict. Thus the sailors speak for the lowest elements in the poet's being, the material and physical desires, the scoffers at vision, the parts that would like to destroy all spiritual progress. They would prefer to put Ailb^beric in charge, the one who speaks as man's common-sense or reason, is 'satisfied to live like other men' and can reason out all the weak points in the 'impossible dreams'. Interpreted in this way, Dectora's part is more convincing; as an embodiment of the vision in Forgael's own mind, pursued, achieved, doubted and held to, her fluctuations are a more logical development of the theme. For it is chiefly in the presentation of Dectora that the play yields to the pressure of dramatic convention and attempts to develop on a surface

1. Collected plays, p.156.

level the story of an attack on a queen's ship. The Shadowy Waters would, I think, have been more intelligible if it had indeed been as Yeats said 'deliberately without human characters', for Dectora has too many of an ordinary woman's emotions and conflicts to be a completely successful embodiment of the spiritual vision.

If we compare this with Und Pippa Tanzt we find that Hauptmann makes no attempt to present his half-child, half-woman figure in anything like a realistic way, although there are many realistic elements in the play as a whole. Pippa is from the beginning a strange, isolated creature, sought after by all men and deigning to give herself only to the one worthy of her. She is never an ordinary child, in fact she is seldom a human character at all; she is almost wholly an image of the spiritual vision and as such is far more successful than Dectora.

Und Pippa Tanzt is a more complex play than The Shadowy Waters and explores in greater detail the search for spiritual vision. The three seekers clearly represent three types of approach to life; old Huhn, a huge half-brute of a man sees his ideal in the work of his hands and lives solely on a physical level; the Manager, something of a materialist with a common-sense attitude, occasionally has visions of the truth but has no spiritual stamina to live by these; only Michel Hellriegel, the poet-dreamer, is prepared to make the necessary sacrifices and follow the road to inner vision. Again, as in

The Shadowy Waters, there is a sense in which these figures represent aspects of one man's experience; this applies particularly to the last act, where Huhn's death coincides with Hellriegel's rejection of the outer world.

Michel's spiritual quest, like Forgael's, is presented in terms of a journey; at his first appearance

the effects of a long fatiguing journey are to be seen in the pale exhausted expression and movements of the young man ... In his entire appearance is a touch of the fantastic and a touch of ill-health.¹

As the sailors thought Forgael mad, so the workmen consider Michel 'not quite right in his upper storey' and his life's aim seems to them quite ridiculous:-

<u>Hellriegel</u>	I want to go out into the world.
<u>Manager</u>	Are you not in the world here with us?
<u>Hellriegel</u>	I am searching for something.
<u>Manager</u>	Have you lost something?
<u>Hellriegel</u>	No! I think something is coming to me ... I really don't know where I am. ²

In this receptive state of mind the 'something' does come to him, as suddenly and unexpectedly as every moment of vision -

Pippa looks at Hellriegel and laughs; he forgetting everything around him, fixes his eyes on hers. His lips move mutely.³

From the inn in the gorge, Michel moves higher to the dilapidated cabin in the mountains and there, through faith in the existence of the ideal, again experiences a moment of vision. All seems transformed by magic, music fills the

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1. Dramatic Works, Vol.V, p.152
 2. Ibid. pp.154-5
 3. Ibid. p.160

cottage, birds sing outside in the snow, old Huhn's roar of anger changes to a 'heralding of great joy' and the 'ocean of light' floods the room.

The voyager, led on by his vision, moves further up to a ridge of the mountain, to the home of Wann, described as 'a mythological character'. He appears to be Hauptmann's conception of the guardian figure and offers an interesting comparison, in respect of both function and presentation, with Eliot's Harcourt-Reilly of The Cocktail Party. He spends his life in contemplation, high up away among the ice and snows, 'far above all kinds of folly that give men like us the headache' and is fully occupied there, for 'tedium is where God is not'. To him, as to Harcourt-Reilly, come the seekers, hoping for solutions to their problems. Michel reaches this refuge after almost succumbing to the difficulties of the journey through the snow:-

One knows at least, when one gasps for breath in the black flames of Hades, that one is a fighter, and is still far from the paradise of light.¹

To Michel the goal of the heavenly city appears as the beautiful glass-maker's city by the sea, where the water blossoms into flowers of glass, and whose every little bridge and staircase and alley I have seen in my dreams my whole life long.²

Wann knows of this city and promises to show Michel the way, which, with Pippa's help, he does by sending Michel into a

1. Ibid. p.204

2. Ibid. p.216

hypnotic sleep in which he sees gardens of stone, blue meadows with marble flowers, mountains and hyacinthine seas, 'more wonders than any human soul can ever comprehend'. What prevents him from fully realizing this vision is the physical element, the earthly ties, 'Why does that damned old grunting ox Huhn stand before the gate and threaten me, and keep me from entering?' In the final scene, Michel betrays his vision to this 'wild, old ragamuffin of a beast' and is left with only faith in the ideal to guide him further. Wann performs a kind of spiritual marriage between Michel and Pippa - 'I wed you to a shade! The man who is wedded to a shade weds you to it!' and sends Michel out into the world in something of the same way as Harcourt-Reilly sends out Celia -

For eventually it may be possible that you will have to play and sing here and there at people's doors, but do not on that account lose your courage.¹

Thus the ending of the play, with the continuing of the journey and the continued faith in the existence of the ideal, resembles in some ways the conclusion of The Shadowy Waters. Michel is committed to Pippa as Forgael to Dectora, and like them, Michel will in a more literal sense 'gaze upon this world no longer'.

The likeness between the movement of the two plays will be clear from the preceding accounts; of more significance

1. Op cit. p.246

perhaps is the similarity between certain images and devices central to the spiritual theme.

Both dramatists, like almost every writer on religious experience, use light as an image of the spiritual illumination. Thus Forgael speaks of being 'drunken with a dizzy light' and of a torch inside the head, and Michel is flooded by 'an ocean of light'. When this light shines, everything else is seen to be insignificant:-

It's not a dream,
But the reality that makes our passion
As a lamp shadow - no - no lamp, the sun.¹

In the second act of Und Pippa Tanzt, stage lighting is used to show the gradual illumination of Michel's soul. In Huhn's dark cottage, a single ray of light falls on Michel's finger-tip and as the 'great joy' increases, spreads throughout the room, and when the curtain falls,

music, which began with the light on Hellriegel's finger, swells, and as it grows louder, depicts the mighty rising of the winter sun.²

The device is repeated at the end of the play, when as the blind Michel speaks of an 'endless twinkling of mirrored lights', 'the first faint light of morning penetrates into the hall'³, and it becomes quite light as he states his conviction that Pippa will dance again.

Similarly, at the close of The Shadowy Waters, the darkened

1. The Shadowy Waters, p.151

2. Dramatic Works, Vol.V.p.189

3. Ibid.p.248

scene is illuminated by a single ray, which grows stronger when all ties with the world are broken, until finally the magic harp 'begins to burn as with fire'.

Closely connected with the light image is music, again traditionally associated with spiritual experience. Musical powers are attributed to both heroes; the Manager guesses that Michel 'sings, too, when he is in his right mind', and everyone fears Forgael's harp -

It is said that when he plays upon it he has power over all the listeners, with or without the body, seen or unseen, and any man that listens grows to be as mad as himself.

A musical instrument as a magical agent is a feature of both plays; Forgael's harp can make even the sailors see visions, and Pippa has to dance for old Huhn when the ocarina plays. It is by playing the ocarina that Michel causes Pippa to appear before him, as if by magic:-

Michel ... I imagine that the little red-haired nymph is in it, and may perhaps jump and dance, when one plays on it. And now I really will try the experiment.

[He puts the ocarina to his mouth, looks around searchingly and plays. At the first tones, Pippa rises with her eyes closed, trips to the middle of the room and takes the position for dancing.]

Pippa Yes, father, I'm coming! I am already here!
[Michel Hellriegel drops the ocarina, and stares with wide open mouth, struck senseless by surprise.]¹

It is music which causes the trance episode in each play; by striking the magic harp Forgael is able to quell the sailors'

1. Dramatic Works, Vol.V, p.178

resistance and send them into poetic dream, and by exercising the same power, he takes hold of Dectora and gains her response.

Michel's trance is induced not by the ocarina but by magic music created when Pippa runs her finger round the edge of a Venetian glass. From this glass comes

a soft tone, which gets stronger and stronger, until its tones unite in harmonies, which, swelling, grow to a short but mighty storm of music ...¹

This section, in which Michel sees his vision of the heavenly city, is heightened by verse, the only verse in the play apart from one soliloquy a little later.

The transe is caused in part also by a model of a gondola, and can only be ended when the boat is taken from Michel's hand. The introduction of the gondola as a hypnotic agent recalls the mystics' contemplation of an object of devotion as a means towards spiritual vision. Since Michel's ideal is seen in terms of Venice, a gondola would be an obvious suggestive symbol.

In the later acts, the gondola is more intimately connected with Michel as the means by which he travels spiritually, a parallel to Forgael's ship. So Wann takes leave of Michel with the words, 'Sail away, sail away, little gondola!'; the 'models of antique, medieval, and modern ocean and river boats, which hang down from the ceiling' in Wann's room perhaps symbolize the many other souls in Wann's care.

1. Ibid. p.218

As we have noted, the gondola is connected with the vision as the city of Venice, and this in turn is only part of the image central to the play, that of glass. Hauptmann's description of the play as 'ein Glashüttenmärchen' refers to far more than the fact that the first act is set in an inn near a glass factory and that many of the characters work there. Glass glitters throughout the play, strengthening the light image; there is broken glass, delicate table-crystal sparkling in lighted Parisian restaurants, wine-filled Venetian glass in Wann's dark room, icicles and frozen fir-cones chinking like glass, snow and ice everywhere giving the impression of a world of glass. For, in fact, the world is presented as a great glass-factory, in which each may catch a glimpse of beauty according to his temperament. Each of the three seekers is a glass-maker by trade; the Manager's attitude to the work is materialistic, though he sometimes sees Pippa in the fire 'when the white flames break from the furnace'; Huhn is 'one of the ghosts of the old glass-factory, that can neither live nor die', dwelling on dreams of the past and refusing to go any further; only Michel travels over the mountains because he would 'like to learn something quite unusual' and find 'the beautiful glass-maker's city by the sea'.

In Huhn's dream in the last act, it seems as if Hauptmann's view of mankind's situation is summed up:-

The world was cold! - there wasn't no day no more, no mornin' no more! There we was settin' around a cold glass-furnace! - and then there was some people, yes, yes ...

then they come from far off, a-creepin' through the snow! They come from far off because they was hungry; they wanted to have a crumb of light upon their tongues! They wanted to drink a wee bit of warmth into their benumbed bones. That's so! - an there they lay around at night in the glass factory! We heard 'em groanin'! We heard 'em waiting! An' then I got up, an' poked around in the ashpit - an' all at once a single spark ... a little spark flew up from the ashes! Oh, Jesus, what'll I do with the little spark, that all at once has flown out of the ashes?¹

To this question each of the seekers must find his own answer; for the poet that spark of light must be cherished, and followed until inner vision is achieved.

I have shown some of the likenesses in the theme and treatment of the two plays; in conclusion, the question must be considered of whether the very different structures of the plays help or hinder the presentation of the theme.

The major difference between Yeats' concise, unified one-act and Hauptmann's straddling four-act play is that the latter is full of movement where the former is in many senses motionless. Und Pippa Tanzt has three scene changes which, as we have noted, represent an upward physical movement corresponding to Michel's spiritual progress, a symbolic use of movement comparable with that in Brand. There is movement from the realistic opening scene, which appears to promise another Die Weber, to the highly imaginative and magical final scenes, a change of tone which is perhaps not wholly satisfactory. In addition, there is a great deal of external action, much of it violent, - dancing, fighting, quarreling, killing,

1. Ibid. p.234

struggling in death-throes.

This is very unlike The Shadowy Waters, which is so stripped of unnecessary movement that it could, as Yeats says, 'be acted on two big tables in a drawing-room'¹. The stage directions read, 'the persons move but little' and, indeed, they have no occasion to. This was for Yeats an experimental lack of action; his two earlier plays The Countess Cathleen and The Land of Heart's Desire, had been more conventional where external movement is concerned.

The effect of this outward stillness is to concentrate the attention on the spiritual and emotional movement, which relies entirely for its presentation on the suggestiveness of the language. Yeats could have been writing of this play that,

If the real world is not altogether rejected, it is but touched here and there, and into the places we have left empty we summon rhythm, balance, pattern, images that remind us of vast passions, the vagueness of past times, all the chimeras that haunt the edge of trance.²

The imagery of The Shadowy Waters is very highly patterned and close-knit. The central images are quietly and unobtrusively introduced before they gain their full symbolic force; thus the sailors talk of the sea, the moon and shadows and Forgael dreams of 'hair that is the colour of burning'. The persistent image of the net is an important one, conveying

1. Letters, p.327

2. The Cutting of an Agate, 1919, pp.32-3

the visionary's sense of the absolute necessity of continuing the spiritual voyage, a suggestive image appropriate to the ship setting and beautifully visualized in the symbolic covering of Forgael with Dectora's hair at the close. In the final lines, the major images - light, net, harp, birds and dreams - are gathered together:-

[The harp begins to burn as with fires.]
Forgael [gathering Dectora's hair about him] Beloved, having
 dragged the net about us,
 And knitted mesh to mesh, we grow immortal;
 And that old harp awakens of itself
 To cry aloud to the grey birds, and dreams,
 That have had dreams for father, live in us.¹

'Suggestiveness' is the keynote of the imagery and indeed of the whole play, and this is exactly what Yeats hoped to achieve. The stage arrangement, in sharp contrast **to** Hauptmann's detailed realistic setting, was to be simple and evocative, 'The sea or sky is represented by a semicircular cloth of which nothing can be seen except a dark abyss', an advance on the symbolic detail of the earlier version in which, for example, the sail was patterned with 'three rows of hounds, the first dark, the second red, and the third white with red ears'.²

The action too is no more than suggestive, making no statement and barely developing a theme. The play probably suggests something different to each listener, according to

1. Collected Plays, p.167

2. The Shadowy Waters, 1900, p.13

the quality of his spiritual experience and this, rather than being a limitation, is one of the play's greatest assets. It is simply the carrying to extremes of a basic element of all art, but one insisted on by the symbolists - 'art must never be a statement, always an evocation'¹.

The Shadowy Waters and Und Pippa Tanzt are experiments in a drama of evocation, neither of them, I feel, wholly successful, but both demonstrating that in such drama the more the outer world and realistic observations are rejected, the greater the suggestive power of the play.

It is possible, therefore, to convey the theme of spiritual search indirectly by either a predominantly intellectual or a predominantly emotional method. Intellectually conceived symbols may form an outwardly simple story resembling in its progress the deeper spiritual movements, or a situation may be presented which creates an emotional atmosphere analogous to that of the spiritual experience. It is essential for the outward story to evoke suitable associations and in this respect, the search for the ideal lover has proved to be the more satisfactory 'objective correlative'.

All the allegorical plays considered have exalted traditionally minor elements of dramatic form to a position of central importance, completely removing interest in character study and creating emotion either by verse or by the exploitation

1. Arthur Symons, Studies in Seven Arts, 1925, p.96

of the visual aspect. Since the characters are all stylized, the plays are inevitably interpretations rather than representations of experience, and as such are not nearly so successful nor so dramatic as the plays in which 'real' characters make the spiritual voyage.

Chapter 3.

The Dream-Play.

Das Traumspiel ist eine neue Form, die meine Erfindung ist.¹

The visualization of dream experience on the stage, as distinct **from** a simple description of a character's dream, is a technique greatly developed during the modern period, though certainly not confined to it. The dream-revelation has proved a convenient method of sorting out a difficult plot, witness Posthumus' incredibly informative vision in Cymbeline; it provides a framework within which the supernatural, magical and fanciful may legitimately be presented, as in The Blue Bird, and, more subtly, it is a means of revealing a character's unacknowledged mental state, of exploring the subconscious. In this respect, Richard III's dream before battle foreshadows the modern psychological approach, for recent experiments with the dramatic potentialities of dream are very much a product of that inward-turning movement, fostered by William James and Bergson and coming to a grand climax in the work of Freud. The modern age's obsessive self-consciousness is nowhere more clearly reflected in the drama than in the vogue of dream-plays instituted by Strindberg, where dramatic form is as radically altered as the novel's in its parallel development of the stream-of-consciousness technique.

Strindberg's experiments with dream form were anticipated

I. Strindberg, Letter to Emil Schering, June 13, 1902.

by Hauptmann though he, being primarily interested in the dream itself as a type of spiritual experience, produced no such startling formal innovations as those of A Dream Play. Where Strindberg was concerned with imitating the movements of dream to gain greater freedom in presentation of subtle mental states, Hauptmann was interested in the dream for its own sake, in its sources and meaning and in the relation between actual waking events and those of dream. Thus his first major dramatic experiment with dream, Hanneles Himmelfahrt (1893), reflects more the growing interest in the psychological foundation of dream than the exploration of it as a liberating stage device, though in fact, this play does make a definite technical innovation leading to the complete abandonment of the 'real' world in later plays.

J.J. Weisert considers that the great technical advance made by this play is that,

the traditional boundaries by which the territory of the dream was delimited on the stage are lacking, and it is left to the perception of the spectator to draw this distinction.¹

But, in the first part at least, the boundaries of the dream are very clearly marked, and by a simple device, familiar from Grillparzer's Der Traum, ein Leben. In that play, the beginning of Rustan's dream is marked by a symbolic extinguishing and lighting of torches; one gaily dressed youth lights his torch from that of a youth in brown, who then extinguishes his light;

1. The Dream in Gerhart Hauptmann, p.53

at the end of the dream the process is reversed. Hauptmann adapts this device, assimilating it neatly to his realistic setting, by marking the boundaries of two of Hannele's dreams with the extinguishing and re-lighting of the nurse's candle. This visual device can leave no doubt as to when we are within Hannele's mind, and we are thus still far away from the uncertainties of Und Pippa Tanzt, and the deliberate removal of all boundaries in Strindberg, though the merging of reality into Hannele's final dream, with no delineation, points to the freedom of these later plays.

Because of this 'technical advance' in the second section, the play was thought to reflect an entirely new development in Hauptmann's outlook, and certainly in comparison with the consistent naturalism of Vor Sonnenaufgang (1889) and Die Weber (1892) it appears highly unrealistic. But in respect of both dream and realism the play hardly represents a major change; Hauptmann's interest in dream is seen in his earliest known dramatic pieces, Liebesfrühling (1881) and Der Hochzeitsung (1884) and persists through the period of his extreme naturalism in the prose studies Bahnwärter Thiel (1887) and Der Apostel (1890); as for realism, there is in fact not only a faithfully observed setting in the almshouse, but a new kind of realism in the careful psychological motivation of the dream.

The opening picture of life in the almshouse acts as prologue, and the old pauper's hymn compresses the theme of Hannele's dream:-

Jesus, lover of my soul,
 Let me to Thy bosom fly,
 While the waves of trouble ...

The almshouse, with the cheating, squabbling, begging, hunger and poverty, is a very effective contrast to the beautiful world of Hannele's dream, and marks the difference between dream and reality; it is, moreover, a microcosm not only of Hannele's background but of the whole world, so inferior ~~to~~ the realm of spiritual vision.

After Hannele has been brought into the almshouse, the discussion fulfils two functions, that of filling in the details of Hannele's life and background, and of setting in motion in her subconscious mind, the train of ideas soon to be the foundation of her dream. The relation between outward events and those of dream is established early, when Hannele, in her semi-delirious state, confuses the noise of an object thrown to the ground with the coming of her dreaded father. Her preliminary delirium and first dream are connected with fears of this cruel father, the cause of her tragedy. This apparition appears almost as the conventional ghost, enveloped in a pale light, and his heartlessness has been well prepared for by the preceding conversation; more interesting is the way in which some of his ideas have just been expressed in the paupers' quarrel; for example, the theme of lying and of lazy sluts not working, coupled with similar orders to a task.

Only after one character's loud assertion that 'she won't last long' has penetrated to Hannele's mind does the more import-

ant visionary experience begins. For the main idea explored in this play is how a single fact, here the knowledge that death is near, presents itself to the subconscious mind; in other words, it is the psychological study of how far dream experience is an amalgam of ideas, actions and wishes of the 'outer' life.

The second dream is of Hannele's mother, whom she has thought of as being in heaven. She is poorly dressed and ill-looking, as Hannele used to know her and as she has been described to us in the earlier section. The heaven she comes from is a child's view of heaven, 'hundreds of thousands of miles' away, with radiant winged angels, wide meadows of lilies and roses, and food and wine for all who hunger and thirst. The Mother speaks in biblical terms and the echoes of Bible stories reveal the child's former association of these with her mother's memory.

This dream takes place within the short time needed to sing the second verse of a lullaby. Sister Martha is shown singing one verse before Hannele falls asleep, the second is sung within the dream by angels, but when the audience is brought back to the external world it seems that the singing was in fact by the nurse. This technique of developing parallel realities is very effective dramatically, and is particularly interesting here where it is based on the scientific fact that an apparently long dream may be experienced in a split second.

The nature of time and its seeming destruction in the 'moment of vision' was to become a question of central importance to the modern movement of ideas, reflected particularly in the psychological novel and the work of Eliot. Strindberg was to apply the time-aspect of dream in a different way; here Hauptmann does little more than present the interesting fact of time-compression in dream, but in such a way as to suggest fascinating dramatic possibilities.¹

As Hannele's fever increases, death plays a more prominent part in the dream; it is a figure resembling some personification of death Hannele might have seen in a religious play -

an angel clad in black and with black wings ... in his hands he holds a long, wavy sword, the hilt of which is wrapped in crepe.

Wish-fulfilment is the psychological aspect most fully considered in this final dream. Hannele is the rich and beautiful princess she would never have been in life, the villagers and her school-fellows respect and admire her and apologise for their mockery of her, the cruel father receives the punishment he deserves, and the school-teacher confesses to a passionate love for her. That Christ should appear to have the teacher's face and that final beatitude for Hannele is a love-union with him, is perfectly consistent with her attitude to Gottwald in the earlier portion and is psychologically convincing.

1. cf. Evreinov, The Theatre of the Soul, for an amusing development of time-compression.

In this section the relation between outward and dream events is clearly marked. The inquisitive paupers, for example, become the villagers crowding round the coffin, their gift of brandy is changed to gifts of flowers, and old Pleschke's distinctive stutter is still heard; the heavenly music had its counterpart in the noisy mechanical organ from the next room, and the bridal clothing is perhaps a memory of the warm clothes given to her in the schoolmaster's house. In the 'realistic' portion, the schoolmaster had tested the degree of her consciousness by asking if Hannele knew his name; the Christ-figure of the vision says, 'Canst thou name my name,' and Hannele replies, 'Holy! Holy! Holy!' The stages in Hannele's delirium are marked by her progress towards this identification; at first she recognizes 'Teacher, sir - Teacher Gottwald', who soon becomes 'dear Teacher Gottwald', then 'The dear Lord - Gottwald' and finally, the holy bridegroom. The consummation is accompanied by the laying of Christ's hand on Hannele's head, - Gottwald's last words to Hannele in the first part had been spoken while he gently stroked her hair in pity. The events of this last dream are so closely bound to the words and actions of the realistic scene that one cannot be certain whether or not Hauptmann meant to imply that the dream was taking place simultaneously with the action of the earlier part, as the second dream clearly was with the singing of the lullaby. The final stage directions, setting the scene 'exactly as before the first

apparition', do not clarify this point, and possibly the author meant to leave it indeterminate.

A dream-feature used here, and later to be greatly developed by Strindberg, is the doubling of characters. Every dreamer knows how one character merges into another with no sense of absurdity, and the audience is not disturbed that for it, as for Hannele, the nursing sister may be the mother. When Hannele wonders how one person may be many and the figure replies, 'The children of heaven are all one in God', Hauptmann touches the theme of unity in diversity for which this technique was to be explored by later dramatists.

The question remains of how far Hanneles Himmelfahrt is intended to portray the actual union of a soul with the Divine. The play is often described as being genuinely mystical, but though there are small points, for example, the sweet perfumes and music, that remind one of accounts of mystical experience, the solid psychological foundations of the dream make it impossible to see this play as other than an exploration of dream experience. The dream is revealed to us, not that we may know the quality of the moment of vision, as in Und Pippa Tanzt, but that we may understand how a dream is related to waking experience. In Hanneles Himmelfahrt the stress is on the dream, and the journey to heaven is no more than the subject of that dream.

As a psychological study of dream experience the play has no rival, and in many technical details it paints the way to the

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less scientific and far more personal analyses of human consciousness in Strindberg's work.

For the journey to heaven as the central theme of an experimental dream-play we must look to Strindberg's The Road to Damascus (1897-8, 1904). Where some dramatists have presented this journey allegorically, and others have shown a character at various stages on the voyage, Strindberg here looks within his own mind, or spirit, and projects various aspects of his experience in the way these might be projected in dream. There are no boundaries in this dream - the audience is precipitated as violently into the subconscious as is the reader of Finnegan's Wake. To some the result is just as confusing; to others, as to Professor Isaacs, it is 'perhaps the greatest of modern dramatic achievements'.¹

Part of the play's greatness undoubtedly lies in its seeming to catch the very essence of the modern spiritual mood, tied as it is to an excessive introspection and self-analysis, verging often on madness, and fighting a fierce battle with orthodox religion. Strindberg seems to have been the unhappy epitome of the modern consciousness, and this is probably one of the reasons why, for all **its** wealth of autobiographical detail, the play is so universally applicable.

The Stranger's conversion is not sudden, as the title suggests, but a slow and painful struggle towards peace and

1. An Assessment of Twentieth Century Literature, 1951, p.156

spiritual security. His pilgrimage begins at a street-corner in life, after a long period of hopelessness and sense of being already damned, where there is now at least some movement, if only of fear, after this spiritual stagnation:-

Stranger I'm afraid now. Things are happening that have no natural explanation.
Lady But you were afraid of nothing. Not even death!
Stranger Death... no. But of something else, the Unknown.¹

The Stranger's way to spiritual resurrection and acceptance of the God of the Mo^{na}astery is no straightforward journey - it is a series of circular movements, (reflected in the settings), a doubling of tracks to understand the past, to expiate sin through suffering, to deny self and cut all ties with the world. By a continual re-assessment of the past in the light of new experience, the Stranger finally sees the pattern of his life and understands the place of suffering in it, a pattern reflected in the structure of the play and in certain symbols, such as the Lady's crocheting at which she works like one of the Fates, sewing and unpicking 'a network of nerves and knots'.

The journey is as much a flight from salvation as progress towards it, an idea not so familiar to the modern reader as it was to the medieval, The Hound of Heaven and The Family Reunion being isolated and frequently misinterpreted examples. Since the Stranger cannot accept the Christian revelation, he cannot allow Christ to suffer for him and must endure the suffering

1. The Road to Damascus, translated by Graham Rawson, 1939, p.39

himself. He sees himself as Job, 'delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved', at the same time establishing the likeness in his experience to Christ's way to the Cross. The inconsistent but extremely rich use of Christian symbolism is one of the means by which Strindberg is able to universalize his personal theme.

The question to be asked now is, what, if anything, does this drama of spiritual experience gain from being set in a form resembling dream? Strindberg enumerated the advantages of imitating 'the disjointed but apparently logical form of a dream' thus:-

Anything may happen: everything is possible and probable. Time and space do not exist; on an insignificant groundwork of reality imagination spins and weaves new patterns: a mixture of memories, experiences, unfettered fancies, absurdities and improvisations.

The characters are split, doubled and multiplied, they evaporate and are condensed, are diffused and concentrated. But a single consciousness holds sway over them all - that of the dreamer ... ¹

The first paragraph stresses the dream form's freedom from restrictions, particularly those associated with realistic drama. A consistent, realistic setting is abandoned and the background can be altered at will to suit the changing moods of the mind; the revaluation of the past can be made clear when there is freedom to visualise former experiences with no reference to time sequence. The disjointedness of dream is imitated very

1. Author's note to A Dream Play (1902)

noticeably in the shifting scenes and the apparent lack of connection between parts of the dialogue. The change in Part II, for example, from the splendour of the banqueting hall to the café and sordid drinking-house and then to a prison-cell has something of a nightmare quality but here, as throughout the play, the dream-like movement is only superficial. There is not only the order and pattern that any artist must impose on his material, but a very obvious patterning in the whole structure of the play. There is no likeness to dream in the carefully constructed movement of Part I from the Street Corner to the Convent and back again through exactly the same scenes, nor in the triple groupings of Parts II and III. For Strindberg does not attempt to imitate faithfully the shapelessness of dream, but takes from dream the freedom to arrange his own pattern, without reference to the logical plot-development of 'realistic' drama.

In the presentation of character, Strindberg puts the dream-theory more consistently into practice and affects more radically the nature of dramatic form. The dream is the product of a single consciousness and the spectator is continually within one mind and one mind alone. Every experience is shown as it presents itself to that single consciousness; in other words, this is monodrama of the strictest kind. 'One knows only one life, one's own', was Strindberg's justification of his prolific use of autobiographical material, but the remark is

particularly applicable to the spiritual life, and by removing the boundaries between the audience and his own spiritual consciousness, Strindberg brings the audience nearer to understanding for itself the quality of spiritual experience.

All the other stage figures are simply projections of the dreamer's consciousness, - a new attitude to character soon to be exploited, particularly by the German Expressionists. The type-names of the characters - Lady, Beggar, Confessor etc., - emphasize this detachment from the world of reality and make it possible for them to appear in different lights according to whatever impression the Stranger may have of them at a particular time. Thus, the Lady is 'impersonal, nameless' to the Stranger, but on occasions she is to him friend, lover, wife, mother, Eve, mother of sin, and Mary, Mother of God.

The dream-feature of the doubling of characters is used often, but most significantly in the Beggar-Confessor-Dominican figure. These are the humanized projections of the Terrible One, the dread power who appears more and more frequently until he is finally recognized as the benevolent deity. He appears in any of these forms according to the view the Stranger has of him; thus he may at one moment be sinister and fearsome, and the next, kindly and sympathetic. In Part III, the Stranger projects the **evil** in himself into the figure of the Tempter, who fights with the Dominican for the Stranger's soul. At the close, the Tempter is overcome, and it is the Dominican who performs the symbolic burial service:-

Tempter (disappearing). Farewell!

Confessor (advancing with a large black bier-cloth). Lord!
Grant him eternal peace!

Choir May he be illumined with perpetual light!

Confessor (wrapping the Stranger in the bier-cloth). May he
rest in peace!

Choir Amen!

The use of characters in this way affects the general conception of the function of character in drama. A great part of the pleasure in a 'normal' play comes from the interaction and conflicts of a variety of supposedly 'real' people; here variety is sacrificed to a greater depth of knowledge of the one single consciousness.

Strindberg considered that in carrying out these theories he had produced a new dramatic form, and many critics have agreed that The Road to Damascus 'completely frustrates any attempt to assign it to any known category'¹. His second essay in this genre, A Dream Play (1902), again adapts the dream's freedom of movement, but to a far more conventional theme. Indra's daughter is the central figure in a familiar plot, the daughter of a god descending to earth to experience the sufferings of humanity and returning to heaven, having 'learned the anguish of all being - learned what it is to be a mortal man'.

The play visualises certain comments on life, for example, that life is suffering and misery, that doing good to one means harming another, that every joy must be paid for with twice its

1. C.E.W.L. Dahlstrom, Strindberg's Dramatic Expressionism, 1930, p.120

equivalent of sorrow, that ambition and ideals are futile and only to be frustrated, in fact, as the refrain in every section of the play stresses, that 'men are pitiable creatures'. Some of the scenes do nothing more than illustrate a single idea of this kind; thus, a sea-coast scene in scorching heat shows that what is paradise for some, (the sunbathers), is hell for others, (the manual workers). It is for the most part a pessimistic view of life, when even behind the door to the riddle of life there is found to be nothing, but the hope is finally expressed that 'suffering is redemption and death, liberation'.

The philosophical and moral aspects probably make the meaning of the play clearer to the general reader than The Road to Damascus, though the dream-like changes of setting and character are even more prolific and confusing than in the earlier play. There is an absurdity too about the dream-elements here that seems to tone down the philosophy with a lighter, humorous touch - thus the setting before the castle, with its crown-shaped flower-bud on it, its background of hollyhocks, and the stable-litter that helps it to grow another wing on the sunny side has all the craziness of dream places, and it is quite in keeping with dream-movement that at the end of the play the hollyhocks should become human faces, the castle burn and the bud on the roof blossom into a giant chrysanthemum. This ridiculous kind of setting proves on closer inspection to

be very carefully calculated symbolism, explored more fully than the more obvious convent, Rose Room, Monastery and river symbols of The Road to Damascus. This castle setting, for example, is closely related to the theme of human progress and its meaning is even perhaps over-emphasized. The Glazier explains that the flowers grow out of the dirt because 'they do not feel at home in the dirt, so they hurry up into the light as quickly as they can to bloom and die', an idea immediately connected to the prisoner within the castle, waiting to be set free:-

<u>Officer</u>	... you are a child of heaven ...
<u>Daughter</u>	You are that too!
<u>Officer</u>	Then why do I have to look after horses, mind stables and see to the straw being removed?
<u>Daughter</u>	So that you may long to get away from it all!
<u>Officer</u>	I do - but its' such a trouble to get free of it!
<u>Daughter</u>	But it is a duty to seek freedom in the light! ¹

The theme of human beings struggling towards the light from the body, or the state of being human, is thus well-established as an idea central to the play.

The theme of perpetual frustration is strengthened by the ability to change the scene at will. The officer waiting for the love who never comes is seen in the bright Spring sunlight, young and radiantly happy, and then immediately afterwards in Autumn when he is old and grey, the passage of time being

1. A Dream Play, Easter and Other Plays, Anglo-Swedish Literary Foundation, 1929, p.272

reflected in the setting - the trees dropping their leaves, the flowers withering, and the lighthouse beam illuminating the scene to show, as the Daughter explains,

Day and night - day and night! ... A merciful Providence seeks to shorten your time of waiting! And that is why the days are flying, pursuing the nights.

Such a freedom with scenic effects as the dream form permits makes great demands in production, and without modern stage developments, particularly in lighting, the play could not be produced at all. Just as in dream, ~~so~~^{as} much depends on visual effects as on the spoken word and certain points are made simply by mimed scenes. The same question may be asked of this play as of The Blue Bird, namely whether the stress on visual techniques for the presentation of loosely connected ideas is justifiable in drama. Is this in fact a play? There is only the loosest thread of a plot in the daughter's trial of human life, the conflicts essential to drama are there only intermittently, and unconnected to any central conflict, there is no character interest, not even in the one main figure, and there is development only of a series of ideas. The work is in fact a set of symbolic moving pictures with commentary, and however amusing, valid and philosophical these may be, they surely cannot be said to constitute drama.

The plays so far discussed have illustrated the three new lines of approach to dream in modern drama:-

- i) the psychological study of the relation between dream and waking experience, stimulated by scientific investigations;

- ii) the dream-method imitated to gain freedom, depth and immediacy in presenting spiritual experience;
- iii) the stage-techniques of the method developed more objectively to make a predominantly moral and social comment on life.

Of these three approaches, the last has been by far the most widespread, dream-techniques being used in plays where there is no suggestion at all of dream-experience. Before looking at the effect of such techniques on the modern conception of dramatic form, it will be valuable to consider examples of the development of the first two approaches.

Christopher Fry's A Sleep of Prisoners (1951) is in some ways very like Hanneles Himmelfahrt; the connection between dream and waking experience is carefully explored, a realistic section leading naturally into the imaginative world; the dreams illuminate character and reveal previous thoughts and ideas, and the final dream, like Hannele's, blends into reality in such a way as to leave doubt as to what is dream and what reality. But A Sleep of Prisoners makes an advance in two directions on Hauptmann's experiments; firstly it attempts a universal comment on life, increasing perception of 'what makes for life and what makes for death'¹, something far deeper than the psychological study of Hannele's dream, however religious its content, and secondly, it makes the technical experiment of

1. A Sleep of Prisoners, 1951, Prefatory Letter

showing the dreams of four different people, all connected to the waking action, and giving a full three-dimensional picture of each character.

The church setting is not only convenient for the performance of a religious play, but ideal background for the dreams. Four prisoners of war compelled to sleep in a church, overwrought from confinement and the unusual surroundings, might be expected to pass a restless night and dream of subjects connected with churches and the Bible stories they had heard as children. The nervous tension produces the men's semi-hysterical wit, Peter's careless pranks and David's outbursts, and in this state their true qualities come to light. The characters are clearly drawn, and the relations between them demonstrated in the actions which are to be the basis of the dreams, - Peter's reading from the Bible, David's attack, Meadow's fatherly and Adam's commanding intervention. In addition, this section stresses the symbolism of the characters' names, a convenient, if rather crude, device to add to the motivation of the dreams, - David King, Able, Adams, and the comforting Meadows.

Each of the dreamers sees himself and his companions as figures of the Old Testament and, involved as they are in violence, both of war and of their private quarrels, their dreams are inevitably violent. David's attack on Peter becomes Cain's murder of his brother (Peter) Able; David as King of Israel is

at enmity with the son he loves, Absalom; David as Abraham must sacrifice Peter as Isaac; Adams, who parted them when they fought in reality becomes the intervening angel in the dream, and the fatherly Meadows speaks as God.

The dream method permits Fry to reveal the men's characters and the relationship between them more fully than would have been possible in a realistic action. For the audience is able not only to form its own impressions of the characters in the early section, but also to see in the dream what each character feels about the others:-

each of the four men is seen through the sleeping thoughts of the others, and each, in his own dream, speaks as at heart he is, not as he believes himself to be.¹

Meadows sees the conflict between David and Peter in its truest light and, in his dream of Cain and Abel, points to the desire for Peter's love of life that is at the root of David's enmity; in his dream of Absalom, David reveals his deep affection for Peter, but must oppose his irresponsible attitude:-

Don't do it to me, don't make the black rage
Shake me Peter. I tremble like an earthquake
Because I can't find words which might
Put the fear of man into you.
Understand! The indecisions
Have to be decided.²

Peter in his dream sees David as the one demanding the death of his carefree approach:-

The free and evening air
Swans from hill to hill.
Surely there's no need for us to be
The prisoners of the dark? Smile, father.
Let me go.³

1. Preliminary Letter, A Sleep of Prisoners
2. Ibid. p.23
3. Ibid. p.32

The first three dreams establishing the men's relationships and characters are carefully shaped, each moving economically and with intensity to its climax. The boundaries are marked by interludes of ordinary conversation, where the verbal wit provides relief from the emotional tension; in addition, the limits of the first dream are marked by the striking of the church clock, which also wakens Peter from his dream, and strikes again to close the play - a device recalling the candles of Hanneles Himmelfahrt.

The fourth dream is rather different, in technique and effect. Where the others served to show the differences between the men and the reasons for them, this illustrates their common plight and draws them together to represent all humanity. Corporal Adams dreams first of a nightmare journey, which seems to express the spiritual state of his company, and of mankind in general:-

And I am salt and sick on a raft above you,
 Wondering for land, but there's no homeward
 I can see. God have mercy
 On our sick shoals, darting and dying ...
 How can a man learn navigation
 When there's no rudder? You can seem to walk,
 You there: you can seem to walk:
 But presently you drown.¹

With a **more** truly-dream-like effect than in any of the other dreams, this journey shifts into an eternal shuffling march which gets nowhere, a memory of their forced march to the prison. The horror of it is stressed by ^{preserving}~~puruing~~ the water image:-

1. Ibid. pp. 37-8

Be careful how you step. These logs we're on
Are slimy and keep moving apart.¹

In this section, Peter's and David's characters appear as they are to their Corporal; Peter's attitude to death is characteristic - 'They can shoot me if they like. It'll be a bit of a rest', while David revolts against circumstances - 'We're prisoners, God! They've bricked us in'. The dream Peter reads from the Bible as the waking Peter had done, but this time a passage appropriate to the general situation:-

Adams Our names are Shadrac, Meshac and Abednego.
This is our last morning. Who knows truly
What that means, except us?
Peter And which of us
Knows truly? O God in heaven, we're bound
To wake up out of this.

The fiery furnace is an apt image for the situation the men are in, both on the surface level of their imprisonment in war-time, on the psychological level of that imprisonment to their own natures which the earlier dreams have revealed, and on the universal level of man's imprisonment to forces beyond his control:-

O God, are we
To be shut up here in what other men do
And watch ourselves be ground and battered
Into their sins?²

That the four men in the furnace represent all humanity is made explicit by Meadows, -

But there's not a skipping soul
On the lonesome³ goat-path who is not
Hugged into this, the human shambles.³

1. Ibid. p.39
2. Ibid. p.41
3. Ibid. p.46

Through the suffering endured in the furnace, the men achieve that perception of 'what makes for life and what makes for death' that Fry felt to be the meaning of progress. Each man sees for himself, and according to his character, the meaning of good and evil, and recognizes a purpose in human suffering:-

Thank God the time is now when wrong
Comes up to face us everywhere,
Never to leave us till we take
The longest stride of soul men ever took.
Affairs are now soul size.
The enterprise
Is exploration into God.¹

Thus stage-dream here has developed from the psychological exploration of character and motive to the presentation of spiritual truths, the acquiring of a knowledge of good as in The Road to Damascus. The soldiers here are only at the very beginning of the spiritual journey, but they have found a 'sense of direction', as Peter's waking question about sleep-walking reminds us.

The bond between the men in their common predicament is strengthened by a technical device;

In the later part of Corporal Adams' dream the dream changes to a state of thought entered into by all the sleeping men, as though, sharing their prison life, they shared, for a few moments of the night, their sleeping life also.²

The boundaries of this dream are indistinct, for after Meadows has told the sleep-walking men to waken up, he himself continues

1. Ibid. p.49

2. Prefatory Letter.

to play the part he had in the dream while at the same time speaking as if he had been awake through it,-

It began to feel like the end of the world
With all your bunks giving up their dead.¹

This indistinctness seems to stress the essential likeness of the dream to the real situation and so drive home Fry's 'simple statement'.

Four dreamers of one dream is something of an innovation when used seriously, as apposed to the fairy-tale licence of the double dreaming in The Blue Bird. It is here an artificial device, designed to draw the men's thoughts together and show the one mind in them, though it is not entirely without psychological justification, as some of Yeats' accounts of shared dreams show. Fry appears to have no scientific interest in this phenomenon, as Hauptmann might have had, but simply uses it to give force and clarity to his theme.

A Sleep of Prisoners has, in Fry's words 'a complicated design', each episode adding to our knowledge of the men and their situation, every detail carefully worked out and with not a superfluous word, and it is surely one of the most successful experiments with dream on the stage. It belongs, with Hanneles Himmelfahrt, to the group of objective dream plays, with no introspection and self-revelation on the dramatist's part. Its advantage over the earlier play is that it presents

1. Ibid. p.51

the subconscious thoughts of representative human beings in a symbolic situation, instead of the isolated experience of a single child in extraordinary circumstances.

Fry solves the problem of dream staging by setting the scenes and conveying the sense of shifting boundaries almost entirely through words. Where Strindberg would have given detailed instruction for a visualized furnace scene, for example, Fry produces a sense of heat, smoke and pain simply through the verse, with an intensity which makes this one of the most moving parts of the play. For an audience this is probably far more satisfactory than elaborate and distracting scene changes, and in a sense more immediate, since the spectator must provide in his own imagination what the characters are seeing and feeling in theirs.¹

The play not only shows a considerable technical achievement in construction but also makes a valid comment on human life and the contemporary situation. Layer after layer of meaning can be seen in it, and the conjunction of early Biblical figures and ordinary twentieth century soldiers gives a wideness of scope embracing all humanity. Easily the best of Fry's dramatic work, it is also one of this century's finest and most successful experiments.

Two English writers of the 1930's incorporate dream in

1. This can be illustrated from the success achieved by radio presentations of dream-elements.

plays, with strong social and political themes. In Stephen Spender's Trial of a Judge (1938), the scenes reflect alternately dream and reality, instructions being given for the lighting and colouring to suggest the illusions and uncertainties in the characters' minds. Auden and Isherwood's best play The Ascent of F6 (1936) reaches its climax in the dying dream of the main character, which occupies the whole of the last act.

This play might also have been discussed as an allegory, for the story of the ascent of an unclimbed mountain clearly symbolizes Ransom's quest for spiritual knowledge as well as the search for the salvation of society. In this double significance the play is closely related to its predecessor The Dog Beneath the Skin (1935), but with the caricature and music-hall elements toned down, the theme is more convincingly presented. The fairy-tale in a modern setting of the earlier play gives way to a very credible story of a mountaineering expedition, which carries well the social and political themes as well as offering an apt image of spiritual progress.

Furthermore, the spiritual aspect of the play recalls the 'saint' theme of Murder in the Cathedral. Michael's surname - Ransom - suggests the idea of one who gives his life for many, which is to be so often in the hero's mind; his comrades almost worship him and testify to his goodness, as both ideal man of action and ideal contemplative, and the point is made explicit in the last lines of Act I, when he hears his mother's song 'A saint am I and a saint are you'.

Michael's progress towards death resembles Becket's, - both are scapegoats in a political intrigue, both are guilty of spiritual pride and have to conquer the demon of the will. There are other reminders of Eliot's play in the Chorus-like figures of the ordinary man and woman, 'living and partly living', who comment, often with unmistakable echoes of Eliot, on the relation of the action **to** their lives; a definite Chorus in the dream describes the spiritual and social 'waste land':-

Let the eye of the traveller consider this country and weep,
 For toads croak in the cisterns; the aqueducts choke with
 leaves;
 The highways are out of repair and infested with thieves:

...

Over our empty playgrounds the wet winds sough;
 The crab and the sandhopper ~~possess~~ our abandoned beaches;
 Upon our gardens the dock and the darnel encroaches;
 The crumbling lighthouse is encircled with moss like a muff;
 The weasel inhabits the courts and the sacred places;
 Despair is in our faces.

Significant too is the visualisation of part of Michael's experience as a chess-game, recalling Becket's game with the First Tempter.

The spiritual theme, and particularly the martyrdom aspect, has been largely overlooked for the more topical **social and political** significance and the rather startling formal innovations, and **so** the strong likeness to a play produced only a year before The Ascent of F6 was written has not been noted.

The play begins and ends in Michael's mind; in the prologue with a conventional soliloquy, and at the close with a dream in

1. The Ascent of F6, 1937, pp.109-110

which his dying thoughts are projected as stage figures. The two episodes are connected, for in the soliloquy Michael, thinking of virtue and knowledge, evil and power, which are to be central themes, describes what is in fact the final situation:-

Friends whom the world honours shall lament their eternal losses in the profoundest of crevasses, while he on the green mountains converses gently with his unapproachable love.¹

The dream is used in a Strindbergian way for reviewing the past and showing the completion of Michael's quest for self-knowledge, - 'F6 has shown me what I am', though since the dream-state is only entered into at the climax, the audience has been able to form its own picture of the actual events, as it cannot do in Strindberg's dream-plays. In the sections between the Chorus' expression of despair as Michael falls exhausted near the summit, and the unveiling of the symbolic figure of peace and salvation, Michael's faults are exposed and acknowledged. In the first, the Dragon and brother James are identified as the feared and hated figure of Power; Michael comes forward as a kind of St. George to 'save him now and save us all'. Their conversation is almost the same as the earlier one in the Lakeland inn but with the rôles reversed, one of the devices in the dream to show that James is simply an aspect of Michael's own character. Another is the dream-like confusion as to who has died - Michael destroys the figure of Power, but his own death is lamented, as the knowledge of its approach comes to him.

1. Ibid. p.14

The second section reflects Michael's guilt at having used his companions as pawns and sacrificed them to his own victory, the game with life-size chessmen recalling again the scene in the inn. His view of the bored and aimless lives of ordinary people, 'the stupid peasants ... making their stupid children', is just as it was in the opening soliloquy, but to it is added now his pride in being their liberator, a pride reflected in his dream of the eulogies to one of England's 'greatest sons'.

In a court scene reminiscent of Strindberg, Michael's victims give evidence in the trial in which he is found guilty of spiritual pride, and with the verdict comes release:-

Free now from indignation,
 Immune from all frustration
 He lies in death alone;
 Now he with secret terror
 And every minor error
 Has also made Man's weakness known.¹

The dream in this play is therefore a device for exploring the hero's motives and showing his acknowledgment of sin and sense of redemption. We may ask why such a device is necessary, and the answer is that since Michael is the only rounded character, the others being stock figures in the allegory and satire, there can be no convincing personal relationships in which the hero's development could unfold. Stylization has necessitated this kind of character exploration, and the dream is simply a convenient way of revealing inner experience.

1. Ibid. p.123

Both Auden and Isherwood spent some time in Germany between the wars, and the influence of Expressionism on their work is very marked, particularly in the dream, which Richard Hoggart describes as 'A scene silly with expressionist fancies'¹. It was through the Expressionist movement that Strindberg's techniques spread over a wide dramatic field, extending to Eugene O'Neill and the contemporary American theatre, so that a quick glance at the experiments made by the German dramatists will not be out of place.

1. Auden: An Introductory Essay, 1951

Expressionism

There are interesting likenesses and differences between German Expressionism and French symbolism, likenesses fostered in part by the influence of Claudel and differences resulting largely from the particular social conditions of Germany immediately before and after the First World War. For whereas symbolism was almost wholly an aesthetic movement, turning away from the social and economic pressures of the time, Expressionism was so committed to the progress of the community, that its spiritual ideals were inevitably bound to the social. Like symbolism, Expressionism aimed at searching out the intrinsic essence of the world, believing that every object had a profounder aspect which it was the duty of art to reveal. But where the symbolistes restricted their Platonism to the search for ideal beauty, the Expressionists developed it into the search for the New Man; to some writers this was predominantly a social question involving the creation of new community; to others it was primarily a spiritual search, an exploration of the relation of Man to God and an awareness of the need to liberate the soul from an earthbound reality. Whatever kind of emphasis was put on the search, however, it was always for the establishment of life on a wider and more imaginative basis, on which a new and greater type of man could grow.

Unlike Symbolisme, Expressionism was predominantly a dramatic movement, deeply concerned with producing a new kind of drama to fit the needs of the 'new' philosophy. In Strindberg's work German dramatists found the kind of technique they wanted to develop, and The Road to Damascus became for them much the same sort of 'sacred book' as Axel had been for the symbolists. Much Expressionist drama follows The Road to Damascus in being a projection of inner experience, a dramatic technique directly connected to the Expressionist theory of intuitive art. Since the artist must deduce the universe from his own ego, he has to express his own soul (-'one knows only one life, one's own'); the result was considered to be not personal experience but the essential experience of humanity.

The dream-feature of the single consciousness was thus adopted, together with the use of stage-figures as mere projections of the one mind, and what Sorge called the 'Ich Drama' became the dominant Expressionist form. The technique of type-names was often carried to extremes as, for example, in Kaiser's Noli me Tangere where the characters are simply given numbers. The projected figures sometimes represent an idea or feeling without being in any way humanized; the white figure in Kaiser's Gas is typical, being simply the concrete presentation of the clerk's fear.

When characters disappear, symbolism, as we have seen in Strindberg, becomes doubly important. In Expressionist drama

a highly intellectual symbolism is developed, particularly the visual kind, in significant settings and costume. Colour symbolism, familiar from Strindberg's 'Rose Room' and white monastery, is explored more intellectually than intuitively; - thus in Sorge's Der Bettler, the colour red conveys the idea of madness, which it does not automatically suggest in the way that, for example, black suggests death.

The visual elements are even more stressed in this type of drama than in Strindberg's so that the plays often approach a kind of drama without words. The kaleidoscope effect was openly acknowledged, first by Sorge in dividing his plays into 'Bilder', a name others were to adopt for their sections as indeed being more appropriate. There was much emphasis on mime and tableaux and stage devices were greatly exploited. In many ways Expressionist drama was nearer to cinema than theatre and in fact many writers experimented with film screen to give greater visual scope.

The concentration of language, under the influence of the Expressionist poets, and the exploitation of the inarticulate cry made further approaches towards a drama without words, which meant for the Expressionists an approximation to music, to whose condition 'all art constantly aspires'. But where for the symbolists approximation to music was by powerfully suggestive words, used simply for their evocative beauty, for the Expressionists it appears to have been by barrenness and inarticulacy,

as in August Stramm's dialogue based wholly on the one word 'du'.

One representative play will serve to show the relation of Expressionist drama to Strindberg's dream-plays, the development of his techniques, and the interweaving of spiritual and social implications. The theme of Kaiser's From Morn to Midnight (1912)¹ is the search for the new man, a single idea pursued with no deviation of any kind to its conclusion that the quest is doomed to fail^{ure} because of the corruption of society.

The hero represents the modern man; he is deliberately characterless and there is no interest at all in him as a person. In the same way, the other figures are all types, with type-names - Mother, wife, Salvation Army girl. De-characterization is carried to its limits, as in Maeterlinck's static drama, for the same purpose of achieving universal significance, but in an entirely different manner.

In the first scene, the mimed action shows the hero's submersion in modern automation, while a later section reveals the mechanical routine of his family life, the banal monotony of the conversation reflecting sterility and aimlessness. The release from this dull world originates in a sexual impulse, but the immedⁱerate failure of the pursuit suggests that any kind of experience can be the starting-point of the new life,

1. Ashley Duke's translation, 1920

whatever its intrinsic value. The theft of huge sums of money from the bank is to be interpreted as a gesture of defiance to that social system which in the end is to destroy him. Similarly, the manipulation of crowd hysteria by the power of money is not only a release of his own pent-up passion but also an attempt at revenge on society for depriving him of a full and free life.

Three of the scenes are straightforward, developing an apparently melodramatic plot on a realistic background. Two, showing aspects of a corrupt society, have a nightmare quality very like that of Kafka's novels, while the two most significant scenes develop Strindbergian techniques to reveal the hero's motives and inner progress.

In the Snow-field scene, the cashier decides to continue the double line of action of revenge on society and search for the new self. He recognizes that this involves the casting-off of his old self - 'My footsteps across the field are blotted out. With my own hands I have accomplished nothingness'¹ - in fact, ~~the~~ return to Chaos that the Expressionists required before the new order could begin -

It comes to pass, it comes to pass! I knew my way would not be in vain. The call was pressing. Chaos₂ is affronted, and shudders at this morning's monstrous deed.

A thunderstorm reflects the state of chaos (as in King Lear),

1. Ibid. p.22

2. Ibid. p.23

while the rising sun heralds the new era.

The tangled boughs of a tree form a skeleton shape which the cashier interprets as an omen of the death he is not yet prepared to accept as inevitable:-

I see stretching ahead of me a host of calls to pay before this evening. It's impossible that you should be the first. The last you may be: but even then only the last resort. A miserable makeshift, a poor lodging at the journey's end. But as a last resort - well, we may come to terms. Ring me up again toward midnight.¹

The skeleton symbol is improbably formed again in a tangle of wires in the Salvation Army hall, where the cashier, having searched in vain for a life of the soul on earth, acknowledges his defeat to the pressure of society, and looks to the life after death. As he dies, he falls back 'with arms outstretched against the Cross on the back wall. His husky gasp is like an "Ecce" and his heavy sigh is like a "Home". One second later all the lamps explode with a loud report'.

This forced use of an obvious symbolism is designed to stress the universal significance of the theme, to suggest that we have been watching the martyrdom of the modern man. In a strict sense this is true, for by his death the cashier 'witnesses' to the existence of another reality. But although the Expressionists liked to call this type of play, and The Road to Damascus, 'Stationsdrama', the resemblance of the action here to the Stations of the Cross extends little further than to the division into seven scenes.

The last act illustrates a development of Strindberg's

1. Ibid. p.58

technique for projecting various aspects of the inner life. In the Salvation Army Hall, each of the penitents' public confession tells of some part of the cashier's own experience, showing his gradual acknowledgement of guilt and progress towards the final act of repentance.

This in this play can be seen the typically Expressionist interweaving of social and spiritual implication, and of worlds of imagination and reality, all bound into a swift and economical movement whose unity depends entirely on the presence of the central figure in each scene.

Subsequent drama has been influenced far more by the techniques of Expressionism than by its beliefs. Eugene O'Neill's plays are frequently described as Expressionist but they are in fact only so where form is concerned. His claim to be concerned not with the relation between man and man but that between man and God is not borne out by his plays, where the interest centres for the most part on an intricate tangle of human relationships or on a psychological exploration of an individual mind in particular circumstances.

One of his early plays experimenting with Expressionist techniques is of this latter kind; The Emperor Jones (1920) successfully shows nervous tension mounting to hysteria by visualizing first of all 'the little formless fears' - 'if they have any describable form at all it is that of a grubworm about the size of a creeping child' - then the guilt and fear about

past events, enacted in mime, and finally the climactic horror of what is to happen, presented as a nightmare vision of sacrifice to a monster.

Apart from the expository first scene, and the short final one in which the irony of the situation is made clear, the play simply reflects the mind of the one character, expressed in his monologues and visualized in the mimed action. We find here again a preponderance of visual elements, at least half the text being taken up with stage directions. The emotion, both in audience and character, is stimulated by the beat of a tom-tom through almost the whole play, - a good example of the emotional use of sound-effects which seems to have a special fascination for American dramatists, particularly for Tennessee Williams.

The Expressionist techniques of The Emperor Jones are ideal for the particular mood conveyed, but in many of O'Neill's later plays one feels that the devices are forced and unnecessary and that some other method might have been better. This seems to me true even of O'Neill's most interesting experiment with ~~the sight-~~^{thought}revelation in Strange Interlude (1927), where something like a stream-of-consciousness technique is developed, the aim being to give a fully-rounded picture of the relationships between the characters, and of their attitude to events. Each character, unheard by the others, says aloud what he is thinking, so that the normal line of dialogues is interrupted

by stretches of spoken thought. The effect of this is an almost unbearable slowing up of the action with the other characters standing woodenly around trying not to hear. A deep and interesting study of character is certainly developed, but the method is far better suited to the leisurely movement of a novel than to the necessarily swift and economical action of a play.

For all his courageous experiments, O'Neill produces his best work away from the influence of Expressionism. Greek tragedy appears to have been a more rewarding model, allowing him, in Mourning Becomes Electra (1931), to develop relationships and create tension without recourse to Expressionist techniques of thought-revelation. The result is an enormous increase in power and swiftness and, in fact, as deep a knowledge of character as in any of his Expressionist plays.

Examples have illustrated the main approaches to dream experience and technique in modern drama, but one play with dream as a prominent feature has defied classification. It is fitting to consider Ibsen's Peer Gynt at the end of this chapter not only because a different kind of dream-activity is explored but because dream experience conditions everything in the play: the central character lives a life of dreams, and his fantasies instigate the action. As well as consolidating many of the methods noted in the dream-plays, Peer Gynt offers interesting comparison with plays dealt with in preceding chapters; its use of Norwegian folk-lore for semi-allegorical purposes supports conclusions drawn in the study of allegories; the theme of redemption through woman is central to the play; it presents both the spiritual journey towards salvation and the flight from self-fulfilment, through as lively and individual a central character as in any of the plays of the first chapter.

In Peer Gynt (1867),¹ the nature of daydream and fantasy is explored through a 'real' and sympathetic character, living in his own dream-world of which he is always hero. The action alternates from actual to dream-world, the distinctions between them becoming ever more vague as Peer grows more and more absorbed by his imagination. There is a masterly variety of ways in which the dream-experience is presented, but the technical interest is overshadowed by the philosophical exploration

1. The Collected Works of Henrik Ibsen, Vol. IV, 1912.

of the nature of the real, of personality and of spiritual progress.

The play falls into two parts, the first four acts developing Peer's character, showing the relation of his fantasies to his life at home and in the world, and the effect of his pursuit of the 'Gyntish self', while the last act presents the return journey to recognition of the truth and discovery of his real self.

Peer's character is first of all outlined by traditional methods. The opening lines of the play sketch in with swift strokes the essential information about him - his aptitude for imaginative fabrication, his half-belief in his own stories and his refusal to commit himself to any binding statement or course of action. The whole of the first act is then devoted to a development of this information in terms of amusing action and dialogue, in which Peer's home-life and background are also described. Peer's character, like Brand's, is partly the result of his mother's influence, who in his early days, refused to face the reality of the drunken, dissolute father and took refuge in 'fairy-tales of princes and trolls'. At the end of Act II, scene 2, the audience has a very full picture of a vivacious and loveable character, a poet *manqué*, whose attractive dream-world is from this point to be more fully presented by direct visualization.

There is a steady development towards this method through the early scenes. In the first, the daydream simply takes the

form of a story told to his mother, a story which has captured his imagination and in which he pretends to be the hero. In the second scene, he makes stories for himself out of the shapes of the clouds, again with himself as hero, and the method of soliloquy is introduced. At the wedding, the day-dream develops into a bragging of his imagined deeds to people in general, until in the second act his visions are projected into stage figures.

The three saeter girls appear without any indication, beyond the improbability of their words and actions, that they are dream-figures, but later Peer explains that he has been 'a whole day drunk' and that the 'sporting with crazy wenches' was all 'lies and accursed stuff'. The girls appear after he has captured Ingrid and are the visual expression of his dreams of sexual prowess. So too is the Green-clad woman whom Peer follows 'with all sorts of lover-like antics' immediately after the audience has seen him fall unconscious. The three troll scenes are all to be understood as dreams of the sleeping Peer, who does not waken until the beginning of Act II, scene 8.

In the troll-scenes the implications of various aspects of Peer's personality are explored - his desire to be emperor of every situation, his philosophy of the self, culminating in the motto 'Troll to thyself be enough', and his evasion policy, superbly expounded:-

For a bride, and a well-managed kingdom to boot,
I can put up with losing a good many things.
But there is a limit to all things on earth.

The tail I've accepted, it's perfectly true;
 But no doubt I can loose what the Chamberlain tied.
 My breeches I've dropped; they were old and patched,
 But no doubt I can button them on again.
 And lightly enough I can slip my cable
 From these your Dövrefied ways of life.
 I am willing to swear that a cow is a maid;
 An oath one can always eat up again;-
 But to know that one never can free oneself,

...
 To feel that one can never beat a retreat, -
 As the book has it, that's what your heart is set on;
 But that is a thing I can never agree to.¹

The Boyg, who is 'not so much as a shape', is open to a number of interpretations, but seems to me to be Peer's sense of the suffocating, obstructing power of his own shapeless personality, preventing him from any positive action. Here thoughts find expression simply in a voice, but Peer's own words and actions create very powerfully that sense of suffocation one experiences in dreams. When he awakens, it is to find that Solveig is helping him and he is for a time turned away from his dreams.

In Act III Peer draws nearer to facing facts than anywhere else in the first part. His opening soliloquy shows that he recognizes the truth of his situation, that he is an outlaw dreaming his senses away, but immediately he lapses again into thoughts of his own splendour. Solveig's approach offers the way to salvation and it seems for a moment as if Peer will follow that way, but the appearance of the Green-clad woman and her child shows that Peer cannot commit himself wholly even to Solveig, from whom he flees with excuses of not wanting to smirch her with sensuality.

1. pp. 78-9

The scene at Aase's death-bed presents realistically Peer's continued evasion of unpleasant thoughts and situations, until mother and son join in a daydream and play their way even to her death. This event brings him momentarily to his senses - he is able to tell Kari quite simply, 'she is dead', - and the episode balances his second return to fact through a woman who believes in him at the end of the play.

Where the preceding acts visualized the implications of Peer's philosophy in terms of Norwegian folk-lore, the fourth translates these into cosmopolitan terms with a corresponding loss of richness and depth. The pattern of symbolism follows closely that of the earlier part, with the apes functioning as the trolls, Memnon as the troll King and the Sphinx as the Boyg. The theory of the Gyntish self leads Peer to dream of being emperor, in a material sense as big business-man and in a spiritual as prophet. In both cases he leaves open the way of retreat - his compromise method is well reflected in the export alternately of idols and missionaries - but the logical outcome of this self-glorification is the lunatic asylum.

With Act V, Peer's real journey of self-discovery begins. All so far has been a flight from responsibility and self-fulfilment but the intimation of the approach of death brings Peer to a reckoning. On the journey back to Norway he becomes aware of his utter aloneness and failure to achieve anything great, but comforts himself with the thought that

There is time enough yet! They shall know in the parish
That Peer has come sailing aloft o'er the seas!

This faith in time is shattered by a thought of death, visualized in the appearance of the Strange Passenger, a figment of Peer's imagination and unseen to anyone else on the boat.

From this point Peer's self-examination is presented almost wholly as a visualization of his thoughts; his awareness of having ignored other peoples' claims in order to save himself is enacted in a shipwreck scene, his pious belief that he has 'at least the honour of a life carried through in accordance with principle' finds expression in the priest's sermon reflecting the picture Peer would like to have of himself, while the hollowness of his fantasies and emptiness of the past are revealed to him in an auction where nothing is sold for nothing.

The past is empty and worthless and his personality has no more centre than an onion; a **burnt-out** landscape reflects his worthlessness and natural objects seem to speak to him of latent powers unused, thoughts unthought, songs unsung and great deeds unaccomplished. The recognition of these facts is expressed in the Button Moulder who comes to melt him down into basic raw material:-

Now you were designed for a shining button
On the vest of the world; but your loop gave way;
So into the waste-box you needs must go,
And then, as they phrase it, be merged in the mass.¹

To one who has lived so unfalteringly by a theory of the

1. p.238

individual self this is the worst humiliation, and Peer desperately reviews his life for some positive aspect, whether of good or evil. Even his sin has been either day-dream or half-heartedness, and in the realization that he has not even earned Satan's recognition he comes to the awareness of his own utter nothingness and to his first positive act of repentance:-

So unspeakably poor, then, a soul can go
 Back to nothingness, into the grey of the mist.
 Thou beautiful earth, be not angry with me
 That I trampled thy grasses to no avail.
 Thou beautiful sun, thou hast squandered away
 Thy glory of light on an empty hut.
 There was no one within it to hearten and warm;-
 The owner, they tell me, was never at home.¹

In this moment of truth is Peer's salvation, for having stripped himself of all trappings he is face to face with reality - in Yeats' words, 'where there is nothing - there is God.' Even as he sees where real salvation lies, Peer is again tempted to go 'round about', but he makes a final effort to go 'right through' and finds that a real Peer does exist in Solveig's faith, hope and love and in the love of the Father to whom she prays. The interpretation of the play is in some twenty lines at the close, where in Brand it was simply in the last half-line, and as in the earlier play the issue is left half-open when the Button-Moulder's voice is heard:-

At the last cross-roads we will meet again, Peer;
 And then we'll see whether -; I say no more.²

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1. P.265
 2. P.271

The last scene presents a universal experience of movement towards salvation through a highly individual character, each stage of the process being clearly related to Peer's early life as it has been presented in the preceding acts. There is however a slight difference between the dream-figures of the first part and the projections of the second, for where the earlier ones were clearly Peer's individual creation, the latter are stylized general types, resembling those in Strindberg's plays. There is an interesting likeness in many of the details of Act V to those of the medieval Everyman; the techniques of the modern dream-play in general can in fact be justifiably compared with those of the morality, though most of the plays are prevented from being wholly in the morality tradition either by the fact that, as here, a rich and individual character is the central figure, or, as in some of the Expressionist plays, that the theme is too worldly.

One play of the modern period is closer to the medieval morality than any other, for it combines the theme of Peer Gynt's fifth act with the stylized central figure of Expressionist drama to make a play which complies in all respects with a standard definition of the morality:-

A Morality is a play, allegorical in structure, which has for its main object the teaching of some lesson for the guidance of life, and in which the principal characters are personified abstractions or highly universalized types.¹

Yeats' The Hour Glass (1911), like the medieval Everyman

1. W.Roy Mackenzie, The English Moralities, 1914,

and The Pryde of Life, presents the theme of the summons of death. The Wise Man has denied the existence of God, of the soul and of anything beyond man's senses, but in the 'spiritual terror' before death he finds 'truth as in a flash'. The message of death is brought to him by an angel, and like Peer Gynt, he has only a short time in which to find someone to save him. Here, as in Peer Gynt, intensity is created by the desperate battle against time, and as with Peer the past is a continual hindrance, with dramatic irony in the pupils' view of the Wise Man's position:-

You'd think, the way he says it, that he felt it.
There's not a mummer to compare with him.
He's something like a man.¹

The Wise Man is an Everyman figure, surrounded entirely by personified abstractions. His family and pupils are simply extensions of himself and reasoning with them is reasoning with himself, as one of the pupils explains. The Fool, in all his earthly poverty, has intuitive wisdom, for he who has nothing can see all things - 'I have seen plenty of angels'. He testifies throughout to the truth that the Wise Man learns only at his death,

that there is a spiritual kingdom that cannot be seen or known till the faculties, whereby we master the Kingdom of this world, wither away like green things in winter.²

The movement towards knowledge of this spiritual kingdom is presented as a straightforward story of the Wise Man's

1. Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats, p.314.

2. p.302.

experience before death. On a second level, all the characters, including the Wise Man, represent aspects of a single consciousness and the story allegorizes a particular spiritual experience, that of the mystic's approach to reality by the 'via negativa':-

We perish into God and sink away
Into reality.¹

In this play the presentation of a spiritual experience is completely unsupported by any subsidiary themes and actions or by any character interest. The experience is translated into general terms of as universal a nature as those of Everyman and in performance, masks and a simple setting stress its timeless significance.² This play is then an illustration of the fact that where the dream-play technique of personified abstraction achieves its fullest generalization, it returns to the method of a very old dramatic form.

1. P.322

2. For designs for mask and scene for The Hour Glass, see Janet Leeper, Edward Gordon Craig, Designs for the Theatre, Penguin Books, 1948, Plates 23 and 24.

Chapter 4

The 'Moment of Vision'

car les plus misérables mêmes ont dans leur existence des moments où ils savent¹ agir comme s'ils savaient déjà ce que savent les dieux.

In the preceding chapters it has appeared that one aspect of spiritual experience has proved particularly difficult to treat dramatically, and yet it has seemed essential to playwrights that they should attempt to present it; this is the 'moment of vision'. The word 'moment' has come to have a special significance in twentieth century literature, which may best be explained by referring to its use in the psychological novels of Proust, Virginia Woolf and Joyce.

These writers directed their search for a new realism to an attempt at catching fugitive thoughts in their progress through the mind, believing that, 'Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end' and that the task of the novelist was to 'trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight of incident scores upon the consciousness'.² The psychological novelists, then, attempted to reproduce the 'stream of consciousness' itself, a term

1. M. Maeterlinck, Le Trésor des Humbles, 1896, p.15.

2. Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Fiction', The Common Reader I, 1925, pp.189-190.

adopted from William James' Principles of Psychology (1890), where the paradox in this idea is suggested:-

The rush of thought is so headlong that it almost always brings us up at the conclusion before we can arrest it. Or if our purpose is nimble enough and we do arrest it, it ceases forthwith to be itself ... The attempt at introspective analysis in these cases is in fact like seizing a spinning top to catch its motions, or trying to turn up the gas quickly enough to see how the darkness looks.¹

In trying to convey the impact of each thought upon the mind, these writers were in effect attempting to catch and record the present moment, and inevitably the flow of consciousness was reproduced as a closely related series of moments of consciousness. So the problem presented to the psychological novelists was a time problem, and it was with various concepts of time that many of them became obsessed. Bergson's theories were a formative influence on Proust's A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, which is based on the idea of 'the invisible progress of the past which gnaws into the future' and of 'the continuation of an indefinite past in a living present'. The narrator in this novel soaks a morsel of madeleine cake in a spoonful of tea and, in tasting it, is filled with an exquisite pleasure:-

this new sensation having had on me the effect which love has of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me, it was myself ... Whence could it have come to me, this all-powerful joy? ... Whence did it come? What did it signify? How could I seize upon and define it?²

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1. Quoted by Leon Edel, The Psychological Novel, 1955, p.20
 2. Remembrance of Things Past, Trans. by C.K.Scott Moncrieff, 1955, Vol. I, p.58.

In this moment charged with significance, the past is recreated, all falls into perspective, all is made clear in an instant of time; the moment of time has become a moment of vision.

In Proust's work the emphasis is chiefly upon the relation of this present moment to past experience, an idea explored also by Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, and closely related to Eliot's moment of self-knowledge in which the significance of the past is recognised. Joyce's concept of the moment, though, throws greater emphasis on the heightened significance of certain objects in moments of vision; his Stephen Dedalus says that the clock of the Ballast office is capable of an epiphany and explains himself by detailed reference to St. Thomas Aquinas. Virginia Woolf recreates the same experience, though stressing the possibility of such a revelation being shared with other people, and it is this emphasis which is most apparent in the novels of Charles Morgan.

In spite of the different emphasis, however, the experience conveyed by each of these novelists is extraordinarily similar; for each it is 'a revelation ... the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance ... an illumination; a match ^hburning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed',¹ in every case there is a sensation of warmth, emotional rapture such as the mystics often describe, there is light, and a feeling both of isolation from, and the closest union with, the

1. Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway, 1947, p.36

things of this world.

The 'moment' is equivalent to the mystic's 'awakening of the self' or 'cosmic consciousness', as reference to a standard work on mysticism will show:-

In such moods of heightened consciousness each blade of grass seems fierce with a new meaning, and becomes a well of wondrous light: a 'little emerald set in the City of God'. The seeing self is indeed an initiate thrust suddenly into the sanctuary of the mysteries, and feels 'the old awe and amazement' with which man encounters the Real.¹

The 'moment of vision' is then in its simplest terms that sense of heightened consciousness which is at the root of all true artistic creation and all religious experience. As such it has frequently appeared in literature,² but never until this century has it been given such prominence and conscious exploration, partly to be accounted for by the psychological interest of the experience, and partly by the fact that, in an age with no firm religious centre, it is for many people the only means of contact with the Real.

The attempt to describe this essentially indescribable experience was a great enough problem in the novel, but the difficulties involved in a dramatic treatment are far greater, for since the moment of vision is an experience of timelessness, it can have no possible movement. Whenever a moment of vision is presented on the stage, the play's movement will be temporarily suspended, though since such a static episode may precipi-

1. Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism, 1912, p.26.

2. cf. Caroline Spurgeon, Mysticism in English Literature, 1913.

tate other action it can be dramatically justified.

In the novel the reader's understanding of the moment depends on the author's use of sound, of imagery and of the suggestive power of words, approaching the method of poetry, where in fact the visionary experience is best created. The narrative method is often carried over into drama, where a character describes a moment of vision experienced off stage. Christopher Fry's St. Cuthman in The Boy with a Cart tells how he

felt the mood
Of the meadow change, as though a tide
Had turned in the sap, or heaven from the balance
Of creation had shifted a degree,¹

and of how 'timber and flesh seemed of equal and old significance' in a moment which directs the future course of the action.

O'Neill's Long Day's Journey into Night provides a more representative example than Fry's specifically Christian experience, and here the likeness to the novelist's method of narration is very clear. Edmund, the poet manqué, describes moments in which life has seemed meaningful, the purpose of his speech being to reveal more of his character and to stress the pitifully meaningless nature of his present existence:-

... for a moment I lost myself - actually lost my life.
I was set free! I dissolved in the sea, became white sails
and flying spray, became beauty and rhythm, became moonlight
and the ship and the high dim-starred sky! I belonged,

1. 2nd edition, 1945, p.21.

without past or future, within peace and unity and a wild joy, within something greater than my own life, or the life of Man, to Life itself! To God if you want to put it that way.

... Then the moment of ecstatic freedom came. The peace, the end of the quest, the last harbour, the joy of belonging to a fulfilment beyond men's lousy pitiful greedy fears and hopes and dreams! And several other times in my life, when I was swimming far out, or lying alone on a beach, I have had the same experience. Became the sun, the hot sand, green seaweed anchored to a rock, swaying in the tide. Like a saint's vision of beatitude. Like the veil of things as they seem drawn back by an unseen hand. For a second you see - and seeing the secret, are the secret. For a second there is meaning! Then the hand lets the veil fall and you are alone ...

This passage is particularly interesting in its association of the experience with the sea, traditional symbol for the life of the soul, in its stress on the sense of oneness with creation, in the relating of the experience to the saint's vision of beatitude, and in the use of the quest image. But all these provoke only an intellectual assent to the existence of such moments and do not create any actual feeling of the experience.

A slightly more dramatic method is for the moment to be presented on stage, with the character who experiences it commenting on the significance he now perceives, as in the following example:-

Rameses

Listen - look -

What is this 'now', the moment we're now crossing?
Can this truth vanish?
Look, your shadow thrown over the chair,
That dog's jerking bark, the distance of whistling,
A gate clanging-to, the water thrown into the yard,

1. Long Day's Journey into Night, London, 1956, p.134.

and expectancy. In The Family Reunion and The Confidential Clerk such shared moments motivate the action, and a degree of immediacy is gained by the fact that one sees the characters experiencing the moment as well as hearing it described. This still differs very little from the novelist's method, however, and one might compare it with the conversations between Julie and Lewis in Charles Morgan's The Fountain.

More purely theatrical methods of conveying the experience have been explored in the use of stage devices, as in the transformation scenes of The Blue Bird, or as in Und Pippa Tanzt and The Shadowy Waters where lighting effects are made to coincide with the spiritual illumination. In this way, an attempt is made to provide the audience with an altered vision supposedly equivalent to the characters', an idea in which there is a hint of the philosophy behind the plays to be considered in the following chapters. To the writers of these plays, Yeats and Maeterlinck, who can perhaps be called pure symbolists, the aim of art was to create the moment of vision:-

The end of art is the ecstasy awakened by the presence before an ever-changing mind of what is permanent in the world ... a small measure of the creative impulse itself, of the divine vision.¹

This identification of the moment of vision with the ultimate aesthetic response means that art becomes a form of religion, as Arthur Symons maintained:-

... in speaking to us so intimately, so solemnly, as only religion had hitherto spoken to us, it becomes itself a

1. W.B. Yeats, The Cutting of an Agate, 1919, p.96.

kind of religion, with all the duties and responsibilities of the sacred ritual.¹

To dramatists for whom the moment is the highest form of experience it seems essential that they should lead an audience to participation in it, and it is indeed only by participation that the moment of vision can really be understood.

Whereas the plays so far considered have merely incorporated the moment of vision as an element of the theme of spiritual experience, here the complete play is designed to create such a moment, the theme being subordinated to the emotional effect of the whole. In Yeats' work the stress is on beauty as a means of leading an audience to awareness of the vast realities beyond everyday existence; in Maeterlinck's early drama the audience is led to such an awareness by the intensification of fear.

1. The Symbolist Movement in Literature, 1908.

PART TWO.

Only by the form, the pattern,
 Can words or music reach
 The stillness.

(T.S.Eliot.)

Chapter 5

Maeterlinck and the 'Théâtre de Marionnettes'

Maeterlinck's experiment with dramatic form can best be understood in relation to the philosophy and dramatic theory outlined in Le Trésor des Humbles, a collection of essays, which though published in 1896 after his most interesting experiments had appeared, clarifies the nature of the ideal towards which he had been working.

The philosophy set forth in the first essay, 'Le Silence', must be understood if Maeterlinck's dramatic aim is to be appreciated. He advocates the cultivation of silence as the means of apprehending Reality, of making contact with the mysterious spirit that flows through all creation, and stresses a distinction between active silence, which is the only 'vie véritable et la seule qui laisse quelque trace', and positive silence, a condition resembling sleep, death or non-existence. In the moments of active silence one's knowledge is as great as that of the gods, one descends into the soul 'jusqu'aux profondeurs habités par les anges' and then 'les vérités endormies se réveillent en sursaut'. The suddenness and briefness of the experience are stressed in the frequent use of the words 'moment', 'minute', and 'instant', but a long preparation of inward silence must first have taken place:-

pour savoir ce qui existe réellement, il faut cultiver le silence entre soi, car ce n'est qu'en lui que s'entr-

'ouvrent un instant les fleurs inattendues et éternelles ...¹

Maeterlinck uses the word 'silence' not only to describe the condition of stillness in which Reality can be perceived, but also to denote that Reality itself. Thus, silence

nous entoure de tous côtés, il est le fond de notre vie sous-entendue, et dès que l'un de nous frappe en tremblant à l'une des portes de l'absolu, c'est toujours le même silence attentif qui ouvre cette porte.²

The personification of silence suggested here is developed through the essay; silence is the 'hôte impénétrable', the 'grand révélateur des profondeurs de l'être', the 'messenger de l'inconnu'; it offers 'des caresses divines' and 'des baisers' and,

si dans ces moments, nous résistons aux ordres invisibles et pressants du silence, nous faisons une perte éternelle que les plus grands trésors de la sagesse humaine ne pourront réparer ...³

Maeterlinck suggests furthermore that silence comes out to meet men in times of death or great sorrow, and in this concept of silence as a living and moving power affecting men's lives is an indication of the invisible actor of his static plays.

Another aspect of his dramatic theory is suggested by the comments in this essay on the function of words. Although words may serve to convey profound ideas and feelings they can never be a fully effective means of communication, since

1. Le Trésor des Humbles, 1896, p.23

2. Ibid. p.17

3. Ibid. p.11

they are the instruments of reason and not of that intuition which alone can know the truth. Only silence can express 'les relations réelles et spéciales qu'il y a entre deux êtres', and Maeterlinck supports this assertion by referring to the silences of love, the moments of communion with other people, which he introduced into Pelléas et Mélisande and analysed at length in Alladine et Palomides and Aglavaine et Sélysette.

Maeterlinck's ideas on the part of silence in drama, arising inevitably out of this philosophy, are developed in the essay 'Le Tragique Quotidien'. He maintains that the beauty and grandeur of great tragedy lie not in the actions but in the words, and again not in the outer meaning of the words but in a 'hidden dialogue' running parallel with them:-

il faut qu'il y ait autre chose que le dialogue extérieurement nécessaire. Il n'y a guère que les paroles qui semblent d'abord inutiles qui comptent dans une oeuvre. C'est en elles que se cache son âme. À côté du dialogue indispensable, il y a presque toujours un autre dialogue qui semble superflu. Examinez attentivement et vous verrez que c'est le seul que l'âme écoute profondément, parce que c'est en cet endroit seulement qu'on lui parle.¹

The purpose of drama, according to Maeterlinck, is to bring the spectator into contact with the great silence, the Reality, and this is to be achieved by emphasizing the hidden dialogue, eliminating violent external action, and concentrating on 'ce qu'il y a d'étonnant dans le fait seul de vivre'. The sense of the mystery of life which great tragedy evokes must

1. Ibid. p.173

instead of being incidental to the play be made the centre of it:-

Ce qu'on entend sous le roi Lear, sous Macbeth, sous Hamlet, par exemple, le chant mystérieux de l'infini, le silence menaçant des âmes ou des Dieux, l'éternité qui gronde à l'horizon, la destinée ou la fatalité qu'on aperçoit intérieurement sans que l'on puisse dire à quels signes on la reconnaît, ne pourrait-on, par je ne sais quelle interversion des rôles, les rapprocher de nous tandis qu'on éloignerait les acteurs?¹

This might best be achieved by exploring the 'tragique quotidien', far more profound and closer to our true being than the tragedy of violent action and great adventures, 'si superficiel et si matériel.'

Maeterlinck therefore desires a 'théâtre statique' in which external action is eliminated in order that the hidden mysteries of the soul ^{may} ~~might~~ be revealed, a 'théâtre de silence' involving absence of external action and unnecessary speech and leading to the spiritual 'silence', and a 'tragique quotidien' which will reveal the beauty, grandeur and gravity of our humble daily life.

The first collection of Maeterlinck's plays², containing his most characteristic work, shows these theories in practice. The plays can be divided into two categories, in one, the 'legendary', semi-allegorical pieces with much of the violent action Maeterlinck condemns, and in the other, the three 'static' plays, one-act tragedies of everyday life. All have

1. Ibid. p.162

2. Théâtre, Brussels, 1911-1912

in common the creation of intense emotion in face of silent spiritual forces, notably death, and the aim of bringing the spectator to an awareness of the great silence.

The 'Legendary' Plays

The action of the first play, La Princesse Maleine (1889), has many fairy-tale elements, but not the happy ending. It stretches over a long period of time from Maleine's betrothal to a handsome young prince, the defeat of her country in a war instigated by his wicked stepmother, the prince's subsequent betrothal to another, Maleine's appearance as a servant and their joyful reunion, to her death at the hands of the wicked stepmother, who in turn is killed by the prince before he himself commits suicide. All the violent actions occur on stage, and the melodrama is increased by such stock devices as screech-owls, an eclipse, poison, a fool and seven nuns in black. In spite of its violence, however, the outward action is less important than the mood it creates; Maleine's terrible death enacted on stage is not nearly so harrowing as the preceding episode in which she is alone in the locked room, nor as her mute horror before her murderers, nor as the long scene afterwards in which her friends are ignorant of her death.

Far more important to the creation of the mood than the

action are the settings, the characters and the particular kind of dialogue, and it is in these three directions that Maeterlinck makes his most interesting experiments.

Each of the legendary plays has a similar kind of setting, in a large gloomy castle surrounded by dark forests and dank unhealthy marshes, a location undoubtedly suggested by Villiers' Axel and perfectly in tune with the symbolist doctrine of mysterious suggestion. In La Princesse Maleine, there are additional details to increase the horror: a vaulted room in a deserted tower contains nothing but fungus and bats; fire has scorched a whole country leaving only blackened stones and withered trees; a cemetery completely surrounds the castle so that from the windows nothing but gravestones can be seen.

A development on the creation of general atmosphere by significant setting is the exploitation, to too great an extent in this play, of the device of pathetic fallacy. In the opening scene a strangely red moon rises in a pitch-black sky after shooting stars have seemed to throw showers of blood on the castle, - 'on dirait que le ciel pleure sur ces fiançailles!'; when the lovers are united, a fountain sprays them gently and as Maleine weeps with fear 'le jet d'eau sanglote étrangement et meurt!'; when the murder is committed, hail patters on the windows like the tapping of a million fingers and a gust of wind sweeps into the room. This device is only really successful when it is subordinated to the moods and deeds of powerfully created characters, as in Macbeth

and King Lear; here, where the characters are reduced almost to shadows, the natural elements are given a disproportionate significance in the general scheme.

An unusual technique for heightening the atmosphere of mystery and horror is introduced here and developed in later plays, and this might be called the method of oblique perception. Here it takes the form of looking at a scene through a mirror; Maleine and her nurse hold a mirror to a crack in the wall to have a full view of the burnt landscape, and there is a symbolic use of the technique when Maleine acts as servant to Uglyane:-

Mais ne penchez pas ainsi ce miroir! - J'y vois tous les saules pleureurs du jardin, ils ont l'air de pleurer sur votre visage.

In Les Sept Princesses and Intérieur, the audience looks at part of the scene through a window, oblique perception being extended now to serve the purposes of the 'silent' drama by distancing one set of actors from the audience so that the horror of their fate is heightened by presenting their response to it in mime. The window in these plays also acts as symbol for the barrier between known and unknown and between the knowing and the ignorant.

The device is used very successfully in Les Aveugles and L'Intruse, where the method of perception is through the acute sense of hearing of the blind. The fear in L'Intruse is unbearably heightened by the questions of the blind grandfather about every little sound, and in Les Aveugles, where all the

characters are blind, significant information is acquired wholly by ear -

Je crois qu'il y a des étoiles, je les entends.

J'entendais qu'il souriait trop gravement; j'entendais qu'il fermait les yeux et qu'il voulait se faire.

The atmosphere of gloom and mystery, working on the emotions of the weak, timid creatures of subnormal intelligence that Maeterlinck creates as his heroines, is as instrumental in the tragedy as any schemes of the wicked characters. Maleine has no will to resist the hostile forces of which she is intuitively aware and becomes paralysed by fear and the sense of her own helplessness. Simple and uncomprehending as she is, she is not an unreal figure and the spectator is moved by pity and fear at the spectacle of her helplessness before the demands of Fate. Maeterlinck has certainly brought these emotions to the forefront as he intended, but he has gained nothing by leaving the background empty. The helplessness of a mighty tragic hero before an overwhelming Fate will surely evoke pity and fear and the cry of 'God of our fathers, what is man?' more effectively than the spectacle of the misery of a childlike creature, who in any circumstances would be helpless and fearful.

The only character with any real will is the wicked Queen Anne, a stylized figure embodying the forces of evil and death. The prince Hjalmar is nearer to normality than any of the

other characters and he alone might have been capable of averting the tragedy. He is dimly aware of the Queen's designs but hardly dares to recognize them - 'J'ai entrevu aujourd'hui les flammes de péchés auxquels je n'ose pas encore donner un nom!' - and his will-power is weakened by a permanent ill-health caused by the humid atmosphere of the marsh-country.

The horror is increased by the difficulty many of the characters have in communicating with each other. When the nurse questions semi-inarticulate peasants, the slowness of their responses creates an appalling mental tension:-

<u>La Nourrice</u>	Qu'est-ce qui est arrivé?
<u>Premier Pauvre</u>	Ce qui est arrivé?
<u>La Nourrice</u>	Oui; il y a eu une guerre?
<u>Premier Pauvre</u>	Oui; il y a eu une guerre.
	...
<u>La Nourrice</u>	Est-ce que le roi et la reine sont morts?
<u>Premier Pauvre</u>	Le roi et la reine?
<u>La Nourrice</u>	Oui, le roi Marcellus et la reine Godelive.
<u>Premier Pauvre</u>	Oui, je crois qu'ils sont morts. ¹

The characters' non-comprehension of their fate is reflected also in the difficulties caused by the King's slight deafness, while his breakdown into madness, where all he can understand is the necessity of having salad for lunch, is a final comment on the general inability to understand what has happened.

The strange kind of dialogue that Maeterlinck introduces here plays on the nerves of the audience and stresses the mood of fear. The 'dialogue extérieurement nécessaire' is reduced to a minimum, the words being for the most part intended not

1. Théâtre, 1921, Vol.I, p.40. For recent examples of plays based on the dialogue of the semi-inarticulate, see Arnold Wesker's Roots, Penguin, 1960 and, more particularly, Harold Pinter's The Room and The Dumb Waiter, first performed Hampstead Theatre Club, 1960.

to convey information but to create atmosphere. It is not the words themselves that **are** suggestive, as are the individual words of such a play as The Shadowy Waters, and of symbolist poetry in general, but the haunting, musical repetition of phrases and sentences:-

<u>Maleine</u>	J'ai peur!
<u>Hjalmar</u>	Allons plus loin ...
<u>Maleine</u>	Quelqu'un pleure ici ...
<u>Hjalmar</u>	Mais n'entendez-vous pas que c'est le vent?
<u>Maleine</u>	Mais qu'est-ce que tous ces yeux sur les arbres?
<u>Hjalmar</u>	Où donc? Oh! ce sont les hiboux qui sont revenus! Je vais les chasser ... Allez-vous-en! allez-vous-en!
<u>Maleine</u>	Il y en a un qui ne veut pas s'en aller!
<u>Hjalmar</u>	Où est-il?
<u>Maleine</u>	Sur le saule pleureur.
<u>Hjalmar</u>	Allez-vous-en!
<u>Maleine</u>	Oh! Vous avez jeté de la terre sur moi!
<u>Hjalmar</u>	Oh! ma pauvre Uglyane!
<u>Maleine</u>	J'ai peur! ¹

Such repetition can be very effective when, as in this passage, it expresses an emotion which the character is incapable of analysing, but if used for conveying information, it may seem ludicrous - "Je suis la princesse Maleine." "Quoi?" "Je suis la princesse Maleine." "Vous n'êtes pas Uglyane?" "Je suis la princesse Maleine." Looking back on this play, Maeterlinck later criticized,

ces répétitions étonnées qui donnent aux personnages l'apparence de somnambules un peu sourds constamment arrachés à un songe pénible.²

In using the dialogue principally for emotional effect, and not, as is usual in drama, to express ideas and reveal

1. Théâtre, Vol.I, pp.66-7

2. Preface to Théâtre, 1921, pp.i-ii

character, Maeterlinck is virtually assigning to words the function of music, and certainly the human voice, of which the repetition makes one unduly aware, seems at times in this play to be equivalent to a musical instrument.

Pelléas et Mélisande (1892), in many ways resembling La Princesse Maleine, supports my contention that, in drama of violent action at least, the conventional method of creating pity and fear is most likely to be successful. The action is far more probable since it arises out of human relationships, the violent deeds being psychologically motivated and the mystery of Mélisande's origin the only unexplained factor in the play.

The childlike and frail Mélisande is closely related to Maleine, but shows more awareness of herself and her situation. She appears more life-like also because she is surrounded by fully-conscious, articulate people. Golaud in particular is a credible human being and one who evokes much sympathy; the conflict between his love for Mélisande and that for his brother is very moving, as is his pathetic attempt to convince himself that the two lovers are simply indulging in a childish game. His remorse after the murder and his passionate desire to establish Mélisande's purity make him a more lifelike character than any in the earlier play. Pelléas is a stronger Hjalmar, able to give conscious expression in soliloquy to his motives and desires. Even the subsidiary characters are articulate and can make such moving comments on the action as 'Si j'étais Dieu, j'aurais pitié du coeur des hommes' and

'Elle est née sans raison ... pour mourir, et elle meurt sans raison'.

Since the characters are conscious and articulate, the dialogue is more conventional and expresses rather than suggests ideas and emotions. Only at moments of very intense feeling is there any echo of the dialogue of La Princesse Maleine,

<u>Mélisande</u>	Il y a quelqu'un derrière nous! ...
<u>Pelléas</u>	Je ne vois personne ...
<u>Mélisande</u>	J'ai entendu du bruit ...
<u>Pelléas</u>	Je n'entends que ton coeur dans l'obscurité ...
<u>Mélisande</u>	J'ai entendu craquer les feuilles mortes ... ¹

The setting is similar to but not so weird as that of the earlier play, and is more effective without the Romantic **bric à brac** -

il est vrai que ce château est très vieux et très sombre ... Il est très froid et très profond. Et tous ceux qui l'habitent sont déjà vieux. Et la campagne semble bien triste aussi, avec toutes ses forêts, toutes ses vieilles forêts sans lumières.²

There are still certain stylized landscape features in the fountain and the underground caves (to be made of central significance in Alladine et Pallomides (1894)), but in general the symbolic details are more closely related to ordinary life, as in the sheep sensing their fate as they go to slaughter, the horse throwing Golaud as the symbol of his marriage, the

1. Théâtre, Vol. II, p.120

2. Ibid. pp.43-4

ring, is carelessly lost, and in the famine-stricken peasants lying immobile as Golaud and Mélisande are to do;

Ils étaient étendus tous les deux devant la porte! ...
Tout à fait comme des pauvres qui ont faim ...

There is a sense in which the action of each of the legendary plays is symbolic, with the innocent sufferer representing the soul on its journey into darkness, facing death either in the form of a wicked person or as an invisible protagonist. In Alladine et Pallomides, where the two women represent the spiritual and physical aspects of love, the symbolic interpretation is in fact made clear in the speeches of the somewhat garrulous characters. The allegorical nature of two of the plays is even more pronounced; Les Sept Princesses (1891), in which a prince who comes to claim the fairest of the seven, finds, after an arduous journey through underground passages, that she is dead, creates very well an atmosphere of mystery and fear as well as suggesting the search for the ideal, unattainable in this life; La Mort de Tintagiles (1894) in its economy of movement and the removal of the figure of death from the scene is nearer to the successful method of the three 'static' plays.

In contrast to the other legendary plays, the action of La Mort de Tintagiles is very slight: a young prince is summoned to a castle where a hidden Presence is waiting to destroy him; his sisters vainly try to protect him and he is taken away to be killed.

The grandmother, feared and unseen, is clearly a person-

ification of Death, and the significance of the play is in the ruthless and inevitable achievement of her will. The other characters are simply representative of humanity, the innocent victim being presented now as a child. The mood created by the child's lack of understanding and the vague premonitions of the sisters reaches its climax in the final scene, where the boy has been imprisoned behind a heavy, impenetrable door and his sister stands powerless, listening with horror to his fall before the silent Presence.

This is a most powerful use of one of Maeterlinck's favourite symbols. In the essay 'Le Silence', he frequently referred to the 'portes de l'abîme', and actual doors in his plays usually carry the significance of the barrier between known and unknown. In the last act of Alladine et Pallomides, as here, part of the dialogue is heard from behind closed doors, another example of the method of oblique perception; in La Princesse Maleine, Hjalmar and the nurse wait outside the door behind which Maleine lies dead; the doors in L'Intruse conceal the mysteries of life and death, while in The Blue Bird the door is opened and these mysteries are for a moment revealed.¹

The sense of horror at the inevitable and pitiless approach of death in La Mort de Tintagiles is diminished by the improbability of some of the actions. The breaking of the sword at

1. cf. Ch. 2, p. 88.

the advance of the unseen Presence is, for example, not nearly so effective as the realistic details in the non-legendary plays, where the same mood is created by very different means.

'Le Tragique Quotidien'

The two one-act plays L'Intruse (1891) and Intérieur (1894) show the approach of the knowledge of death to uncharacterized nameless figures who could be any people, in a timeless setting that could be anywhere. The 'tragedy of daily life' does not, then, imply a naturalistic contemporary setting, but one which, through being unlocated, applies to any times and place. The stage directions of L'Intruse specify 'a rather dark room in an old castle', but the references in the text are not to such Gothic features as abound in the legendary plays, but to details of any ordinary house. These details are functional in creating the atmosphere of fear and marking the gradual approach of the knowledge of death; six characters sit next to a room in which a woman lies ill, and as death draws near, the creatures outside in the garden are suddenly silent, the sound of a scythe is heard, the room grows cold, the door blows open and cannot be shut again and the lamp is dimmed. These incidents suggest the intervention of supernatural forces and since they can all be explained by natural causes are far more powerful than the 'magical' happenings of some of the legendary plays.

The mood of L'Intruse is created principally through one spiritually sensitive old man who in his physical blindness can sense supernatural presences unperceived by the others. Dramatic tension arises from their refusal to acknowledge the truth of his statements, as ~~at~~ the very moment of death:-

L'Aieul Qui est-ce qui s'est levé?
L'Oncle On ne s'est pas levé!
Le Pere Je ne me suis pas levé!
Les Trois Filles Moi non plus! - Moi non plus! - Moi non plus!
L'Aieul Quelqu'un s'est levé de table!¹

The grandfather's fearful questions are conveyed in the hypnotic repetitive dialogue familiar from La Princesse Maleine, and the mystery is increased by the oblique perception of his sensitive hearing:-

L'Aieul Qu'est-ce j'entends encore?
La Fille Rien, grand-père; ce sont mes mains que j'ai jointes.
L'Aieul Et ceci? ...
La Fille Je ne sais pas, grand-père ... peut-être mes soeurs qui tremblent un peu?²

In this play there is practically no 'necessary' dialogue, that is to say, none which conveys information, for apart from the few words telling of the sick woman and the expected arrival of her sister, the speech serves entirely to create emotion. The knowledge that the woman has died is conveyed in mime, with a nun making the sign of the Cross and the family silently entering the room of death, while the blind grandfather is

1. Théâtre, Vol.I, p.276

2. Ibid. p.275

left alone to cry out man's emotional response to death -
 'Où allez-vous? - Où allez-vous? - Elles m'ont laissé tout
 seul!'

In Intérieur, the informative dialogue and the emotions of the principal characters are set on two different planes. Here Maeterlinck experiments with a unique kind of 'silent drama' in which none of the main figures is heard to speak, since they are observed by the audience from outside the window of their house. The dramatic effect is obtained in part by giving the audience information which will evoke pity and fear for those whom it concerns and who are seen to be as yet happily ignorant. The emotion created by this ironic situation is intensified by the growing distress of the old man who has to break the news of the daughter's death to this peaceful and contented family. The horror is now not at the approach of death, since this has taken place before the play begins, but at the sorrow which the knowledge of the fact will bring, and in this way external action has been almost completely removed and attention focused on 'le chant mystérieux de l'infini ... l'éternité qui gronde à l'horizon'.

Les Aveugles (1891) is the extreme example of Maeterlinck's 'static' drama; physical movement is almost impossible, since all the characters are blind, and the main progress of knowledge affects the characters only and not the audience. For the central situation is clear to the audience as soon as it sees that the twelve blind people do not know that their guide,

a priest, is dead in the midst of them; the only other significant knowledge for the audience to acquire is that these people are alone on an island, the one person with sight being a helpless baby, and that they will therefore never be rescued. The movement for the blind people is a progressive intensification of bewilderment and fear until the dead priest is discovered, followed by a gradual recognition of their fate; the knowledge that death will soon come is, as in L'Intruse, indicated by their sense of a strange Presence among them. This, like Intérieur, is a drama of ironic situation, made more powerful by the fact that the figure of death is visible to the audience throughout the play, and its statuesque quality heightens the sense of the helplessness of man before unseen forces.

The obvious symbolism here is more consistently developed than in the other plays. The blind people represent humanity on the island of life in time, cut off by the great sea of the Unknown, which they fear and try to forget. They have never seen themselves or others, and in their vain attempts at communication is implied the fundamental isolation of the individual:-

Nous ne sommes jamais vus les uns les autres. Nous nous interrogeons et nous nous répondons; nous vivons ensemble, nous sommes toujours ensemble, mais nous ne savons pas ce que nous sommes! ... Nous avons beau toucher des deux mains; les yeux en savent plus que les mains.¹

1. Théâtre, Vol.I, p.311

Within the group are certain more specifically symbolic figures - the young girl who dimly remembers life in another world, the man who prefers to sit by the fire rather than seek the sunlight, the mad-woman said to have moments of vision and clearly representing the visionary among the spiritually blind. She is no longer capable of expressing herself in words, but in that state of receptive silence which Maeterlinck so highly praises, she is able to see, though dimly, the reality of the priest's death -

L'aveugle folle se frotte violemment les yeux en gémissant et en se tournant obstinément vers le prêtre immobile.¹

She weeps at her inability to express what she has seen, and seems to suggest the sorrow of the visionary incapable of communicating his vision:-

... il me semble que j'entends pleurer tout à coup parmi nous! ...
 ... je crois que c'est la folle ...
 ... Il n'y a qu'elle qui pleure ainsi!
 ... On n'entend pas pleurer les autres ...
 Il faut voir pour pleurer.²

The priest is the representative of an orthodox religion incapable of giving light and spiritual sustenance to the people. He had hoped to cure the blind but had been unable to fulfil his promise and had gradually lost his own visionary power - 'Il devient trop vieux. Il paraît que lui-même n'y voit plus depuis quelque temps'. He tried to help them to

1. Ibid. p.315

2. Ibid. pp.316-317

understand life, but there were vast areas of experience of which he too was ignorant:-

Il disait aussi qu'il nous fallait connaître un peu la petite île où nous sommes. Lui-même ne l'a jamais entièrement parcourue; il y a une montagne où personne n'a monté, des vallées où l'on n'aime pas à descendre et des grottes où nul n'a pénétré jusqu'ici.¹

The figure of the dead priest in the midst of the groping, stumbling company is a powerful visual symbol of Maeterlinck's conception of the Church's ineffectiveness in the human predicament.

The priest is discovered with the help of a dog who has come through the forest to find them. It was part of Maeterlinck's philosophy that animals have a surer instinct and a more intuitive knowledge than man, and here, as in La Princesse Maleine and The Blue Bird, the dog represents instinct or intuition. It is by intuition that one of the blind men is led to the priest, but it is only through reason that he can complete the discovery. There is no mention of the dog after the priest has been found; he is only a guide and having given the first pointer, cannot help any further.

As the knowledge of their true situation comes to the group at the end of the play, and as they are aware of the vast realities existing beyond their understanding, they give the only two cries of which humanity is capable, one the cry of the intellect, 'Qui êtes-vous?', the other the cry of

1. Ibid. p.295

the heart, 'Ayez pitié de nous!' The only answer to these cries is a profound silence.

The effectiveness of this symbolic representation of humanity's predicament rests in the fact that the intellectual aspect is balanced by powerful emotion; the dark forest, for example, is an intellectually conceived symbol of man's spiritual state but its effect is intensified by the emotional associations of this scene. Fear is created by Maeterlinck's characteristic methods, particularly here by the unnatural concentration on hearing and touch as means of perception, so that although the figures are stylized representatives of humanity, their emotion is real and infectious. This harmony between a moving outward situation and the general condition it symbolizes makes this one of Maeterlinck's best dramatic works, as well as perhaps his most interesting experiment.

In the light of these experiments, the validity of Maeterlinck's dramatic theory may now be considered. Les Aveugles illustrated the 'static drama' at its utmost limits, but several lines of progression were observed in it. For, in fact, 'static drama' is a contradiction in terms and a completely static stage presentation could only be a motionless tableau. None of Maeterlinck's plays is this, though in outward form Les Aveugles may be said to resemble a theatrical transposition of a painting.

The main purpose of the 'static drama' was to remove external action from the stage in order to concentrate on the

fundamental spiritual mysteries of life. This Maeterlinck has in the one-act plays technically achieved, but, since human life is action, he has not been able to omit the exteriorization of these mysteries in significant action, albeit off-stage. A violent death has occurred in Intérieur, a woman dies in L'Intruse and the dead priest is before our eyes in Les Aveugles. These deaths are dramatic actions in the sense that they precipitate the mental and spiritual movement which is the real centre of the drama.

Necessary information about an existing state of affairs, often in conventional drama acquired through external action, is given to the audience entirely in words, and in the growth of such knowledge is a degree of dramatic movement. Facts may be imparted artificially, as in L'Intruse, by one character telling another details which he must already know, or more subtly, by the bewildered questions of helpless people, such as the blind, about their position. In the latter case, information is given simultaneously with the intensification of emotion, a method very successfully used in Intérieur, where the old man's fear and horror increase as he reviews all the facts of which he alone is in possession.

The most significant line of development is the parallel movement of emotion in characters and spectators, developing from slight uneasiness to bitter anguish as the characters become aware of their situation. There is a suggestion of conflict in the hostility of cosmic forces to the individual, with their imagined movement across the scene in L'Intruse and

Les Aveugles, and it is this sense of conflict which makes it possible to consider these works as drama:-

On y a foi à d'énormes puissances, invisibles et fatales, dont nul ne sait les intentions, mais que l'esprit du drame suppose malveillantes, attentives à toutes nos actions, hostiles au sourire, à la vie, à la paix, au bonheur. . . . Cet inconnu prend le plus souvent la forme de la mort.¹

Death is the invisible protagonist of Maeterlinck's early plays, and in leading the audience to a contemplation of this most obvious indication of the mystery beyond our lives, he hoped to create a spiritual calm, a silence of the soul, - 'de faire voir l'existence d'une âme en elle-même'.² Although Maeterlinck spoke of having experienced this state in watching great tragedy, the 'silence of the soul' must not be confused with the tragic 'catharsis'. For where tragedy resolves into peace and consolation, with 'calm of mind, all passion spent', Maeterlinck's drama leaves one for the most part with an unalleviated horror. La Mort de Tintagiles and Les Aveugles illustrate this most clearly, there being no relaxation of tension at the close of the play, which the practical movements at the end of Intérieur and L'Intruse to a certain extent supply.

The one modern play which rivals Maeterlinck's work in suggesting the inevitable approach of the hostile forces of death, points to the nature of the difference between 'catharsis' and the emotional effect created here. Synge's Riders to the Sea

1. Preface to Théâtre, Vol.I, pp.ix-x

2. 'Le Tragique Quotidien', Le Trésor des Humbles, p.162

recalls 'le tragique quotidien' in its association of fate with natural powers, in the constant presence of the unseen protagonist, and in the economy of outward movement. But Synge's *Maurya* is a 'real' individual character, whose progress in the play is through fear to acceptance of death. The calm of acceptance, in both character and spectator, is the complete tragic effect, but in Maeterlinck's early plays no character ever comes to terms with death. The spiritual effect of Maeterlinck's drama is something peculiarly his own, stimulating awareness of unknown realities and leaving the mind almost unbearably sensitive to the vast mysteries of life.

Much of the unique effect of his work arises from the elemental power of the characters' emotions before forces which they cannot understand. The uncomprehending dream children, with names from some remote fanciful period, or the representative figures with type-names denoting their position in life, seem to be essential humanity, stripped of any individual trimmings. Their tragedy is that of any soul, it is the 'tragique quotidien'. The most powerful actors in this drama are the unseen forces controlling the universe, manipulating the puppet-strings; this is the implication of the term 'theatre de Marionnettes', with which Maeterlinck described La Princesse Maleine -

Quand j'ai écrit la Princesse Maleine, je m'étais dit:
 "Je vais tâcher de faire une pièce à la façon de Shakespeare pour un théâtre de Marionnettes."¹

1. Quoted by May Daniels, The French Drama of the Unspoken, 1953, p.56

This must be understood in relation to his comments, mentioned above, on Shakespearean drama,-

Ce qu'on entend sous le roi Lear, sous Macbeth ... le chant mystérieux de l'infini ... ne pourrait-on, par je ne sais quelle interversion des rôles, les rapprocher de nous tandis qu'on éloignerait les acteurs?¹

In concentrating on the mysterious forces, Maeterlinck has not only made the fate of his beings seem as controlled as that of puppets, but has created figures whose characters are more or less unchanging, who use silence and gesture as much as words, and who represent basic types of humanity rather than individuals:-

Maeterlinck wrote on the title-page of one of his volumes Drames pour marionettes, no doubt to intimate his sense of the symbolic value, in the interpretation of a profound inner meaning of that external nullity which the marionette by its very nature emphasizes.²

Maeterlinck's interest in marionettes was, however, practical as well as symbolic, for he shared with many of his contemporaries a dislike not only of the 'character interest' in drama, but of the individual interpretation of the actor, imposing his own personality on whatever part he played. In La Jeune Belgique (1890), he maintains that a work of art dies as soon as it is put on stage, for an actor, by introducing human interest, destroys the symbolic suggestiveness. He would like to remove the human being entirely from stage presentation and replace it by 'une ombre', 'un reflect, une projection de

1. 'La Tragique Quotidien', Le Trésor des Humbles, p.162

2. Arthur Symons, 'An Apdlogy for Puppets', Plays, Acting and Music, 1928, p.13

formes symboliques ou un être, qui aurait les allures de la vie sans avoir la vie'.¹ It is the same idea that D.H.Lawrence was to develop after seeing the marionettes at Palermo:-

There is something extremely suggestive in them. How much better they fit the old legend-tales than living people do. Nay, if we are going to have human beings on the stage, they should be masked and disguised. For in fact drama is enacted by symbolic creatures formed out of human consciousness: puppets if you like: but not human individuals. Our stage is all wrong, so boring in its personality.²

Maeterlinck's own work was in fact sometimes performed by puppets, but more significant is the effect of these theories on the conception of the actor's function and of the type of character to be created, theories considered critically by Arthur Symons, translated into terms of stage technique by Gordon Craig and resulting in a new type of dramatic experiment in the later works of Yeats.

The representative, stylized quality of puppets which had interested Maeterlinck attracted Gordon Craig, who held that 'the perfect puppet resembles us all'³. Arthur Symons develops the idea, likening the generalizing power of the marionette to that of the Greek mask - and continues,

It will be a lesson to some of our modern notions, and it may be instructive for us to consider that we could not give a play of Ibsen's to marionettes, but that we could give them the Agamemnon.⁴

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1. Quoted by May Daniels, op cit. p.74
 2. Sea and Sardinia, p.202
 3. Puppets and Poets, The Chapbook, No.20, February 1921,p.27
 4. Op cit. p.11

Gesture as well as emotion is generalized, and in this lies the particular beauty and suggestiveness that Lawrence noted. Not only then were the marionettes studied for the simplification of humanity and the generalizing of emotion but for their controlled beauty of movement, to be so prominent an aspect of Yeats' dramatic theory.

Above all, for we need it above all, let the marionettes remind us that the art of the theatre should be beautiful first, and then indeed what you will afterwards¹

- The idea of the marionettes thus became central to the development of a 'theatre of beauty', and what had in Maeterlinck been predominantly a philosophical concept of man's place in the universe became for Yeats solely a question of stage technique. In this lies the difference of method between Maeterlinck and Yeats, for although both aim to create the moment of vision, one evokes mystery through fear, starting from a philosophical idea, the other creates the mystery of beauty based on purely aesthetic theory.

1. Arthur Symons, op cit. p.11.

Chapter 6

Yeats and the Theatre of Beauty

What attracts me to drama is that it is ... what all the arts are upon a last analysis ... a moment of intense life.¹

I have invented a form of drama, distinguished, indirect and symbolic ... - an aristocratic form.²

Yeats' dramatic work is a record of constant search for a form that would 'enable us to pass for a few moments into a deep of the mind that had hitherto been too subtle for human habitation'.³ Like Maeterlinck, he identified the ultimate aesthetic response with a religious state, in which it seems 'as though life itself were trembling into stillness and silence';⁴ this ecstasy is 'the best that art - perhaps that life - can give'.⁵

His quarrel with the realistic drama of his time, with what he called the 'theatre of commerce' was that, in stressing the externalities of life and thought, it evoked no sense of this spirituality but rather filled 'one's soul with a sense of commonness as with dust'.⁶ His own work is in every possible aspect opposed to the play of social problems and

1. W.B.Yeats, Plays and Controversies, 1923, p.103

2. W.B.Yeats, The Cutting of an Agate, 1919, p.2

3. Ibid. p.7

4. Ibid. p.33

5. Ibid. p.27

6. Ibid. p.77

faithful observation of 'life'. From first to last, his plays attempt to create a theatre of beauty and remoteness and in this 'distance from life' to draw near to an imaginative reality.

In the Plays for Dancers Yeats creates the form that most nearly approaches his ideal, and by examining the theories on which these were built, the nature of that ideal will be illuminated.

The Plays for Dancers are modelled on the form of the Japanese Noh plays, introduced to Yeats by Ezra Pound, for whose collection of Fenollosa's manuscripts Yeats wrote a prefatory essay. The Noh play is, as its title, meaning 'accomplishment' implies, an aristocratic, specialized form, demanding skill in construction and a set of circumstances for its production that Yeats, perhaps alone in this period, was well fitted to supply. Moreover, the Noh exists to create the state of yugen, which, translated¹ both as 'ideal beauty' and 'mysterious calm', appears to be equivalent to Yeats' 'stillness and silence'. All the elements in the play are directed to the achieving of this state; there is a slight plot built around a single meaningful action, but this is less important than the perfect combination of rhythmic chant, dance and music by which yugen is captured. There are seldom more than two or three characters, distanced from actuality

1. by F.A.C.Wilson, W.B.Yeats and Tradition, 1958, p.41

by mysterious masks and splendid costume, and supported by a chorus of musicians.

In the essay on 'Certain Noble Plays of Japan', Yeats makes clear what it is that attracted him to this form. Of first importance is the fact that there is no attempt at naturalistic effect, 'no observation of life, because the poet would act before us all those things which we feel and imagine in silence'.¹ All is beauty and strangeness, in which one can apprehend 'the continual presence of reality', and in the use of ancient themes of gods and goddesses, ghosts and tombs, Yeats detected a likeness to his own feeling for the Irish legend and belief which had been consistently the basis of his dramatic work up to this time.

The few scenic requirements of the Noh attracted one who in the early days of the Irish theatre had been forced by financial circumstances to use only the simplest properties. There were, however, more than mere economical considerations in his desire for the kind of play which needed players 'but to unroll a mat in some Eastern garden'. Yeats had discovered in the process of simplification from the fairly elaborate settings of The Countess Cathleen to the curtain and screen of The Hour Glass that by removing the interest in scenic effects the human voice became more important and the verse more effective.

Yeats' dramatic theory was based on a belief in 'the

1. The Cutting of an Agate, p.16

ancient sovereignty of words' and in the power of the beautiful voice to convey these with intensity. In 'The Reform of the Theatre' (1903) he had written of the need for 'a stronger feeling for beautiful and appropriate language than one finds in the ordinary theatre',¹ and his critical writings are full of references to the efforts made by his actors to restore the art of the musical speaking of verse, and 'to assume that subtle monotony of voice which runs through the nerves like fire'.² His suggested reform of the theatre involves the removal of 'everything that draws the attention away from the sound of the voice' notably over-elaborate gesture, scenery and costume.

There was therefore a great attraction in the simple requirements of a play whose 'few properties can be packed up in a box or hung upon the walls where they will be fine ornaments'.³ The Noh stage was almost always bare, with an invariable backcloth depicting a spreading pine which stressed the symbol of eternity in the three small pine trees at the entrance to the stage. Yeats was to simplify the setting even further, adapting the symbolism to his own needs. His musicians give details of the place and weather and the imagination of the audience supplies the rest:-

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1. Plays and Controversies, p.46
 2. Ideas of Good and Evil, 1903, p.24
 3. The Cutting of an Agate, pp.2-3

Painted scenery after all is unnecessary to my friends and to myself, for our imagination kept living by the arts can imagine a mountain covered with thorn-trees in a drawing-room without any great trouble, and we have many quarrels with even good scene-painting.¹

Of even more interest to Yeats is the economy of gesture and the rhythmical movement of the Noh play. He describes how Japanese players move from the hip, keeping the upper part of the body still, and associate a definite thought with every gesture or pose. Their 'grave and decorative' movements are founded upon those of puppets so that all the actor's individuality is removed. The rhythmical movement culminates in dance, but not 'any existing form of stage dancing'. It is a reserved, controlled movement, its minuteness determined by the nearness of the spectators.

The use of masks in the Noh plays helps to achieve 'distance from life' and the resulting universality. The unchanging expression of the mask cannot be at the mercy of an author's frailty, it can be viewed from any distance and still be a work of art and its immobility suggests depths of universal emotion that no human face can hold, seeming an image 'of those profound emotions that exist only in solitude and in silence'.²

In this form, designed to achieve universality by remoteness from individual variation, Yeats found it possible to reveal 'a hundred lovely intricacies'. At the Hawk's Well (1916) is modelled more closely on the Noh form than the other dance

1. Note on At the Hawk's Well, Plays and Controversies, p.416

2. Ibid. p.417

plays, and it is of special interest to this study because its central situation is the search for the 'well at the world's end', the symbolic source of eternal life and reality.

The well is filled at brief moments and he who could drink of it would have eternal life. The figures in the play are the guardian of the well, an old man who watches and waits, and has grown old in waiting, without success, and a young man who expects to be lucky at once. When the well does flow for a moment, the old man is asleep and the young one has been led away by the dance of the hawk-like guardian. He has not been able to drink, but has glimpsed the flow of the water; he has 'lost what may not be found, Till men heap his burial mound'.

The situation is intense and suggestive, but it is only a fraction of the total play, which is, in fact, more stage performance than actual text. In this, the musicians' part is especially important to the creation of the mood. They make the ritual movements of the folding and unfolding of the cloth with its hawk-image, which serves instead of curtains to mark the beginning and end of the play. Their instruments are the only stage properties apart from a patterned screen and a blue square cloth representing the well, so that in their opening song they conjure the scene 'to the eye of the mind' and establish the mood - 'I am afraid of this place'. As the old man enters to the rhythmic beat of drum taps, they interpret his mimed action and in describing his appearance add further details to the scene:-

He is all doubled up with age;
 The old thorn-trees are doubled so
 Among the rocks where he is climbing.¹

At the climactic dance, when the characters are beyond words, the musicians voice their thoughts and again interpret the movements, but it is impossible to have any impression of the power of this dance from a mere reading of the text. Since character interest has completely disappeared and action become less important than tone of voice, gesture, dance and song, one cannot know whether Yeats' 'theatre of beauty' achieves its aim of creating the spiritual silence without being present at a performance carried out in all respects according to Yeats' wishes. He himself records his satisfaction with some of the productions² and of feeling 'most alive at the moment when a room full of people share the one lofty emotion'³, so that we can assume his aim to have been achieved. Here the difference of method between Maeterlinck and Yeats is very clear, for in the 'theatre of fear' the response was evoked by elements within the play itself, particularly by the dialogue and the kind of character created.

The Noh play, originating in the temple and later belonging exclusively to the aristocracy, was intended for a 'few score people of good taste', a similar kind of specialized group as

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1. Plays and Controversies, p.340
 2. Of the first performance of At the Hawk's Well, he writes: 'the audience and the players and I myself were pleased', and of a public performance, 'I think At the Hawk's Well was a real success, though a charity audience is a bad one'. cf. Plays and Controversies, p.417 and Letter of 10th April 1916 to Lady Gregory.
 3. Plays and Controversies, p.416

that for which Yeats wrote his Plays for Dancers. Here then is the ultimate in esoteric drama, created for the few initiates and performable only in certain circumstances.

There is obviously not a great deal of scope for development in this form and Yeats felt it an advantage that he would not be absorbed by it but could 'record all discoveries of method and turn to something else'.¹ Such discoveries inevitably affected his subsequent dramatic work, which is for the most part an expansion of the dance-play technique, allowing a more detailed symbolism and even, in The Resurrection, a good deal of discussion.

Masks, musicians and dances become a permanent feature of Yeats' drama, the musicians proving to be a flexible device as they speak for an invisible figure such as the saint in The Cat and the Moon or for the severed head in The King of the Great Clock Tower. In the later plays the stylized element in the musicians is stressed with a slight humour that suggests the spontaneity and intimacy of the unrolled mat in an Eastern garden, but to a certain extent destroys the mystery. The musician in A Full Moon in March says,

What do we do?
What part do we take?
What did he say?

and he is answered,

'Sing anything, sing any old thing,' said he.²

1. The Cutting of an Agate, p.2
2. Collected Plays, p.621

In The Death of Cuchulain, the old man, 'looking like something out of mythology', comments on the sound of the drum and the pipe,

That's from the musicians; I asked them to do that if I was getting excited. If you were as old you would find it easy to get excited.¹

Where the Plays for Dancers were limited in appeal to the 'few cultivated people' who appreciated the arts of performance, the later plays are often limited by their obscure philosophical implications and the great fund of personal imagery. Where the imagery of At the Hawk's Well for example, was universally suggestive, that of The Herne's Egg, based as it is on Indian thought, is illusive, and unclarified by the Irish setting, characterization and plot.

The philosophical implications of the two related plays, The King of the Great Clock Tower (1935) and A Full Moon in March (1935) are clearer, and many of the techniques of the dance-plays are used to develop the theme of spiritual consummation. In the opening song of The King of the Great Clock Tower, the spiritual reality is again described as the 'Land of Heart's Desire', where all is perpetual dance. A traditional story of the queen wooed by a common man veils the theme of man's quest for spiritual vision. The Stroller, a 'man of no account', lives in a sordid material world, but nevertheless has brief flashes of illumination:-

1. Ibid. p.694

I ran to the Boyne Water
 And where a sea-mew and the salt sea wind
 Yelled Godhead, on a round green hillock lay;
 ... Then great Aengus spoke -
 O listen, for I speak his very words -
 'On stroke of midnight when the old year dies,
 Upon that stroke, the tolling of that bell
 The Queen shall kiss your mouth' ...¹

He holds to his belief in a life after death and that at midnight, traditional symbol for the moment of death, he shall be given the kiss of the liberation of the soul. This climax is enacted in dance, where the Queen holding the severed head to her breast provides a mysterious visual image of great intensity.

As in At the Hawk's Well, the final lyric suggests the two attitudes to the spiritual reality. The 'rambling, shambling travelling-man' is sustained by a vision of future beatitude:

Yet all the lovely things that were
 Live, for I saw them dancing there,

but one part of the mind, 'the wicked, crooked hawthorn tree', refuses to believe in any kind of spiritual life:-

Lovely lady or gallant man
 Are blown cold dust or a bit of bone.²

The same theme is stripped of inessentials in A Full Moon in March, but both plays fall short of the intensity and dramatic effect of Yeats' best play of the last period, Purgatory. Here the economy learnt from the Noh plays serves a passionate theme with different levels of symbolic significance, visualized in the setting of the ruined house and the bare tree. The

1. Ibid. p.637

2. Ibid. p.640

intensity is created by more conventional methods, from within the central character himself and the situation he produces, rather than from the arts of music and dance, and there is therefore a wider appeal in this play, as also in The Resurrection.

For the most part, however, the 'theatre of beauty' was destined to appeal only to the few, in spite of the fact that Yeats had hoped to make 'vigorous and simple men' understand his vision. In the note on At the Hawk's Well he describes the boredom of a London audience of The King's Threshold, which made him feel the necessity of writing for himself and his friends. For the Plays for Dancers, at least, depend not only on a sympathetic performance, but on the ability of the audience to be moved by such artistic effect if the 'stillness and silence' are to be produced. The most delicate balance in both performance and reception is essential to these as to Maeterlinck's plays if absurdity is not to be the result.¹

Yeats' belief that 'in the studio and in the drawing-room we can find a true theatre of beauty'² represents the extreme position of symbolist drama, for with only a few exceptions, the plays considered in this study have appealed to minority audiences, mostly those of the 'little theatres; without whose courageous and imaginative producers many of them would never have been performed.

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1. Max Graf, Composer and Critic, 1947, p.255 describes how 'at the first performance of Maeterlinck's The Intruder in Vienna the audience laughed as if they had been present at a joke'.
 2. The Cutting of an Agate, p.11

The stimulus to the 'little theatre' movement came from France, where Antoine's Théâtre Libre was founded in 1887 and Paul Fort's opposing Théâtre d'Art in 1890. In this latter theatre Maeterlinck's work was performed and under Lugné-Poe's direction introduced to London in 1895 with L'Intruse and Pelléas et Mélisande. Already in 1891 George Moore had written 'On the Necessity of an English Théâtre Libre', which must offer 'a supremacy of sensation - the strange, the unknown, the unexpected',¹ and the Independent Theatre had been formed in that year with a performance of Ghosts at the Royalty Theatre. The realistic and social problem drama was the main interest even here, with George Bernard Shaw its most startling discovery, and the symbolist drama was confined to even more select groups, such as that founded by Yeats and Arthur Symons in 1903, called the 'Society of the Masquers' and intending to produce 'only those works which convey a sentiment of beauty', including among others Peer Gynt and Les Aveugles.²

If Yeats was the foremost dramatist in promoting a 'theatre of beauty', Craig was its supreme advocate in the field of design. To Craig as to Yeats the theatre was the place in which people should be moved by beauty to an awareness of spiritual realities:-

The theatre should not be a place in which to exhibit scenery, in which to read poems, or preach sermons; it should be a place in which the entire beauty of life can be unfolded,

1. Impressions and Opinions, 1913, p.176

2. For a history of the 'little theatres', see A.I. Miller, The Independent Theatre in Europe, New York, 1931.

Information about the Society of the Masquers is from unpublished material in the possession of Miss A. Saddlemyer.

and not only the external beauty of the world, but the inner beauty and meaning of life. It should not only be a place to show facts in a material way, but the place to show the whole world of fancy, and in a spiritual way.¹

His ideal is more concisely put in words which echo the unfulfilled ambitions of many of the symbolist writers:

The theatre of the Future shall be the Temple of Life - the Temple of Beauty; and it shall be for ~~re~~ the people.²

A theatre of beauty was indeed created, whose spiritual effect perhaps warranted the use of the word 'temple', but it proved to be a temple for initiates and not for the people.

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1. E.Gordon Craig, The Art of the Theatre, 1905, p.13
 2. Ibid. p.15

Conclusion

This study of representative symbolist plays has shown that the general conception of dramatic form has been modified and extended in a number of ways in order to convey a theme indicative of the spiritual temper of the age; in conclusion, the most outstanding developments in the treatment of the four basic elements of drama are to be summarized.

With Aristotle's dictum that, 'action is the first principle and, as it were, the soul of tragedy', modern dramatists would no doubt agree, but their view of what constitutes dramatic action might in many cases be very different. The central theme of symbolist drama is concerned with an inward, spiritual movement, and although for Aristotle action embraced mental processes as well as outward deeds and events, it meant such processes manifested in external acts. Brand is the clearest example of this traditional method, where the spiritual movement is marked by a series of outward acts and conflicts. Some symbolist writers, however, have attempted to dispense as much as possible with external action as a means of suggesting inward movement, believing that the silent activity of the soul does not in real life necessarily manifest itself in visible action. One method is the starting of the play very near the spiritual climax, so that most of the action is a process of retrospection expressed in discussion, as in Ibsen's late plays and Eliot's. In these cases an outward symbolic action usually

reflects the spiritual climax - Solness' climbing of the tower, Rubek's ascent of the mountain, Harry's departure from Wishwood, for example.

When outward action is almost completely removed, an approach to 'static drama' may result. It has been seen, however, that Maeterlinck's work, the most notable example of this, is not in fact wholly static and that there has to be movement of some kind for drama to exist, although one more recent play, Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot refines both outward and inner movement even further so that the very inaction becomes a comment on man's spiritual situation.

In certain short plays, such as Yeats' Plays for Dancers, the whole of the simple outward action has the force of a symbol, and this method may be extended into full-length allegories where inward movement is suggested by an outward succession of events bearing some inherent resemblance to it. Here spiritual experience is translated into a logical, coherent and unified outward plot, an arrangement of incidents complying with the traditional view that action should be exhibited in its development and in its results. But with the dream-play technique, a logical sequence of outward events is almost completely abandoned, with the inward movement the only coherence.

The symbolist concern with the inward life is thus reflected in the treatment of action in three ways in particular; - action may be a means of conveying symbolism; outward events may be

almost non-existent; an illogical shifting movement may reflect that shifting movement of the mind in which spiritual development takes place.

The spiritual exploration has resulted on the one hand in a greatly increased interest in a single character, and one of the most noticeable features of modern drama is the obvious self-analysis that a dramatist makes through a central figure. This is reflected most clearly in the 'artist plays', but in many others the main character is only a thinly-disguised self-portrait. It is also true to say, I think, that the range of character portrayed in single plays has become more limited, and that this may be attributed to the increased interest in self-exploration. Of all the plays considered in the first chapter, only The Masterbuilder could be said to have a range of individual, fully-created characters, each clearly distinguishable from the others; for the rest, while idiosyncrasies abound in the central character, the supporting figures are usually representative, stylized types.

Typification is indeed the most outstanding aspect of character-creation in symbolist drama. Where a full exploration of the individual consciousness is required, the mind is divided into component parts which are made agents of the action; these may be fixed figures as in the Morality plays, or in the 'doubling' method of the dream-technique may be altered to

reflect the changing feelings of the central character, so that one stage-figure no longer represents one supposedly real human-being.

On the other hand, there is a group of plays where there is no character interest at all, not even in a single consciousness. The plays of the German Expressionists develop the use of stylized figures to represent human-beings in general, and type-names are given simply to denote position in the social framework - Mother, Son, Cashier, Lady, - the extreme of the method being reached in the distinguishing by mere numbers.

A similar kind of typification is used by Maeterlinck, not for the predominantly social comment of the Expressionists, but to strip human beings of all individuality in order to reach supposedly the basic 'soul', but in fact more accurately, the basic emotion. This leads to the creation of puppet-characters, figures symbolizing man's position in the universe, and more importantly, giving a certain remoteness and universality.

A similar idea is behind Yeats' use of the mask, whose immobility suggests the eternal, the unchanging and the universal; Craig's plea for the actor was, 'let us again cover his face with a mask in order that his expression - the visualized expression of the Poetic spirit - shall be everlasting'.

Of the two methods of individual characterization and universalized typification, the former seems to me to be both more truly dramatic and more effective. The greatest drama

offers an ordered section of intense life which the audience itself can live by identification with the characters, and much of the dramatic pleasure arises from this vicarious suffering and triumph through recognizable human beings. Is it not true that in all things the universal is more powerfully conveyed through the individual, and that although there is a great deal of artistic pleasure and effect in remoteness and generalization, the particular has the greater intensity?

Two extremes may be noted also in the experiments with dramatic language, directed on the one hand to a revival of poetic drama and on the other to the exploration of silence as a dramatic medium. Both are however attempts to achieve a similar effect. Spiritual experience needs to be conveyed in a language more elevated than that of ordinary conversation, the adequate medium for social realism, and this heightening is provided in one case by the suggestiveness and intensity of poetic language, and in the other by the simple, highly patterned dialogue of Maeterlinck's drama. These forms of language have been made to impose on the drama a pattern which is to a certain extent a substitute for that more usually imposed by the external action or plot. Eliot in particular emphasized the musical pattern created by the rhythms of dramatic poetry and perhaps achieved his greatest success with it in Murder in the Cathedral.

Yeats' work reflects his desire to restore the 'ancient

sovereignty' of words, and a great deal of the total effect of his drama rests on the richly poetic language; such a play as The Shadowy Waters relies entirely for its suggestiveness on the resources of language, but it is a type of poetry suitable only for intense experience. Eliot's main concern, on the other hand, was with a search for a dramatic verse that would convey not only the intensities but also the banalities of life, for a form 'in which dramatic characters can express the purest poetry without high-falutin and in which they can convey the most commonplace message without absurdity'.

At the other extreme, language was pushed into the background and almost disappeared. The German Expressionists, with their belief that art must search out and recreate life's intrinsic essence, attempted to find an adequate language for this process of recreation. New words were coined and a new grammar explored, where unnecessary inflexions and prefixes were omitted and words were rapped out in what became known as the 'telegram style'. The result was almost the removal of language altogether - Kaiser's Gas II has been described as 'of all plays the most deficient in words' - and for certain inner emotions expression could only be found in an inarticulate cry.

A more sustained exploration of silence as a dramatic medium was made by French dramatists of the 'théâtre de silence' or 'théâtre de l'inexprimé', of which Maeterlinck was the symbolist exponent and Jean-Jacques Bernard the most influential

spokesman. This experiment was based not only on a reaction against an imprecise use of the spoken word but on a belief in the mysterious potentialities of silence, with Maeterlinck as a means of approaching a spiritual reality and with Bernard of exploring depths of human personality.

Maeterlinck's belief that words are not fully effective as a means of communication and that the silence of the 'hidden dialogue' is the true medium, resulted in a use of words not for their meaning but for their suggestive sound, and in a stress not on the single word, but on the phrase or sentence, repeated to give a purely emotional, musical effect. Words were thus no longer used to express ideas and analyze emotions but simply to reproduce emotion, a method surely more suited to lyrical forms than to drama, where a peculiar intensity arises from the communication of one character with another by means of the spoken word, and from comment on events as these are enacted before one.

There is a certain amount of dramatic effectiveness in Maeterlinck's use of words, which creates the terror and mental vacuum at which he aimed. More recently, experiment has been continued along these lines by Ionesco and Harold Pinter, but there is a limit to the use that can be made of this technique and fear is probably the only emotion which it can create; Maeterlinck's own later plays exploring the silences of love show the sterility inherent in the method.

When words disappear completely, mimed action may replace them. In Kaiser's From Morn to Midnight mime is used to make a social criticism, the silent enactment of part of the cashier's daily routine illustrating the mechanical nature of his life. More generally mime has been developed as a means of expressing inward experience for which words are felt to be inadequate; Claudel's incongruous association of mimed and filmed action was an attempt to suggest the silent movement of the mind, but the method seems less successful than that of the conventional soliloquy.

A further use of the technique is made by Yeats in the Plays for Dancers, where mime is part of the general design for creating remoteness and mystery. The development of silent movement into dance is also a noticeable feature of symbolist drama, dance not as an incidental, a means of stressing an emotion or atmosphere, but as the climax of the whole play. This is illustrated particularly in the work of Yeats and Hauptmann, where dance represents a spiritual experience, in its extreme beauty of movement suggesting the quality of a visionary state, and recalling the traditional image of the 'dance of life'.

Stress is on the visual element of rhythmic movement, and it is a reflection of the general interest in scenic effect as a means of suggestion. This may, as with Yeats, take the form of a desire for a simplified setting where nothing detracts

from the spoken word and where the overall impression is of beauty, mystery, and remoteness.

On the other hand, a very free use of stage devices has been made by dramatists wishing to convey the richness of spiritual experience or the flexibility of inward movement. It has been seen that in The Blue Bird the entire philosophical meaning is conveyed through suggestive tableaux and that in the dream-plays a great deal of the symbolism is expressed in the settings. Here a traditionally minor element of dramatic form has been elevated from its position as an intensifier of emotion and support of action to a prominent place for conveying the meaning of the play.

The use of film has also been explored, but not, I feel, with any measure of success. In Toller's Hoppla! film gives a wide picture of the general situation within which the particular events of the play take place, and in Christophe Colomb there is tentative exploration of the value of film in revealing inner experience. In both cases, words would surely have been a more profitable medium, for there is in the use of film-screen a confusion of response which it hardly seems possible even to overcome, since the visual techniques of film and drama are quite distinct.

Aristotle maintained that spectacle was the least artistic dramatic element and the one least connected with the dramatist's creative work, and it is a distinctive mark of the modern playwright that he relies to such an extent on stage effects. This

is partly a result of new inventions in lighting, recording and scenic manipulation, offering potentialities with which the dramatist is ^{perhaps} momentarily intoxicated. Although spectacle has for some writers been simply a substitute for impoverished language and for others almost an obsession, so that it seemed as if,

Players and painted stage took all [their] love
And not those things that they were emblems of,

yet these experiments are surely a step in the right direction, for a vital dramatic form must not only reflect and fit the changing needs of its age, but adapt and develop the changing conditions of the theatre.

Even if symbolist drama has had only a minority appeal and although its experiments may not always have been wholly successful, nevertheless experiment is a sign of life, and it may be that such plays will prove to be of more lasting value and significance than ephemeral social problem plays, and that on these foundations may be built that drama which shall be in Eliot's words, 'an organ for the expression of the consciousness of a people'.

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