INFORMATION TO USERS

This was produced from a copy of a document sent to us for microfilming. While the most advanced technological means to photograph and reproduce this document have been used, the quality is heavily dependent upon the quality of the material submitted.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help you understand markings or notations which may appear on this reproduction.

1. The sign or "target" for pages apparently lacking from the document photographed is "Missing Page(s)". If it was possible to obtain the missing page(s) or section, they are spliced into the film along with adjacent pages. This may have necessitated cutting through an image and duplicating adjacent pages to assure you of complete continuity.

2. When an image on the film is obliterated with a round black mark it is an indication that the film inspector noticed either blurred copy because of movement during exposure, or duplicate copy. Unless we meant to delete copyrighted materials that should not have been filmed, you will find a good image of the page in the adjacent frame.

3. When a map, drawing or chart, etc., is part of the material being photographed the photographer has followed a definite method in "sectioning" the material. It is customary to begin filming at the upper left hand corner of a large sheet and to continue from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. If necessary, sectioning is continued again—beginning below the first row and continuing on until complete.

4. For any illustrations that cannot be reproduced satisfactorily by xerography, photographic prints can be purchased at additional cost and tipped into your xerographic copy. Requests can be made to our Dissertations Customer Services Department.

5. Some pages in any document may have indistinct print. In all cases we have filmed the best available copy.

University Microfilms International

300 N. ZEEB ROAD, ANN ARBOR, MI 48106
18 BEDFORD ROW, LONDON WC1R 4EJ, ENGLAND

8112365

LIEBERMAN, JOSEPH ALPHONSUS

THE EMERGENCE OF LESBIANS AND GAY MEN AS CHARACTERS IN PLAYS PRODUCED ON THE AMERICAN STAGE FROM 1922 TO 1954

City University of New York PH.D. 1981

University
Microfilms
International 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106

Copyright 1981

by

Lieberman, Joseph Alphonsus

All Rights Reserved

THE EMERGENCE OF LESBIANS AND GAY MEN AS CHARACTERS IN PLAYS PRODUCED ON THE AMERICAN STAGE FROM 1922 TO 1954

by

JOSEPH LIEBERMAN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1981

© COPYRIGHT BY

JOSEPH LIEBERMAN

1981

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

1/13/81
date

Stanley A. Wan
Chairman of Examining Committee

1/13/81
date

Stanley A. Wan
Executive Officer

Glenn Ian Lowry

Cara Mauro Roberts
Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

Abstract

THE EMERGENCE OF LESBIANS AND GAY MEN AS CHARACTERS IN PLAYS PRODUCED ON THE AMERICAN STAGE FROM 1922 TO 1954

by

Joseph Lieberman

Adviser: Professor Stanley A. Waren

The purpose of this study is to document the emergence of lesbians and gay men as characters in plays produced on the American stage, thereby rectifying an egregious omission in American theatre history. While three dissertations have, in recent years, critically analayzed gay characters in shows produced on the New York stage, none of these studies covered productions seen prior to 1952. This dissertation examines shows--all but one done on Broadway--produced during the period between both Post World War periods.

The genesis, the presentation, and the critical and public reactions to the thirty-two "identified" productions are included in this study, along with a brief resumé--whenever possible--of the playscript. A number of interviews with indiviuals who had been involved with the productions are also included in this work.

The findings of this study show that a 1927 Penal Code prohibition in the statute books of New York State had inhibit-

ed playwrights and producers from presenting dramatic depictions of lesbian and gay men as characters in Broadway plays over a period of four decades. Nevertheless, more than one hundred shows with gay roles were seen by New York theatregoers from 1927 until 1967 while the law prohibiting them was still on the state's statute books.

Another finding of this dissertation is that such roles were finally allowed in legitimate theatre productions without risking a court closing or a police raid because activists within the theatre joined with civil libertarians in insisting that the same freedom inherent on the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, which was enjoyed by the printed media, also be allowed the American stage. It was not Gay Liberation, familiar to the American public throughout the 1970s, but rather American stage liberation, fought for in the 1930s and 40s, that ended the prohibition of theatrical depictions of the "unrecognized minority."

ACKNOWLEGEMENTS

For the considerable time they took, and their patience, too, in supervising this somewhat lengthy study, I would like to express my gratitude to the members of my dissertation committee: Professors Stanley A. Waren, Vera M. Roberts and Glenn M. Loney.

With Dr. Loney's help in formulating a proposal that provided me with a sense of direction in rectifying an egregious omission in the history of the American stage, I was better able to bring into focus the significance of the material I have identified and examined for this study. While so doing, I was most particularly dependent upon Dr. Waren for his painstaking editing of my original, rather unwielding drafts of this dissertation, and for his support, reasonableness, and unflagging good humor while chairing my committee.

It saddens me that I am unable to thank the late Herman Shumlin for his immeasurable contribution, too, to this dissertation. The genesis for this study is a term paper which I wrote for one of Professor Shumlin's Twentieth Century American Theatre classes at the Graduate School of the City University of New York. Without his positive reaction to that essay, pertaining in part to his production of The Children's Hour, I should never have considered expanding the scope of it by undertaking this study.

I had the good fortune of finding myself in a class

conducted by a giant of the American theatre because, almost by accident, I enrolled in one of Dr. Roberts' classes at Hunter College a decade earlier. My introduction, under her tutelage to the concept of show business as an academic discipline left such an indelible impression upon me that, imbued with her enthusiasm and awed by her scholarship, I eventually went on to enter the Graduate School's doctoral program in theatre. This dissertation, the culmination of my work with the City University of New York, is the end result of my initial and fortuitious encounter with Professor Roberts at Hunter College. For that reason, I most especially wanted her to be among the members of my dissertation committee. Having Dr. Roberts and Dr. Waren both on my committee, I was twiced bessed with a matching pair of the most perceptive editors and scrupulous proofreaders.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION 1

II. SHOLOM ASCH'S THE GOD OF VENGEANCE (1922) . . . 43

III. EDOUARD BOURDET'S THE CAPTIVE (1926) 78

IV. MAE WEST'S THE DRAG (1927) 124

V. THE 1927 BROADWAY SHOW RAID 158

VI. WILLIAM HURLBUT'S SIN OF SINS (1926) AND THE CAPTIVE ON THE ROAD 185

VII. CLOSETED GAYS ONSTAGE IN THE 1920S: 198
Eugene O'Neill's Strange Interlude (1929)
Michael Arlen's The Green Hat (1925)
Noel Coward's The Vortex (1925)

VIII. MAE WEST'S PLEASURE MAN (1929) 215

IX. THOMAS H. DICKINSON'S WINTER BOUND (1929) . . . 235

X. SIX PLAYS SEEN IN THE 1930S BEFORE THE VETO OF THE DUNNIGAN CENSORSHIP BILL: 257
Christa Winsloe's Girls In Uniform (1932)
Noel Coward's Design For Living (1933)
Mordaunt Shairp's The Green Bay Tree (1933)
Lillian Hellman's The Children's Hour (1934)
J. R. Ackerley's Prisoners Of War (1935)
W. D. Bristol's Reprise (1935)

XI. SIX PLAYS SEEN IN THE 1930S AFTER THE VETO OF THE DUNNIGAN CENSORSHIP BILL: 352
Stephen Powys' Wise Tomorrow (1937)
Aimee and Philip Stuart's Love Of Women (1937)
Mazo de la Roache's Whiteoaks (1938)
Chester Erskin's The Good (1938)
Oliver H. P. Garrett's Waltz In Goose Step (1938)
Leslie and Sewell Stokes's Oscar Wilde (1938)

XII. EIGHT PLAYS SEEN IN THE 1940S: 402
Moss Hart's Lady In The Dark (1941)
Alan R. Kenward's Proof Through The Night (1942)
Rose Franken's Outrageous Fortune (1943)
Dorothy and Howard Baker's Trio (1944)
Milton Lewis and Julian Funt's The Dancer (1946)

Jean Paul Sartre's No Exit (1946)
Tennessee Williams' A Streetcar Named Desire (1947)
Keith Winter's The Rats Of Norway (1948)

Chapter
XIII. TEN PLAYS SEEN IN THE 1950S: 480
Wolcott Gibbs's Season In The Sun (1950)
Mordaunt Shairp's The Green Bay Tree (1951)
Lillian Hellman's The Children's Hour (1952)
Robert Anderson's Tea and Sympathy (1953)
Louis O. Coxe and Robert Chapman's Billy Budd (1951)
Calder Willingham's End As A Man (1952)
Tennessee Williams' Camino Real (1953)
George F. Kaufman and Leueen Mac Grath's The Small Hours (1951)
Dorothy Parker and Arnaud d'Usseau's Ladies Of The Corridor (1953)
Ruth and Augustus Goetz's The Immoralist (1954)

XIV. CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS 530

. . . . . .

SOURCES CONSULTED 545

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Almost a quarter of a century before American citizens began emerging as self-identified lesbians and gay men[1] from their traditional status of invisibility[2] within the social structure, that traumatic process had already been completed for their fictitious, dramatic counterparts who, by the middle of the twentieth century were finally able to appear with

---

[1]John Boswell, assistant professor of history at Yale University, noted that, "The word 'homosexual,' despite its air of antiquity, was actually coined in the late nineteenth century by German psychologists, introduced into English only at the beginning of the present century, and vehemently opposed for decades after its appearance precisely because of its bastard origin and vague connotations. In contrast, 'gay' . . . probably antedates 'homosexual' by several centuries and has generally been employed with far greater precision: most speakers use 'gay' to describe persons who are conscious of erotic preference for their own gender." John Boswell, Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 42-43; because it makes an important distinction among the sexes within the gay ranks, poetess Adrienne Rich explains, "The word 'Lesbian' must be affirmed because to discard it is to collaborate with silence and lying about our very existence," Michael Bronski, "Northwest Corner of Your Mouth," Boston Gay Community News, 10 November 1979.

[2]According to research done by the Alfred A. Kinsey Institute, "eighty-five per cent of the gay population is indistinguishable from the straight population unless they tell you they are gay." Scott P. Anderson,"Kinsey Study Declares Gays 'Indistinguishable,'" Los Angeles Advocate, 23 August 1978.

impunity in plays produced on the Broadway stage. Just as sodomy statutes have intimidated gays in America for two centuries, a 1927 penal code prohibition in the statute books of New York State had much the same effect upon the dramatic depiction of lesbian and gay men as characters in Broadway plays over a period of four decades.[1] Nevertheless, more than one hundred shows with gay roles were seen by New York theatregoers from 1927 until 1967 while the law prohibiting them was still on the state's statute books.[2]

Twenty-one plays with illegal lesbian and gay male characterizations, overt as well as covert, were produced on the Broadway stage during the time extending from the First until the Second Post-World War periods (1923 to 1945),[3] a theatrically repressive era in New York City when self-appointed, puritanical watchdogs of public morality, in concert with some religious and political pressure groups, insisted upon the enforcement of the state's penal code prohibiting such entertainment. Shows were closed in night-stick police raids, and performers, playwrights and producers arrested and threatened with imprisonment; yet, even in the wake of such censorship,

---

[1]Jonathan Katz, Gay American History (New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell Company, 1976), p. 91.

[2]Donald Lee Loeffler, An Analysis of the Treatment of the Homosexual Character in Dramas Produced in the New York Theatre from 1950 to 1968 (New York: Arno Press, 1975), pp. 43-47; my own computation from 1927 to 1949.

[3]My own computation.

lesbian and gay male characters periodically appeared in Broadway plays. Some of these illegal presentations proved to be among the most commercially successful and critically acclaimed dramas of the theatrical season in which they were seen.

One year after the New York City police closed The God Of Vengeance, the first play with a gay motif produced on the American stage, the Chicago police, in 1924, raided the home and arrested the head of the earliest documented attempt to form a social and political group of gay men in the United States. During the quarter of a century that followed, no other recorded attempts were made by the gay underground community to identify itself with activist organizations. Consequently, during the period spanning both post World War periods there was no connection between the emergence of lesbians and gay male characterizations in plays produced on the American stage and any factions, or any individuals either, representing whatever activist sentiments there may have been within the gay subculture.

Lesbians and gay male characterizations were, despite the New York Penal Code prohibition, finally allowed to appear on the Broadway stage without risking a court closing or a police raid after activists within the theatre joined with civil libertarians in insisting that the same freedom of speech inherent in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, which was enjoyed by the print-media, also be

allowed the American stage. Even such drama critics as John Chapman of the Daily News and George Jean Nathan of the Journal American raised their voices in support of what Chapman termed "the liberalization of the New York stage,"[1] despite their negative reactions to the sight of gay impersonations in dramas they reviewed.[2]

It was not gay liberation, familiar to the American public throughout the 1970s, but rather American stage liberation, fought for in the 1930s and 40s, that ended the legal prohibition of theatrical depictions in Broadway plays of the "unrecognized minority"[3] of American lesbians and gay men. In 1938, George Jean Nathan wrote:

> The sons of swish may not in facie curiae constitute an endearing picture, it takes no heated argument with the bartender to prove. But in a world drama that has freely presented almost every other form of abnormal and perverted humanity, most often without objection, they may--if treated objectively and without cheap sensationalism--be allowed their clinical place.[4]

---

[1]John Chapman, "Moss Keeps Things Humming In Theatre by Making Mistakes," New York Daily News, 27 February 1945.

[2]Allan Pierce, "Homophobia and the Critics," Christopher Street, June 1978, p. 40.

[3]Gay people have been identifying themselves as "the unrecognized minority" since, as one gay sociologist posited, "a minority . . . would be any outnumbered people . . . [who] . . . from a sociological viewpoint, must have another characteristic; and that is its lower and unequal status in society." Donald Webster Corey (pseud.). The Homosexual In America: A Subjective Approach (New York: Greenberg Publisher, 1951), p. 3.

[4]George Jean Nathan, undated, untitled, magazine article fragment from an unknown publication in Oscar Wilde file, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts.

In 1945, Trio, a drama about the breakup of a lesbian relationship finally reached Broadway despite formidable and much-publicized opposition to its presentation. Bedlam broke out during the curtain calls on opening night. "I looked for them to tear down the marquee and do a snake dance up on the street in frenzied triumph,"[1] reported Burton Rascoe in the World-Telegram. Doubting that the play or the performance had, in large part, elicited such enthusiasm, the drama critic concluded that "this demonstration was the natural reaction of Americans against any threat of official censorship--against any form of regimentation."[2]

Official censoring of the English-language stage by the government had been practised in England where the Lord Chamberlain's Office was empowered under the Theatres Licensing Act of 1737 to decide what was appropriate entertainment for the British public. Such "offensive personalities"[3] as lesbians and gay men were not seen on the British public stage until after the Licensing Act was liberalized by Parliament in 1968. Before that time, only production companies with subscription-list memberships were able to give performances of playscripts not approved by the government censor. Upon these

---

[1]Burton Rascoe, "'Trio' Is Good But Fails Buildup As Sensation," New York World-Telegram, 30 December 1944.

[2]Ibid.

[3]The Oxford Companion To The Theatre, ed., Phyllis Hartnoll (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 248.

private stages, in little theatres with small audiences during legally limited engagements, gay male roles were seen by London playgoers in the 1920s for the first time in over three and one-half centuries.

There has been, to date, but a single attempt to write an historical account of gay dramatic characterizations in English-language drama. "English playwrights from the time of Shakespeare and American playwrights from the time of O'Neill," observed theatre historian Frederick Howe in 1977, "have as generally sensitive people been more aware of homosexuality than moved to write about it, but still drama in English is laced with gay themes."[1] In a preface to two, brief, cursory articles for the Advocate, Howe continued:

> However, no critics or drama authority has yet written about them as a totality. Until the definitive history of homosexuality in drama in English is written (in the not too distant future, I hope), let us break the conspiracy of silence by talking informally about homosexual themes in English and American plays.[2]

If Howe's efforts are a fair sample, any history of gay characterizations in English-language drama until they emerge in both British and American stage productions in the twentieth century would, of necessity, have to be very brief. After proclaiming that the drama in English is laced with gay themes, Howe identified seven Elizabethan plays with gay

---

[1]Frederick Howe, "Homosexuality In English Drama," Los Angeles Advocate, 23 February 1977.

[2]Ibid.

characterizations, either obviously overt or suspiciously covert, until he came to consider the 1920s when American producers made an abortive attempt to introduce lesbian and gay male roles in Broadway plays.

Howe would like to add two plays by John Ford to those he cited by Marlowe and Shakespeare, the only other dramatists he identifies over a period of four hundred years as having written plays with gay characterizations. As if to anticipate his own disputable analysis of the plays by the Caroline dramatist, Howe warns readers:

> There is always the possibility of looking so assiduously for homosexual themes that we begin to see them where they don't exist. But in doing that there is less danger to our gay consciousness and pride in gay achievements than in meekly accepting the erroneous, common belief that drama in English is wholly heterosexual, a few instances to the contrary notwithstanding.
>
> English language drama is permeated with homosexual feelings. They may be merely implied or discreetly understated, but they are indubitably there. They don't go away because the heterosexual establishment choose to ignore them, ridicule them or "excuse" them, generally on the grounds that, to put it crudely, the theatre is a strange (if amusing) place and its people all a bit odd--well, queer.[1]

Howe's observation that "John Ford depicted homosexual love at the height of its most idealistic form,"[2] in Perkin Warbeck and The Broken Heart is, perhaps, an example of, in his own words, "the possibility of looking so assiduously for

---

[1]Ibid.

[2]Ibid.

homosexual themes where they don't exist."[1] In Perkin Warbeck, James IV of Scotland fondly supports the title character, whom he mistakenly believes to be his cousin, as the pretender to the throne of England. A platonic, but hardly altruistic friendship exists between the charming young impostor and the king as they aid one another for their own political advantages. In The Broken Heart, a vengeful Spartan feigns friendship for another young man in order to entrap and murder him. Since his best friend has married during the course of the dramatic action, the duped and doomed young man is delighted with the protagonist's proposal of friendship replying that they will be "partners, in all respects else but in bed,"[2] meaning, obviously, that he hopes they will be as close as it is possible for two heterosexual men to be in a platonic relationship.

While there may be reason to believe that Ford may have regarded "platonic love, which transcends the physical, as the noblest,"[3] as Howe contends is evident in both dramas, the critic's conclusion that the Caroline playwright "depicted homosexual love as the height of its idealistic form,"[4] would be open to question by those who would define gay people as

---

[1]Frederick Howe, "Homosexuality In English Drama," Los Angeles Advocate, 23 February 1977.

[2]John Ford, The Broken Heart, ed. Brian Morris (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966), p. 74.

[3]Los Angeles Advocate, 23 February 1977.

[4]Ibid.

being "conscious of erotic preference for their own gender."[1] By definition a platonic relationship is free from sensual desire.

Howe's comment, on the other hand, that Christopher Marlowe's Edward II is "the only play in English literature that treats homosexual love as a grand passion and a fit subject for tragedy"[2] would be difficult to challenge. While William Shakespeare chose to share his poetic sentiments about one man's passion for another with Mr. W. H., "the onlie begetter" of his "sugared sonnets," rather than with the theatre-going public, Marlowe--who some believe to be one of the unnamed rival poets vying for Mr. W. H.'s affection mentioned in the Sonnets[3]--wrote three plays with gay characters, the first dramatist to do so for the English-language public stage. "There are, however, references before . . . Marlowe to gays," another theatre historian, William H. Hoffman, reminds us. "In The Killing of Abel of the fourteenth century and among the earliest mystery plays written in English, there are obscene puns about Cain's behavior with Abel, the Devil and his 'boye' Garcio."[4]

---

[1]John Boswell, Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 43.

[2]Frederick Howe, "Homosexuality in English Drama," Los Angeles Advocate, 23 February 1977.

[3]Leslie Hotson, Mr. W. H. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), p. 257.

[4]William M. Hoffman, ed., Gay Plays: The First Collection (New York: Avon Books, 1979), p. xiv.

Quoted by his intimates as having commented, "That all they love not Tobacco and Boies were fooles,"[1] and by Thomas Kyd as declaring that Jesus was gay and "St. John the Evangelist was bedfellow to Christ,"[2] Marlowe must have unsettled some segments of his audience, too, with scenes almost as shocking as his private pronouncements by friends. In his historic account of one of England's gay monarchs, Edward II, the king openly declares his love and flaunts his sexual preference for two of his favorites at court. King Henry III of France is shown indulging himself with his minions in a scene in The Massacre of Paris, and Jupiter was seen holding Ganymede, his catamite, on his lap in Dido, Queen of Carthage, acted by the Children of the Chapel Royal.

Theatre historian Williams M. Hoffman made these observations about Edward II which he views "as a landmark of free expression:"

> Here in a play about a male homosexual, a king of England in the fourteenth century, described by Marlowe two centuries later, we have a rare glimpse into sophisticated social attitudes of the past. Edward is obsessively in love with Piers Gaveston. He is so taken with the young man that he neglects his duties of state, much as Anthony did for the sake of Cleopatra. It is for Edward's neglect of duty, not for his sexual direction, that he is opposed and eventually deposed (and killed in a manner they thought appropriate as punishment for his particular brand of lust) by the nobles of the realm. This is made very clear in Act I, Scene IV, in the speech of the elder Mortimer:

---

[1]Paul Kocher, Christopher Marlowe (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), p. 209.

[2]Ibid., p. 58.

> Thou seest by nature he is mild and calm.
> And seeing his mind so dotes on Gaveston,
> Let him without controlment have his will;
> The mightiest kings have had their minions--
> Great Alexander lov'd Hephestion;
> The conquering Hector for Hylas wept;
> And for Patroclus stern Achilles droop'd.
> And not kings only, but the wisest men--
> The Roman Tully lov'd Octavius;
> Grave Socrates, wild Alcibiades.
> Then let His Grace, whose youth is flexible
> And promiseth as much as we can wish,
> Freely enjoy that vain, light-headed earl,
> For riper years will wean him from such toys.

And young Mortimer's speech:

> Uncle, his wanton humour grieves not me.
> But this I scorn, that one so basely born
> Should by his sovereign's favour grow so pert
> And riot it with the treasure of the realm
> While soldiers mutiny for want of pay.

So, in the first play in England about a homosexual, homosexuality is viewed without alarm and forms merely the background of a particular character. Centuries pass before such equanimity arises again.[1]

Not even the most rabid court censors could have taken exception to Marlowe's treatment of the tragic but hardly sympathetic royal invert of Edward II. In the play, Edward's punishment for sodomy is far worse than the death by hanging gays faced during the reign of Elizabeth I. The king's executioners shove a red hot poker up his rectum. The actor playing Edward screams, and one of the executioners comments, "I fear his cry will raise the town."[2]

---

[1]William M. Hoffman, ed., Gay Plays: The First Collection (New York: Avon Books, 1979), pp. xiii-xiv.

[2]Christopher Marlowe, Edward the Second, ed., W. Moelywn Merchant (New York: Hill and Wang, 1970), p. 104.

Performances of Edward II seem to have been rare after it was premièred in 1593. Marlowe scholar J. M. Robertson "assumes that Edward II had no success on the stage and offers 'obvious reasons' for the fact, viz. 'that it obtrudes a theme always objectionable.'"[1] Although it was performed at least once for a Jacobean audience, there is no record of any other productions, either at college or in a public theatre, for the next 286 years.[2] In 1903, Granville Barker played the title role in a production by the Elizabethan Stage Society at Oxford. Since then British audiences have seen a number of collegiate and professional performances in London and in Edinburgh.

It was not until February of 1958, however, that New Yorkers witnessed the first American professional performance of Edward II at the Theatre de Lys, an Off-Broadway theatre in Greenwich Village.[3] In October of 1965, Eric Bentley's English version of Edward II, A Chronicle Play, by Bertolt Brecht and Lion Feutchtwanger, was enthusiastically acclaimed at the première of The Actor's Workshop production in San Francisco.[4] The German playwrights used Marlowe's plot, but simplified it, eliminating, among other things, the horrifying mode of execu-

---

[1]H. B. Charlton and R. D. Waller, eds., Introduction to Edward II by Christopher Marlowe (New York: Gordian Press, Inc., 1930), p. 29.

[2]Gerald Pinciss, Christopher Marlowe (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, Co., 1975), p. 108.

[3]Ibid., p. 110.

[4]Bertolt Brecht and Lion Feutchtwanger, Edward II, A Chronicle Play, trans. Eric Bentley (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1966), p. 100.

tion in their loose adaptation written in 1926.

Director John Houseman's City Center Acting Company brought their production to Broadway during the 1974-75 theatrical season. "With the fading of sexual inhibitions of our contemporary stage, it has become possible to realize a production,"[1] Houseman said of Marlowe's drama almost four centuries after it was first performed for Elizabethan audiences.

"The ambivalence of Shakespeare's character perhaps qualifies him as one of the first playwrights to show a marked homosexual sensibility, certainly his Sonnets reveal this,"[2] Graham Jackson wrote in "The Theatre Of Implication," an article for The Canadian Theatre Review.

> Shakespeare toyed with homosexuality in Twelfth Night and As You Like It, where sexual identities were swapped as quickly as cloaks and jerkins. More explicit, but still not above the innuendo level, is Sebastian's relationship with the pirate Antonio, in the above mentioned Twelfth Night;Mercutio's relationship to Romeo; or Mark Antony's to the boy Eros, in Antony and Cleopatra.[3]

A number of theatre historians, along with critics, scholars, psychologists, psychoanalysts and poets, have identified other plays by Shakespeare which contain, in their estimation, "sexually suspicious" male characters. Dr. Ernest Jones contended that Iago in Othello "possessed a subconscious

---

[1]Gerald Pinciss, Christopher Marlowe (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1975), p. 110.

[2]Graham Jackson, "The Theatre of Implication," Canadian Theatre Review (Fall 1976):35.

[3]Ibid.

affection for the Moor, the homosexual foundation of which he did not understand."[1] The idea that Iago is a covert gay has also been advanced by Martin Wangh.[2] According to Avi Erlich, who is suspicious of Hamlet's close friendship with Horatio, "close analysis of Hamlet's language shows persistent fantasies of homosexuality as an implausible escape from frightening heterosexuality."[3] Not only is Hamlet gay, according to E. E. Krapf, but so was Shakespeare.[4] Two famous poets, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and W. H. Auden, have cited other protagonists in Shakespeare's work who may have been closeted creations. King Leontes, in The Winter's Tale, according to Auden, is a "typical case of repressed jealousy brought on by repressed homosexuality."[5] Coleridge, in 1813, described the king in Richard II as being "a man with a wantoness in a feminine shew, feminine friendism, with intensely woman-like love of those immediately about him."[6]

---

[1]Marvin Rosenberg, The Masks of Othello: The Search For The Identity of Othello, Iago, and Desdemona By Three Centuries of Actors and Critics (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961), pp. 175-184.

[2]Martin Wangh, "Othello: The Tragedy of Iago," Psychoanalytic Quarterly, XIX (1950):202-212.

[3]Avi Erlich, Hamlet's Absent Father (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 128.

[4]E. E. Krapf, "Shylock and Antonio: A Psychoanalytic Study of Shakespeare and Antisemitism," Psychoanalytic Review, XLIII (1955):113-130.

[5]W. H. Auden, "The Alienated City: Reflections On 'Othello,'" Encounter, August 1961, p. 11.

[6]Twentieth Century Interpretations of Richard II, ed. Paul M. Cubeta (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1971), p. 60.

If the thought ever occurred to any scholar or critic, or to any member of the countless audiences that have viewed The Merchant Of Venice over four centuries that the title character who begins the play lamenting, "In sooth, I know not why I am so sad,"[1] is sad because he is gay, there is no written record of such a reaction until 1934 when Thomas Arthur Ross declared that "Antonio is homosexually in love with Bassanio, but is continent."[2] Since then, E. E. Karpf has suggested that "Antonio's melancholy, or depression . . . is Shakespeare's own,"[3] a depression that is evident in the playwright's Sonnets.

In his study of The Merchant Of Venice, Graham Midgley wrote:

> Antonio is an outsider because he is an unconscious homosexual in the male, heterosexual world of Venice. He is in love with Bassanio; he himself is left with no mate at the end; and he is melancholy throughout because his very love for Bassanio drives him to help him find a heterosexual relationship.[4]

W. T. Scott also feels that Antonio is not conscious that his attraction to his young, obviously heterosexual god-

---

[1]The Merchant of Venice, 1. 1. 1.

[2]Thomas Arthur Ross, "A Note On The Merchant Of Venice," British Journal of Medical Psychology XIV (1934):303-311.

[3]E. E. Karpf, "Shylock and Antonio: A Psychoanalytic Study of Shakespeare and Antisemitism," Psychoanalytic Review, XLII (1955):113-130.

[4]Graham Midgley, "The Merchant Of Venice: A Reconsideration," Essays in Criticism, X (1960) cited by Norman N. Holland, Psychoanalysis and Shakespeare (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1964), p. 238.

child is sexual in nature. This character type, according to Jung, as Scott notes, is "particularly given to the kind of depression described in the opening lines of the play."[1] In 1970, Clive Barnes, then the drama critic for the New York Times, identified Antonio as an apparent "homosexual"[2] in a review of the play. If, indeed, the critic and those scholars who had identified Antonio as a "closeted gay" are correct in their assessment, he is, as his creator fashioned him, also a man of sterling character. Bassanio calls him:

> The dearest friend to me, the kindest man,
> In doing courtesies, and one in whom
> The ancient Roman honour more appears
> Than any that draws breath in Italy.[3]

Another character in the play calls him:

> . . . the good Antonio, the honest Antonio, --
> O, that I had a title good enough to keep his name company!--[4]

Shakespeare, Arthur Ross decided, "regards continent homosexuality as noble and admirable and therefore he shows Antonio in Act V was the most noble character in the play."[5]

---

[1]W. I. D. Scott, Shakespeare's Melancholics (London: Mills and Boon, Ltd., 1962), Ch. 3, as cited by Holland, p. 238.

[2]Clive Barnes, "Theatre: Another Look At 'Merchant,'" New York Times, 10 June 1970.

[3]The Merchant Of Venice, 3. 2. 292-296.

[4]Ibid., 3. 1. 12-14.

[5]Thomas Arthur Ross, "A Note On The Merchant Of Venice," British Journal of Medical Psychology, XIV (1934):301-311.

There is but one passing reference to an overt gay sexual relationship in all of Shakespeare's work. In Trolius and Cressida, Thersites, a deformed and scurrilous Greek, accuses the Grecian commanders Achilles and Patrocles of being lovers, which, of course, Homer suggests they were in the Iliad. "Thou art thought to be Achilles' male varlet," Thersites blurts out mockingly to Patrocles. "Male varlet, you rogue! What's that?" the commander asks confused and annoyed. "Why his masculine whore,"[1] replies Thersites. Patrocles neither denies the charge nor does he mention the matter to Achilles in the ensuing scenes.

During the Restoration when witty comedies were brought to one of their highest points in English-language public theatre presentations, we have evidence that at least one farce presented at the royal court included "a wonderful obscene gay scene."[2] Entitled, Sodom: or, The Quintessence of Debauchery, the five act farce in rhyming couplets was written by John Wimot, the Earl of Rochester, and is described in the Directory of Gay Plays as:

> A satire of King Charles II and his court, about a king who decrees that "buggery" is to replace conventional sex; the play includes scenes of masturbation, anal intercourse, sex during menstruation, bestiality, sex with dildos, etc. . .[3]

---

[1] Troilus and Cressida, 5. 1. 17-18.

[2] William H. Hoffman, ed. Gay Plays: The First Collection (New York: Avon Books, 1979), p. xv.

[3] Gay Theatre Alliance: Directory of Gay Plays, ed. Terry Helbing (New York: JH Press, 1980), p. 91.

This Restoration sex farce was published posthumously in Amsterdam in 1660, which may account for its survival.

With no more than two exceptions, the English-language public theatre did not again see either overt gay characterizations, such as Marlowe had the audacity to introduce, nor controversial "covert" ones, such as Shakespeare created, until the turn of the twentieth century. Both exceptions can be found in comedies. While Restoration comedies such as William Wycherley's The Country Wife and George Farquhar's The Recruiting Officer have scenes in which a pretty young woman dons a pair of britches in order to disguise herself as a boy, such comic devices have no bearing on the emergence of lesbian or gay male roles on the English-language stage. However, about the Restoration farce, Sir John Vanburgh's, The Relapse, produced in 1696, Robert Wood notes that "Vanburgh introduced a very frank homosexual scene in his comedy."[1] Scott Giantvalley of the University of Southern California describes it:

> There is a mock homosexual seduction scene, in which Coupler, "a Matchmaker," puts the make on Young Fashion, who promptly exclaims,"Stand off, old Sodom!" But since he does need the older man's skills at intrigue, he finally allows the matchmaker a couple of kisses at the end of the scene. The author hardly intends his audience to be on Coupler's side in this comic conflict between homosexual and heterosexual, but unlike so many homosexual characters in 20th Century drama, Coupler is no figure of pity or scorn or villainy, and certainly not sick or criminal--the only problem is that he's "got the wrong

---

[1]Robert Wood, "Homosexuality On The Modern Stage," in The Third Sex, I. Rubin, ed. (New York: New Books, 1961), p. 86.

man," not unlike many Restoration comedy heterosexual characters, whose sexual excesses are often misdirected.[1]

When asked for the most significant piece of gay theatre to date, critic Eric Bentley replied, "The Importance Of Being Earnest, because it is by Oscar Wilde (and his best play)."[2] Another critic, Mary McCarthy, does not share Bentley's enthusiasm for Wilde's work which marked the second appearance in English dramatic literature--after the Elizabethans--of characters who seem to some to be sexually involved with their own gender. "To the bisexual man," McCarthy wrote in 1963, "it was perhaps deliciously comic that a man should have one name, the tamest in English, for trips and 'lost weekends.'"[3] In this Victorian comedy of manners about two young bachelors, Jack invents a fictitious personality living in London, an imaginary brother named Ernest, whose name and reprobate mode of living he adopts during his frequent trips to the city. Algernon, the other young bachelor, invents an imaginary friend named Bunbury whom he visits frequently in the country. Algernon calls his visits to his friend "Bunburying."

Of course, audiences have always understood that such trips were taken by the bachelors to "sow their wild oats."

---

[1]Scott Giantvalley, Dept. of English, University of Southern California, private correspondence dated 5 July 1977.

[2]Terry Helbing, "'Rogues' Gallery," Christopher Street, June 1978, p. 18.

[3]Mary McCarthy, "The Unimportance of Being Oscar Wilde," Mary McCarthy's Theatre Chronicles (New York: Farrar, Straus & Company, 1963), p. 106.

Since Algy and Jack are very much enamoured of the two lovely young ladies whom they succeed in wooing during the course of the dramatic action, it would seem that their sexual preference, both close to and away from home, was heterosexual. The comedy met with great success during its initial engagement in 1895 and in countless revivals since then; still, critic McCarthy complains that the audience "is pointedly left out of the fun," because "the joke about the name Ernest is doubtless a private one."[1]

Since she made no mention of it in her critique of The Importance of Being Earnest, McCarthy herself may have been left out of whatever amusement may be derived from recognizing Wilde's esoteric bawdy humor in devising the name Bunbury, which contains a slang expression for the buttocks coupled with a verb. W. S. Gilbert had fun with the same slang expression when he called the fleshy poet of his comic opera, Patience, Bunthorne--coupling it with a noun. Oscar Wilde was, of course, the poet satirized by Gilbert in 1881. Fourteen years later Wilde seems to have toyed with the same first syllable that the lyricist used to mock him, to get a point across to certain theatregoers who went to make up his audiences.

By the turn of the century, sentiments ran so high not only in Victorian England, but in America as well, that Wilde's name became as repugnant to most people as the crime of which

---

[1]Ibid.

he had been convicted. Wilde's obloquy was such that even after his plays were eventually revived in the twentieth century, his name was, for many years, often excluded from playbills and advertisements.

America had no pre-production censorship by a government official as in Great Britain, but certain private citizens wanted to decide what the public ought not to read or to see on the stage. Chief among these moral censors was Anthony Comstock, a spinsterish drygoods salesman "whose I.Q.," according to one of his critics, "would almost certainly not have rated him above the age of twelve."[1] In 1873, Comstock founded the New York Society For The Suppression Of Vice, which he headed until 1915. Under his direction, the Watch and Ward Society was organized in Boston. In a number of spectacular raids on publishers, and attacks, widely publicized by the press, on certain stage productions, Comstock called upon the police to suppress books and plays that he believed would tend to corrupt the public's morals.

The New York police closed Sapho, a drama about a Parisian prostitute who had been the model for a statue of the lesbian poetess Sappho, in February of 1900, because people were shocked to see a woman carried by her lover through a bedroom door as the curtain descended. "We expect the police to

---

[1]Ernest Sutherland Bates, "Comstock Stalks," Scribner's Magazine, April 1930, p. 362.

forbid on stage," newspaper editor William Randolph Hearst protested, "what they would forbid in streets and low resorts."[1] Sapho reopened when a jury acquited Olga Nethersole of giving an indecent performance in the title role.

In 1905, also egged on by Comstock, the Manhattan police closed Bernard Shaw's Mrs. Warren's Profession after opening night because it dealt with a seemingly respectable woman who operated a brothel. Damaged Goods, about a syphilitic young man, caused a furor in 1913, but was not shut down. There was talk of state censorship of the Broadway stage when Al Woods produced The Demi-Virgin in 1921. The show became a hit after the producer kept it running with an injunction that prevented the License Commissioner from shutting down the mildly risqué play.

After his death Anthony Comstock's position in the Society For The Suppression Of Vice was filled by John S. Sumner who spearheaded the drive against lesbian and gay male characterizations on stage when they were introduced to Broadway theatregoers in the 1920s. Sumner was joined by some politicians, much of the clergy, publisher Hearst, and several of the most prestigious New York drama critics.

Curiously enough, female impersonators, who had been familiar for many years to American theatregoers in minstrel shows, vaudeville skits, Broadway follies and even serious

---

[1]Abe Laufe, The Wicked Stage: A History of Theatre Censorship and Harassment in the United States (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1978), p. 25.

dramas, seemed to have no connection in the public consciousness with abhorrence of lesbians and gay men. Charles Pierce, a professional imitator of famous actresses, observed that, "until the night club came along in the '30s, 'homo' was not inevitably attached to female impersonation."[1] Julian Eltinge, the great female impersonator, was so successful that he was able to build his own Broadway theatre in 1912. While female impersonators in vaudeville and Bert Savoy, who starred in the Ziegfeld Follies, did comic, campy impersonations of women, Eltinge was considered a serious artist, playing female parts in straight dramas and musical comedies.

While Eltinge was held in the highest public repute and female impersonators in vaudeville were warmly received and applauded in 1928, actors who portrayed men wearing female attire in the Broadway play, Pleasure Man by Mae West, were that same year arrested by the police and spat at by onlookers as they were being led away from the stage-door to the paddy-wagons. There was no mistaking from their performances, with dialogue supplied by West, that the actors in Pleasure Man were portraying effeminate sexual deviants.

There has been very little study and documentation of the emergence on the American stage of lesbians and gay men as characters in dramatic productions. Articles by Frederick

---

[1]Frederick Howe, "An Exploration of the History of Female Impersonators," Los Angeles Advocate, 5 October 1977.

Howe such as "Homosexuality In The English Drama," "Homosexuality In The American Drama," "The American Musical: Grand, Gaudy, and Guardedly Gay," "Gay Theatre U. S. A.," and "An Exploration Of The History Of Female Impersonators," have all appeared in recent years in the Advocate. Christopher Street, the homophile New York magazine, devoted one issue, June 1978, to articles concerning gay plays and the gay theatre movement, plus one cursory but important historical article by Allan Pierce entitled, "Homophobia and the Critics." No theatrical material other than eight pages documenting the closing in 1925 of The Captive is included in Jonathan Katz's sizeable study, Gay American History, published in 1976. All three of the American drama dissertations, and all (published within the last decade) concerned with gay characters seen in shows produced on the New York City stage, are essentially critical studies and do not cover productions prior to 1952.

This study covers thirty-two productions--all but one produced on Broadway--for the years 1922 to 1954. The genesis, the presentation, and the critical and public reaction of the "identified" productions--along with a brief resumé of the playscripts, whenever possible--is included. Documentation for this unrecorded chapter in theatre history is available mainly in the Reference Department, Theatre Collection of the New York Public Library at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, and in the Newspaper Annex of the New York City Public Library.

The first of the dissertations written about gay dramatic characterizations seen on the New York stage is by Donald Lee Loeffler, and is entitled, An Analysis of the Treatment of the Homosexual Character in Drama in New York Theatre from 1950-1968. After analyzing seventy-five scripts, Dr. Loeffler concluded that the gay character "has been accurately portrayed by the playwrights according to scientific, psychological and sociological study."[1]

The second dissertation concerning lesbian and gay men as characters in American drama is entitled, "American Drama and the Emergence of Social Homophilia, 1952-1972." Its author, Gene R. Touchet, examined twenty plays produced during the past twenty years,[2] concluding that they reflected a growing positive, humane, tolerant, even supportive attitude in America towards gays by heterosexuals.

The third, and most recent, dissertation is entitled, "The Theme of Homosexuality in Selected Theatrical Events Produced in the United States Between 1969 and 1974." Dr. Stephen Shapiro analyzed twenty-eight plays, concluding, contrary to Dr. Touchet's findings, that "in spite of the increased efforts of militant gays to cause society to alter its perceptions of homosexuals as sick and disturbed individuals, the predom-

---

[1]Donald Lee Loeffler, An Analysis of the Treatment of the Homosexual Character in Dramas Produced in the New York Theatre from 1950 to 1968 (New York: Arno Press, 1975), p. 165.

[2]Gene R. Touchet, "American Drama and the Emergence of Social Homophilia, 1952-1972" (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1974), p. 98.

inant image of the homosexuals on the stage continues to be that of a troubled, unstable, unhappy group of human beings."[1]

In 1970, Dr. W. David Sievers published Freud On Broadway, based mainly on his doctoral dissertation in the Psychology Department at the University of California completed fifteen years earlier. A dozen pages in Dr. Sievers' 454-page history of psychoanalysis and the American drama were devoted to plays that contained either gay characters, or characters which, in the author's judgment, were "latent male inverts" or "latent lesbians."[2]

Dr. Sievers identified thirty-nine Broadway shows produced over a fifty-year period which in some way relate to gay characterizations or to what he adjudged to be a "latent homosexuality" in heterosexual characters. Some of these shows, short-lived and long-forgotten, contain not a single allusion to gay emotional or sexual orientation or activity, yet, in this psychoanalyst's opinion dramatize situations or conflicts that are potentially gay in nature. Almost one-third of the thirty-nine Broadway plays identified by Dr. Sievers in Freud On Broadway as having to do with what he terms "The Tragedy Of Inversion" have nothing whatsoever to do, in the opinion of

---

[1]Stephen Richard Shapiro, "The Theme of Homosexuality in Selected Theatrical Events Produced in the United States Between 1969 and 1974" (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1976), p. viii.

[2]W. David Sievers, Freud On Broadway (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1970), p. 93.

this writer, with the emergence of lesbians and gay men as characters in plays produced on the American stage. Some mention must be made of these shows, however, in the event that others, perhaps, might consider them of value in a study as comprehensive as this is intended to be. Mention must also be made of those characters in plays that Dr. Sievers suspects of having suppressed elements of "latent homosexuality," even though that consideration does not fall within the intended scope of this analysis.

"The earliest hint of Lesbianism was in Glaspell's The Verge (1921), followed by Lawson's Roger Bloomer (1923),"[1] Dr. Sievers claims, but his supposition may seem debatable to some after an examination of these two dramas. The Verge, by Susan Glaspell, one of the founders of the famous Provincetown Players of Greenwich Village, concerns a maniac-depressive matron, a twice-married mother, who passionately strangles a lover because he compliments her on being a beautiful woman. "Possibly her unconscious homosexual wish to be 'other' than woman," Dr. Sievers suggests, "--drove her past the verge of insanity."[2]

In John Howard Lawson's expressionistic drama, Roger Bloom, a frigid young woman who is disgusted by men and disturbed by "a dirty thing called Sex,"[3] kills herself because

---

[1]Ibid., p. 93.

[2]Ibid., p. 71.

[3]Ibid., p. 141.

she cannot make love with a young man for whom she cares. Because this distracted character says that she would like to cut her hair short, put on trousers and be a man, Dr. Sievers identifies the frigid young woman's sexual inhibitions as "latent homosexuality derived from her hysterical aversion to men."[1]

Dr. Sievers' determination that a drama that failed in 1928, These Days by Katherine Clugston, anticipated Lillian Hellman's 1934 success, The Children's Hour, appears to be based upon some references in drama reviews that he misconstrued rather than on a careful exmination of the playscript. These Days, produced by Arthur Hopkins and seen on Broadway for eight performances,[2] concerns the spoiled, unhappy daughter of a millionaire who elopes with a poor young man to escape the boredom and oppressiveness of a boarding school run by a strict, suspicious head-mistress. By the last act the willful young heiress is in Paris, an unhappy divorcee who has joined that lost generation of American expatriots familiar to readers of the novels of Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

These Days is identified by Sievers as a most perceptive study of lesbianism that "shows young girls driven into unnatural 'crushes' with each other beaause of the frigid, warped influences of the old-maid head-mistress who teaches

---

[1]Ibid.

[2]Burns Mantle, Ed., Best Plays of 1928-29 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1929), p. 415.

the girls that an interest in boys is a disloyalty to the school."[1] There are, however, no references or allusions in the playscript of These Days to unnatural "crushes" among the students whose relationships with one another appear to be the usual, platonic schoolgirl friendships. Nor is there any mention by any of the dramatic critics of the young actresses in the play--Katherine Hepburn among them--projecting lesbian infatuations of their classmates.

Dr. Sievers might have come to his questionable conclusions about These Days because the playscript, which has never been published, was not available to him. Consulting some of the drama reviews of the New York dailies would certainly have misled him unless he was familiar with the climate of opinion along Broadway just one year after the police closed the lesbian love drama, The Captive. Robert Garland of the Morning Telegram wrote of the author of These Days:

> Perhaps a year or so ago, she was frightened by "The Captive." No matter what frightened her, you may believe me when I say that she is hot and bothered over the fact that, where girls' finishing schools are concerned, all is not well along the Hudson.[2]

Garland himself seems to have been affected by The Captive, and, if not frightened by it, certainly suspicious of female relationships in general after having seen that show. He wrote of These Days, "It hints--more than hints if you crowd

---

[1]Sievers, p. 94.

[2]Robert Garland, "Arthur Hopkins Presents 'These Days' At The Cort," New York Morning Telegram, 13 November 1938.

me at all sorts of things best not mentioned on the stage or in our chaste column of family newspapers."[1]

The reviewers for the Post and the Brooklyn Eagle both suspected that the head-mistress of the boarding school might, by her puritanical, prohibitive attitude turn her students away from their natural sexual inclinations. "Her very affection for her pupils could lead her to the impasse," the critic for the Post commented, "--much commoner than we like to think--where a pupil's natural interest in the opposite sex is diverted into a 'crush' upon the teacher."[2] Writing for the Brooklyn Eagle, Arthur Pollock reported that in the play "the girl wants to go away and marry Dwight and they will not let her, keeping her prisoner as long as they can and feeding her mind with the stupid poison that makes for perversion."[3]

The references to boarding schools and perversions are comprehensible if one is aware of critic George Jean Nathan's concerns made during the engagement of The Captive when he declared that "now little girls are trying to sneak out of schools along the Hudson to run down for a matinee."[4] Three of the reviewers of These Days apparently took a cue from

---

[1]Ibid.

[2]"The She-Devil in the Boarding School," New York Evening Post, 17 November 1928.

[3]Arthur Pollock, "Theatres," Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 14 November 1928.

[4]William Pendleton Gaines, fragment of an untitled, undated interview with George Jean Nathan on file in MNWEZ n. c. 6901, Lincoln Center.

Nathan to have reacted so suspiciously to the Hudson boarding school drama. Such suspicions are simply not supported by an examination of Clugston's playscript.

The head-mistress in These Days wants to keep her school free from scandal and hold onto every tuition-paying student. Aware that one girl, the play's protagonist, is planning to elope, the head-mistress cajoles another student, who has a natural, but somewhat flamboyant crush on her, to inform on her classmate. After hearing the informer out,the woman never gives the infatuated girl a second thought. This does not, however, drive the student into the arms of one of her classmates, nor does the head-mistress's attempts to foil the protagonist's elopement drive her into a similar unnatural crush as Dr. Sievers mistakenly assumes in his appraisal of These Days.

Dr. Sievers finds hints of "latent homosexuality" in the glib youths of Harry Wagstaf Gribble's March Hares,[1] produced in 1921, and in Paul Osborne's Oliver Oliver,[2] seen in 1934, because they somewhat resemble the foppish wits--who, incidently were not intended to be sexually gay--in Restoration comedies. Another young man, a character in the 1929 production of Kenneth Britton's Houseparty, also aroused Dr. Sievers'

---

[1]W. David Sievers, Freud On Broadway (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1970), p. 68.

[2]Ibid., pp. 337-338.

suspicions. The college student leaves his girlfriend to go abroad with a classmate who is attempting to recover from guilt feelings after he accidentally killed a young woman. The fraternity brothers are so close according to the author of Freud On Broadway,"that there is a strong hint of latent homosexuality,"[1]

In his psychoanalysis of the American drama, Dr. Sievers cites three plays which contain roles of obviously effeminate young men. These incidental characters were seen on Broadway in The New Gallantry (1925) by Frank Merlin and Brian Marlow, in Loudspeaker (1927) by John Howard Lawson, and that same year, in Machinal by Sophie Treadwell.[2]

In three other dramas, the psychoanalyst finds evidence that there is a "close relationship between homosexuality and paranoia."[3] Although none of the characters identified by Dr. Sievers in Mignon and Robert McLaughlin's Gayden (1949), Mel Dinelli's The Man (1950), and Milton Lewis and Julian Funt's The Dancer (1946) are shown, at least during the dramatic action, to be sexually attracted to other men, Dr. Sievers blames "latent homosexuality" for their destructive, dangerous criminal behavior. The title character in Gayden is suspect because he seduces women but lives with his protective mother.[4] The

---

[1]Ibid., p. 338.

[2]Ibid., p. 94.

[3]Ibid., p. 409.

[4]Ibid., pp. 408-409.

bachelor murderer in The Man, Dr. Sievers notes, has "an effeminate interest in curtains,"[1] and, most damning of all, the psychotic dancer who resembles both Jack-The-Ripper and Nijinsky in The Dancer has a "homosexual benefactor,"[2] although--however sexually suspect he may have appeared to certain of the critics--according to the playscript, the character is only a wealthy dilettante.

Three years after Dr. Sievers published Freud On Broadway, Louis Shaeffer revealed in his biography of Eugene O'Neill, O'Neill, Son and Artist, that in 1928, the playwright wrote what he hoped would be the first compassionate, comprehensive portrait of a gay male ever seen on the Broadway stage.[3] Dr. Sievers failed to recognize O'Neill's gay creation in Strange Interlude, a Broadway hit in 1928, but identified, instead, two other characters in dramas by O'Neill as heterosexuals with "latent homosexual" inclinations. In The Great God Brown, produced in 1926, O'Neill has one male character kiss the mask of another man whom his wife had loved. By this gesture, the playwright intended to show in his expressionistic drama that the two men were, in fact, one and the same person.[4] While recognizing this, Dr. Sievers still insists that "the homosexual

---

[1]Ibid., p. 419.

[2]Ibid., p. 409.

[3]Louis Shaeffer, O'Neill, Son and Artist (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), p. 242.

[4]Sievers, p. 11.

theme is confirmed"[1] in the mask kissing scene. "There is also a suggestion of latent homosexuality,"[2] the psychoanalyst suspects between two men involved with the same woman in another of O'Neill's plays, The First Man, produced in 1922.

In 1933, the Theatre Guild produced a proselytising Marxist drama, American Dream, by George O'Neil, in which a disillusioned, dissolute playboy is identified by Dr. Sievers as being "a homosexual,"[3] yet that judgment is not confirmed in the playscript. Rejected by the Communist Party to which he has turned in hopes of finding some meaning to his life of pointless pleasures, the playboy protagonist of George O'Neil's American Dream refers to himself as "a homosexual hero-worshipper," "a fairy," and "pansy,"[4] in an outburst provoked by his jealous wife. She had accused him of being excessively attached to a Communist friend whom her husband admires. His outburst may have revealed more about the effete playboy's self-deprecating esteem, and even his contempt for gays, than it does about his own sexual proclivity.

A French literary scholar, Professor Georges-Michel Sarotte of the University of Paris, claims to have completed

---

[1]Ibid., p. 111.

[2]Ibid., p. 103.

[3]Ibid., p. 217.

[4]George O'Neil, American Dream, Epic of An American Family, (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, p. I-52.

"the first comprehensive, systematic analysis of male homosexuality in American theater and fiction."[1] Dr. Sarotte writes in the introduction to Like A Brother, Like A Lover: Male Homosexuality in The American Novel and Theater from Herman Melville to James Baldwin, published in 1976:

> The present volume began as a doctoral dissertation (Doctorat d'Etat, Sorbonne, 1974); it was ruthlessly condensed and thoroughly revised for publication in France (1976), and is now being offered to the American public in English translation.[2]

In his study of male relationships in the works of such novelists as Henry James, Carson McCullers, Jack London and Ernest Hemingway, Dr. Sarotte devotes only a little more than a quarter of his 305-page volume to consideration of the gay characters and themes, most of them covert, in the work of Tennessee Williams, William Inge and Edward Albee. "Using the resources of psychoanalysis, sociology and literary criticism,"[3] Dr. Sarotte's publisher proclaims, the French professor of American literature was limited to an examination of the plays of just three American dramatists since no others of consequence repeatedly included characters either obviously or suspiciously gay in their work. Eugene O'Neill, Lillian Hellman, Arthur Miller, and Neil Simon each wrote only one play in which such roles are significant. Thornton Wilder never touched upon

---

[1] Georges-Michel Sarotte, Like A Brother, Like A Lover, trans. Richard Miller (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/ Doubleday, 1978), p. ix.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., back flap of book jacket.

the subject in any of his work.

"Gay theatre has a longer history than the gay novel--but not nearly so fertile a one," Graham Jackson reminds us in "The Theatre of Implication:"

> From the very beginning, innuendo has been the chief means of conveying homosexual themes to the theatre audience. . . . The public, the majority of the theatregoers, have always insisted upon special protection from anything unpleasant. As many playwrights, directors and producers learned the hard way, one cannot always do on a stage what one could do without censure in a novel. The stage presentation packing a more immediate and less intellectual punch.[1]

Elizabeth Inchbald (1753-1831), the English novelist and playwright, said that the novelist "lives in a land of liberty, whilst the Dramatic Writer exists but under a despotic government,"[2] an observation that held true of the English-language theatre until the second half of the twentieth century.

There were no novels with overt gay male characters before the 1930s, according to Dr. Jim Levin who has made a study of the subject;[3] yet in 1896 the first American drama with a gay character was published. Written by Chicago-born novelist, Henry Blake Fuller (1857-1929), the eleven-page playlet, At Saint Judas's, is included in a collection of twelve very brief one-act dramas under the title, The Puppet-

---

[1]Graham Jackson, "The Theatre of Implication," Canadian Theatre Review (Fall 1976), p. 34.

[2]L. W. Conolly, The Censorship of English Drama 1737-1824 (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1976), p. 11.

[3]Jim Levin, "Butterflies, Pansies, Twilight Men and Strange Brothers: The American Male Homosexual Novel Between the Wars," Gai Saber (New York: Gay Academic Union, 1978), p. 244.

Booth. Despite the collection's title, the playlets do not seem suited for puppet productions and considering its brevity and the elaborate scene prescribed for its performance, At Saint Judas's may be a "closet drama" meant to be read rather than played. It did not receive a professional performance during the author's lifetime,[1] and there is no record of any production since his death in 1929.

Henry B. Fuller, eulogized by another novelist and playwright, Thornton Wilder, as his "friend and teacher,"[2] wrote his little tragedy of a gay bachelor when he was twenty-nine years old and a bachelor himself--as he remained so all of his life. Set in the sacristy of the church of St. Judas's, the dialogue is interrupted throughout by Latin chants and comments from symbolic figures who come to life in eight stained-glass windows: ten knights, a band of chaste damsels, an army with banners, the sheeted dead, the seven cardinal sins and the seven cardinal virtues, the angelic host and Lucifer falling. In the foreground, a bridegroom and his best man, both in uniform, are readying themselves for the wedding ceremony. The distressed man tells of first learning of the planned nuptuals when his friend talked about wanting to marry, "in your sleep--

---

[1]Constance M. Griffin, Henry Blake Fuller: A Critical Biography (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1939), p. 49.

[2]Tributes to Henry B. Fuller In Whose Minds and Hearts He Will Always Live, ed. Anna Morgan (n. c.: Ralph Fletcher Seymour Publisher, 1920), p. 106.

your pillow next to mine."[1]

> THE BEST MAN. . . . (He places his hand upon the other's shoulder.) If she were to come, I should not let her have you. She shall not have you. Nobody shall have you.
>
> THE BRIDEGROOM. What is your meaning, Oliver?
>
> THE BEST MAN. I shall not let you go. Our friendship has been too long; too close, too intimate. It shall not be destroyed; it shall not be broken. No one shall come between us.[2]

Revolted at his friend's confession of such passionate affection, the bridegroom rages at him.

> THE BRIDEGROOM. You are not fit to live. You are not fit to die, but die you shall. I shall not kill you. You shall kill yourself. You shall do it now, and I shall see you do it, you have no other road to redemption.[3]

At Saint Judas's ends with "the body of a man in a pool of blood"[4] after the bridegroom leaves the sacristy with its eight stained glass windows that had been full of living, chanting figures while the dramatic conflict between the two young men was being resolved.

It was not until 1918 that a play with a lesbian character was published for the first time in the English language: Sholom Asch's The God Of Vengeance. Four years later it was produced on the New York stage. The lesbian as a character

---

[1]Henry B. Fuller, The Puppet-Booth: Twelve Plays (New York: The Century Co., 1896), p. 88.

[2]Ibid., p. 96.

[3]Ibid., p. 98.

[4]Ibid.

does not exist in English dramatic literature until the third decade of the twentieth century. Still, lesbians appeared as characters in both English-language novels and in Broadway plays translated from Yiddish and French a whole decade before gay male characters were to be found in English-language novels or permitted to be seen on the New York stage.

The very first sight of one young actress in the arms of another, "hugging her passionately and kissing her with paroxismal delight,"[1] as one disgusted drama critic reported in reviewing the New York play, A Florida Enchantment, had nothing to do with lesbian characters. "It was nauseous. It was disgusting,"[2] the same reviewer wrote of the petting scene in Archibald Clavering Gunter's comedy that opened on 12 October 1896 in Hoyt's Theatre. "It will insist upon being recollected as the most singular of all the offenses that have been committed upon our stage."[3]

A. C. Gunter, called "the shopgirl's favorite novelist,"[4] based his farce on one of his most popular penny novels, A Florida Enchantment. It premièred at the Park Theatre in April 1896, was seen again for a three-week engagement in the autumn

---

[1]Untitled review of A Florida Enchantment, dated 12 October 1896, from unknown New York newspaper on file, Lincoln Center.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Fragment from another review from file cited above.

of that same year at Hoyt's Theatre. In the summer of 1914, a silent-film version starring Sidney Drew was released by the Vitagraph Company. Neither the novel nor the movie version had the same effect on people as did the staged performances. After one scene, a reviewer reported, "the management very considerately arranges to have seven boys walk smartly around the audience with ice water."[1]

The New York Dramatic Mirror has left us with this plot resume of A Florida Enchantment which so unsettled theatregoers before the turn of the century:

> A young girl becomes possessed of a few magical seeds that confer a change of sex upon any individual who swallows one of them. The maiden courageously swallows a seed, and finds herself a young man. Then she tries the effect of the seed upon her negro maid-servant who is straightway metamorphased into a darkey valet. Thus transmogrified, the young girl obtains revenge on a faithless lover by paying court to a pretty widow. Her former devices to play parts in contrary sexes constitutes the body of the play.[2]

From another reviewer we know that the plot of A Florida Enchantment, which he called "a most audacious one,"[3] also involves "the transformation of a very masculine and persistent love-making physician into a timid and somewhat hysterical female."[4] "The change from manhood to womanhood is so mortifying and disappointing," according to another critic, "that

---

[1]Ibid.

[2]"At Hoyt's Theatre A Comedy in 4 Acts by Archibald Clavering Gunter," New York Dramatic Mirror, 17 October 1896.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid.

his pleadings to be changed back into a man are complied with."[1] On the other hand, the young woman turned into a man has a marvelous time romping around and flirting. "Mr. Gunter took pains to announce," reported the Dramatic Mirror, "that his primary reason in perpetuating the play was to show that in a measure men have a better time than women amid the social environment of our present civilization."[2]

Accepting the author's farcical premise that no less than four magical, nevertheless seemingly genuine, sex changes take place in A Florida Enchantment, then it is not a woman at all who falls in love with another woman in the comedy. A. C. Gunter may have written the first play about transexuals, male as well as female, but A Florida Enchantment no more relates to the emergence of lesbians and gay men as characters in plays produced on the American stage than does George Axelrod's 1959 Broadway comedy, Goodbye Charlie, in which the title character, a notorious womanizer, is reincarnated in the body of a beautiful woman.

Not a single one of the playwrights who, in the 1920s, brought lesbians and gay male characters onto the American stage, have been identified as being gay. W. Somerset Maugham and Noel Coward dared not risk public exposure and popular rejection by identifying themselves with the subject matter.

---

[1]Ibid.

[2]Fragment of another review from file cited above.

Late in his career, Maugham told his nephew:

> Why do you suppose that Noel or I have never stuck our personal predilections down the public's throats? Because we know it would outrage them. Believe me, I know what I'm talking about. Don't put your head in a noose, . . .[1]

While his reference to hanging was not, of course, meant to be taken literally, it does help to remind us that not until 1861 did England drop the death penalty by hanging for men convicted of gay sexual activity--just thirteen years before Maugham's birth. Oscar Wilde was humiliated and imprisoned as a convicted sodomite less than a decade before Maugham had his first play produced on the London stage.

Although this introduction does not include a summary of the persecution and ostracism of the invisible minority among the English-speaking peoples, it is important to be reminded of such intolerance at the beginning of a study of the emergence of the dramatic depictions of lesbians and gay men in English-language productions in the legitimate theatre in America. Keeping in mind the anathema directed at gay people, it is hardly surprising that, with the single exception of audacious Christopher Marlowe, English-language playwrights--whatever their sexual predilection--did not create roles that might identify them with a subject "not to be mentioned among Christians" during the three and one half centuries after the first public theatre was built in London. No less surprising was the reception accorded the very first play with a lesbian role to be seen in an English-language production when it opened in a New York theatre in 1922.

---

[1]Robin Maugham, Somerset and All The Maughams, (New York: The New American Library, 1966), p.201.

CHAPTER II

SHOLOM ASCH'S
THE GOD OF VENGEANCE
(1922)

"Lesbian love walked out onto a New York stage for the first time last night,"[1] a newspaper critic erroneously announced after the sensational premiere of The Captive at Broadway's Empire Theatre on September 29, 1926. With but few exceptions, other critics were also under the mistaken impression that The Captive marked the first time that a drama on any English-language stage explored a subject that for almost a millennium and a half was "not to be mentioned among Christians." More than half a century later that mistaken notion still remains in the few references made to The Captive by theatre historians and feature story writers.

In the busiest decade in the history of the American theatre, the 1920s, The Captive had not only the most anxiously anticipated Broadway opening in memory, but a closing that made front-page headlines in almost all of the New York papers.

---

[1]Burton Davis, "Much Talked Of 'Captive' Opens," New York Morning Telegraph, 30 September 1926.

Despite its notoriety, The Captive did not, however, afford New York audiences their first look at lesbians in love as dramatized in a Broadway play.

The Captive had, indeed, explored "a subject that had long been taboo in the English and American drama," as a more enlightened first-night critic noted, "save for a brief flash in 'The God Of Vengeance'--a flare-up that was soon snuffed out by the courts."[1] It was in that brief flash that Broadway audiences saw the first drama ever performed in the English language depicting a lesbian character--four years before the American première of The Captive.

That "brief flash" mentioned by the critic referred to the brevity of a lesbian love scene rather than to the extent of the engagement of The God Of Vengeance. The drama had been running for two months in little theatres in Greenwich Village before moving to Broadway for another two-month engagement. Then it went on to a theatre in the Bronx before returning to reopen in one of the small playhouses, where it had first been seen by New York audiences. In all, The God Of Vengeance was performed 133 times before it closed.[2]

An engagement of such length is all the more impressive considering that two of New York City's most important

---

[1]Frank Vreeland, "The Marble Bride," New York Evening Telegram, 30 September 1926.

[2]Burns Mantle, ed. The Best Plays of 1922-23 (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1923), p. 584.

newspapers turned down advertisements for the show. After Burns Mantle of the News saw it in Greenwich Village, that paper not only refused to run advertisements for The God Of Vengeance, but also ignored all of the court proceedings against it. The Times stopped running ads for Sholom Asch's drama the day after the theatre-owner, the producer, the star and the cast were arrested, and before they were tried and found guilty of having presented, in violation of Section 1140 of the New York Penal Code, "an obscene, indecent, immoral and impure theatrical production."[1] That ordeal for those connected with the production of The God Of Vengeance "put the fear of the law," gloated critic Burns Mantle, "in the hearts of several other producers given to taking chances with plays of questionable character."[2]

No American playwrights included lesbian and gay male characters in work produced during the socially, sexually and artistic revolutionary aftermath of World War I. Puritanical legal restrictions among the English-speaking people were certainly a factor in the absence of characterizations not unfamiliar to Continental theatregoers during the same post war period. O'Neill would wait until 1928 to introduce a gay character in Strange Interlude, but so circumspectly that the

---

[1]"14 Indictments Follow Probe Of New Play," New York American, 7 March 1923.

[2]Burns Mantle, ed. The Best Plays of 1922-23 (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1923), p. 11.

critics seemed not to recognize it as such. Banned from public theatre presentations, Prisoners of War, by English author J. R. Ackerley, was seen in a limited engagement in 1925 at a private membership playhouse in London; still a decade passed before an American producer dared bring the drama about a gay infatuation to Broadway.

It is hardly surprising, then, that New York audiences should have been introduced to the first lesbian character ever seen on the American stage by a playwright from an area of theatrical activity far removed from the English-speaking world. Even before World War I plays done in the Yiddish theatre, according to Maurice Schwartz, "were more forthright, earthy and robust in the treatment of sex than were plays seen on Broadway."[1] And so it was that Sholom Asch--whose novels in translation eventually won him international popularity among both Jewish and non-Jewish readers--gave New Yorkers their first look at a play with a lesbian love scene.

Sholom Asch was only twenty-one years old when he wrote a drama of such shocking candour and mature insight that, according to scholars of Yiddish literature, it "aroused heated debate"[2] and "created bitter dispute on both sides of

---

[1]David S. Lifson, The Yiddish Theatre in America (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1965), p. 93.

[2]Sol Liptzin, The Flowering of Yiddish Literature (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1930), p. 188.

the Atlantic,"[1] among the most liberal audiences as well as more conservative Yiddish-speaking theatregoers. Asch had become the first Yiddish dramatist whose plays established an international reputation outside of the Jewish world when, in 1907 at the Deutsches Theatre in Berlin, Max Reinhardt gave Gott Fun Nekoma its first production in a German-language translation, Gott Der Rache. Within the next decade, it played all over Germany, as well as in Russia, Austria, Poland, Holland, Norway, Sweden and Italy after it had been translated into a dozen languages. Gott Fun Nekoma, which had been seen for seventeen years in productions in New York's Yiddish theatres, ran into trouble only after it was translated into English as The God Of Vengeance and ventured up from the Provincetown Theatre, a small playhouse in Greenwich Village, to the Apollo Theatre on "The Great White Way."

The God Of Vengeance is set in a Jewish house of prostitution in a provincial town in Poland. The proprietor naively believes he can raise a teenage daughter untouched by the sensuality of the establishment he operates in the cellar of his home, only a staircase below the family's living quarters. To insure that his closely protected daughter does not follow in the footsteps of her mother, an ex-prostitute, but marries, instead, a respectable, middle-class scholar, the father buys

---

[1]A. A. Boback, The Story of Yiddish Literature (New York: Yiddish Scientific Institute, American Branch, 1940), p. 217.

a Torah Scroll for his home, expecting the Pentateuch to protect the girl and placate the vengeful God of the Old Testament.

Once the facts are established in the first act, the play's outcome is, of course, predictable. The surprise, or shock, comes in the person of a young prostitute who at the end of Act One sneaks upstairs to visit the daughter. Instead of being lured below by a male patron, or a male procurer, the teenager is involved in her own home with one of the prostitutes--a possibility that never occurred to her overprotective father. After they kiss passionately, the First Act curtain descends as the two young women are locked in an embrace.

In the Second Act, Rivkele, the daughter, barefoot and wearing only a light shawl over her nightgown, sneaks out of her bedroom, while her parents sleep, to join Manke, her friend, to frolick outside in the warm May rain. Dripping wet, Rivkele and Manke come into the basement-bagnio. Both barefoot, they are wrapped together in a wet shawl.

> MANKE (she speaks with a concealed passion and love, softly and ringing). Do you feel cold, Rivkele? Snuggle up close to me. Let me keep you warm, nice and warm. Come, let's sit on the sofa. (She leads her to the sofa and sits down next to her.) That's right, press your face against by breast. Like that, that's the way. And let your body caress me. So cool, like water running between us. (Pause.) I uncovered your breasts and washed them with the rain water that ran into my hands. So white and firm, your breasts, and the blood in them cools under the hand like white snow, like ice. And their fragrance is like the smell of grass in the meadows. And I loosened your hair. Its scent is the scent of the rain. (She buries her face in RIVKELE's hair.) The scent of May rain is in it, so light, so soft, so fresh, like the grass in the meadow, like the apple on the

bough. Cool me with your hair. (She washes her face in RIVKELE's hair.) Cool me so. Wait, let me comb you like a bride, hair parted in the middle, with two long black braids. (Combs her hair.) Would you like me to, Rivkele? Would you?

RIVKELE (nodding). Yes, I would.

MANKE. You will be the bride, a lovely bride. It's Friday night. You're sitting at the Sabbath table with your father and mother. I'm the bridegroom, your bridegroom come to visit you. Would you like that, Rivkele, would you?

RIVKELE (nodding her head). Yes, Manke.

MANKE. Then we draw close to each other: you're my bride and I'm your bridegroom. We embrace. (She puts her arms around her.) We're pressed together, and we kiss very quietly, like this. (They kiss.) We blush, we're so embarrassed. It's good, isn't it, Rivkele?

RIVKELE. Yes, Manke, it is.

MANKE (lowers her voice, whispering in her ear). And then we go to sleep in the same bed. No one sees us, no one knows, just the two of us, like this. (She presses RIVKELE to her.) Would you like to sleep the whole night through with me, Rivkele, in the same bed?

RIVKELE (embracing her). I would, I would.

MANKE. Come, come.

RIVKELE (whispering). I'm afraid of my father. He may get up.

MANKE. Wait, Rivkele, wait. (Thinks awhile). Would you like to go away with me? We'll be together all day and all night. Your father won't be there; your mother won't be there. No one will scold you or hit you. We'll be alone, all day. We'll have such fun. Would you like that, Rivkele?

RIVKELE (closes her eyes). My father wouldn't know?

MANKE. No, we'll run off tonight, now, with Hindel, to her house. She has a house with Sholyme. She told me so. You'll see how good it will be. Young men will come, officers. We'll be alone the entire day. We'll

> dress like officers and ride around on horses. Come, Rivkele, would you like to? Would you?[1]

The proprietor's daughter runs off with Manke to spend the night with her in the house another prostitute shares with a procurer. The enraged father discovers too late that his daughter has escaped from the bedroom in which he had locked her as the Second Act comes to a close.

In the final act, Rivkele is brought back to her home by the procurer after her mother has paid him dearly to do so. "Are you still a chaste Jewish girl?"[2] the distraught father shouts repeatedly at his badgered, frightened daughter. Since she does not know how to answer after a night of lesbian love-making, Rivkele replies, "I don't know!"[3] Enraged at his daughter's evasiveness, and assuming that she has been seduced by a man, the proprietor brutally drags her by the hair to place Rivkele among his prostitutes down in the brothel in the cellar. As he does so, the embittered father calls out to the astonished match-making rabbi--who has witnessed this climactic scene--to take away the Torah Scroll that failed to protect his daughter from the vengeful wrath of the God of Israel.

---

[1] The Great Jewish Plays, trans. and ed. Joseph C. Landis (New York: Horizon Press, 1966), pp. 98-99.

[2] Ibid., p. 111.

[3] Ibid.

It may be difficult for many secular, modern readers and theatregoers to relate to the predominantly religious motif and the melodramatics of The God of Vengeance. Since World War II, wherever it has been produced, the drama has "retained merely antiquarian interest,"[1] according to an authority on Yiddish literature. Asch's delicately exotic lesbian love scene from The God of Vengeance is, however, surprisingly modern in its sensual candor and its insight into the dynamics of sexual seduction.

Dr. Issac Goldberg, who translated Asch's drama from Yiddish into English in 1918, observed that "When Ash (sic) wishes to deal with sex as sex he is not afraid to handle the subject with all the poetry and power at his command."[2] While twenty-one year old Asch had been bold enough to handle as best he could the subject of lesbian love in 1907, it was not until fifteen years later than an American, a woman, dared to produce The God of Vengeance for English-speaking audiences. Dr. Goldberg's translation, published in Boston, had been available for four years before the play was staged in English in New York City.

Because of its subject matter, the setting and the fact that the protagonist turns against his religion at the climax

---

[1]Sol Liptzin, The Flowering of Yiddish Literature (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1963), p. 188.

[2]Sholom Asch, The God of Vengeance, trans. Issac Goldberg (Boston: The Stratford Co. Publishers, 1918), p. xi.

of The God of Vengeance, it was attacked--as might be expected--as being scandalous and sacrilegious by certain critics and playgoers when first it was given in Yiddish.[1] Asch apparently felt no need to reply to any such criticism until an American court adjudged it obscene and immoral.

"I was not concerned whether I wrote a moral or immoral play," Sholom Asch wrote after its American premiere. The playwright continued:

> What I wanted to write was an artistic play and a true one. In the seventeen years it has been before the public, this is the first time I have had to defend it. . . .
> As to the scenes between Manka and Rivkele, on every European stage, especially in Russia, they were the most poetic of all, and the critics in those countries appreciated this poetic view. This love between the two girls is not only an exotic one. It is the unconscious mother love of which they are deprived. The action portrays the love of the woman-mother, who is Manke, for the woman-child, who is Rivkele, rather than the sensuous, inverted love of one woman for another. In this particular scene, I also wanted to bring out the innocent, longing for sin, and the sinful, dream of purity. Manka, overweighted with sin, loves the clean soul of Rivkele, and Rivkele, the innocent girl, longs to stay near the door of such a woman as Manka and listens within.[2]

The first lesbian love scene to be played on an English-language stage came, then, not from the pen of a woman but from a heterosexual male who believed in the Judaic concept of sin, which included lesbian love, and who conceived of that relationship--at the age of twenty-one--as a maternal as well as

---

[1]Sol Liptzin, The Flowering of Yiddish Literature (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1963), p. 92.

[2]Program for the Broadway production in 1923 at the Apollo Theatre of The God of Vengeance, Lincoln Center, pp. 17-18.

an exotic one. Be that as it may, the results do not obviously reflect only these concepts. On the contrary, judging from the dialogue, it would more certainly seem that Asch understood lesbianism to involve erotic male-female role playing. Manke, the older, experienced and aggressive partner, play-acts at being a bridegroom while assigning Rivkele the role of the bride in her little game of seduction.

From the inconclusive evidence available today it is impossible to ascertain definitely how much of this brief scene was included in its first English-language presentation. According to Alice Kauser, the play-broker who produced it, cuts were made in The God of Vengeance "to defer [to] the sensitive people who do not care to listen to passages spoken in public although those very passages could possibly have no offence when read."[1]

Alexander Woollcott, who reviewed the drama for the New York Herald, seems to have been familiar with portions, at least, of Asch's script as it was seen abroad and in Yiddish-language productions in America. Woollcott noticed that the two "scenes of amorous inversion" had been "severely shortened."[2] He was highly critical of the English translation for which no credit was given Dr. Goldberg either in the Provincetown Theatre or Apollo playbill. "Of the quality of Asch's play as it

---

[1]Ibid., p. 6.

[2]Alexander Woollcott, "The Reviewing Stand," New York Herald, 21 December 1922.

was first written," Woollcott observed, "it is not easy to form any opinion from the version exhibited last evening."[1] The critic took particular exception to the language of the lesbian love scenes which he felt was, in translation, "that of a conference of the social subject at the City Club."[2]

Those who had read Burns Mantle's review in the Daily News could have had no idea that The God of Vengeance was the first play to introduce lesbian characters to English-language audiences.[3] Mantle, like most of the New York critics, failed to make any mention whatsoever of the lesbian motif, probably for the same reason that the critic for the Evening Telegram gave for the sketchiness of his review. "The terrible details need not be recorded here," the critic explained. "They are almost too terrible to look upon in the theatre."[4] Similarly distressed, the reviewer for the Morning Telegraph observed that "despite the fact a story or an episode may be 'true to life,' even a reproduction of life, it seems to us that there are some themes that have no place on the stage."[5]

---

[1]Ibid.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Burns Mantle, "Father In Double Role Gets Ovation," New York Daily News, 21 December 1922.

[4]"The Elder Schildkraut in a Devastating Play," New York Evening Telegram, 20 December 1922.

[5]"Truth," New York Morning Telegraph, 21 December 1922.

Just as evasive as most of the gentlemen of the press covering the première of the Asch drama, Kenneth MacGowan of the Globe made no reference to the lesbian love scene other than to note that among the prostitutes there was "one of even more irregular and nasty habits."[1] The critic of the New York Sun mentioned "two episodes such as we have never before seen on the stage,"[2] without identifying them any further. However, even with whatever cuts were made, Heywood Broun of the World understood that "the play deals frankly with the perversion of a young girl." Disgusted at what he saw, Broun complained that "the scene between the young girl and the harlot in her father's establishment made us a little sick." The reviewer concluded: "The American stage has not yet achieved absolute frankness in dealing with the more traditional vices. We can afford to wait until that fight has been won before venturing into decadence."[3]

The critic for the New York Evening Post, like Broun, understood full well that "the girl falls victim to a Lesbian,"[4] and stated so. The Post also observed that "despite the fact

---

[1]Kenneth MacGowan, "The New Play," New York Globe, 20 December 1922.

[2]"Rudolph Schildkraut Stars In God of Vengeance," New York Sun, 20 December 1922.

[3]Heywood Broun, "The New Play," New York World, 20 December 1922.

[4]"The Play," New York Evening Post, 20 December 1922.

that certain pathological phases of life are not suited for the stage, those in Sholom Asch's 'The God of Vengeance' were more or less absorbing."[1] Percy Hammond of the Tribune wrote, "Of course the girl is contaminated by the red miasma of her environment. Propinquity to the Polish Jezebels influences her to odd aspirations, the nature of which it unbecomes us to suspect. At any rate she is carried away by one of her parent's dubious saleswomen."[2] A woman reviewing The God of Vengeance--perhaps the only one of her gender to do so for a national publication--was more candid than most of the male critics in appraising the personality and the plight of the brothel owner's daughter. "Her inverted curiosity makes her the easy victim of her sex," wrote Maida Castellum, "and she escapes with Manke, a Lesbian companion, to her predestined fate."[3]

The seduction scene was still in the show after it was moved from Greenwich Village to the Apollo Theatre on 42nd Street. This infuriated the critic for Theatre Magazine. English-born Arthur Hornblow fumed:

> The progress of this translation from the Yiddish from a Washington Square theatre to the august sanctity of a 42nd Street house is ascribable, alas, not so much to its merit as to its dirt. A more foul and unpleasant

---

[1]Ibid.

[2]Percy Hammond, "The Theatres," New York Tribune, 20 December 1922.

[3]Maida Castellum, "The Stage," New York Call, 21 December 1922.

> spectacle has never been seen in New York. The decadence which we hear has submerged a large element of German dramatics has crept via MacDougal Alley into Broadway and I can only ascribe the absence of a police sergeant to the fact that his visits have on former occasions done little less than augment the popularity of the play. Mr. Asch's drama deals fundamently with the vengeful god of Judea.
>
> . . . The Jewish god is a horribly cruel one in this instance. He thwarts the father's purpose by having his pure young daughter fall into the clutches of Lesbians and the audience is treated to a nightgown scene in which the women make overtures to each other which go so far beyond the pale of what is permissible that I can only voice my astonishment at the authorities allowing a thing of this sort to be continued before heterosexual audiences, comprised of individuals young and old who go to the theatre to be entertained and without any conception of what they may be asked to witness. It is really a bit thick. There may be a place for such dramas on the stage but their audiences must be known as intelligent and incorruptible and not the immature, easily influenced individuals to whom The God of Vengeance might do grievous damage.[1]

While Hornblow recognized the implications of the nightgown scene, at least one member of the cast did not. Morris Carnovsky, the veteran actor--and in 1977 one of the few surviving members of the original Provincetown Theatre production--could not remember any mention of lesbians during rehearsals. Carnovsky recalled:

> No such thing even occurred to me until some reviewers mentioned it. I would recognize such a thing today, but at the time it seemed to me just a sensitive little scene, very subtly done, in which the prostitute offered to help the daughter, if I remember correctly, run away from home after they had been frolicking in the May rain. Of course, I was very young as this was my first acting job in New York.[2]

---

[1]Arthur Hornblow, "Mr. Hornblow Goes To The Play," Theatre Magazine, April 1923, p. 68.

[2]Morris Carnovsky, interview by telephone, 15 August 1977.

If a young man in the cast of The God of Vengeance was unable to recognize the women's relationship for what it was, it is very likely that a considerable portion of the audiences, as well as some of the critics, were just as naive in 1922. Manke's attention to Rivkele might have seemed to some to be a ploy not to physically seduce her--a possibility inconceivable to many--but to seduce her to a life of prostitution much as a male procurer might have done. Producer-director Herman Shumlin saw The God of Vengeance at the Apollo Theatre.

> I had no idea that the scene in which the two women fondle one another--and I do remember it--had anything to do with sexual perversion which would have shocked and puzzled me in 1923. Women in America were often openly and physically affectionate with one another even in public. Sisters, schoolgirls, matrons, mothers and daughters would touch, kiss, hug and hold hands. So the scene seemed familiar to me. American men, on the other hand, rarely touched except to briskly shake hands.[1]

A visiting reviewer from the Baltimore Sun, in defending the morality of a drama in which "the sins of the father are indeed visited upon the children!" wrote: "One may say in passing that there are those who like to read into the friendship of the two girls something more than appears on the surface, but this is scarcely borne out by the dialogue in the third act."[2]

In his autobiography, My Father and I, stage and film

---

[1]Interview with Herman Shumlin, New York City, 4 March 1979.

[2]Program for the Broadway production in 1923 at the Apollo Theatre of The God of Vengeance, Lincoln Center, p. 14.

star Joseph Schildkraut remembered this about the plot of the play in which his celebrated father, Rudolph Schildkraut, had starred: "The girl is seduced by a prostitute in her father's brothel, is paired off with one of the customers, and runs away from home in search of glamour and excitement."[1] Thirty-six years after the fact, Schildkraut's memory of his father's show may have been faulty, or it may have been that sometime during the run of The God of Vengeance a line or two of dialogue was added to both the second and third acts establishing that Manke had turned Rivkele over to a male customer, a fate not worse than a lesbian liaison, surely, in the eyes of audiences and dramatic critics.

Schildkraut would have readers of his memoirs believe that lesbianism was a false charge brought against Asch's drama. The actor contended that:

> To bolster their accusations the "moralists" presented as witness a policeman who testified that the girls in the brothel scene had performed in the nude--which was an outright lie; that the daughter and the prostitute were "openly flaunting their lesbian relationship"--another lie.[2]

Joseph Schildkraut blamed the Society for the Suppression of Vice for lodging a complaint against The God of Vengeance, denouncing the drama as "obscene, indecent, disgusting, and tending to corruption of the morals of youth."[3] These self-

---

[1]Joseph Schildkraut, My Father and I as told to Leo Lania (New York: The Viking Press, 1959), p. 181.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

appointed private citizens, who with private funding monitored the New York stage as if they were government censors, were kept very busy in the 1920s when emerging playwrights such as Eugene O'Neill and veterans such as W. Somerset Maugham were making contributions to the theatre on such subjects as sex, religion, politics, and economics.

Rain--which told of a married preacher's repressed sexual infatuation with a prostitute--was based on one of Maugham's short stories. Starring Jeanne Eagles, Rain was the biggest hit of the 1922-23 Broadway season during which the cast of The God of Vengeance was arrested. In that same season, Loyalties by John Galsworthy examined anti-Semitism in English high society; Why Not? questioned existing divorce laws; and Bernard Shaw's The Devil's Disciple and Elmer Rice's expressionistic The Adding Machine were both anti-establishment plays. Despite the failure of the national prohibition of the sales and consumption of alcoholic beverages--which became increasingly obvious in the early twenties--the American climate of public opinion continued to be as prohibitive throughout that decade as some playwrights dared to be progressive.

During its run, The God of Vengeance was closed twice in Greenwich Village for brief periods when authorities harassed the producers with charges of operating without a license and violating the law prohibiting Sunday performances. Eventually certain citizens demanded, and got, criminal court action at the direction of the District Attorney's office after the play

moved to Broadway. The Jewishness of the play must be taken into consideration in any examination of its problems with the law. It was not the predominantly Protestant Society for the Suppression of Vice that the editor of Jewish Daily Record cited in this connection.

Abraham Cahan charged:

> The entire pogrom on Sholom Asch's "The God of Vengeance" comes from Dr. Silverman, the rabbi of Temple Emanuel. It was he who brought the charges to the District Attorney, . . .
>
> Behind Rabbi Silverman are American Jews, who are up to date with their suits and dresses, but not with their understanding. They belong to the generation which believes that the highest duty of literature is to hide the truth.[1]

The producer who brought The God of Vengeance from a little theatre in Greenwich Village to Broadway, Attorney Harry Weinberger, had this reaction to Jewish hostility to a play in which lesbians appear:

> A few Jews consider the play a reflection on Jews. I do not. Any more than I consider Hawthorne's "Scarlet Letter," a reflection on Christians and Christian ministers. It would be surprising if the play were against the Jewish race, written as it is by the greatest Jewish writer of modern times, Sholom Asch.[2]

"'God of Vengeance' is not a typically 'Jewish Play,'" Asch protested.

> "A Jewish Play" is a play where Jews are especially characterized for the benefit of the Gentiles. I am not such a "Jewish" writer. . . .
>
> Jews do not need to clear themselves before anyone. They are as good and as bad as any race.[3]

---

[1]Programme for the Broadway production in 1923 at the Apollo Theatre of The God of Vengeance, Lincoln Center, p. 18.

[2]Ibid., p. 1.

[3]Ibid., p. 18.

Rabbi Silverman was one of the most outspoken religious leaders in Manhattan among those who demanded throughout the 1920s that the Broadway stage be purged of plays that explored sexual settings and situations, and most especially any relating to any sort of deviation. Understandably he took particular exception to Asch's drama in which all of the characters in the brothel, including the lesbians, were Jewish. A gentile reviewer reminded readers of that fact. Alan Dale wrote in the American:

> The large Hebrew percentage of the New York theatregoers will not perhaps consider that their race is illuminated by the episodes set forth in this play. . . . I imagine that any religion would be morally incensed at a play built around such stuff. But the Hebrew race always seems to be blind to the indignities heaped upon it by the drama.[1]

Had not the rabbi and his Manhattan congregation taken a stand alongside the many Christian detractors of the play, the criticism in one of William Randolph Hearst's papers would have seemed substantiated. Coming from Europe, the Jewish actor Rudolph Schildkraut could not have had the same sort of qualms that the American congregation had in New York. Instead of being vilified, The God of Vengeance had had enthusiastic receptions in many capitals on the Continent, particularly in Berlin where the stage star had directed himself in the Reinhardt world première. Schildkraut agreed to star in the first English-language production of the drama at the Provincetown Theatre in

---

[1]Alan Dale, "Depressing Play New Offering at Apollo," New York American, 24 February 1923.

Greenwich Village, the year the Provincetown Players ceased using the little theatre off Washington Square.

Produced by the Players Company, Schildkraut's English-language debut was called a "superb performance" by Alexander Woollcott, "which hushed his audience and held it breathless."[1] Percy Hammond, who also witnessed the December 19th opening in 1922, wrote of Schildkraut:

> Last evening at the Provincetown Theatre his performance stirred one of those outbursts of violent approbation more common to Grand Opera histrionism and football games than to displays of impersonification without music. They were still cheering when we left.[2]

Backstage, John Barrymore, who had electrified Broadway the month before with his Hamlet, knelt dramatically in admiration before Schildkraut to kiss his hand.

Although he avoided making any mention in his review of lesbianism, the critic for the New York Times may have had it in mind, as well as the subject of prostitution, when he made a pessimistic prediction about the chances of The God of Vengeance's survival. "It is not likely to achieve popularity," John Corbin presaged, "unless Greenwich Village should develop an appetite for the seamy side of life beyond anything it has yet displayed."[3] Asch's drama, however, proved to have wider

---

[1]Alexander Woollcott, "The Reviewing Stand," New York Herald, 21 December 1922.

[2]Percy Hammond, "The Theatres," New York Tribune, 20 December 1922.

[3]John Corbin, "The Play," New York Times, 20 December 1922

geographic appeal than to just those who lived within walking distance of the unheated, drafty avant-garde little playhouse. The demand for seats during its run at the Provincetown was such that Attorney Weinberger--who took over the production from Alice Kauser--moved it first to the larger Greenwich Village Theatre and then, to attract bigger audiences, to Broadway to open at the Apollo Theatre on 42nd Street on 19 February 1923.

Greenwich Village had, particularly after World War I, become New York City's Left Bank, hospitable not only to the so-called bohemians, but also to the underground gay community. Audiences supporting the experimental little theatres in the Village were composed, in large part, of anti-establishment, avant-garde intellectuals, writers and artists. Although the newspaper critics would come down to the Provincetown Theatre to see a production--especially with a star as prestigious as Rudolph Schildkraut--booming Broadway kept the watchdogs of public morality so busy in 1922 that they did not concern themselves with tacky little showcases in the Village. When, during the next couple of years, they looked in on two of Eugene O'Neill's productions: All God's Chillun Got Wings and Desire Under the Elms, the playwright and his producers had to deal with the bigots and the moralists who objected to the dramatization of miscegenation and infanticide.

Because Asch's drama had been reviewed when it premièred in Greenwich Village in December, none of the critics, under-

standably, went to have a second look at the show in February the night it opened on Broadway. The production, and even Schildkraut--who had garnered such sensational reviews for his dazzling performance--were largely and pointedly ignored by newspaper columnists. When a rare editorial or news item did appear in which The God of Vengeance was either damned or defended, the production was often not mentioned by name. During the run of The God of Vengeance, Chief Magistrate McAdoo, in an obvious reference to the show, was quoted as saying:

> If you attack a book or play you only advertise it for the class of people who want that sort of thing. In the last few days I was asked to begin what would have turned out to be a long dilatory proceeding against a play, and I am convinced that the theatre people themselves were behind the movement to advertise their thoroughly nasty, rotten production.[1]

In a long editorial defending freedom of expression on the Broadway stage, in the New York American, the title of Asch's play was never mentioned once. Even some of those who supported and admired The God of Vengeance obviously thought it best not to identify the play in print--perhaps in fear of provoking the wrath of those who found it so dangerous and disgusting--although it must have been perfectly obvious to most reasonably alert and aware readers which Broadway show was being defended. The editorial in the American read, in part:

> Here, now, is a play on Broadway charged with being "immoral." It has been in print and on the stage all over Europe and in this supersensitive city for seventeen years. Suddenly some dramatic tea-tester discovers a poisonous

---

[1]"Morals Critic No Court, Says M'Adoo," New York American, 13 March 1923.

> flavor in this histrionic brew. Hosts of respectable persons see the play. Apparently none the worse for their experience. Yet the senseless censors, having by request begun to condemn, continue condemnatory.
>
> The present writer has seen the play in question. He finds it terribly moral. Believes that no one who sees this play can escape a thrill of terror because of the inescapable "moral"--the inevitable working out of the law of compensation. And yet the officially censorious find immorality--mainly because they can and do. . . .
>
> Freedom of expression, liberty of action, exercise of choice in doing or avoiding--which is the very essence of morality--all that gives significance to the democratic experience and evolving humanity.
>
> All this is involved in censorship and in the effort of well-meaning but misguided minorities to guide the really superior majority with their benevolent despotism.[1]

It is surprising that any such editorial attacking the self-appointed public censors would have appeared in any daily paper during this decade, but it is nothing less than astonishing that it should have been printed in one of William Randolph Hearst's publications. Four years after one of Hearst's editorial writers not only characterized one lesbian love drama as "terribly moral," and chastized those who would interfere with its continued performances, the publisher himself would pen an editorial damning another lesbian love drama and calling for a censorship law to keep such productions off the New York stage.

"Had Harry Weinberger been content to continue its run in Greenwich Village instead of sending the production uptown to the Apollo Theatre," one critic declared, "no doubt The God of Vengeance in its English version would have lived and died

---

[1]"Oh, For Sense For Censors!" (editorial) New York American, 26 March 1923.

undisturbed."[1] It was easy enough for the respectable middle-class press and respectable middle-class New Yorkers to ignore something going on off the beaten-path in the bohemian milieu of Greenwich Village, but it was something else again to ignore the same thing being done on The Great White Way. The Times reported that after the show opened in the Apollo Theatre "it packed them in during the past week."[2] The Times continued to run ads helping business for The God of Vengeance for another two weeks. In the meantime a Grand Jury went about surreptitiously investigating the show without consulting those involved with the production. The playscript used for the Broadway production which differed from the published text was not available to the District Attorney so the Grand Jury could not take it into consideration.

On 6 March 1923 during the Tuesday night performance of The God of Vengeance detectives appeared backstage at the Apollo Theatre to inform the theatre owner, Michael Selwyn, the producer, Harry Weinberger, and twelve actors in the cast that they had been indicted by a Grand Jury. The fourteen were charged with violation of the Penal Code which "defines the crime of presenting an obscene, indecent, immoral and impure theatrical production."[3] According to the Times:

---

[1]"Rudolph Schildkraut Stars in God of Vengeance," New York Sun, 20 December 1922.

[2]"News And Gossip Of The Rialto," New York Times, 25 February 1923.

[3]"14 Indictments Follow Probe of New Play," New York American, 7 March 1923.

> Between the second and third act a detective informed Harry Weinberger of the indictment.
>
> The play continued without interruption, Mr. Weinberger having requested the detectives not to molest the players before the end of the performance because of their temperaments.[1]

No summonses were issued and there was no formal arrest. The fourteen individuals simply agreed to appear, as they were invited to do so, voluntarily the next morning before the judge presiding in General Sessions. When they did, the defendants all pleaded not guilty to the charge after being officially arrested. Released when each paid $300 bail,[2] the cast was able to get back to the theatre in time to give a matinée performance. "Inspection of the indictment," the American reported:

> revealed that the Rev. Joseph Silverman, Rabbi of the fashionable synagogue, Temple Emanu-el, on Fifth Avenue, was one of the witnesses to testify as to the immorality of the play.[3]

"Most of the complaints were alleged to have said that the play was anti-Semitic,"[4] the Times noted, yet racially offensive material was not a consideration that the Grand Jury could have acted upon since the Penal Code violation concerned only the presentation of an impure theatrical production. The

---

[1]"'God of Vengeance' Cast Is Indicted," New York Times, 7 March 1923.

[2]"'God of Vengeance' Brings 14 Arrests," New York American, 8 March 1923.

[3]Ibid.

[4]"'God of Vengeance' Cast Is Indicted," New York Times, 7 March 1923.

arrests of Rudolph Schildkraut and the cast of The God of Vengeance did not make the front page of any of the New York dailies, but was noted, rather briefly--in those papers that reported it--in articles to be found somewhere inside the papers, and without the photographs that usually accompanied events involving theatrical personalities. In the brief synopsis of the play's plot that was included in some of the news reports of the Grand Jury's indictments, no mention whatsoever was made of the plot's pivotal lesbian seduction.

In one of the few editorials to comment immediately upon the indictment, the Herald congratulated the Grand Jury for keeping a watchful eye on the city's theatrical fare. The editorial went on to note:

> Often the author or producer goes beyond the pale of things permissible under the mistaken notion that Art with a big A demands the realistic depiction of life no matter how low the characters of the particular phase of life he depicts have fallen. . . .
>
> This country particularly demands that its literature, its stage and its art be kept clean as American opinion has maintained them. It will not do to defend impure plays or books with the statement that they have been tolerated in this or that country of Europe. The Continental standards are not ours.[1]

The God of Vengeance was no longer being performed when, more than two months after the producer, theatre-owner and cast were arrested, the case finally went to a jury. Although the trial itself was largely ignored by the press, the guilty verdict made front-page news in most of the important New York

---

[1]"Plays That Cross The Line," Editorial, New York Herald, 8 March 1923.

dailies. The Assistant District Attorney said "that in his thirty years as a playgoer, he never had seen a more salacious performance than 'God of Vengeance.'"[1] The producer, Attorney Harry Weinberger had argued his own defense, citing questionable material in the Bible and Shakespeare as being more shocking than anything in Asch's drama, but the jury felt otherwise. Rudolph Schildkraut was at home ill the day of the verdict, and the World ran a page-one photo of him under the caption "He May Go To Jail."[2]

Schildkraut and Weinberger were both fined $200 and the cast given suspended sentences. Judge McIntyre, pleased with the verdict, announced that it would have a "wholesome effect on the theatrical profession" and that "the time had come when the drama must be purified."[3] The last instance of a similar conviction was thirty years before when a judge, not a jury, decided that a play called Orange Blossoms was immoral. While Al Woods had been brought to court to defend himself before a judge of having produced a salacious show, The Demi-Virgin, two years before, the conviction of those involved in the production of The God of Vengeance marked the first time that an American jury found performers guilty of presenting

---

[1]"'God of Vengeance' Players Convicted," New York Times, 24 May 1923.

[2]"'God of Vengeance' Immoral; 11 Actors in Play Convicted," New York World, 24 May 1923.

[3]New York Times, 24 May 1923.

immoral public entertainment. It was hardly a coincidence that Asch's drama also marked the debut of a lesbian character in an English-language dramatic presentation.

The World quoted a number of theatrical personalities who were just as pleased as Judge McIntyre over the conviction. Theatre-owner Lee Shubert said, "No salacious play should be produced on the American stage. Anything that tends to lower the standard of public morals should never be produced."[1] Arthur Hopkins, who had directed John Barrymore in Hamlet that same season, contended that, "The best way to avoid obnoxious censorship is to enforce existing laws. If The God of Vengeance violated the recognized law, the decision reached today will prove a good thing for the American stage."[2]

Like Hopkins, an editorial writer for the New York Times also pointed out how much better it was to have a jury decide that a play was immoral than "an official comparable to the English censor, . . . It is a wholesome thing for all to know," the Times editorial continued, "that there is a Penal Code to which painters and writers and playwrights and actors and theatrical managers must pay due regard."[3]

With the single exception of Heywood Broun, the New York drama critics were curiously silent about the jury's

---

[1]"'God of Vengeance' Immoral; 11 Actors In Play Convicted," New York World, 24 May 1923.

[2]Ibid.

[3]"Better Than Censorship," Editorial, New York Times, 25 May 1923.

decision that The God of Vengeance had been an immoral production. Broun, who admittedly did not enjoy nor appreciate Asch's work and was even made "a little sick"[1] watching the lesbian love scene, could not understand why it should have been made a legal issue. Broun wrote:

> We want to know specifically and precisely just what harm has been done to the community by the production of The God of Vengeance. The nature of the play was fully discussed after the first night. People who went thereafter wanted to be shocked. Very probably they were. What of it?[2]

Understanding little or nothing of Anglo-Saxon mores, Constantin Stanislavsky--who had brought the Moscow Art Theatre to New York for its first appearance in 1923--could not comprehend why The God of Vengeance should have been adjudged immoral by an American jury. Noting that it "was presented throughout Russia during the days of the Czar, and there was no protest against it," Stanislavsky added that "Russia in those days had a very rigid censorship."[3]

The guilty conviction of those involved with the production of The God of Vengeance was eventually overturned by the Court of Appeals which held that in such a trial for breaking the Penal Code "the manuscript of a play must be allowed

---

[1]Heywood Broun, "The Play," New York World, 20 December 1922.

[2]Heywood Broun, "It Seems To Me," New York World, 25 May 1923.

[3]Program for the Broadway production in 1923 at the Apollo Theatre of The God of Vengeance, p. 15.

in evidence and anyone who has seen it [the show] at any time must be permitted to testify."[1] This opinion has stood as a protection to all plays since 1923. Alice Kauser, the original producer of the English translation of Asch's drama, had written to Harry Weinberger when he was indicted after bringing the show to Broadway:

> My understanding is that the published play is the play upon which you, as manager, and the actors have been indicted. That in itself is a great wrong. The play as presented has been cut, although it was given in its entirety upon the Yiddish stage for the last ten years, so I am informed.[2]

We can be sure, from two reviews, that at least one drastic cut was made in the Provincetown Theatre production. Both the Times and the Sun mentioned that during the last moments of the play, the bawdy-house operator drives his wife and wayward daughter from his establishment.[3] Certainly this conclusion is less shocking than the original in which the enraged father drags his daughter down into the bordello-basement to offer her as a prostitute to his patrons. We can be just as sure, however, from the incensed reaction of the reviewer for Theatre Magazine, Arthur Hornblow, that the lesbian relationship

---

[1]"Provincetown And The Law," Typewritten article, with notations by Harry Weinberger on file, "Censorship: U. S. Stage, 1920s, MWEZ n.c. 6901," Lincoln Center.

[2]Program for the Broadway production in 1923 at the Apollo Theatre of The God of Vengeance, p. 15.

[3]John Corbin, "The Play," New York Times, 20 December 1922, and "Rudolph Schildkrut Stars in God of Vengeance," New York Sun, 20 December 1922.

and seduction scene was, in large part, still in the show when it played on Broadway.[1]

The fate of a father who was being punished by a vengeful deity for continuing to operate a brothel by having his daughter fall into an unspeakable sin, and her fate, too, of being forced into a life of prostitution after a lesbian liaison, or, as in the New York production, of being thrown out of her home seemed,--if not to the Grand Jury, at least to some critics--to argue the moral merits of Asch's drama. "It's moral is the familiar maxim, 'as ye sow, so shall ye reap,'"[2] wrote the man from the Sun. Another reviewer defended it as "so important an example of the way in which the stage can most properly be used as a pulpit--for no sermon is more vivid."[3] A columnist enthused, "No better sermon can be preached from Synagogue or Church than can be heard at the Apollo Theatre,"[4] and Mary Garden, the famous opera star and a most respectable maiden lady, made the statement that "'The God of Vengeance' was the most moral play in New York."[5]

In his defense of the play he had brought to Broadway,

---

[1]Arthur Hornblow, "Mr. Hornblow Goes To The Play," Theatre Magazine, April 1923, p. 68.

[2]New York Sun, 20 December 1922.

[3]Program for the Broadway production in 1923 at the Apollo Theatre of The God of Vengeance, Lincoln Center, p. 14.

[4]Ibid., p. 16.

[5]Ibid., p. 13.

Attorney Harry Weinberger also argued that The God of Vengeance was highly moral because the father is so severely punished for operating a bordello.[1] Perhaps Weinberger took his clue from the play's original producer, Alice Kauser, who had written:

> Nothing more moral than the presentation of sin being punished with uncompromising catastrophe or a great tragedy has been presented. . . . 'The God of Vengeance' preaches this: no individual can pursue a sinful occupation without bringing not only upon himself but upon those with whom he comes in contact, the consequences born of any profession that weakens and corrodes the social fabric.[2]

While there were many references to morality and immorality, and even some to prostitution, by the press in its coverage of both the Grand Jury indictments and the trial of those involved with The God of Vengeance, there was not a single mention made in print of the drama's lesbian characters. Unless one had read some of the notices for the play, or had seen it or heard about it from someone who had, there would have been no way of knowing from the daily newspapers that Asch's work had anything at all to do with lesbian love. Although no other single aspect of the controversial drama so unsettled those critics who took exception to the production, and the charge of presenting lesbian characters was leveled against the producer and cast at their trial, the subject was simply unmentionable in 1923 as far as newspaper reporters were

---

[1]"'God of Vengeance' An Obscene Play; 13 Found Guilty," New York Morning Telegraph, 24 May 1923.

[2]Program for the Broadway production in 1923 at the Apollo Theatre of The God of Vengeance, Lincoln Center, p. 6.

concerned, especially in articles meant not for more sophisticated readers of the drama page but for the general public more familiar with the first couple of pages of the paper. It is no wonder, then, that The God of Vengeance had not been associated with the emergence of lesbian and gay men as characters in plays produced on the American stage in whatever references to Asch's drama that can be found in publications available today.

Like most popular plays produced in the prolific 1922-23 New York season when 190 shows were mounted,[1] The God of Vengeance passed on into theatre history, and despite its notoriety, was quickly forgotten, so quickly that just four years later few reviewers reporting on the far more sensational opening of The Captive knew--or at least remembered to mention--that Sholom Asch had been the first to present lesbian characters on the English-speaking stage.

Sholom Asch's The God of Vengeance--which can be read in the anthology, The Great Jewish Plays--is still considered by some to be the greatest drama of modern times of the Yiddish Theatre.[2] In its time, the play had diametrically opposite effects on the Yiddish and the Broadway theatre. Despite the negative reaction by the more conservative element in Jewish audiences, Asch's seamy drama started a vogue in Yiddish theatre. Managers and stars began searching for other scripts, if not

---

[1]Burns Mantle, ed. The Best Plays of 1922-23 (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1923), p. vii.

[2]Encyclopedia Britanica (14th ed.) XXII, 892.

about lesbians, certainly about prostitutes. Broadway producers, on the other hand, were understandably intimidated by the police arrests and the court conviction of the cast of The God of Vengeance, so they avoided plays about women outside of the pale of middle-class morality.

The drama was banned by the author himself, understandably, during the Nazi Holocaust of the 1940s, but had been seen in the two preceding decades in a number of productions in Yiddish from coast to coast in the United States without provoking any police raids. When, in 1974, the English-language version was revived for the first time since it served Rudolph Schildkraut as a vehicle, The God of Vengeance caused no discernable stir in an Off-Off Broadway production by the Jewish Repertory Company. The Society for the Suppression of Vice had, by then, long been defunct. Night-stick censorship of the Broadway stage in the 1920s, like Prohibition of the same period, was no longer a viable tool of public suppression available to puritanical religious and political factions.

CHAPTER III

EDOUARD BOURDET'S

THE CAPTIVE

(1926)

In 1926, when America's "unrecognized minority" was keeping its very low public profile, a reporter from Variety confided to that publication's less-knowledgeable readers:

> Ladies of this character are commonly referred to as Lesbians. Greenwich Village is full of them, but it is not a matter for household discussion or even mention. There are millions of women, sedate in nature, who never heard of a Lesbian, much less believing that such people exist. And many men, too.[1]

Four years earlier it was not only possible, but very likely, that a large portion of the audience and critics failed to recognize the lesbian attachment in The God of Vengeance. It would also have been possible to have eliminated the sexual attachment between the prostitute and the daughter as Asch had originally conceived it without completely destroying the logical progression of the plot. A few lines of dialogue could have been added to Asch's script to indicate that the daughter had been turned over to a male patron after the

---

[1]"The Captive," Variety, 8 October 1926.

prostitute lured her from home. Still the story would have made sense even though such a turn of events would have certainly robbed the tragedy of its ironic twist of fate.

Four years after Broadway saw the first unmistakable lesbian characters in a stage play, there were most certainly portions of the audience, but none of the critics, still unable to recognize the lesbian attachment dramatized in The Captive. Since that relationship was the very core of the dramatic conflict in the 1926 production, no scene cuts and no additional dialogue would have been possible from the original script without distorting or garbling the drama's theme and its plot. Consequently, there could be no mistaking the pivotal importance of the lesbian infatuation to the play, although many critics could not bring themselves to identify it in print and employed euphemisms and evasions in writing their reviews.

Because word from abroad of the Parisian première of what American theatregoers would come to know as The Captive became common gossip among the drama critic's circle, most of the reviewers were well aware of the nature of the play months before it opened on Broadway. Some reporters also cognizant of the subject matter began preparing New Yorkers for the arrival of the English-language production with occasional news items in which word went out to the public prior to its opening that the Parisian import would be a lesbian love drama.

By the time The Captive was closed after a sensational police raid on three Broadway shows on a single night in 1927, there was really no getting around identifying the nature of the drama. Reports of the night-stick raid on Broadway were carried in newspapers not only in the United States but throughout Europe. "The Captive . . . revealed to thousands of innocents," historian Frederick Lewis Allen noted, "the fact that the world contained such a phenomenon as homosexuality."[1]

A month before the start of the 1926-27 theatrical season New Yorkers began to read news items about Gilbert Miller's plans to bring Edouard Bourdet's Parisian sensation La Prisonnière to Broadway. "Rumors are about," the Morning Telegraph confided, "that women's organizations and ministerial associations may try to halt the production or emasculate it. Basing their actions on reports of persons with the reforming complex who have seen the play in Paris."[2] On his way back from France, after having seen the original Parisian production, producer-director Gilbert Miller was "flatly told by Mrs. Henry R. Loomis," the World reported, "that she intended to use all her influence as former president of the Colonial Dames of America to prevent such an affront to American womanhood as would be involved in the unmolested production of this unsavory

---

[1]Frederick Lewis Allen, Only Yesterday (New York: Harper and Row, 1931), p. 113.

[2]"'La Prisonniere' To Be Put On By Frohman Here September 29," New York Morning Telegraph, 28 August 1926.

drama."[1] Producer David Belasco declared that it would be impossible to present Bourdet's drama on Broadway.[2] "I advised against the production of 'The Captive' after seeing it in Paris." wrote Hearst drama critic Alan Dale, "for the reason that it might evoke debates which seem unnecessary."[3]

"During the summer and early autumn of 1926," Atkinson of the Times disclosed:

> Rumors that an American producer was bringing to America an adaptation of Bourdet's "La Prisonniere" was received with a great deal of uncertainty by the news from Paris, where this trenchant drama began its career, had stressed the audacity of the theme, with a general tintinabulation about censorship and the decadence of the stage. And those who were already nauseated by the fetid smells of several plays then current were quite distressed at the prospect of sensationalism in the form of abnormality. Surely, they complained, themes of this character are not fit subjects for open portrayal on the stage. Indeed, the audience for the opening performance at the Empire Theatre was prepared for a violent shock.[4]

The reviewer for the New York Evening Post also reported perturbation in certain quarters about the possibility of a play in which lesbians would be portrayed on the Broadway stage.

> The town's busybodies had it that M. Bourdet had written stuff unfit for the American ears and suggested calling the police. No less a sage than Mr. Al Woods [the well-known, very successful theatrical producer] predicted

---

[1]"Gilbert Miller Preparing To Defy Mrs. Loomis By Producing 'The Prisoner,'" New York World, 20 August 1926.

[2]"'Captive' Will Be Offered Broadway," New York American, 28 August 1926.

[3]Alan Dale, "One Tragic Phase of Human Nature Frankly Staged," New York American, 30 September 1926.

[4]J. Brooks Atkinson, Introduction to The Captive by Edouard Bourdet, trans. Arthur Hornblow, Jr. (New York: Brentano's 1926), p. vii.

> that if Mr. Miller lifted the Empire curtains upon "La Prisonnaire" [sic] he would be taken forthwith to play the title part in Ludlow Street [where a city jail was located].[1]

"Scenes such as were found in 'The God of Vengeance' are missing, it is said, from 'La Prisonniere,"[2] the Sun informed readers attempting to placate those distressed theatre-goers who had been traumatized at the sight of the lesbian seduction scene in the Asch drama. "Whatever is difficult for the squeamish to digest," the paper explained, "is confined to the dialogue."[3] The critic for the Daily Mirror, Robert Coleman, passed on this bit of misinformation to those who anticipated the arrival of La Prisonnière with consternation:

> In adapting this piece for the stage Arthur Hornblow was compelled to delete one of the central characters and several risque situations, as we are told by friends who saw it abroad, and we are inclined to believe that it was greatly devitalized in the process. But, after all, American modesty must be considered. We must be spared our blushes.[4]

Another misinformed critic, Percy Hammond, confided to his readers that "it was the intention of the American adaptor to mitigate the victim's plight by suggesting that her bondage was a thing threatened, not already accomplished--a change, it

---

[1]John Anderson, "The Play," New York Evening Post, 30 September 1926.

[2]Stephen Rathbun, "In And About The Theatre," New York Sun, 28 August 1926.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Robert Coleman, "'The Captive' Dazes," New York Mirror, 30 September 1926.

is said, from the Paris version."[1] "No," protested Edouard Bourdet, "there was no change whatsoever in the play from the original version. It is given exactly as it is being shown in Paris--the only difference being that the words are spoken in your tongue."[2]

Translator Arthur Hornblow, Jr., director-producer Gilbert Miller and the play's star, Helen Menken, all felt it necessary to declare emphatically that the American offering was an exact duplication of the French.[3] Hornblow took liberties only in translating the title and in making Jacques' mistress an unmarried lady in the English version. "But I had to make her married for Paris or no one would have considered her respectable," Bourdet explained. "Had she been single, they would have thought her just a cocotte."[4]

It was feared that by calling it "The Prisoner" theatregoers would mistake La Prisonnière for another among the rash of war plays after the end of World War I. The translator wanted to call Bourdet's drama "The Shadow," but was advised against it since Ethel Barrymore had starred in a play by that

---

[1]Percy Hammond, "Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 30 September 1926.

[2]Charles Parmer, "Bourdet Releases Himself From His 'Captive Myth,'" New York Morning Telegraph, 28 November 1926.

[3]Percy N. Stone, "Helen Menken Defends English Translation of 'The Captive,'" New York Herald Tribune, 10 October 1926.

[4]Percy N. Stone, "Bourdet Didn't Try to Shock When He Wrote 'The Captive,'" New York Herald Tribune, 12 December 1926.

name. At first referred to in print as "Captive," the production finally went into rehearsals as The Captive.

The most notorious, if not indeed the first drama concerned with a lesbian relationship to be produced in any English-language theatre was written for the theatre in Paris, a city far more sophisticated and sexually liberal after World War I then either London or New York.[1] "Our native dramatists have, up to this point, evaded such an issue," a New York critic observed. "It was for M. Bourdet to blaze the trail."[2]

Because that particular Parisian was not only the most discreet in all his references to the delicate subject matter, and also adept in his dramaturgy, Bourdet's lesbian love drama was hailed almost unanimously as a serious, subtle theatrical study of a subject most of the critics found, in the words of J. Brooks Atkinson of the New York Times, a "loathsome possibility," that was "horrible in its implications, terrible to contemplate."[3]

According to Atkinson--who wrote the introduction to the play when it was published the same year The Captive was produced on Broadway--the genesis for La Prisonnière was a

---

[1]"Parisian Plays Are Naughtier Than New York's," New York Herald Tribune, 20 February 1927.

[2]Ray W. Harper, "Footlight Reflections," Brooklyn Citizen, 3 October 1926.

[3]J. Brooks Atkinson, "The Play," New York Times, 30 September 1926.

story told to the playwright by a fellow officer he met while fighting in the trenches during World War I. The soldier was deliberately seeking death in battle because his wife had become sexually involved with another woman, a situation that made his home life wretched.[1] According to the playwright on a visit to New York while The Captive was playing on Broadway, Atkinson's report was fallacious. One day in Paris, Bourdet told an interviewer, after rereading some of Sappho's fragments, he met a man who seemed very unhappy.

> He was a man distinctly troubled about something; but he never mentioned it to me, whatever it was. I merely conceived the idea that perhaps he was tortured by his wife's failings. For all I know, his sorrow may have been the results of an erring son--but the thought gave me the idea for La Prisonniere. So, you see it on your Broadway today.[2]

Psychological analyses of sexually shocking or titilating situations were, as well as social satires, Bourdet's forte. The French playwright was able to combine both, seven years after the production of La Prisonnière, when he turned his attention to gay men. In the comedy, The Snobs, (Les Fleur Des Pols), Bourdet delineated with mordant wit and insight the lifestyle of Paris' gay upper-classes.

Of La Prisonnière, the playwright said:

> I do not believe such a situation as I present it is an exceptional one--else why the vogue for the play? It

---

[1]J. Brooks Atkinson, Introduction to The Captive by Edouard Bourdet, trans. Arthur Hornblow, Jr. (New York: Brentano's, 1926).

[2]Charles Palmer, "Bourdet Releases Himself From His 'Captive Myth,'" New York Morning Telegraph, 28 November 1926.

> seems that it is merely one which has not been handled as I have done. . . . Of course since the success of it, imitations, ground out by hack writers of the theatre, have sprung up on all sides. Two have failed miserably in Paris. And one died last night in Chicago. . . .
>
> My aim in writing this play was to present an original problem of our times--original from the standpoint of theatre. Then, of course, came the problem of handling it. You've seen it; you know that I present it from the man's viewpoint, being a man. I do not know how it would be handled from the woman's angle. . . .
>
> But I am aware of this; a playwright must not be the judge of his character. He should not be for or against the character but he may show the disastrous consequences of a character's actions. Art has no result: Oscar Wilde spoke the truth when he said that. . . .
>
> Art may be put in action in a bit of thought and conversation over a tea table; nothing more. I have not tried to reform the world. I merely show the disastrous results of an existing situation. It was not for me to absolve or blame anyone. And yet, I can see no result except good from the presentation of my play, for while it reveals a given course of action, it casts no glamour over unnatural acts.[1]

Because Edouard Bourdet, a one-time administrator of the Comédie Française, tried not to overstep the boundaries of French dramatic propriety of the period, his work was not considered salacious even when his subject matter was shocking, even scandalous, to most in his audiences. The playwright was, however, faulted if not censored in France for failing to include a more emphatic moral point of view in such plays as La Prisonnière.

At least one American critic concurred with his French detractors. The reviewer for the Bronx Home News protested that Bourdet's drama "points no moral and, indeed, it has

---

[1]Ibid.

none to offer. The play serves no apparent purpose and it would have been better if it had not been written."[1] However, no such general reaction, interestingly enough, came from most American critics who reviewed the play. On the contrary, Atkinson of the Times, for example, commended rather than faulted Bourdet because the "play approaches its subject matter objectively."[2] That was something Atkinson could not bring himself to do. In his reactions to The Captive, the New Englander referred to the older lesbian as "the festered one,"[3] involved in a "twisted relationship"[4] with a younger woman caught up in a "warped infatuation."[5] The Parisian playwright, on the other hand, by his own admission, did not know what to think about the nature of women who love other women when he sat down to write the lesbian love drama. Accepting the concept of such a sexual preference as being "an unnatural act"--just as Sholom Asch regarded it as "sinful"--Bourdet, like the Yiddish dramatist, still refrained from passing judgment on his lesbian creations.

"I have never made a study of the sort of women discussed," the thirty-eight year old French playwright confided

---

[1]"New Plays," Bronx Home News, 1 October 1926.

[2]J. Brooks Atkinson, Introduction to The Captive by Edouard Bourdet, trans. Arthur Hornblow, Jr. (New York: Brentano's, 1926), p. viii.

[3]Ibid., p. ix.

[4]J. Brooks Atkinson, "The Play," New York Times, 30 September 1926.

[5]Ibid.

to an American interviewer when he came to New York to see Hornblow's translation of La Prisonnière.

> They are something entirely out of a man's knowledge and always will be. I have not attempted to do a portrait.
>
> Instead, I imagined I was writing the story of a man's great sorrow. It was a calvary I was showing, with a man and not a woman on the cross.[1]

The Captive concerns an evasive and perturbed young woman, Irene De Montcel, who in her desperation to remain in Paris, lies to her father, a member of the Foreign Service, when he insists that she join the family on his new assignment in Rome. Pretending to be interested in a suitor favored by her father--who in truth she has rejected romantically--Irene coaxes that young bachelor to support her in this deception.

If the diplomat were led to believe the couple were involved in a courtship leading to marriage, Irene--for reasons she refuses to confide to Jacques, the rejected suitor--could stay on in Paris. The young lady, touching a corsage of violets that she had been wearing at her first appearance, lifts the telephone to make a call after Jacques goes into another room to be questioned by the diplomat about his intentions. As the first act curtain comes down, Irene cannot be sure Jacques, her childhood friend and a distant cousin, will lie to her father on her behalf, and the audience has no way of knowing the identity of the person to whom Irene can hardly wait to speak to on the phone.

---

[1]Percy N. Stone, "Bourdet Didn't Try To Shock When He Wrote 'The Captive,'" New York Herald Tribune, 12 December 1926.

The second act, in Jacques' apartment, takes place a month later. His mistress has come to announce that she is ending their six month relationship. Jacques is more interested in his next visitor, an old school chum, Monsieur d'Aiguines, a married man who seems to be involved with Irene. Jacques, it turns out, did support her in her lie and has since discovered that Irene spends most of her time in Paris visiting the d'Aiguines' home. The gentleman denies being Irene's lover, and resents even being mistaken for her good friend. After much difficulty, d'Aiguines brings himself to admit that Irene has been phoning and visiting his residence because of an intimate emotional involvement with his wife. After making this confession to Jacques, he warns his friend to get away from Irene.

> D'AIGUINES: . . . it is not only a man who can be dangerous to a woman, . . . in some cases it can be another woman.[1]

The distraught husband tells Jacques that his hair has turned gray at thirty-five because he has married a lesbian. Euphemistically he refers to lesbians as "shadows,"[2] mysterious and menacing ones since they threaten the sanctity of the male dominated household.

> D'AIGUINES: . . . They must be shunned, let alone . . . We don't know anything about it. We can't begin to know what it is. It's mysterious--terrible! Under

---

[1]Edouard Bourdet, The Captive, trans. by Arthur Hornblow, Jr. (New York: Brentano's 1926), p. 145.

[2]Ibid., p. 148.

> cover of friendship a woman can enter any household, whenever and however she pleases--at any hour of the day--she can poison and pillage everything before a man whose home she destroys is even aware what's happening to him. When finally he realizes things it's too late--he is alone! Alone in the face of a secret alliance of two human beings who understand one another because they're alive, because they're of the same sex. Because they're of a different planet than he, the stranger, the enemy![1]

Despite this damning tirade, d'Aiguines adds, about his Austrian-born wife:

> D'AIGUINES. She has all the feminine allurements, every one. As soon as one is near her, one feels--how shall I say it--a sort of deep charm. Not only I feel it. Everyone feels it. I really believe that she is the most harmonious being that has ever breathed . . . I worship her.[2]

D'Aiguines has no intention of leaving his wife of eight years because he claims he could not live without her. Aware that Irene has been miserably unhappy of late, Jacques asks his old school-chum why she should be suffering so.

> D'AIGUINES. I don't know. (Rises.) You don't suppose I'm confided in, do you? She is suffering as the weak always do, struggling with the stronger nature until they give in.[3]

Before departing, d'Aiguines again warns Jacques to have nothing more to do with Irene despite his love for her.

> D'AIGUINES. . . . remember-she can never belong to you no matter how you try. They're not for us.[4]

---

[1]Ibid., p. 149.

[2]Ibid., p. 150.

[3]Ibid., p. 151.

[4]Ibid., p. 157.

Irene is Jacques' fourth visitor since her younger sister had come earlier to report on Irene's unhappiness. Even before Irene learns that Jacques knows about Madame d'Aiguines from her husband, she pleads:

> IRENE. Protect me! Shield me! . . . I know I must seem crazy. Well, I am crazy! You have to treat me like a crazy person--a sick person--[1]

The young woman, very distressed, tells Jacques that she is in imminent danger because Madame d'Aiguines has invited her to go on a cruise.

> IRENE. . . . and I mustn't go. I don't want to go--if I do, it's all over. I'd be lost.[2]

When confronted by Jacques about her secret involvement, she begins to confide in him for the first time.

> IRENE. You see, there are times in which I can see clearly, such as now, when I am sane and free to use my own mind. . . . But there are other times, when I can't, when I don't know what I'm doing. It's like--a prison to which I must return captive, despite myself. I'm--I'm--
>
> JACQUES. Fascinated?
>
> IRENE. Yes![3]

Irene offers to give herself physically to Jacques, believing that he can cure her of her infatuation for another woman. Jacques, ignoring d'Aiguines' warnings, attempts to kiss her on the mouth. As she looks up to see his face filled with longing, Irene makes an abrupt move of aversion. Jacques,

---

[1]Ibid., p. 169.

[2]Ibid., p. 170.

[3]Ibid., p. 178.

crestfallen, lets her go.

> IRENE. No, no--forgive me! (This time it is she who offers her lips to him. Then, her nerves giving way, she lets her head fall on his shoulder, struggling with herself a moment and breaks into tears.) . . . No, no!--pay no attention!--It doesn't mean anything . . . It's all over! You will keep me with you always?
>
> JACQUES. I'll try.[1]

The last act of The Captive again takes place in Jacques' drawing room, eleven months after his marriage to Irene, most of which has been spent travelling. While his bride has been doing everything in her power to satisfy him as a dutiful wife and homemaker, Jacques is clearly dissatisfied with mechanical love-making with a woman who submits to him but is unable to requite his passion. This puzzles and upsets Irene who is not unhappy in their relationship. To test her, Jacques invites his ex-mistress to their home to retrieve love letters she wants back. As he expected, his wife is utterly without jealousy and tells Jacques that he is only behaving fairly to return the lady's compromising correspondences. Irene leaves him alone in the house to receive his guest while she goes out to visit an interior decorator's shop.

Jacques' ex-mistress does not want to resume their affair, but he obviously does. During her visit, she struggles to avoid being hurt again by the man she loves, almost as

---

[1]Ibid., pp. 178-79.

fiercely as Irene had struggled in the second act to avoid her involvement. With one kiss, the lady's passion is rekindled, her resistance collapses, and the couple plan to see one another again in the near future.

After his mistress' departure, Jacques' wife returns home very disconcerted, begging him to take her away again from Paris. For the first time since their engagement, Irene has seen Madame d'Aiguines--whose husband has left her--quite by accident in the decorator's shop. Irene confesses that during the past year Madame has attempted to correspond with her but Irene returned the letters unopened. Once the persistent lady begged Irene to visit her when she was seriously ill, but even then Irene refused to resume their friendship. Now Madame d'Aiguines has been ordered by her doctor to go to Switzerland to assure her complete recovery, but she will not leave Paris, even at the risk of losing her life, until she can effect a reconciliation with Irene.

Jacques has had enough of helping Irene. Coolly and civilly, he tells her so, leaving his wife alone in the study with a box of violets that have just arrived from the florist. Irene crushes the violets to her bosom before fleeing the room with her hat and coat. Jacques returns in time to hear the front door slam. The curtain falls as he tells a servant that, like his wife, he too will be going out.

For the second time in the history of the theatre, the sound of a young wife slamming a door in a drama as she

left her home and husband had an unnerving, if not enraging effect, on many critics and audiences. While the climax of Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House provoked hostile reactions on both sides of the Atlantic, Bourdet's lesbian love drama incensed many New Yorkers who had seen the show, or had not, and did not want anyone else to see it. On the European continent its reception was far more cordial and appreciative.

La Prisonnière, starring Madame Sylvie, was first produced at the Théâtre Femina in March of 1926. It was instantly hailed by the French critics as one of the great masterpieces of dramatic writing. "It has been likened to a Greek tragedy," the New York Telegraph informed readers, "and even compared by critics to that sacred cow of French classics, Racine's 'Phedre.'"[1] But at its French première, according to an American critic, "even Paris sat up and gasped."[2]

Another American critic noted that "at the Grand Guignol they had shuddered blissfully through the horrors of 'Les Perverties' long before Bourdet ever dreamed of conferring dignity, sanity, and sympathy upon the situation."[3] While appreciated by many of his countrymen, some found Bourdet's

---

[1]"'La Prisonniere' To Be Put On By Frohman Here September 29," New York Morning Telegraph, 28 August 1926.

[2]Frank Vreeland, "The Marble Bride," New York Evening Telegram, 30 September 1926.

[3]Gilbert W. Gabriel, "'The Captive' From Paris," New York Sun, 30 September 1926.

La Prisonnière highly amusing for, according to the same critic, it was "the target of unnumbered, indescribably free burlesques."[1]

La Prisonnière's Parisian acclaim was soon duplicated in Berlin and Vienna by Max Reinhardt who had premièred Asch's The God of Vengeance. "Even in a Reinhardt production," another American critic contended, "the play was too strong for the stomach of Berlin."[2] However, it broke attendance records in the German capital with its one hundredth performance and was still going strong a month before the Broadway production was forced to close.[3] No play in years had so many simultaneous presentations as La Prisonnière, which could be seen in Paris, Brussels, Berlin, Vienna, Holland and Switzerland during the same theatrical season. It had been rejected by the Lord Chamberlain in London, and it was prohibited in Budapest. Except for that latter, single exception, Bourdet's drama ran into no other censorship problems on the Continent.

Only the French florists ran into trouble as a result of the success of The Captive since it caused a devastating drop in the violet market.[4] The same thing happened in

---

[1]Gilbert W. Gabriel, "'The Captive' From Paris," New York Sun, 30 September 1926.

[2]E. W. Osborn, "The New Plays," New York Evening World, 30 September 1926.

[3]"'Captive' Breaks Berlin Records," New York Morning Telegraph, 16 January 1927.

[4]Gilbert W. Gabriel, "'The Captive' From Paris," New York Sun, 30 September 1926.

sections of America familiar with the lesbian love drama's notoriety.[1] "They Say It With Violets,"[2] was the title of the Brooklyn Citizen's review of the show and Alexander Woollcott labeled his critique, "The Message of Violets."[3] Bourdet, familiar with Sappho's lesbian love poetry which was, in part, his inspiration for the play, picked the flower because Sappho mentions that she and the woman she loved had worn "violet tiaras"[4] when they were happy together. "A number of women refused to buy violets or even wear the color,"[5] Abe Laufe recalled in The Wicked Stage. For many decades after the reason for such widespread aversion to the flower had been forgotten, one had to be very careful both in Europe and in America--at least in certain more sophisticated and theatrical circles--not to give unintended offense by sending a corsage identified in Bourdet's drama as being a token of lesbian love.

The Captive was produced and directed by Gilbert Miller for the Charles Frohman Company. The Famous-Players Lasky, a motion picture company in Hollywood, California, had

---

[1]Eleanor Barnes, "'The Captive' Good Play For Medical Student," unidentified Los Angeles newspaper, 1928, in The Captive file, Lincoln Center.

[2]"The Premiere," Brooklyn Citizen, 30 September 1926.

[3]Alexander Woollcott, "The Stage," New York World, 30 September 1926.

[4]Sappho, Sappho, trans. by Mary Barnar (Berkley, California: University of California Press, 1958), p. 42.

[5]Abe Laufe, The Wicked Stage: A History of Theatre Censorship and Harrassment in the United States (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1978), p. 61.

owned and operated the Broadway production company since Frohman's death. According to reports from the West Coast because of The Captive there was a serious split between Adolph Zukor, President of the film company, and its first vice-president, Jesse Lasky:

> . . . it is 'The Captive' that is said to have put Zukor and Lasky at daggers' points . . . Lasky . . . commanded Gilbert Miller, . . . to produce the play last August over the protest of Zukor, who is said to have regarded it as "obscene and unworthy of presentation on the American stage." As a result bad feeling is said to have resulted between the two film executives, which culminated in an open split on Wednesday when the play was raided.[1]

The Captive also destroyed the twenty-five year business relationship between Abraham L. Erlanger, who controlled the largest chain of playhouses in New York and throughout the nation, and the Charles Frohman production company. Erlanger refused to lease Miller a theatre because of his objections to seeing a lesbian love drama put on the Broadway stage. The director-producer turned to the Shubert brothers, who operated a rival theatrical chain to rent their Empire Theatre, although it had a thousand seats and was too big for an intimate drama. Nevertheless, the second balcony had to be opened, for the first time since Maude Amams played Peter Pan at the Empire, because of the sensational box-office receipts for Bourdet's drama.

---

[1]"Rumor Zukor-Lasky Split," New York Morning Telegraph, Weekly Motion Picture Section, 13 February 1926.

Miller's decision to rent a theatre best suited for light comedies and musicals annoyed at least two important critics, and, it would seem safe to guess, at least those in the audience who had to settle for seats in the second balcony. "Mr. Gilbert Miller perhaps made a mistake in choosing a very large theatre for so intimate a play," the man from the Wall Street Journal wrote. "He might have minimized this error if in staging the play he had rehearsed his artists out of their confidential delivery of their lines which made most of them inaudible to spectators not close to the stage."[1]

Alan Dale from the American had a seat very close to the stage, yet he was as angry as if he had seen it from the last row in the second balcony. Blaming the actors for failing to project their lines in such a large house, Dale wondered, "Could it have been that the producer of 'The Captive' was so afraid of the lines that he begged the actors to mumble them? . . . The coughing in the audience testified to their inability to hear what was going on."[2]

Perhaps their inability to hear all of the dialogue put both reviewers who complained about the size of the Empire in very captious moods. Both were disappointed in the performances which the other critics for the dailies raved about enthusiastically. Dale, who attacked every aspect of the

---

[1]Metcalfe, "The Theatre," Wall Street Journal, 2 October 1926.

[2]Alan Dale, "One Tragic Phase of Human Nature Frankly Staged," New York American, 30 September 1926.

production in the Hearst paper for which he wrote, declared that The Captive had been "so massacred, so atrociously acted last night, . . . Mlle. Sylvie, who played the part in Paris, divested it of any cheap theatrical garishness, but Miss Menken, . . . evidently decided that this role called for nothing more than the most tawdrily expressed theatrical emoting."[1]

The reviewer for the Wall Street Journal, who disliked the play as much as Dale admired it, concurred with him about the star's performance. "Miss Menken played the young woman with a ghastly white make-up and crouching movements which may have gained sympathy for the character as a neurotic defective," according to the Wall Street Journal, "but stirred no other emotion."[2] The reviewer for the New Yorker reported that, "New York is assembling to see 'The Captive' with an idea that it is to witness a super special close-up of the Beast of Apocalypse--and I must admit that Helen Menken suggests something of the sort in her dead white make-up, writhing and twisting about the stage; either that or a recent and prolonged diet of green apples."[3]

Such negative criticism was by no means characteristic of the reception given by the press and the public to the highly publicized Broadway opening. "The play rose into the

---

[1]Alan Dale, "One Tragic Phase of Human Nature Frankly Staged," New York American, 30 September 1926.

[2]Metcalfe, "The Theatre," Wall Street Journal, 2 October 1926.

[3]"The Theatre," New Yorker, 9 October 1926, p. 33.

Empire Theatre last night upon a transatlantic tidal wave,"[1] one critic wrote in describing opening night at the Broadway playhouse on 40th Street just across the street from the old Metropolitan Opera House. It was, unquestionably, the most exciting entry of the 1926-27 theatrical season during which no less than 260 shows were produced,[2] including Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion, Anita Loos' durable Gentlemen Prefer Blondes; The Silver Cord, the first play attacking American momism, and Broadway, the first play with American gangsters.

The Captive was also the hottest ticket of that season, and the most expensive for a straight play. Costing $5 a seat, which was very high for the period, tickets for the sold-out opening night were boosted by speculators to $25.[3] "If ever a play was a success this one is," one newspaper pronounced. "They stand in line to buy tickets."[4] The Captive, predicted Burns Mantle, "is now promising to be the season's sensation in practically every theatrical center of the world."[5] There was good reason, of course, for the unusual public interest in Bourdet's import. Word-of-mouth reports had alerted both

---

[1]John Anderson, "The Play," New York Evening Post, 30 September 1926.

[2]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1926-27 (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1927), p. 3.

[3]New York Evening Post, 30 September 1926.

[4]Percy N. Stone, "Helen Menken Defends English Translation of 'The Captive,'" New York Herald Tribune, 10 October 1926.

[5]Burns Mantle, "'The Captive' As Ugly and Devastating As Sin, And As Common," New York Daily News, 30 September 1926.

curious theatregoers and theatre-watchers that something unheard of was to be seen dramatized on the Broadway stage.

"A new motif has crept insidiously onto the American stage," reported the reviewer for Vanity Fair magazine:

> and as a consequence one of the darker secrets of sex has been exposed to the multitudes. . . . Never once does the author present his thesis in the open; it remains an intangible complication. It is developed entirely by suggestion, which might lend itself to other interpretations, were not rumors of the play's evil implications flying thick and fast about town.[1]

It was with varying degrees of trepidation that the first-night audience took their seats at the highly publicized American premiere of Edouard Bourdet's lesbian love drama at the Empire Theatre on the night of 29 September 1926. "Appalling rumors had been brought from Paris by shy American tourists that La Prisonniere dealt with dreadful sex-specters," critic Percy Hammond informed readers of the Herald Tribune, "the nature of which is customarily discussed in nervous whispers."[2]

"The immoralists ever in search of the pornographic and obscene," the critic from the New York Graphic prognosticated, "as well as the 'comstockians,' ever snouting out 'vice and depravity,' are foredoomed to disappointment, for there is nothing mawkish or repellent in this drama."[3] Percy Hammond,

---

[1]Donald Freeman, "La Prisonniere," Vanity Fair, December 1926.

[2]Percy Hammond, "The Theatres," New York Herald Tribune, 30 September 1926.

[3]Kelcey Allen, "Amusements," New York Graphic, 30 September 1926.

who had also been among the first-nighters, recorded that "no blanched faces could be noticed, there were none who crawled under their chairs to hide their embarrassment."[1]

The gilt-edged first-night audience included New York's playboy mayor, Jimmy Walker, and theatre luminaries such as Billie Burke, Otis Skinner and Ruth Gordon; studio boss, Adolph Zukor, film star Norma Talmadge, playwright Anita Loos, and Broadway star Eva Le Gallienne, who that very season had started her Civic Repertory Theatre. "From the first nighters," the critic from the Brooklyn Standard noted, "there was scarcely a ripple of reaction. . . . The audience wondered and wondered and the most sophisticated understood."[2]

Charles Brackett, the erudite drama critic for the New Yorker, reporting on the predicament of the protagonist of The Captive, resented "the hypothesis that the intimate circle of a worldly French diplomat would regard her idiosyncrasy as so unique and dumbfounding."[3] It would also be hard to believe that sophisticated theatre people found Irene's involvement either unique or dumbfounding. Leonard Spigelgass the Broadway playwright and Hollywood scenarist, gives us some idea of how open certain gays could be about their lifestyle at least among an elite group of famous American and British

---

[1]Percy Hammond, "Theatres," New York Herald Tribune, 30 September 1926.

[2]"The Captive At Empire," Brooklyn Standard, 30 September 1926.

[3]Charles Brackett, "The Theatre," New Yorker, 9 October 1926, p. 33.

playwrights, songwriters, directors and super-stars working in the English-language theatre between the two World Wars. Spigelgass recalled that:

> . . . homosexuality in that period had two levels: One, it was held in major contempt, and the other was that among his [lyricist Lorenz Hart] kind it was the most exclusive club in New York. That's terribly important to realize--that it was a club into which you couldn't get . . . I mean, no ordinary certified public accountant could get into the Larry Hart, Cole Porter, George Cukor world. That was the world. That was Somerset Maugham. That was Cole Porter. That was Noel Coward. That was it if you were in that, and I remember those houses on Fifty-Fifth Street, with the butlers and carryings-on. . . . You were king of the golden river! That was it! In spite of the attitude towards homosexuality in those days. On the one hand if you said, 'They were homosexual--oh, my isn't that terrible!' On the other hand you said, 'My God, the other night I was at dinner with Cole Porter!' Immediate reaction: 'Jesus Christ, what did he have on? What was he wearing? What did he say? Were you at that party? Were you at one of those Sunday brunches? So you had this awful ambivalence. Show folks; show biz people just couldn't make it.[1]

The female attachments of Katherine Cornell were common gossip at least in the same higher echelons of the theatre in New York and London to which Spigelgass referred.[2] Another lesser-known actress appearing on Broadway during the 1920s, Blyth Daly--the daughter of stage star Arnold Daly--said in self-mocking, gay good humor of herself, Tallulah Bankhead, Estelle Wynwood and Eva Le Gallienne: "We were dubbed 'the four horsemen of the Algonquin' by the Broadway wits and wise guys in the days when we all made the Algonquin Hotel our

---

[1]Samuel Marx and Jan Clayton, Rogers and Hart, Bewitched, Bothered and Bedevilled (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1976), p. 237.

[2]Tad Mosel, Leading Lady, The World and Theatre of Katherine Cornell (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978), p. 386.

hang-out."[1]

Ironically enough, just four years after being among The Captive first-nighters, Le Gallienne was to play a real-life role, much publicized by the tabloids, strikingly similar to that of Madame d'Augines in Bourdet's drama. A socialite sued his actress wife, Josephine Hutchinson, because according to her husband she preferred to be with Le Gallienne "morning, noon and night."[2] Hutchinson was referred to as Le Gallienne's "shadow"[3] in the Daily News, the euphemism used for lesbian in The Captive.

Exactly fifty-two years to the very day that New Yorkers were reading the reviews in the morning papers for The Captive, Le Gallienne claimed she could not recall the sensational subject matter of the play nor anything about the headlines announcing the closing of the famous lesbian love drama. The alert, very circumspect eighty-year old actress did say, however:

> The only thing I do remember about the play is that it did not make any sense to me that Basil Rathbone, who was so handsome, charming and cultivated, was in it. I could not understand how any woman would not have been satisfied having him as a husband.[4]

---

[1]Conversation with the late Blyth Daly in Studio City, California in 1948.

[2]"Bell Divorces Actress Eva Le Gallienne's [sic] Shadow," New York Daily News, 8 July 1930.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Eva Le Gallienne, telephone interview from Weston, Connecticut, 30 September 1978.

British-born Basil Rathbone, who had been Le Gallienne's leading man in the Broadway hit, The Swan, two years before, and who would go on to film stardom in Hollywood, costarred in The Captive with Helen Menken who had become a star with two Broadway successes in a row: Seventh Heaven and The Makropoulos Affair. There were curtain calls after the first and second acts amid an uproar of bravos and applause. After the second act ovation, Menken--never at a loss for words--made a little speech praising Gilbert Miller, who took his bow from a seat in the audience, for having had the courage to produce the daring, controversial play. The enthusiastic uproar from the first-nighters was not repeated at the completion of the play, ending with the slam of a door as a young wife leaves home and husband to take a lesbian lover. "A singularly silent and thoughtful audience," the Evening Telegraph noticed, "walked out the Empire Theatre at 11:30 to think it over."[1]

The next day "the entire press resounded with the most lavish praise a play has received for at least a decade,"[2] its producer-director, Gilbert Miller, boasted. With the exception of Alan Dale of the American among the critics on the major New York daily papers--no matter how revolted they may have felt about the subject matter or the advisability of dramatizing it--no fault was found with Miller's polished, professional

---

[1]Burton Davis, "Much Talked of 'Captive' Opens,'" New York Morning Telegraph, 30 September 1926.

[2]"'The Captive' Is Withdrawn" "Cast of Play To Escape Trial," New York Sun, 16 February 1926.

direction and production, the performances, or Bourdet's literate, well-crafted, dramatically effective and tastefully restrained handling of the lesbian love story. "Its author," wrote Dale who alone hated the performances, "has dealt with his subject splendidly, reverently, and without the least ribaldry, or ridicule, or contempt, or any of the childish and quite ignorant moods of a small town community."[1]

"The most daring show of the season,"[2] Variety announced. "A show filled with more good acting," enthused the Evening Journal, "and fine character drawing than any ten pieces which have thus far blossomed forth."[3] Alexander Woollcott, who characterized the play as "an almost lachrymally sympathetic study of a young woman struggling helplessly in the toils of an abnormal erotic passion," praised the "intelligently, lavishly produced," play. "Bourdet has made the venture," Woollcott wrote, "with infinite tact and reticence."[4]

Atkinson of the Times commented:

> With Mr. Hornblow's adaptation and Mr. Miller's masterly direction "The Captive" becomes, as it is written, a restrained though uncompromising tragedy, rather than a malodorous trucking to low curiosity. Thus for the thousandth

---

[1]Alan Dale, "One Tragic Phase of Human Nature Frankly Staged," New York American, 30 September 1926.

[2]"The Captive," Variety, 6 October 1926.

[3]Garrick, "The New Play," New York Journal, 30 September 1926.

[4]Alexander Woollcott, "The Stage," New York World, 30 September 1926.

> time it was evident that the motives of a dramatic production are of far greater importance than the details of the subject matter.[1]

Alan Dale, the only reviewer from the daily papers who had seen the original Parisian production, was as appreciative of Bourdet's script as he was disappointed in the American version. Dale wrote:

> When you recall the scores and scores of horrible sex plays that pass muster and censor, with ease, even grace, the psychological trend of this French import, its delicate handling and its wonderful appeal must be truthfully chronicled. There is not one risque line in the entire make-up of the drama. It is direct as a Greek tragedy, and its understanding of at least one side of human nature--which as we live in the world, we may as well recognize when it is so reverently discussed--is intense and marvelously sympathetic. . . .
>
> "The Captive" is one of the most poignant tragedies, and its "heroine" one of the most tragic figures imaginable. Unfortunately, "The Captive" was so massacred, so atrociously acted at the Empire last night, that it was at times difficult to detect the acting merits of the play.[2]

"We are of the opinion that such subjects fall in the province of pathologists," Robert Coleman contended in dismissing The Captive because of its subject matter. "It is dull theatrical fare as far as we are concerned."[3] The reviewer for the Brooklyn Times had similar feelings. "Here is a play amazingly well done that was not worth doing at all," he wrote. "It

---

[1]J. Brooks Atkinson, Introduction to The Captive by Edouard Bourdet, trans. by Arthur Hornblow, Jr., (New York: Brentano's 1926), pp. vii-viii.

[2]Alan Dale, "One Tragic Phase of Human Nature Frankly Staged," New York American, 30 September 1926.

[3]Robert Coleman, "'The Captive' Dazes," New York Mirror, 30 September 1926.

is an importation from the French, and, like the other French importation, 'Damaged Goods,' it belongs in the clinical laboratory rather than the theatre."[1]

H. Z. Zorres, writing for the Commercial, commented:

> In a graceful little curtain speech . . . Helen Menken referred to the "courage" of Gilbert Miller in presenting American audiences "La Prisonniere," . . .
>
> But it requries no courage for any producer to stage any play in this town. The more bold he is, the more publicity, and a resultant stampede to the box office of the curious and the morbid. . . .
>
> The drama is literate and craftsmanly. It is magnificently written and played. But even granting that "The Captive" is intended solely for the audiences of adult intelligence, there seems no justification for the production in a public theatre of a play whose subject belongs essentially to the field of medicine.
>
> To report that "The Captive" is unsavory or immoral would be inaccurate. Its purpose seems illuminating rather than entertaining. It is obviously written and produced in gravity and with a serious purpose. It engenders that respect one feels always in the presence of tragedy. But even some tragedies cannot be viewed without disgust. There seems no legitimate excuse for staging "La Prisonniere."[2]

George Jean Nathan, who during the run of the show became increasingly intolerant of its existence, initially reacted to it with an open mind and jocund humor. Nathan was amused at much of what other New York drama critics wrote about The Captive, or rather what they failed to write. Nathan observed:

> The very critics who are perfectly willing to consider "Oedipus Rex," for all its perversion, as a drama pure and simple seem to be indisposed to consider the present play in a like manner. Its Lesbian motif they don't seem to be able to get entirely out of their fore-consciousness. The

---

[1]"The New Play," Brooklyn Times, 30 September 1926.

[2]H. Z. Zorres, "'The Captive' Is Seen At Empire," New York Commercial, 30 September 1930.

> old moral tone is to be detected in four out of every five reviews of the work. In this connection, it is the local reviewers in their attempt safely to get around a forthright statement of just what it is that Bourdet's play is about . . . just what there is to offend any newspaper reader in the world is difficult to make out.
>
> Thus, we encounter in the Times such evasions as "twisted relationship with another woman," and "warped infatuation;" in the World, such euphemisms as "tormenting impulses" and "bondage;" in the Evening World such equivocation as "the poisonous serpent's spell of a decadent woman;" and in the Daily News such phrases as "a cancerous growth."[1]

On the same day that Nathan took reviewers such as J. Brooks Atkinson and Burns Mantle to task for their timidity in writing about lesbians, Percy Hammond explained in his column that these reticent colleagues within the critics' circle were afraid that if they wrote with complete candour, their critiques might be considered "as salacious as the play itself." Hammond described the way a critic was forced to deal with the subject:

> All he can do is to hint, and by the sly winking of his wicked eye convey the news that "The Captive" treats of a drama suitable only to the consideration of sex postgraduates. . . .
>
> It may be whispered again, however, to those who are on the inside, that "The Captive" deals with a class of woman whose joys and sorrows are to be pitied and censored.[2]

At least two reviewers reacted to The Captive with such outrage that there could have been no doubt in their readers' minds as to what they had seen on the stage of the

---

[1]George Jean Nathan, "The Week In The Theatre," New York Morning Telegraph, 10 October 1926.

[2]Percy Hammond, "The Theatres," New York Herald Tribune, 10 October 1926.

Empire Theatre. Theatre Magazine's Arthur Hornblow, incredibly enough, the father of the translator of La Prisonnière, raved.

> Sexual perversion as a subject for dramatic consideration is not new in the drama. . . Until now, however, that form of sexual perversion known to physiologists as Lesbianism has not appealed to dramatists as a fit subject for the stage. . .
>
> It is a play you feel you would not care to have missed, yet from which, as from Ibsen's Ghosts, you emerged as from a charnel-house, glad to breathe once more the fresh air of heaven! . . . It is a sad commentary on the decadent times in which we live that, amid the general chorus of praise which, with only few exceptions, greeted this play, no protesting voice was raised in the public press against its particularly offensive subject, or is it that, from now on, our wives, sons, and daughters are free to discuss at the breakfast table the gangrenous horrors of sex perversion.[1]

Frank Vreeland of the Evening Telegram alluded to some sort of evolutionary genocide that would dispose of lesbians and gay men.

> In considering such intolerance one must bear in mind Nietzsche's warning that the weak always destroy the strong who encourage them too much. In fact, it is quite possible that the subnormal, if allowed much sway, would deride--and persecute the normal as much as the latter outlaws them now. . . . The most charitable view one can take of such persons is that they have a defective nervous organization. One thing evolutionary theory makes plain--that species which survive always rid themselves of defectives, of abnormal beings who do not carry on the species. . . . Whatever you or I think of such arrested persons, history will dispose of them in the immemorial fashion.[2]

After Bourdet's drama settled down to what would have been a lengthy engagement had not the show been closed, George

---

[1]Arthur Hornblow, "Mr. Hornblow Goes To The Play," Theatre Magazine, December 1926, p. 16.

[2]Frank Vreeland, "The Marble Bride," New York Evening Telegram, 30 September 1926.

Jean Nathan voiced a second, delayed and very negative reaction to it. The prestigious critic called The Captive "the most subjective, corruptive and potentially evil-fraught play ever shown in the American theatre."[1] Distressed that some in the audiences must have felt that the two women may have gone on "to live happily ever after," Nathan fumed:

> Bourdet's play amounts in simple words to nothing more or less than a documentary in favor of sex degeneracy. It is the persuasive advancement of the assurance that a degenerate physical love between two women is superior to the normal physical love of the opposite sexes.[2]

Nathan told an interviewer, "It is certainly inviting to females with a leaning toward perversion, and certainly to such sisters on the borderline this couple of hours of enchantment is not designed to bolster their wills."[3] Appalled by Nathan's statement that, "if he owned a daughter he shouldn't care to have her see 'The Captive,'"[4] his fellow aisle-sitter Percy Hammond protested:

> That utterance from so wanton a pundit is the severest arraignment the current tendency toward fire and brimstone has suffered. When a scholar of Mr. Nathan's freedom of belief and expression admits that a masterpiece of the Drama might bring discomfort to a broadminded parent, it is a signal for us to worry about the state of the theatre, . . . When the devil of Mr. Nathan's calibre

---

[1]George Jean Nathan, "Theatre," American Mercury, March 1927, p. 373.

[2]Ibid., pp. 373-74.

[3]William Pendleton Gaines, fragment of an untitled, undated interview with George Jean Nathan on file in folder MWEZ n.c. 6901, Lincoln Center.

[4]Percy Hammond, "The Theatres," New York Herald Tribune, 16 January 1927.

> turns in dread from the horrors of the theatre it is time to be afraid.[1]

Nathan defended his position "for the simple reason that this fine play is a charming presentation of degeneracy and young girls are very susceptible to charm."[2] In his estimation, Bourdet's drama was "an exceptionally evil one so far as an impressionable portion of the public goes. Drama, like literature, can very easily throw morals off the track."[3]

Nathan was sure that "now little girls are trying to sneak out of the schools up along the Hudson to run down for a matinee."[4] He wrote:

> To believe that such stuff does not at least pique curiosity on the part of susceptible young women--and the Empire Theatre has been full of them since news of the play first got around the boarding schools--is to believe more than I, for one, am capable of.[5]

Of the make-up of The Captive's audiences, the critic confided to an interviewer:

> I had been talking to a man who attended a matinee performance. . . He told me that he, and apparently a mere handful of males in the house, felt embarrassingly conspicuous amidst such overwhelming feminine assemblance. . . . If all the ladies present were not weakened they were at least made curious.[6]

---

[1]Ibid.

[2]William Pendleton Gaines interview with George Jean Nathan.

[3]George Jean Nathan, "Theatre," American Mercury, March 1927, p. 375.

[4]William Pendleton Gaines interview with George Jean Nathan.

[5]American Mercury, March 1927, p. 375.

[6]William Pendleton Gaines interview with George Jean Nathan.

At least four reviewers in the first-night audience made mention of the probability that in 1926, most Americans, even in a cosmopolitan city such as New York, had no conception of lesbian relationships or lifestyles. "I really think that a good percentage of the audience will fail to ascertain what it is all about,"[1] a reviewer from the borough of Brooklyn decided. Another from Manhattan reported that "among the first-nighters there was much speculation as to whether the extraordinary theme would be comprehensive to that coddled fellow, the man on the street."[2] The critic from the Sun "overheard two sweet young things in the lobby deciding that few persons would really know what it was all about," after seeing The Captive. "'Well, my mother wouldn't,' said one of them."[3] Alexander Woollcott concurred with the young lady:

> I think the average playgoer straying within its doors (remembering, perhaps, that that is where he saw "Peter Pan" and dear Mr. Drew's comedies) would sit through the three engrossing acts without once suspecting the true nature of the Bondage which is the very sum and substance of "The Captive."[4]

John Drew, the stage star Woollcott mentioned, was one of the celebrities asked about his reaction to the controversial

---

[1]Ray W. Harper, "Footlight Reflections," Brooklyn Citizen, 3 October 1926.

[2]"'The Captive' Presented At Empire Theatre," New York Graphic, 30 September 1926.

[3]Gilbert W. Gabriel, "'The Captive' From Paris," New York Sun, 30 September 1926.

[4]Alexander Woollcott, "The Stage," New York World, 30 September 1926.

play after Nathan's repeated attacks upon it. Drew told an interviewer, "perhaps young girls should not be taken to see it, but if they do see it, it should not harm them." The romantic comedy star could not understand "how any woman would want to go and do likewise, after having seen this tragedy."[1]

"Some say that curiosity would lead girls to find out about it," Helen Menken said of the lesbianism in the play in which she starred. "That's folderol. Curiosity never led a person into hell yet." The actress continued:

> If we have tendencies we should face them in the sun, understand them for what they are, fight them as they are, and in time, take away their fascinations as things known and understood.[2]

The stage manager said in defense of The Captive that "girls came in school detachments to see the play. . . . It added to the understanding of the audience by showing the devastating effect of such an attachment between women." Letters of praise, the stage manager confided to one newspaper, were received by Helen Menken. They came, he said, from:

> deans of women's colleges and heads of finishing schools; who said they were already concerned with the necessity of impressing the girls in their charge with the dangers of a reprehensible attachment.[3]

---

[1]"Censorship As John Drew Sees It," New York Morning Telegraph, 20 February 1927.

[2]"Now One Idea Is This," Editorial in the New York Morning Telegraph, 18 January 1927.

[3]"Girls' Schools Upheld 'Captive' Says Shostac," New York Herald Tribune, 21 February 1927.

The loquacious star of the show told an interviewer:

> I believe "The Captive" is the greatest moral lesson Broadway has seen in many years. I think all girls should see it, that they may understand the horrible unhappiness a similar relationship may bring them. . .
> How could it be terrible when ministers write to me how glad they are to see such a problem set forth in its fearful unhappiness, when college heads ask me to come and lecture before their girls on such a problem.[1]

Edouard Bourdet's most effective dramatic device in The Captive is, of course, that of never presenting the off-stage pivotal character. Madame d'Aiguines consequently becomes more threatening, mysterious and fascinating than she might have been had it fallen to some actress to make plausible a role described as having "all the feminine allurements," and of "being the most harmonious being that ever lived."[2] John Mason Brown noted the shrewdness of "Bourdet's restraint in omitting Madame d'Aiguines. Unseen and only talked about, she dominates three acts, a hundred times more vivid than if she had ever appeared."[3]

The playwright may have decided not to create a lesbian femme fatale because he admittedly could not understand such a personality, or might have thought it wisest to keep the more aggressive lesbian off-stage rather than run the risk of

---

[1]Clare Odgen, "Captive Is Moral Lesson, Helen Menken, Star Asserts," New York Morning Telegraph, 16 January 1926.

[2]Edouard Bourdet, The Captive, trans. by Arthur Hornblow, Jr. (New York: Brentano's, 1926), p. 150.

[3]John Mason Brown, "Diadems Of Paste," Theatre Arts, December 1926, p. 811.

horrifying bourgeois Parisian audiences as the Grand Guigol had done with its production of Les Perverties. But audiences were not really spared the trauma of seeing a lesbian characterized in The Captive, at least in the estimation of another critic in 1926. "I resent the implication," Charles Brackett of the New Yorker protested, "that Irene is merely the captive of Madame d'Aiguines' rather than being imprisoned by her own abnormality."[1] That is clearly the impression Bourdet wanted to convey, yet, inconsistently he included a very telling scene in which Irene is shown to be instinctively revolted by sexual contact with someone of the opposite sex of whom she is, at the same time, very fond.

Bourdet may not have recognized that in creating Irene he came closer to approximating the real-life psyche of a congenital lesbian than he had intended. However, most of the critics indicated no such recognition in Irene. Percy Hammond referred to the play's protagonist as "the hapless lady enslaved in the noxious chains of abnormality,"[2] and Atkinson of the Times called her "a young lady of good family who has fallen victim to the fatal fascination of a loathsome attraction for another woman."[3]

---

[1]Charles Brackett, "The Theatre," New Yorker, 9 October 1926, p. 33.

[2]Percy Hammond, "Theatres," New York Herald Tribune, 30 September 1926.

[3]J. Brooks Atkinson, "The Play," New York Times, 30 September 1926.

Actress Helen Menken admitted to an interviewer that she had been "reluctant to do the role but my husband [Humphrey Bogart] persuaded me. . . I have seen girls like Irene. They are pathetic beyond all description. They are young women with great flights of poetic fancy, unless they become hardened to the point of viciousness."[1] After signing a contract to star in The Captive, Menken went to Paris to see how a French actress portrayed one of these "young women with great flights of poetic fancy." "I did not see Mme. Sylvie who created the sensation over there," the American star reported. "I am told she resembled a collection of all sins whereas, I concentrated on only one."[2] Menken did not clarify what sins other than the one she concentrated on, a lesbian infatuation, Irene--so well-bred, inhibited and guilt-ridden in the English-language version--could have been guilty of in the French production.

Helen Menken's conception of the title role both on first reading The Captive and after playing it for four and one-half months was that Irene "was a normal being struggling against a powerful influence." The actress reasoned: "that she was a normal character is proven by the fact of her struggle; had she not been normal, there would have been no struggle."[3]

---

[1]Wilma Soss, "Helen Menken Star of Exotic Play Talks In a Taxi," Brooklyn Daily Times, n. d., 1926.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ada Paterson, "Miss Menken Defends 'The Captive,'" Theatre Arts Magazine, February 1927, p. 22.

Apparently the ordeal of portraying even what she understood to be a normal girl in a play about a lesbian's powerful influence was so unsettling to Menken that she had a physical reaction to it. The pallor of the star's ghost-white make-up which she affected was distracting to a number of reviewers who made mention of it in their critiques.[1] The actress explained:

> There had been a good deal of discussion of my make-up. The cause of the discussion was my state of intense nervousness on the first night. It showed in my pallor. I was dead white. I put on a great deal of rouge but the underlying whiteness showed through the coat of red.[2]

Articulate, gregarious and vivacious, Menken granted numerous interviews during the winter of 1926-27 in which she always had a great deal to say about her portrayal of a woman sexually, intellectually and emotionally attracted to another of her gender. The actress warned that such a relationship should be avoided like "the black plague."[3] Years after the show was closed, Menken was still being quizzed about The Captive. In one such interview, in 1930, the actress admitted something that she had been careful not to reveal while the show was still running and under attack. "While playing in 'The Captive,'" Hollywood gossip columnist Sidney Skolsky

---

[1]Frank Vreeland, "The Marble Bride," New York Evening Telegram, 30 September 1926; "The Captive," Variety, 6 October 1926; J. Brooks Atkinson, "The Play," New York Times, 30 September 1926; "At The Play," Town Topic, 2 October 1926; "The Theatre," New Yorker, 9 October 1926, p. 33.

[2]Paterson, p. 22.

[3]Clare Odgen, "Captive Is Moral Lesson, Helen Menken, Star, Asserts," New York Morning Telegraph, 16 January 1927.

learned from Menken, "she received on the average of fifty letters a day from girls. She also received as presents many slave bracelets. The entire collection is now in the possession of Gilbert Miller."[1]

Certainly the Empire Theatre was being filled during the autumn and winter of 1926-27 by more than just busloads of young girls from boarding schools on field-trips to learn a moral lesson at a matinée of The Captive. The engagement was getting from $21,000 to $23,000 per week,[2] impressive box-office receipts for a straight play more than half a century ago. A police officer noted that at the performance he saw of the play, four days before it was raided, "70 percent of the audience on Saturday night, . . . were under 25 years of age. . . . Women comprised 60 percent of the audience, and groups of unescorted girls in twos and threes sat together."[3]

Because of repeated demands for some kind of censorship of the Broadway stage particularly by numerous religious leaders ever since Anthony Comstock headed the Society For The Suppression Of Vice in 1873, a voluntary play jury system of quasi-official citizens had been set up in Manhattan even

---

[1]Sidney Skolsky, "Behind The News," New York Daily News, 7 July 1930.

[2]"'The Captive' Quits But New Producer Will Defy Police," New York Times, 17 February 1927.

[3]"Captive Immoral, Mahoney Decides," New York Times, 9 March 1927.

before the production of The God of Vengeance in 1922. When that show was threatened by a court order to close, playwright Zoe Akins had said that she thought it had been a great mistake on the part of the producer "not to ask for the people's jury to pass upon the play and thus avoid your difficulty."[1]

The same fate of arrests and court procedures did not seem to be in store for The Captive which was presented for the consideration of the play jury less than a month before its opening. The show appeared to be safe from the dangers of suspension or expurgation when the majority of jurors failed to find it objectionable. The District Attorney defended the jury system and agreed to abide by its decisions. The play jury had its weaknesses, he admitted, but insisted that "it is the best thing we have so far."[2]

While one New York newspaper ran a banner headline on its editorial page reading, "Don't Relax Mayor! Wipe Out Those Evil Plays Now Menacing Future Of The Theatre,"[3] another paper more soberly reminded the District Attorney that he had bound himself to abide by the verdict of the play jury on The Captive. "As a man of honor, whatever he or anyone else may think of

---

[1]Program for The God of Vengeance, p. 11

[2]"Banton Defends Play Jury System," New York Times, 30 December 1926.

[3]"Don't Relax Mayor! Wipe Out Those Evil Plays Now Menacing Future Of The Theatre," New York American, 26 January 1927.

the play,"[1] the paper editorialized, the District Attorney could not close the play despite reports of a committee of citizens having petitioned him to do so.

William Randolph Hearst, the best-known and certainly the most influential mass-media power boss in the United States in the 1920s, took particular exception to The Captive despite the fact that his employee, Alan Dale, critic for the American, was singularly tolerant of the dramatization of a lesbian love drama. Hearst was a strong supporter of New York State's Motion Picture censorship law which the Governor, Alfred E. Smith, wanted repealed. In The Captive with all of its notoriety Hearst had found an issue on which to challenge and embarrass the liberal Governor who, like himself, had presidential political ambitions. Hearst wrote:

> The effect of censorship, or of this fear of censorship, can be easily estimated by the fact that the great firm which produces many of the best and cleanest and highest class of moving pictures in the United States is responsible for one of the most vicious and obscene plays that has disgraced the stage in this year nineteen hundred and twenty-six.
>
> Without the influence of censorship, this firm might have produced moving pictures as demoralizing as its stage play, and certainly under the influence of censorship it would have abstained, and would have been compelled to abstain, from inflicting the injury on American morals that it has inflicted with its degraded stage production.[2]

---

[1]"District Attorney and 'The Captive,'" New York World, 23 November 1926.

[2]William Randolph Hearst, "The Best Treatment For Unclean Spoken Plays Is To Apply The Methods Which Protected Motion Pictures," New York American, 30 December 1926.

It was with this editorial in which Hearst had singled out The Captive primarily because it had been financed by a Hollywood film company that the publisher began his campaign for purification of the American stage in order to back the Governor into an uncomfortable political cul de sac. The Herald Tribune informed its readers:

> A political movement is gathering throughout the state, under the leadership of William Randolph Hearst, to push a theatre censorship bill through the state legislature and lay it before Governor Smith.
>
> It is politically recognized as an opportunity for Mr. Hearst to use this pure stage movement to produce a situation now which would embarrass Governor Smith in the 1928 campaign--in retribution for the public insults which the Governor in his last campaign hurled at Mr. Hearst . . .
>
> Hearst representatives for the last few weeks have been organizing committees throughout the state to stir up a general demand for state censorship of the theatre.[1]

Variety, the publication for people in show business, was well aware of the Press Baron's campaign to produce "material against the governor in the campaign of 1928"[2] by instigating public sentiment in support of stage censorship in New York State. Smith had won wide liberal support in his uncompromising stance for the abolition of the state's motion picture censorship board elucidated in his 1923 message to the legislature. If the Governor did not veto any stage censorship bill placed before him, he would lose a sizable portion of his

---

[1]"Banton To Sift Stage Charges To Foil Hearst," New York Herald Tribune, 1 February 1927.

[2]"Police Ready To Raid Theatres With 'Dirt' Plays," Variety, 9 February 1927.

liberal support. If, on the other hand, Smith vetoed such legislation he would enrage an even larger block of voters by seeming to condone the production of what the puritans termed "dirty plays" on the American stage.

Of all the shows shocking to the American public's sensibilities during the 1926-27 theatrical season, The Captive was understandably the one that Hearst should have singled out as an example of the decadent and sordid state of the Broadway theatre. The closing of the lesbian love drama and the statute banning shows of its ilk from the New York stage reflected widespread popular sentiment and support for such a prohibition during a period in American history when the Volstead Act was the law of the land. The response by another segment of the populace to such prohibitions also reflected what drama critic Burton Rascoe concluded was in 1945, after another show with an illegal lesbian character opened on Broadway, "the natural reaction of Americans against any threat of official censorship--against any form of regimentation."[1]

---

[1]Burton Rascoe, "'Trio' Is Good But Fails Buildup As Sensation," New York World Telegram, 30 December 1944.

CHAPTER IV

MAE WEST'S

THE DRAG

(1927)

The threat that lesbians as characterized in The Captive seemed to pose to the social order paled in the face of the probability that Broadway would soon be playing host to gay men as characters in a play. During the winter of 1927 Burns Mantle informed readers of the Daily News that:

> The day after the mayor called the managers to the carpet and warned them that either they had to clean up their plays or he would do it for them, a comedy called "New York Exchange" was boldly advertised as "the story of a male 'Captive' and as ugly as a cage of snakes and as fascinating."[1]

Another newspaperman reported:

> Next we may have to look at 'The Captive's' pale brethren, and then it will be over. There was, at least before the present hysteria over cleaning up the stage, two plays dealing with male perverts scheduled for New York production. One is by a Frenchman, Jacques Natanson, the title which translates into something like The Butterfly Man! and the other by an American which is called 'The Drag.' The last, as the title shouts, is quite frankly concerned with anything but he-men.[2]

---

[1]Burns Mantle, "Enter The Lord High Censor," New York Sunday News, 6 February 1927.

[2]Fragment of an untitled, undated newspaper article in file folder MWEZ n.c. 6901, Lincoln Center.

During the first two weeks of February, 1926, while The Captive continued to play to packed houses without any indications that it was in imminent danger of being closed, there were a number of items in the city's daily papers detailing what was considered a threat to the community. "'The Drag,' Mae West's 'Homosexual comedy drama,'" warned the World, "the entry of which into New York would prove, it is feared, the last straw upon the back of the uncensored theatre, opened a step nearer Broadway last night."[1] The reference was to the opening in Paterson, New Jersey, for a three-day run prior to its planned Broadway première, of a show that had begun its try-out engagement in Bridgeport, Connecticut, to turn-away boxoffice business.

Almost every one of the city's daily papers alerted its readers to the existence of The Drag with some mention of the show's out-of-town try-out in articles sometimes found on page one. The Herald Tribune ran such a report almost every day on the play's progress. On the other hand, after reporting that The Drag had opened out-of-town, the Daily News never mentioned it again, not even when the play closed in New Jersey as a direct consequence of the sensational raid on the three Broadway plays.

To make matters worse, during the try-out of The Drag, William Morganstern, the play's producer, announced that four

---

[1]"Paterson Sees 'The Drag' Billed as 'Medical Play,'" New York World, 4 February 1927.

other plays as daring as the censor-threatened piece would shortly appear in the city. "The four," said Mr. Morganstern, "are by Mae West."[1] A week later the Evening Post revealed that "The District Attorney and the Police Department have definitely decided to prevent the New York production of 'The Drag' it was learned today from an official source in the District Attorney's office."[2] In a page-one warning the paper passed on the word that: "Police Won't Let 'Drag' Play Here. Will Arrest Everyone Connected With Show If Production Is Attempted."[3] Other papers repeated the same warning and threat.

Even theatre people were up in arms. Seventy-six theatrical producers met at the Astor Hotel on Broadway presumably to discuss a censorship bill framed in Albany. The real purpose of the meeting, according to certain theatrical writers, was to oppose the appearance of The Drag on the New York stage for fear its presentation would result in censorship.[4] Three committees, one composed of producers, another of actors and a third of playwrights met at Actors' Equity Association's offices to devise some plan that would prevent The Drag from reaching Broadway.

---

[1]"'The Drag' and 'Sex' Not The Half Of It," New York Evening Post, 2 February 1927.

[2]"Police Won't Let 'Drag' Play Here," New York Evening Post, 9 February 1927.

[3]Ibid.

[4]"'Drag' Censored At Bridgeport; Battle On Here," New York Herald Tribune, 1 February 1927.

Producer Al H. Woods, who had tried and failed to interest Chicago audiences in a lesbian love drama entitled, Sin of Sins, after The Captive proved a box-office blockbuster, told the press, "If any New York theatre owners or lessees permit such a show to go on the boards at their playhouse, they will not be deserving of anything else than the strictest kind of censorship."[1] John Golden, another very important Broadway producer, warned: "While I have not seen 'The Drag' the things I have heard about the play have convinced me that its invasion of New York now would be the straw to break the camel's back."[2]

The secretary of the New York Police Department went to Bridgeport--by train little more than an hour out of Manhattan--to see the "homosexual comedy-drama" at the direction of the Police Commissioner, as did a few curious New York drama critics, one of whom dismissed it as "a tawdry and badly written and insincere piece of catch-penny claptrap."[3] Another reviewer concluded that "The play was offensive, not for its bold invasion of an unexplored sociological area, but by reason of its bungling insincere treatment of that region of truth."[4]

---

[1]"'Drag' Censored At Bridgeport; Battle On Here," New York Herald Tribune, 1 February 1927.

[2]Ibid.

[3]"Paterson Sees 'The Drag' Billed As 'Medical Play,'" New York World, 4 February 1927.

[4]"Boasting Of Sex, 'The Drag' Goes On," New York Sun, 1 February 1927.

Variety, which covers all out-of-town try-outs, reported from Bridgeport, Connecticut, the home-base and final resting place of super-showman P. T. Barnum:

> If P. T. Barnum had ever been inspired to stage a grand and glittering spectacle entitled, for instance, "The Destruction of Sodom," this is about the way he would have gone about it. The whole play is a cheap and shabby appeal to sensationalism, done without intelligence or taste and in the spirit of a Winter Garden revue. If it ever gets to Broadway, it would be a calamity, . . . "The Drag" is a dramatization of a wild party given by a rich pervert and bedizened men friends. This episode is staged with Hippodrome elaborations taking close to 20 minutes of the third act, and without dialogue or dramatic action of any kind. . . . As far as the dramatic requirements are concerned, it could have happened off stage and come into the story as perhaps a few lines of dialogue. . . . The whole venture is without justification and merits the unqualified condemnation of the public, the theatre and the authorities, not to speak of calling the prompt intervention of the police.[1]

An editorial in Hearst's New York American, advocating the publisher's plan to censor the stage as motion pictures were being censored by New York State, informed readers:

> In a disgusting theatrical challenge to decency just revealed at Bridgeport, where the foulest use of sex perversion yet attempted by the theatrical baiters for dirty dollars is being polished for a metropolitan run, we see where the lack of censorship is bringing us.[2]

In the same issue of the same paper, it was disclosed that John S. Sumner, the secretary of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, had written a letter to Mayor Walker demanding immediate police action if the Morganstern production appeared on Broadway.

---

[1]"Plays Out Of Town," Variety, 2 February 1927.

[2]"Only A Major Operation Can Save The Stage," Editorial, New York American, 2 February 1927.

The playscript of The Drag has never been published, but a carbon-copy of the author's original script which she sent to the Copyright Office in Washington, D.C. in February, 1926, is available to the public at the Library of Congress. West had crossed out her name on this manuscript and wrote above it, in pencil, Jane Mast, the pseudonym she used for the play's production.

The Drag opens in the library of the home of Doctor Richmond in New York City. With some rather old-fashioned exposition the Doctor and his spinster sister, Barbara, reveal in conversation that the old maid, a cynical, tough-minded woman, has kept house for her brother and raised his daughter, Claire, after the death of his wife. Barbara is concerned that all is not well with the marriage of her niece and wealthy, young industralist Rolly Kingsbury, but the Doctor pays her little attention since she is admittedly very suspicious of men.

A young man, David Caldwell, identified by the author as "an outcast" in the cast of characters because he is a drug addict, is brought to the Doctor's home in an emergency by a friend, Clem Hathaway. David is very disturbed, but Clem is in a cheerful mood as he makes gay, campy jokes about the good-looking taxi-driver who drove them to the Doctor. "Ride around a while, dearie," Clem tells the driver, "and then come back for her if you're so inclined."[1] Referring to the driver as "rough

---

[1]Mae West, The Drag, (Unpublished manuscript on file in Manuscript Division, Thomas Jefferson Building, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., dated February 1927), Act I, p. 6.

trade"[1]--that is, a heterosexual male from a rough, working-class background who prostitutes himself for gays--Clem leaves the unsettled younger man saying, "Well, so long kid. I hope he's a gorgeous doctor and does you good."[2]

David breaks down before the Doctor, pleading for help.

DAVID. . . . I'm one of those damned creatures, who are called degenerates and moral lepers for a thing they cannot help--a thing that has made me suffer--Oh, God!--Doctor, I can't explain.

DOCTOR. Tell me everything--This perversion of yours--is it an acquired habit or has it always been so?

DAVID. Always, from the earliest childhood. I was born a male, my mind has been that of a female. Whay [sic] as a child I played with dolls. I even cried when they cut my curls. As I grew older the natural desires of youth were unknown to me. I could not understand why women never interested me. I was attracted by my own sex. How was I to know it was wrong, when it seemed perfectly natural to me.

DOCTOR. Go on!

DAVID. I soon realized I was not like other men. I sought those of my own kind as companions. I realized that we were outcasts. I suffered. I rebelled. I fought with myself--but it was stronger than I. Then I gave in. Why not? I was, what I was. There were others like me. Oh, we all fight in the beginning, but it was no use.

DOCTOR. What seems right to the normal men in the matter of sex, seems wrong to you?

DAVID. As wrong as our desires seem to those others. (Pauses) In time I met another like me. (Rises, paces floor) How can I tell you? (Pause) We were attracted to each other. We loved each other. I worshipped him. We lived

---

[1]Ibid.

[2]Ibid.

> together. We were happy. The curse didn't seem to matter so much. We loved our own life--lived it in our own way. No normally married couple were happier than we were. Then--he married.[1]

David's lover had married, he tells the Doctor, because his family insisted. To make matters worse, since marrying, the young man has a new lover, "a normal man."[2] David wants to kill himself; the Doctor suggests he take up athletics. Becoming increasingly upset at his predicament, the drug addict is taken to another room where he can be given a sedative.

Judge Kingsbury comes to visit his old friend, Doctor Richmond. Barbara, still trying to figure out why the marriage of her niece and the conservative jurist's son does not seem to be happy, repeats some gossip she has heard linking Claire's name to that of her husband's best friend, Allen Grayson, an engineer employed by the Kingsley company that Rolly manages.

> JUDGE. Bosh! Why Rolly's very fond of Grayson. If anyone's interested in Grayson, I'd say it's Rolly and not Claire.[3]

Claire Kingsbury, the Doctor's daughter and the Judge's daughter-in-law, enters the library interrupting a lengthy debate between the two men concerning society's treatment of gay males. The more tolerant doctor faults the law for imprisoning sexual inverts; the harsh, homophobic judge blames the medical profession for not finding a cure for this "disease." The men depart leaving Claire along with her suspicious, out-spoken Aunt Barbara.

---

[1]Ibid., Act I, p. 7.
[2]Ibid., Act I, p. 8.
[3]Ibid., Act I, p. 12.

While the younger woman cannot bring herself to confide in her aunt, she assures her, at least, that neither she nor her husband are romantically involved with someone else. Claire wants to escape and suggests that she and Barbara take a trip to Europe. Rolly Kingsbury arrives to join his wife. He is unable to understand why she would want to go abroad, but makes no objection to such plans. Dr. Richmond, on the other hand, hopes to dissuade his daughter from leaving her husband which he feels might threaten their marriage. Rolly is just about to leave the library after Claire, Barbara, the Doctor, and the Judge have made their exit when:

> . . . David opens Door R. His coat and vest are off. He half staggers into room.

DAVID. Doctor--Doctor . . . It's no use I can't--Rolly!

ROLLY. You--What are you doing here?

DAVID. Rolly--

ROLLY. Why are you here?

DAVID. I couldn't stand it any longer--I came here to see the Doctor--thought--

ROLLY. You came here to tell him--

DAVID. It's not so. I didn't tell him I so much as knew you. I came because I thought he could help me.

ROLLY. You fool he can do nothing for you--For any of us. (Takes out his wallet)
Here take this--and get out of here.

DAVID. I don't want your money--Rolly please--

ROLLY. Get out of here. I've had enough of you.

DAVID. I've heard all about you and Grayson, he doesn't give a damn about you.

ROLLY. Shut your mouth about Grayson--leave his name out of it.

DAVID. It's true and you know it. He doesn't give a damn for you.

ROLLY. Damn you--you--you
(Grabs david [sic] by the throat and swings him onto divan. Doctor enters)

DOCTOR. Rolly!

ROLLY. Who is this--this mad man--He tried to attack me.

DOCTOR. My poor lad--What's got into you? It may be the drug I've given him--I don't know--poor devil--Thank God, Rolly, you're not what he is--Come, come, my boy--Come--

DOCTOR. (Leads David R. L. E. David turns and looks at Rolly.

ROLLY. Not what he is--
(Looks after doctor and David and then sinks in chair)
Good God!

CURTAIN[1]

Act Two takes place in the drawing room of Rolly Kingsbury's home. Master Billy Mac, a lively boy, comes racing into the room looking for a dog. He is a neighbor and apparently familiar with the house since he teases Parsons, the butler, about being crabby before he is sent on his way in search of the dog. Later in the act, Billy returns with the dog as he leads it out the front door. Billy's relationship to either the other characters or to author's thesis is never clarified.

Claire is out for a drive which gives Rolly an opportunity to entertain some of his gay friends: Clem, Rosco, Winnie and Duchess. Although their wealthy host is not, they

---

[1]Ibid., Act I, pp. 23-24.

are "campy," effeminate, and self-mocking young men jealous of one another. They play-act at being very "bitchy" as they deprecate their kind in petty, mindless raillery. Referring to themselves throughout their conversation as "queens," "molls," "Annie," "dearie," and "bitch," they use "she" instead of "he" and let out screams and call out "whoops!" Their mindless chatter concerns "drag" costumes they plan to wear when impersonating women and parties they have attended.

The Duchess, a big man of Swedish extraction, is the most flagrantly effeminate in his behavior, constantly powdering his face. Clem, who had taken David, the drug addict to see Dr. Richmond, warns Duchess of attracting the attention of the police with his powder puff.

> DUCHESS. Say--the cops, they like me. They all know me from Central Park.[1]

Clem tells of attending a "drag" "over at Peter Pan's:"

> CLEM. . . . It was a great party but the place was raided and when they backed up the wagon, they got all but one and she jumped out the window. That must have been you.[2]

When the talk turns more serious as the men discuss young David's addiction, he is referred to as "that sentimental Moll," a "poor queen," who takes "heroin and morphine by the barrels."[3]

---

[1]Ibid., Act II, p. 2.

[2]Ibid., Act II, p. 5.

[3]Ibid., Act II, p. 6.

CLEM. . . . the trouble with her is he's sensitive of what she is. Now, I don't give a Goddamn who knows it. If [sic] course, I don't go flouncing my hips up and down Broadway picking up trade or with a sign on my back advertising it. (Aside - laughs) But of course, I don't pass anything up either, dearie, I'm out to have a good time as well as the next.[1]

Clem has become involved with the taxidriver whom he described as "rough trade" in the first act. One of the other characters warns him to, "Dish the dirt, because you won't be able to dump that bird so easily."[2]

Rolly Kingsbury has invited his employee and best friend, Allen Grayson, a handsome young bachelor, to visit him at home while his wife, Claire, is out for a drive and he is entertaining his gay friends. The engineer has brought plans he has been working on for one of the Kingsbury companies to show to Rolly. "Yes, I'd love to stay and see your construction,"[3] Clem says to Grayson during his brief encounter with the engineer. "So glad to have you meet me," Winnie tells him as they are exiting, "Come up some time and I'll bake you a pan of biscuits."[4]

When they are alone, Rolly wants an immediate reaction to Allen's impression of his friends.

ROLLY. You've never met that particular type before?

GRAYSON. I can't say that I have.

ROLLY. Perhaps you have and didn't know it.

---

[1]Ibid., Act II, p. 6.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., Act II, p. 7.

[4]Ibid., Act II, p. 8.

GRAYSON (Looks up)

ROLLY. Why do you suppose I've had you come here so often. Haven't you noticed the friendship I've had for you since the day you stepped into the office? All I could do was eat, drink, sleep, think of Allen Grayson.[1]

GRAYSON. Why, Rolly, I'd hate to have you think of me that way. (Rises) I've always looked at you as a he man. God this is-- . . .[2]

The young engineer is very distressed at his employer's confession of love. He begins questioning Rolly about his marriage and his relationship with Claire. Rolly dismisses his marriage as a social convenience and his wife as a naive woman unable to understand his sexual proclivity.

GRAYSON. Why I think that's the most contemptable thing you could do--marry a woman and use her as a cloak to cover what you are.[3]

In righteous and heated indignation, Grayson turns on his dissembling employer. "Go to hell," he tells Rolly, "I think you're a rotter! God!"[4]

Claire returns from her drive with her friend and confidante, Marion. When the two women are alone, the miserable younger woman confesses to the matron that her marriage to Rolly has never been consumated. Rolly pretends that he is going to be out of town, occupied with business matters and has asked Allen to take his wife to the opera after which she

---

[1]Ibid., Act II, p. 9.

[2]Ibid., Act II, p. 6.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid., Act II, p. 10.

will spend the weekend at her father's home rather than be alone in her own. After Rolly's departure Claire and Allen are alone. She is miserable at Rolly's treatment of her and he is aware of her frustrating marital relationship. Weeping, Claire falls into Allen's comforting arms as the curtain descends.

While his wife is staying with her father over the weekend, Rolly is giving a drag party in the drawing room of his home. As the curtain rises on the last act the guests in female attire are dancing. Parsons, the butler, introduces each new arrival as he enters welcomed by screams of excitement and approval from the other transvestites. The Duchess makes his entrance, followed by the Grand Duchess, the Doll, the Taxi Driver and Kitchen Kate. Clem becomes annoyed at Duchess for flirting with the Taxi Driver.

> CLEM. Listen, Bargain, if you don't want me to clean you out of this joint, lay off of Civic Virtue before I knock you loose from this flat breezer of yours. I've got what gentlemen want.[1]

One of the transvestites does a toe-dance number; another dance number to the song "How Come You Do Me Like You Do?" follows; then Dolly sings, "Goody-Goody-Good." The entertainment is followed by screams from the guests.

Between numbers, the guests joke about their harassment by the New York City police and their appeal to heterosexual men. Discussing a recent raid at one of their drag parties,

---

[1]Ibid., Act III, p. 2.

Kitchen Kate says:

H -- . . . we had a grand time--The police were perfectly lovely to us--weren't they girls?

Ensemble - Yes!

O -- They were.

H -- Perfectly lovely, why the minute I walked into jail, the captain said--Well Kate what kind of a cell would you like to have? And I says--oh, any kind will do Captain, just so it has a couple of peep-holes in it. I crave fresh air.[1]

In another exchange, Kitchen Kate and another transvestite become involved in some self-mocking, salaciously suggestive badinage about their sex appeal to heterosexual men while, at the same time, mocking others in drag who compete for the same attention.

O -- . . . I'm the type that men prefer. I can at least go through the navy yard without having the flags drop to half mast.

H -- Listen, dearie--pull in your aerial, you're full of static. I'm the type men crave. The type that burns 'em up. Why, when I walk up 10th Avenue, you can smell the meat sizzling in Hell's Kitchen.[2]

Clem and Duchess have an off-stage fight over the taxi driver. Duchess races back on stage minus his wig which Clem tosses at him. The doorbell rings.

(There is a sudden hush--then everybody in hushed tones says Oooh!)

(Lights out)

---

[1]Ibid., Act III, p. 2.

[2]Ibid., Act III, p. 3.

No. 1. Oh, my God, it must be the cops!

No. 2. My God, the place is pinched!

No. 3. Don't give your right name, dearie!

No. 4. The place is raided![1]

As the transvestites file out of the drawing room, their host, Rolly, assures them that he will see to it that nothing comes of the raid on his party. The guests are resigned to such harassment.

No. 12. I don't care, I had a gay time.[2]

No. 13. I had a grand time

No. 14. I had a gorgeous time.[3]

Rolly accompanies his guests off stage. Immediately after they depart, a gun shot is heard between the sounds of a door slamming. Parsons, the butler, rushes into the drawing room and phones Judge Kingsbury that something terrible has happened at his son's home as the drag party scene comes to a confusing close.

Judge Kingsbury, Claire, Allen Grayson and Parsons are gathered in the drawing room for the last scene of the drama during which a police inspector is questioning them about the murder of Rolly earlier that same night. The gun-man has escaped and Allen is under suspicion after the butler attempts to incriminate him by repeating some of what he had heard of

---

[1]Ibid., Act III, p. 4.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

the conversation between Rolly and Allen when the deceased revealed his sexual preference to his employee. The butler makes no mention of the gay proposition made during the two men's last conversation. Allen, too noble to besmirch the dead man's reputation, does not divulge that information either even though his interest in Claire makes him the prime suspect in the case.

Dr. Richmond, with David, his drug-addicted patient in tow, breaks into the police interrogation.

> DOCTOR. This is the mad-man. The poor depraved, unfortunate, who shot our boy.
>
> JUDGE. (Struggles with detective to get at David) You killed my boy--You killed my boy!
>
> DAVID. I killed him, because I loved him. (He collapses)
>
> JUDGE. (Gazing at David) A mad-man, a mad-man.
>
> DOCTOR. This is the poor abnormal creature we discussed the other day.
>
> JUDGE. Take him out of my sight before I strangle him.
>
> DAVID. Strangle me, strangle me--You Judge Kingsbury--the great supporter of justice--You would crush me, destroy me--But your son was the same as I--yes, I killed him--when you condemn me, you condemn him.[1]

Concerned about his patient for whom he had no cure to offer when the young man came to him hoping for a medical remedy for his gay sexual orientation, Dr. Richmond turns to his friend, the Judge.

> DOCTOR. Bob, we don't know what we bring into this world. We are blind, deaf and dumb. We can see no faults, no sins, no wrongs in our own, it's another man's son you

---

[1]Ibid., Act III, p. 6.

> condemn, him, it's true, it's true! You've sent many up the river, and you know it, Bob, but whne [sic] it hits home it's a different story. In this civilized world, we are not civilized enough to know why or for what purpose these poor degenerates are brought into the world. Little did we know that a fine, strong boy, like Rolly, was one of them.[1]

The Judge turns to the inspector.

JUDGE. Report this--a case--of suicide . . .

INSPECTOR. Yes--your honor.

CURTAIN[2]

For more than half a century no scholars or critics were able to obtain a copy of The Drag to evaluate what William M. Hoffman posits may be "the first modern gay play."[3] After Hoffman located the Library of Congress's manuscript in 1978, he concluded:

> Although the play was billed as "a homosexual comedy in three acts," it is in fact an extremely serious melodrama that borders on a plea for tolerance of homosexuals. The Drag contains long, intense intellectual discussions based on the most advanced contemporary scientific opinion (Ulrichs, Krafft-Ebing, and a smattering of Freud).
>
> Sometimes the serious sections are unintentionally funny especially to a modern ear, but usually the characters ring true, especially when the gay people are talking among themselves. Gay slang seems to have changed little over the years.[4]

Hoffman noted that page 15 in the Library of Congress's copy is missing, but such is not the case. Page 15 of the carbon copy the author mailed to the copyright office is in the

---

[1]Ibid., Act III, p. 7.

[2]Ibid.

[3]William M. Hoffman, introduction, Gay Plays: The First Collection (New York: Avon Books, 1979), p. xvi.

[4]Ibid., pp. xvi-xvii.

manuscript, numbered but left blank. On the bottom of page 14, Doctor Richmond tells Judge Kingsbury at the conclusion of their lengthy discussion, "There is a cure for this thing,"[1] Perhaps West had hoped to find some information about a proposed cure and include it on blank page 15 when The Drag went into production. There was no mention by the critics who reviewed The Drag of such a miraculous remedy being suggested by the Doctor in the show.

A few drama critics--but none of New York's most prestigious--went either to Connecticut or to New Jersey to catch one of the try-out performances of the controversial production. The reviewer for Zit's show business publication gave a plot resume of the play, but because he obviously left before it was over, concluded that, "In the end Alan chooses the woman to love and kills her homosexual husband."[2] Zit's critic had this reaction to the first scene of the last act which may have driven him from the theatre:

> The sensation of "The Drag," however, is not the plot itself, but a party of homo-sexuals which takes place on the stage. This party is called, in the esoteric set, a "drag," and to go "in drag" means for a person to appear in woman's clothes.
>
> It is privileged for few to be present at one of these "drags," but to those who have attended them it is a never-to-be-forgotten sight, although it does leave a bad taste in the mouth. People who were, seemingly, males before they came to the party, suddenly are transformed to shriek-

---

[1]Mae West, The Drag, Library of Contress, Act I, p. 14.

[2]"'The Drag' Mae West's New Play Has 'Poppa Love Poppa' Theme," Zit Theatrical Newspaper, 5 February 1927.

> ing, screaming women. They hurl ribald epithets at one another, in jocular fashion, drink, and, if it happens to be a "drag" to which they bring their male sweethearts, then the function becomes the most disgusting orgy imaginable.[1]

After assuring readers of Variety that he went to Connecticut with no revulsion at the prospect of seeing "homosexuality as the subject matter of a drama," the reviewer from that show business publication reported:

> But as treated in "The Drag" it illuminates nothing, serves no decent purpose and is altogether vicious. This is because its exploitation in this play is utterly insincere and everything urged in its favor is phoney, the object being an inexpressibly brutal and vulgar attempt to capitalize a dirty matter for profit and without a shred of decency in purpose or means.[2]

Another critic from Manhattan who went to Bridgeport to catch the out-of-town opening, had an entirely different reaction. "Went To Be Shocked," the reviewer from the Graphic entitled his appraisal, "Found 'The Drag' Clean."

> It is a mighty daring theme, the first time that such a calcium light has been cast on those who will never get over to greet St. Peter--unless they fly over--that has ever been put on the speaking stage. . . .
>
> The blood-red subject was laid bare with a scalpel of the surgeon, but done so nicely that it drove home a lesson. The scoffers remained to praise. There were a dozen curtain calls after each of the three acts.
>
> The play starts off with what Elmer Grandin, as Dr. Richmond, declares "Reveals 5,000,000 third sex people in this country alone and civilization has done nothing to cure them. . . .
>
> But it was life, if even not your life or mine. And it was put on (get this) to bring out the moral lesson of the

---

[1]"'The Drag' Mae West's New Play Has 'Poppa Love Poppa' Theme," Zit Theatrical Newspaper, 5 February 1927.

[2]"Plays Out Of Town," Variety, 2 February 1927.

> play and the lesson there was to it all. A mighty lesson! . . .
>
> The expected effluvium and stench were absent. It is true it featured the "culls and scraps" of a cross-section of humanity, but it did not debase, nor degrade. . . .
>
> There is not a ribald line in the whole play, unless you construe this: "You must come over some time, dearie, and I'll bake you a pan of biscuits."[1]

The same reviewer from the Graphic made mention of the "surprising fact" that the greatest percentage of the audience at the performance he saw were women. Also in that same audience sat the unhappy manager of the Lyceum Theatre in Paterson, New Jersey. He had come to Bridgeport with his lawyer to serve notice of cancellation of a contract to house the show. But the man from Paterson left the theatre telling his booking agent that he was only too glad to book such a production in his house. The manager of a theatre in Stamford, Connecticut, who had cancelled The Drag, expressed willingness to play it after he saw a performance in Bridgeport. It seems that before the show opened a police sergeant, acting as a censor for the department, had insisted on certain changes during rehearsals in the production with a cast that, according to Variety, included "about 40 young men from Greenwich Village."[2]

When a reporter from the Evening Post went to see the show in Paterson, New Jersey, he noted other:

---

[1]"Went To Be Shocked, Found 'The Drag' Clean," New York Graphic, 1 February 1927.

[2]"'The Drag's' Rehearsing With 60 Villagers," Variety, 14 January 1927.

> . . . visitors from New York--and fully a third of the audience was from the city, and few of them were women--The audience seemed to have been divided into two groups--those who fully understood the subject under discussion and those to whom the whole theme was a puzzle.[1]

Like the reviewer from the Graphic, who had seen the show in Connecticut, the Evening Post reporter found The Drag to be anything but shocking. "Strain their ears as they might, they heard no words which have not, in recent years, come into common usage," the newspaperman declared, "at the bourgeois dinner table or was not at least pseudo-medical."[2]

Despite as many reports as not declaring that The Drag was, perhaps disappointingly, 'clean,' New York newspapers continued to keep the public keyed-up with articles and items concerning the show's out-of-town try-out that made it seem like a staged sex orgy. The Herald Tribune reported when it opened in Bridgeport on January 31, 1927 that:

> The show deals with a subject usually discussed only in medical works. One of the local critics describes one scene as being "in some ways as revolting a scene as Nero or one of the more decadent kings of France might have put on a few centuries or more ago."[3]

Obviously aware of the possibility of being legally prevented from bringing the show into New York because of the subject matter of The Drag, those with vested interest in it attempted to give the impression that Mae West had done some sort

---

[1]"Banton Abandons Play Jury System," New York Evening Post, 4 February 1927.

[2]Ibid.

[3]"'Drag' Censored At Bridgeport; Battle On Here," New York Herald Tribune, 1 February 1927.

of a dramatization of a medical argument. "This is a scientific play," one backer was quoted as saying, "Why, there's worse plays than this in New York right now. This is a medical play."[1] C. William Morganstern, producer of both plays authored by West, Sex and The Drag, told the press that the latter "has a moral just like 'Sex.' It deals with the discussion of a disease."[2] In another statement the producer proclaimed, "This play has to do with an abnormal sex condition which is widespread, and its purpose is to enlighten the public."[3]

Reports out of both Bridgeport and Paterson indicated that business for The Drag was nothing less than sensational and audiences, for the most part, receptive. "The house was a sell-out and the ticket line a block long by eight P.M.," the World reported when the play opened in New Jersey. "The majority were men, with a fair turnout of women. Only two persons in the audience grew noisy, and they subsided when the rest of the audience hissed them."[4]

Certainly aware of such audience enthusiasm in New Jersey, Broadway theatre-owners were, nevertheless, afraid of having their playhouse raided under the penal code prohibiting

---

[1]"Paterson Sees 'The Drag,' Billed As A 'Medical Play,'" New York World, 4 February 1927.

[2]"'Drag' Censored At Bridgeport; Battle On Here," New York Herald Tribune, 1 February 1927.

[3]"Stage Wants Police Power For Play Jury," New York Herald Tribune, 3 February 1927.

[4]New York World, 4 February 1927.

impure shows and would not book Morganstern's production. There were rumors around town that The Drag would either replace or play on alternate nights at Daly's Theatre with Sex, but because Mae West's starring vehicle was going so well there, the possibility never eventuated. At wit's end because he could not find a Broadway house, an assistant to the producer announced that Morganstern was seriously considering hiring Madison Square Garden for two performance of The Drag, asserting that it was "a moral play that could be given in a church."[1]

Mae West had obviously anticipated a hostile reaction to the subject matter she was the first to dramatize in the history of the American theatre. The tactic of defending The Drag from possible censorship by identifying it as Morganstern said, "a scientific study of males who are to be pitied rather than scorned,"[2] can be traced to the playwright's device of opening the play in a doctor's library with a discussion of the problem as she thought she understood it.

In an interview for Playboy magazine forty-three years after the fact, the actress-author remembered this about the ill-fated production:

> WEST: The city fathers asked us to keep it out of New York. . . So we opened in Paterson, New Jersey, and we were gettin' up to $50 a seat; they came from all over the country to see it. Caused a scandal. I was always ahead

---

[1]"Actors Arrested With Producers in 3 'Sex' Plays," New York World, 16 February 1927.

[2]"Uncertain Sex In New Play Stirs Row," New York Evening Journal, 1 February 1927.

> of my time, dear. It had a cast of 60 and it glorified homosexuals. The big scene is a dance, with about 40 of 'em in drag--I even had taxicab and truck-driver types in drag. I directed it but didn't appear in it. They never used the word sex, but I had screamin' Gay great lookin' guys flauntin' it all over the place. There were at least a dozen curtain calls after each of the three acts and it took an hour to empty the theatre--everyone wanted to visit the actors, even though a great percentage of the audiences were women. The time's right to do it on the screen, but The Boys in the Band is doin' the same thing I did and I hear A Patroit For Me copied my drag ball scene from Sex--the oddest party ever produced for the stage. . . .
>
> PLAYBOY: Was The Drag the first homosexual play in America?
>
> WEST: The first realistic one about men, I think. I used comedy to make mine interestin', but I wanted to show the tragic waste that was spreadin' into our society when people were shocked by it in any form but didn't do anything about it. It starts seriously in a doctor's office and this doctor says 5,000,000--now about 20,000,000 I'm told--people in this country alone are gay and civilization has done nothin' to cure them. . . . In The Drag, I used phrases like, "Oh, let your hair down, Mary" and "Drag Queen" and "she dished and dished and dished" and "all night she camped all over the place."[1]

In this same interview, West spoke of her friendship with some effeminate chorus boys when she worked in vaudeville. Denying to the interviewer that she was gay herself, the film star apparently made use of her effeminate friends in drawing portraits of gay men for The Drag. While West admittedly had a personal rapport with gay men, particularly very effeminate ones who were performing transvestites, she apparently was very uncomfortable even at the sight of lesbians. "I saw The Captive . . . ," the actress said, "and I thought it was perfectly

---

[1]"Playboy Interview with Mae West," Playboy, January, 1971, pp. 76-78.

shocking. Awfully immoral it seemed to me. You may think I'm kidding but plays like that make me blush."[1]

Accused by the reviewer for Variety of exploiting gay transvestites in an insincere, phony and vulgar manner "for profit and without a shred of decency,"[2] the stage and film-star defended herself in a magazine article published two years after The Drag folded.

> I admit that in my play "Drag" I was a little bit premature. The public is still too childlike to face like grownups the problem of homo-sexuality. How few are the people who even know what the word means?
>
> Because of the universal ignorance I wrote "Drag" with the intention of taking it to all the theatres in the country to teach the people. So much of a stir was made, however, that I voluntarily removed it and I must mark time until our country grows up to show them a vital truth.
>
> The time will soon come when homo-sexuality will be faced--open-mindedly. . . . It is a great problem. Many of our famous lawyers, doctors, bankers and judges are homo-sexualists. Thousands of others suffer because they are starving for love both in body and soul, and they become mental prostitutes. Five thousand perverts applied for only fifty parts when we were casting for "Drag" because there only could he do what he was starving for--act like a woman and wear expensive, beautiful gowns. Some homo-sexualists are not to be blamed for their condition. They are the inverts or the ones born that way. I think that the explanation of them is in the fact that the hormones have male characteristics and the mother sets her mind on having a girl--or vice-versa. There is a conflict and the result is a homo-sexualist or a Lesbian. Some, however, are perverts--become that way because of weak character or desire for new thrills.
>
> Professor Burton, of Columbia University, declared that "Drag" was a masterpiece. The problem is here. It is the duty of the government to at least face this great truth

---

[1]Fragment of an untitled newspaper article dated 10 January 1927 in file MWEZ, b. c. 4415, Lincoln Center.

[2]"Plays Out Of Town," Variety, 2 February 1927.

> and do something about it. Let them treat it like a disease--like cancer, for instance, discover its causes and if it is curable, cure it. I am sure that soon the tabu on homo-sexuality will be removed. For we are modern now, we are slowly going back to nature and facing the hard-true facts of life intelligently.
>
> The theatre will be my medium to sex education. I pride myself on the fact that I have always been ahead of public teachers. I realized the importance of the problem and devoted my career in the theatre to the education of the masses. I shall boldly continue to do so, in spite of criticism, insults, and narrow-minded bigots. I believe that when I have my own theatre, as I hope to some time in the future, my purpose can go unhindered by silly and old fashioned taboos and busy bodies.[1]

West never did get her own theatre although she grew rich enough as a Hollywood super-star to buy more than one. Neither did the popular entertainer pursue her plans to provide the masses with sex education through dramatic presentations whenever she returned to the New York stage or performed in night clubs.

Although Mae West did not, at least in interviews, cite politics and mores for bringing down the wrath of the establishment upon her for being the first to dramatize the lifestyle of the most bizarre segment of the underground gay community, the titular producer of her plays did so most emphatically. "It's all politics,"[2] William C. Morganstern cried out the day after one drama with a gay theme was closed on Broadway to prevent another from being moved across the Hudson River to

---

[1]Mae West, "Sex In The Theatre," Parade, September 1929.

[2]"3 Theatres Raided: 'Sex' and 'Captive' Players Arrested," New York Herald Tribune, 10 February 1927.

play in Manhattan. "Morganstern said 'The Drag' had fallen victim to a 'hysterical condition,'" the World reported, "which also forced action against 'Sex,' 'The Captive,' and 'The Virgin Man.'"[1]

"Walker Play Crusade Laid To Pre-Election Promise,"[2] the Evening Post informed its readers, echoing Morganstern's cry, "It's all politics."

> Mayor Walker was called upon for point-blank statements by representatives of several religious faiths and he has acknowledged that he gave these representatives his word of honor that, if elected, there would be no occasion to regret any support the churches might give him in his campaign. . . .
>
> The Catholic Church, through one of its two organizations, has been interested in the drive against unclean stage productions, . . .
>
> Likewise, the Greater New York Federation of Churches, several times has taken official notice of the need of purifying productions.[3]

Baptist and Methodist clergymen took particular exception to much of what was playing on Broadway and their pontifications from their pulpits were prominently publicized by the New York press throughout the 1920s and well into the next decade. Over the radio, Protestant preacher Dr. S. Parkes raised his outraged voice on his popular program calling for continued police action and stiffer state and city stage censorship legislation. Similar sermons could be heard in many of the churches and

---

[1]"'The Drag' Quits as 3 Sex Plays Reap Harvest," New York World, 13 February 1927.

[2]"Walker Play Crusade Laid To Pre-Election Promise," New York Evening Post, 16 February 1927.

[3]Ibid.

synagogues throughout the city's five boroughs.

In Manhattan, Cardinal Hayes made the same demands from Saint Patrick's Cathedral. When the New York City police closed three Broadway shows in one night it was reported that Rabbi Wise, who was held responsible for the closing the The Captive, and Anglican Bishop Manning "were about to wade into the situation when the raiders beat them to the front page."[1] Another Rabbi, Nathan Kraus, while opposed to censorship, told a meeting of the Jewish Theatrical Guild:

> We don't want the stage converted into a dumping ground for the moral and spiritual garbage of the human race, and plays dealing with abnormality belong to the psychopathists and psychoanalysts.[2]

While all of the major religious denominations had been heard from repeatedly as cries went up from places of worship for censorship of the American stage, the Catholics alone had the political clout in New York State to actually take any action on the matter. Both New York City's mayor and the state's governor were Roman Catholics. On the last day of 1926, the Evening Journal reported:

> The other day the Mayor of New York called a number of commercial theatrical producers into conference and told them that there were only six current plays that were successful, that all six were dirty, and that unless they themselves undertook to clean up the stage they faced the prospects of censorship.[3]

---

[1]"The Talk Of The Town," New Yorker, 5 March 1927, p. 19.

[2]Jonathan Katz, Gay American History (New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell Company, 1976), p. 89.

[3]William M. Feigenbaum, "Does The Stage Need A Censor?" New York Evening Journal, 31 December 1926.

Criticizing Jimmy Walker for being, "New York's night-life mayor, the man who frequents night clubs and prize fights so much that his noctural excursions are a scandal among many sections of his people," the Evening Journal surmised:

> It may be that the impetus for his new drive has come from the Mayor's church organization. It is a fact that only recently Cardinal Hayes solemnly inveighed against what he called indecency on the stage, which address was promptly followed by Mr. Walker's action.[1]

It was at the very same time that Mayor Walker--who began his clean stage compaign at a speech to the Catholic Actors' Guild--was being pressed by the religious leaders in the city to take action in the face of the threatened arrival of The Drag that his fellow Democrat, Governor Smith, was being threatened by political embarrassment. Unless Walker had the Manhattan police close certain plays already on Broadway, Smith would be forced to veto legislation proposed by State Senator Greenberg in Albany that was designed to censor the New York theatre.

"Smith Against Censor," reported the Times, "Governor Is Said To Favor Greater Activity By The Police."[2] The World elaborated: "Governor Smith expressed his opinion that no state censorship law was needed and the adequate statutes cover the situation if enforced."[3] The Herald Tribune explained the

---

[1]William M. Feigenbaum, "Does The Stage Need A Censor?" New York Evening Journal, 31 December 1926.

[2]"Smith Against Censor," New York Times, 4 February 1927.

[3]"Actors Arrested With Producers in 3 'Sex' Plays," New York World, 10 February 1927.

seemingly liberal Governor's preference for strong-arm, night-stick censorship:

> As the Hearst state censorship campaign is understood politically the immediate purpose is to confront Governor Smith with a bill which his previous political utterances will compell him to veto. The Governor has been uncompromising for the abolition of the state motion picture censorship board. Now the Greenberg Bill proposes an enlargement of the duties of that board to include theatricals of all kinds . . .
>
> After Governor Smith vetoed the Greenberg Bill he could be accused of protecting immoral shows and Tammany Hall accused of collecting Broadway graft.[1]

Since Hearst had singled out The Captive in his editorial that launched his clean stage campaign to embarrass the man who had insulted him publicly, and since another editorial in his paper deplored the possibility that The Drag would be seen on Broadway, both gay plays had to be prime targets in any police raid instigated to foil the press baron's plans. While waging his campaign for a state censor to check immorality on the New York stage, Hearst made sure the public understood his support of the sort of entertainment he endorsed by giving extensive press coverage to such movie musicals as The Red Mill starring Marion Davies. Ironically enough, the very week the publisher succeeded in closing The Captive by forcing Smith's Tammany Hall cronies to raid the show, The Red Mill opened on Broadway with glowing reviews of his mistress, Marion Davies's talents in both of Hearst's New York dailies.

During the commotion among city officials in trying to

---

[1]"Banton To Sift Stage Charges To Foil Hearst," New York Tribune, 1 February 1927.

decide how best to cope with the threatened Broadway opening of The Drag, its author was settled, and seemingly safe from the police and the censors, at Daly's Sixty-Third Street Theatre in her first starring vehicle, Sex, which she had written for herself. Like The Captive, Sex had been cleared by the quasi-citizen's play-jury of charges that it was immoral. The Times had dismissed West's vehicle as "a crude, inept play, cheaply produced and poorly acted,"[1] and the Wall Street Journal rejected it as being "intended for crude mentalities."[2] According to Billboard, West's first play was "poorly written, poorly acted, horribly staged, Sex does not even contain anything for the dirt seekers."[3] Some newspapers refused to run ads for the production because the title was, in 1926, so offensively shocking. Those second-string critics sent to look at the show at its opening wrote either indignant or humorous reviews and Sex was not expected to survive.

Set in a bawdy house, West played the stereotype "whore with a heart of gold" who proved herself better than her betters and ends up knowing her proper place in the social order--entertaining the gentlemen of the fleet while they are on shore leave. Soon after its devastating reception by the critics, Sex was discovered by the U. S. Navy and the Coast Guard. The

---

[1]"'Sex' A Crude Drama," New York Times, 1 April 1926.

[2]"Theatres," Wall Street Journal, 30 September 1926.

[3]"Sex," Billboard, 8 May 1926.

seamen, attracted by the title, flocked to see the show. It gradually caught on with other groups of less sophisticated theatregoers and those curious about its brazen title. Mae West had succeeded in making the move from vaudeville to the legitimate theatre, from song and dance comedienne--whose specialty was an acrobatic feat of balancing three 150 pound men on her shoulders--to Broadway dramatic actress.

Somehow West managed to find time, while starring in Sex, to direct The Drag in preparation for its out-of-town try-out. "Officials came from New York to see it," the playwright recalled, "and asked me please not to bring it into New York. It will upset the city and we are not equipped to handle it."[1] The play began doing such sensational business in New Jersey that New Yorkers read reports about crowds fighting to see it. "Six patrolmen were sent to the theatre to handle the crowd that stormed the door an hour before the curtain rose,[2] reported the Herald Tribune.

Despite threats in the press emanating from the office of the District Attorney and the Department of Police, West and her co-producers would not be intimidated. They were going ahead with plans to bring their money-maker into New York. However, according to Variety, before they did so, the producers:

---

[1]Richard Meryman, "Mae West, A Cherished, Bemusing Masterpiece of Self-Preservation," LIFE, 18 April 1969, p. 72.

[2]"Crowds Fight To See 'The Drag,'" New York Herald Tribune, 4 February 1927.

> attempted to secure the endorsement of the medical fraternity and the city officials to the effect that "The Drag" is educational and a remedial gesture on behalf of the "Homos." According to the "author" of "Sex," the Homos number one male in every 20 in the United States and a larger percentage in Europe.[1]

In the same article, headlined, "Confidential Performance of 'Drag' For Endorsement," Variety divulged that:

> A midnight performance of "The Drag" was scheduled for Daly's, New York, last night (Tuesday) after the regular performance of "Sex." . . . Mae West staged the midnight show for City officials and 25 physicians, with newspaper men barred. No notice of the midnight show was sent out.[2]

For whatever reasons, perhaps even problems with Actors' Equity, this report was denied the following day by the producers and the city officials who might have been expected to be among those invited to the private performance. One police official, according to the World, "specifically denied he had attended the showing, but he would not say it had not been held."[3] It may very well be that the Broadway debut of gay males as characters in an American play took place on February 8, 1927, for a very limited, select audience, secretly and by night.

---

[1]"Confidential Performance of 'Drag' For Endorsement," Variety, 9 February 1927.

[2]Ibid.

[3]"Actors Arrested With Producers In 3 'Sex' Plays," New York World, 10 February 1927.

CHAPTER V

THE 1927 BROADWAY SHOW RAID

"To-day Broadway told itself the worst is true--the shows are going to be raided," New Yorkers read on the morning of February 9, 1927. "Pessimists think the night sticks may descend tonight."[1] The same day Variety informed its readers, "Police Ready to Raid Theatres With 'Dirt' Plays." The weekly publication explained:

> Taking a tip from Governor Al Smith that the Penal Code covered the matter of salacious plays, District Attorney Banton and Police Commissioner McLaughlin came forth with statements late last week to the effect that presentation of dirt plays would bring arrests and prosecutions. . . .
>
> The Governor again made it plain that he did not believe in state censorship bills now pending in Albany. He even called attention to a Supreme Court decision wherein it was held that any play tending to incite or arouse impure imagination, constitutes the maintenance of a public nuisance, is punishable under the law, even though there be no indecent language or obscene exposure.[2]

Contending that the Governor was right in pointing out that existing city laws and the State's Penal Code were more than adequate to handle the situation, the District Attorney

---

[1]"Will Raid 'The Drag' If It Opens," New York Sun, 9 February 1927.

[2]"Police Ready To Raid Theatres With 'Dirt' Plays," Variety, 9 February 1927.

reneged on his promise that there would be no retroactive prosecution of plays approved by the play jury. "I am not in sympathy with these radical Bolshevist ideas that try to obliterate the distinction between decency and indecency,"[1] District Attorney Joab H. Banton declared, before the police raid on three Broadway plays.

The Mayor of New York was out of town the night the actors and managers of three shows were taken to a night court to be arraigned on charges of being "a public nuisance," as well as "tending to corrupt the morals of youths and others."[2] In Mayor Walker's absence it was up to the Acting-Mayor to bring complaints to the attention of the District Attorney. That office was also contacted by the New York Society For The Suppression Of Vice which cited George Jean Nathan's "extremely caustic condemnation of the play The Captive."[3]

Even Broadway ticket scalpers guessed correctly that the lesbian love drama was one of those ear-marked for closing in the anticipated raid. Every seat was sold out before the curtain rose on the night of February 9th, and, according to

---

[1]"Mr. Banton Goes To The Play," New York Evening Post, 12 February 1927.

[2]"Sex Plays Are Raided," New York Daily Mirror, 10 February 1927.

[3]John S. Sumner, "For The Ultimate Good Of Society There Must Be A Cessation Of Dirty Plays--Hence The Theatre Closings," Theatre Magazine, August 1928, pp. 11-12.

the World, "hawkers in the street shouted, Here you are! Get your tickets for positively the last performance of 'The Captive!'"[1]

It came as a surprise that the District Attorney also decided to close a vapid comedy, The Virgin Man, which had run for a year in London after being approved by the office of the Lord Chamberlain. The Virgin Man was about to post closing notices because of disappointing reviews and business. The light comedy concerned a worldly wife who playfully arranges, without success it turns out, for the seduction of her young brother-in-law, an innocent college student.

Sex was the third show picked for this police raid on Broadway shows. Percy Hammond, who had not bothered to see Mae West's starring vehicle when it first opened, decided, simply out of curiosity, to look in on the show the month before it was closed down for being a public nuisance. "'Sex' was in plight no worse than many of its reputable companions of the stage,"[2] Hammond reported in a very brief appraisal.

If, in fact, Sex was not worse, at least in Hammond's opinion, than other stage productions seen at the same time on Broadway, why was it selected for closing? Heywood Broun was one of the very few drama critics who had any reaction in print to the raid on the Broadway shows. "'Sex' has now been

---

[1]"Actors Arrested With Producers In 3 'Sex' Plays," New York World, 10 February 1927.

[2]Percy Hammond, "The Theatres," New York Herald Tribune, 4 February 1927.

running for eleven months," Broun pointed out, "and,'The Captive' has had more than 150 performances. If either or both of these plays constitute a scandalous condition, just what did they constitute three months ago?"[1]

While waiting for some theatre-owner to offer The Drag shelter along Broadway, the show continued to do turn-away business in New Jersey including the performance on the night of the police raid in New York. "Definite steps have been taken to make sure this drama of perverted sex," reported one of Hearst's papers, "will never be shown to a public audience in New York."[2] By closing Sex, the District Attorney got results. The Drag folded the very next day.

"'Sex'and 'The Virgin Man'appeal to morons," the District Attorney said. Singling out The Captive, Banton concluded, "The other two are indecent and vulgar, but this one is thoroughly bad."[3] During the second act of the February 9th performance of Bourdet's internationally acclaimed drama, the stage of the Empire Theatre was suddenly filled with policemen who stood blocking the set's entrances and staring at the performers. Basil Rathbone was so shocked and disconcerted that he forgot his lines. "The stage manager rang

---

[1]Heywood Broun, "It Seems To Me," New York World, 4 February 1927.

[2]"'Drag' Staged At Bridgeport," New York American, 1 February 1927.

[3]W. J. Blalock Jr., "The Night They Raided Three Broadway Shows," New York Sunday News, 22 April 1956.

down the curtain," Helen Menken recalled, "and most of the actors became hysterical. . . . Basil was finally quieted when the policemen consented to retire to a corner of the stage. The curtain rose once more and the play resumed."[1]

No hint of any such hysteria was mentioned the next day in the headlines or the front-page accounts of the police raid. "Police Politely Serve The Warrants After Final Curtains; Victims Not Unwillingly Submit Cordially To Arrest, Which Will Be Repeated Till Plays Are Purged."[2] the Times informed its readers.

Mayor Walker was most certainly cognizant of the planned raids since he had made special arrangements for Helen Menken's trip to court to spare her the indignity faced by Mae West and other performers who were herded into waiting taxis. Menken recalled:

> I had visions of something terrible like a paddy wagon, but I had a pleasant surprise when I got my make-up off. A very nice chauffeur appeared at my door and announced that Mayor Walker, who was an old friend of mine, had sent his car for me. So I rode to court in the mayor's private car enjoying the irony of the situation.[3]

On the whole the experience of being arrested and brought to court was apparently less enjoyable for the actress than

---

[1]"Helen Menken Recalls 'Captive' And Her Arrest," New York Herald Tribune, 9 June 1935.

[2]"Police Raid Three Shows, Sex, Captive and Virgin Man: Hold Actors and Managers," New York Times, 10 February 1927.

[3]New York Herald Tribune, 9 June 1935.

the ride in her old friend's car. Menken finally took to her bed under the strain of the situation. On the very day she had a 'nervous collapse,' the Herald Tribune reported that "Walker At Palm Beach, Smiles Over Theatre Raids."[1] From a golf course in Miami, the playboy mayor commented:

> I do not believe in censorship in any of its forms, and I think the producers will clean their own houses without interference from us. But, of course, the police have been ordered to interfere whenever a play offends public decency.[2]

A blanket order was given to the New York police to arrest without warrant all persons connected with a performance which, in the mind of any individual officer, seemed to violate common decency. Neither the order, nor the night-stick raid drew any outraged editorial protests from the daily papers. Hearst's tabloid, The Daily Mirror, boasted that it had given every possible support to the crusade by those indignant citizens who had protested the unsavory character of many of the Broadway plays.[3] Both the Morning World and the Evening World blamed the producers rather than the police and politicians for the raid. "Something had to be done," the Evening World

---

[1]"Walker At Palm Beach, Smiles Over Theatre Raids," New York Herald Tribune, 18 February 1927.

[2]"Walker Backs McKee," New York Times, 15 February 1927.

[3]"Sex Plays Are Raided," New York Daily Mirror, 10 February 1927.

editorialized, "If it is not cleaned from the inside, it will certainly be from the outside."[1]

A couple of the newspapers objected to the raid primarily because it gave such sensational, free publicity to the offensive shows, thus increasing their patronage until the courts were able to order the productions closed. In an editorial entitled, "Cleaning Up The Stage," the Times suggested some sort of a play censorship committee empowered to prevent professional actors from appearing in any play found objectionable.[2] The Evening Post, like the Times, resented the fact that the shows were able to reopen for business after being raided. The Post noted, too:

> The players themselves were forced to go through an ordeal of public exploitation that was neither just nor necessary . . . Nevertheless, despite these evils, two plays, which in theme went further than any heretofore presented on the American stage are checked. However, haltingly, even stupidly, the subject of sex perversion has been prevented from establishing itself in the theatre.[2]

In an article in the magazine published by the Theatre Guild, the most prestigious production company in America in the twenties, a writer made this appraisal of the situation.

---

[1]"The Warning To The Stage," New York Evening World, 10 February 1927, and "Mr. Banton's Raids," New York Morning World, 11 February 1927.

[2]"Cleaning Up The Stage," New York Times, 11 February 1927.

[3]"The War On Unclean Plays," New York Evening Post, 18 February 1927.

"If the people of New York want policemen to decide what they shall and shall not see in the theatre, this seems to be an excellent solution."[1] The same writer also recommended that the police seek the advice of respectable theatre people before deciding to use their night sticks on another Broadway show. "The people," the article concluded, "including the theatrical interests and all friends of free speech, will acknowledge that the suppression of downright and unquestionable indecency is the proper business of the police."[2]

Perhaps because police raids against certain activities in New York City were commonplace in the 1920s--federal agents of the Prohibition Administration repeatedly made strong-arm forays on speak-easies--there was no public outcry. Professor Donald Stewart, one of the very few voices raised in outrage over the issue, thought that he would be joined by many another when he declared, "The idea of Helen Menken going to jail for playing the part of 'The Captive' is preposterous. The public will not tolerate such outrageous persecution."[3] The week of the Broadway raids, when one newspaper announced, "We're Still

---

[1]Hiram Mothersill, "Sense and Censorship," Theatre Guild Magazine, November 1928, p. 11.

[2]Ibid.

[3]"Clean-Stage Drive Halts For Courts," New York Herald Tribune, 12 February 1927.

The Wettest City Despite Those 39 Raids,"[1] the Professor of Dramatics at Princeton University envisioned--also mistakenly it turned out--that New York would become a busy bee-hive of surreptitious theatrical activity. "Bootlegging of plays," the Princeton professor predicted:

> can be carried on just as bootlegging of intoxicating drinks. If plays are censored, private societies will be formed which will charge no admission to the plays, but to go one must be a member of the club. The play jury could not stop such productions.[2]

A few other voices were eventually raised in protest. In Theatre Magazine, one outraged writer attacked the Society for the Suppression of Vice and The Watch and Ward Society as being Philistines. "What a pity that a great play like The Captive had to suffer," the writer concluded, "but again here was an example of spinelessness before the police."[3] Dr. Holmes of Manhattan's Community Church decried:

> The police, in attempting to clean the New York stage, have begun as usual by making fools of themselves. Yesterday they raided "The God Of Vengeance," the day before they raided Bernard Shaw's "Widower's House," (sic) and now they run true to form by raiding "The Captive," one of the really serious plays in town.[4]

---

[1]"We're Still The Wettest City Despite Those 39 Raids," n. p., New York Newspaper Clipping, 12 February 1927, in file MWEz, b. c. 4415, Lincoln Center.

[2]"Stage Wants Police Power For Play Jury," New York Herald Tribune, 12 February 1927.

[3]Benjamine De Cassers, "Smash The Panders and Smut-hounds!" Theatre Magazine, July 1928, p. 12.

[4]"Clergyman Flays Police For Raid on Captive," New York Morning Telegraph, 11 February 1927.

Actor's Equity Association--which had been very active in the successful campaign to keep The Drag out of New York--made no protest after its union members had been manhandled and publicly humiliated during the Broadway police raid. Counsel for the actors union simply said it "washed its hands of the situation."[1]

Before the raid the Morning Telegraph reported, "One thousand Protestant clergymen of the Greater New York Federation of Churches yesterday passed a resolution backing up the District Attorney in his drive against objectionable plays."[2] Drama critic and columnist Heywood Broun took objection to at least one reason given by the Methodists for supporting Banton's closing of Bourdet's play.

> Some of the Methodist Brethren who have paid their respects to "The Captive" have suggested that the particular aberrancy with which the play concerns itself is a matter in which cities alone are concerned. . . . I must ask permission to meet this particular charge with an unholy snicker. The problem is neither local nor of our own age. Let the Methodist Gentlemen look to the Bible and they will find that long before there was a New York, curious pathological quirks did exist.[3]

In Washington, D.C., the representative from Mississippi, a state in which the legitimate theatre was all but nonexistent, urged federal stage censorship. A bill to that effect

---

[1]"Press Old Charges Against Liveright, Backer of 'Captive,'" New York Times, 18 February 1927.

[2]"Banton Will Make Cops Play Critics," New York Morning Telegraph, 8 February 1927.

[3]Heywood Broun, "It Seems To Me," New York World, 4 February 1927.

was introduced in Congress which named sixty-seven lewd or obscene Broadways plays, but the federal legislation never passed.[1] A Congressman from New York City, Sol Bloom, urged that the whole audience be arrested for patronizing immoral shows.[2] Mayor Walker observed, with satisfaction, that "the managers will think a long time before expending $50,000 to $60,000 on a production if there is a possibility that all they get in return will be a warrant."[3]

An entirely different reaction to the raid came from across the Atlantic. André Gaillard, the first man to produce La Prisonnière, observed:

> After a play has run more than three months, . . . it seems strange that it should suddenly be banned. It is all the more surprising because it makes it appear that New York's morals are narrower than those of Berlin and Vienna and especially the French Provincial cities, noted for their straight-laced ideas, where "La Prisonniere" has been running lately.[4]

Also from Paris, Augustus Thomas, one of the major American dramatists of his time, spoke out in annoyance at the police tactics aimed at inhibiting the Broadway theatre for which he had been writing since 1875. "There was no reason to

---

[1]"Arrest Sex Play Audiences, Urges Bloom," New York Morning Telegraph, 14 February 1927.

[2]Ibid.

[3]"'The Captive' Flees Wrath of Law," New York Daily Mirror, 17 February 1927.

[4]"New York Modesty Tardy Says 'Captive' Originator," New York Herald Tribune, 11 February 1927.

close 'The Captive' after a three-month run," said Thomas. "I consider 'The Captive' handled delicately and artistically. The plot is legitimate and the theme of the Twentieth-Century."[1]

Arthur Hornblow, Jr., defended his contribution in translating La Prisonnière:

> It was throwing a light on a subject too little understood, a subject that requires a great deal of light. Man conquers only when he understands. If widely produced, this play would have been of inestimable value to mankind.[2]

Although all of New York's daily papers ran front-page headlines reporting the Broadway raid, and most of them ran daily accounts of the ensuing court proceedings and of the ten day imprisonment of Mae West and her two coproducers, there was little mention of the sensation of the 1926-27 theatrical season in the drama sections of the very same newspapers. Percy Hammond, one of the few critics who made any comment at all in his column, wrote: "We should all have faith in the Mayor, the Police and the District Attorney, and trust no matter in which direction they squirt their hoses, purification will be the result."[3]

While the other most important newspaper critics such as J. Brooks Atkinson, George Jean Nathan, Burns Mantle, and

---

[1]"Augustus Thomas in Paris Assails Banton Play Raid," New York Morning Telegraph, 12 February 1927.

[2]"'The Captive' Flees Wrath of Law, Daily Mirror, 17 February 1927.

[3]Percy Hammond, "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 13 February 1927.

Alexander Woollcott were all silent after the raid, Hammond also had a comment when there was speculation that The Captive would reopen after having been closed after the police raid. After having attacked Nathan for his narrow-mindedness, the critic for the Herald Tribune also seems to have had some sober second thoughts about the advisability of allowing females to see The Captive. Hammond declared that if the new producer who takes over the show "will debar weak women and children from attendance and confine its audiences to men only, 'The Captive' should be allowed to continue its career as a fine play, illustrating a sinister topic."[1]

Mae West and her titular producer realized the futility of attempting to bring The Drag into New York when, the day after she was arrested for appearing in Sex, an Assistant Prosecutor in Bayonne, New Jersey, Aloysius McMahan, directed Chief of Police O'Neill to close "the homosexual comedy-drama" after it had been all set to open in their city for a third out-of-town engagement. "'The Drag' Dragged Off The Board in Bayonne,"[2] Hearst's tabloid, the Daily Mirror, announced with headlines accompanied by a full front-page photo of hundreds of would-be patrons waiting in a queue in front of the Bayonne Opera House. Eight hundred theatregoers had seen the matinee and final

---

[1]Percy Hammond, "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 20 February 1927.

[2]"'The Drag' Dragged Off The Boards in Bayonne," New York Daily Mirror, February 1927.

performance of The Drag at the Opera House, while five hundred more[1] waited in vain to buy tickets for the evening performance cancelled by the city's Irish Catholic Assistant Prosecutor and Police Chief.

With the curious exception of the Daily News, which ignored the existence of The Drag after first reporting on its Connecticut opening, all of the major daily newspapers connected the out-of-town threat of The Drag and the closing of the three Broadway plays. Details of court proceedings in the aftermath of the raid shared front page space with announcements of the demise of the first drama with gay males as characters ever seen on an American public stage. Headlines read: "Bayonne Bars 'The Drag,'" "'The Drag' Ends Hectic Career; Morganstern out,"[3] "'The Drag' Quits,"[4] and "'The Drag' Stopped."[5]

"Five million people in the United States are interested in conditions similar to those pictured in 'The Drag,'" Morganstern said. "There is no reason why the stage should not deal with their problem."[6]

---

[1]"Bayonne Bars 'The Drag,'" New York Times, 10 February 1927.

[2]Ibid.

[3]"'The Drag' Ends Hectic Career; Morganstern Out," New York Morning Telegraph, 13 February 1927.

[4]"'The Drag' Quits as 3 Sex Plays Reap Harvest," New York World, 13 February 1927.

[5]"'The Drag' Stopped," New York American, 11 February 1927.

[6]New York Morning Telegraph, 13 February 1927.

The contempt with which gay men were held in the 1920s is evident in the following characterizations of members of The Drag's cast which appeared in one of the New York papers:

> Now that "The Drag" has been dumped into the garbage heap, and at least a score of its former players must go back to trimming hats and selling ribbons, it may not be amiss to describe some of the "queer" characters who are said to have appeared in "The Drag" during the brief time it dragged itself about.
>
> It is certain that Mae West, who sponsored the play, didn't have to work hard to complete the homosexual cast. The nature of these creatures is such that they will snap at a chance of appearing in public. And, when they are offered a chance to appear on the stage in gowns, dearie, real gowns; well-woops!
>
> Chief among those reported to have appeared in the last act of "The Drag," which was the big "camp" scene of homosexuals, was a person known as "The Duchess." . . . and she is the arbiter of homo-land. There is no greater authority (sic) of manners and etiquette . . . and whenever one of "her" tribe is found guilty of a lapse in the most correct social usage, "The Duchess" deals harshly with "her." . . .
>
> Another celebrated homo said to have played in "The Drag" is called "Mother Superior." This character is an indefatigable correspondent. He is said to have studied for the priesthood at one time, but abandoned taking holy orders for the more exciting life of a homosexual in the great city. "Mother Superior" is the confessor and spiritual advisor of a large group of homos and both he and "The Duchess" hold court in a certain eating place on Fifth Avenue in the forties. Whenever a publication takes the queer clan to task, it is always "Mother Superior" or "The Duchess" who wrote a defense. . . .
>
> Incidentally the entire "queer" crew think it is terrible that the play should have closed. Most of them have been convinced, for the last several years, that they can act much better than regular Broadway actors or actresses, and they think it's "too dreadful, dearie," that the rude police should have stopped the play."[1]

Two members of the community, a religious leader and a theatrical producer, stated that nothing ever seen on the

---

[1]Untitled New York newspaper article dated 11 February 1927, no publication in the clipping file for The Drag, Lincoln Center.

American stage was as vulgar, tawdry and salacious as the countless items published every day in the New York tabloids--all of which supported suppression of freedom of expression in the legitimate theatre. "It would be a farce or a comedy," religious leader John Haynes Holmes was quoted as saying, "to remove 'The Captive' while the tabloids are allowed to pollute the channels of public life with the foul sewage."[1]

George Renauent, director of a theatrical group, told the Times:

> To stop a show and not the tabloids is most unfair and inconsistent. The prices of Broadway shows run from $1.10 to $5.50, thus cutting down the number of people who would go to see the plays. And when they buy tickets they know what they are going to see. But the two-cent tabloid which prints indecent pictures and stories comes within everybody's reach, especially for children who are seldom seen at the theatre. There is not a single play in New York which can compare with some of our tabloids for indecency and filth.[2]

The cast and managing director of The Captive never went to trial. Because the state Supreme Court granted an injunction restraining the politicians from raiding the show again, Bourdet's drama played five more days. Gilbert Miller, who was admitted to the Legion of Honor in Paris for producing the English translation of La Prisonnière, was arrested in New York the day after he was decorated by France. Miller was determined to keep the show running. However, "Mr. Lasky and

---

[1]"New York Missing Something," no publication, dated 26 February 1927, in the clipping file for The Drag, Lincoln Center.

[2]"Raided Shows Open Under Court Order," New York Times, 11 February 1927.

Mr. Zukor brought pressure to bear on Mr. Miller and forced him to close the play," a Broadway producer, Horace Liveright, confided to an interviewer, "because they were afraid of what their small town public might think of their producing a play like 'The Captive' in New York. I don't like to think the legitimate stage is dominated by motion picture interests."[1]

Liveright, a well-known publisher as well as a producer, announced that he would take over production of the play from the Famous Players Lasky in Hollywood which suffered a considerable financial loss by abandoning the production. More than $80,000 had to be given back at the boxoffice to ticket-holders who would never get to see The Captive.[2] "The total loss involved in abandoning the New York and road show," according to the Times, "was estimated at somewhere between $150,000 and $130,000."[3]

A week after the Broadway raid the newspapers contained more articles concerning The Captive. The Times announced with front-page headlines: "'The Captive' Quits, But New Producer Will Defy Police."[4] With an affidavit declaring that Bourdet's

---

[1]"Horace Liveright Clatters Down B'Way On Rosintante," New York Post, 17 February 1927.

[2]"'The Captive' Quits, But New Producer Will Defy Police," New York Times, 17 February 1927.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid.

drama "has been approved by responsible psychiatrists and doctors," Liveright began a court battle to reopen The Captive on Broadway by hiring Arthur Garfield Hays, former counsel for John Thomas Scopes who was arrested for teaching evolution in Tennessee. Determined to defend The Captive by making a "Scopes case in New York," Garfield declared:

> We laugh at those people down in Tennessee, . . . but we do the same thing in New York. In Tennessee, it was held you should keep people ignorant to save their souls. Here the police attempt to say you should keep them ignorant to save their morals.[1]

Supporting Liveright, Menken, Rathbone and other members of the cast of The Captive retracted their promises--made under the duress of the police raid to the judge--never again to appear in the play. "Far from seeing that we have been engaged in the commission of a crime, . . ." read the statement signed by the show's cast, "we feel that we have been privileged in using our talents in a play of the highest merit and social value."[2]

"The cast of 'The Captive' appeals to some very lofty principles," declared an editorial in the Evening Post, "in behalf of a very weak case." The editorial continued:

> "We owe it to ourselves, our profession and to the public to refuse to be intimidated." This sounds brave and fine. But in behalf of whom is it made? Why, in

---

[1]"Fight To Save 'Captive' Like Scopes Case," New York Herald Tribune, 19 February 1927.

[2]"Raided Shows Are More Defiant," New York Sun, 11 February 1927.

> behalf of the right to introduce the theme of sex perversion on the American stage. We hope the city will continue to fight to prevent"The Captive"from reopening.[1]

Exactly one month to the day that the cast and producer of The Captive were arrested, Supreme Court Justice Jeremiah A. Mahoney ruled that, "the stage is not a place for the portrayal of grossly immoral human emotions."[2] Holding that the police had acted correctly in stopping the show and preventing its revival, Mahoney declared, "The law recognizes the fact that many people must be protected from their very selves."[3] Although Mahoney's ruling was headlined in some of the New York papers, the case itself, even when it was appealed, failed to excite either the press, the general public or even the liberal intellectuals enough to make it in any way comparable to the Scopes Monkey Trial, as Liveright's Counsel had hoped. "The subject matter of 'The Captive' has been dealt with in some of the most famous classics of history," Attorney Hays argued, appealing Mahoney's ruling. "The matter is handled in a delicate, artistic, subtle and inoffensive manner. There is not an offensive, or vulgar line in the play, nor is there any obscene or unrefined situation or action."[4]

---

[1]"Editorial," New York Evening Post, 17 February 1927.

[2]"'Captive' Immoral, Mahoney Decides," New York Times, 9 March 1927.

[3]Ibid.

[4]"Legislature Gets Play 'Padlock Bill,'" New York Times, 19 March 1927.

Roger Liveright had no choice but to abandon his plans for putting The Captive back on Broadway. Less than two months after the police raid, the Republicans in Albany slipped through the State Assembly, during the closing hours of the session, legislation amending the Penal Code of 1909 under which the police raids were conducted against The Captive, Sex, and The Virgin Man. Not only was a specific reference to prohibiting plays "depicting or dealing with, the subject of sex degeneracy, or sex perversion,"[1] added to the public obscenity restrictions of the Code, but a much publicized amendment, Section 1140A, stated that theatre owners could have their playhouses padlocked on the orders of the Licensing Commissioner for a year if they rented to a producer of a show which a jury decided "would tend to the corruption of youth or others."[2]

The Wales Law, named after a legislator who introduced it, became popularly known as the Wales Padlock Law. The practice of padlocking a supposedly idle brewery in which beer was being surreptiously brewed during prohibition most certainly inspired the political cartoonists on the American and the World, a week before the Broadway show raid, to do prophetic drawings involving a padlock. In one cartoon a giant padlock

---

[1]Jonathan Katz, Gay American History (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1976), p. 90.

[2]"Legislature Gets Play 'Padlock Bill,'" New York Times, 19 March 1927.

was attached to a lowered curtain preventing it from rising on the stage. In the other cartoon there was a padlock on the front door of a theatre in which its owner had allowed the production of a play the police felt corrupted public morals or was a public nuisance.

Padlocking would have been possible only after the District Attorney's office succeeded in getting a guilty verdict from a jury after trying a producer for presenting an immoral show, and then only if the theatre-owner refused to eject the production from his property after the conviction.

"I fear it does not go far enough," complained one State Senator from Brooklyn the day the measure was voted on. "It is a slap on the wrist when a good, man-sized punch in the jaw is what is needed. When sex degeneracy and sex perversion have been shown on the stage, it is time to call a halt."[1]

At least one attorney declared that the Wales Law was unconstitutional when Governor Smith signed the bill in 1927.[2] Forty eight years later, the U.S. Supreme Court extended the same kind of Constitutional protection against advance censorship and prohibition to the legitimate theatre that newspapers, books and motion pictures enjoy. Today a theatre owner or

---

[1]"Padlock For Stage Voted By Senate," New York Times, 24 March 1927.

[2]"Smith Approves Theatre Padlocks; Vetoes Gas Cut-Off," New York Times, 8 April 1927.

operator in America cannot legally, sight unseen, bar a production from his stage as the unconstitutional Wales Law insisted he do in New York State for more than four decades.

While religious leaders and puritanical pressure groups had been urging stage censorship ever since Anthony Comstock began working for such legislation a decade after the end of the Civil War, cooler heads in government had prevailed until the 1920s. Liberals, such as Alfred E. Smith, who actively opposed state censorship of motion pictures, and the rakish theatre-going Mayor Jimmy Walker seemed most unlikely to pose a threat to the freedom being enjoyed by those who were writing for the legitimate stage in America. However, with the introduction of lesbians and the imminent introduction of gay men on the Broadway stage, passions were so inflamed, that Smith and Walker reacted in order to assure their political survival. That strong-arm reaction gave rise to legislation that the Governor did not expect would ever be placed before him either to sign or to veto.

Billboard, a show business publication, blamed the Broadway producers for the passage of the Wales amendment to the Penal Code. In an editorial, the editor charged:

> The Padlock Bill could have been defeated without trouble between the time it was jammed through the Assembly and the time the Governor signed it--but the theatrical interests didn't even try to stop it.
>
> They allowed an action to be taken which puts offending theatres in the same category as bootleg joints and dives.

> It is the worst black eye that ever was handed to show business--and the money-mad, heedless, apathetic producers are to blame.[1]

"'The Drag' brought on the crisis," producer Winthrop Ames declared after the Broadway show raid.

> It could have been avoided. Now our main interest centers on avoiding an Albany censorship. If that were to come the theatrical world would be paralyzed as has been the motion picture world with its censorship.[2]

Variety reported that during a meeting of a committee of showmen:

> in objecting to state or city censorship, fear of destroying the American stage was expressed. London's stage is in a state of stagnation, it was claimed because of rigid censorship ideas.[3]

Yiddish Theatre scholar David S. Lifson pointed out, thirty-eight years after the enactment of the Wales Padlock Law, that it "is considered a link in the chain which brought about the decline in the Broadway stage at the end of the 1920's,"[4] together with the more significant arrival of the "talkies" and the impact of the Depression.

---

[1]"Clean Plays By Force," Editorial, Billboard, 23 April 1927.

[2]"Liveright Appeal To Reopen 'Captive,'" New York Times, 20 February 1927.

[3]"'The Drag,' Blamed For Bringing The Play Censorship To A Focus, Stopped Last Week in Jersey," Variety, 16 February 1927.

[4]David S. Lifson, The Yiddish Theatre in America, (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1965), p. 92.

Producer Gilbert Miller had said before more theatrical censorial amendments were added to the New York State Penal Code in 1927:

> The motion pictures have left the legitimate stage only the adult portion of the public, speaking from an intellectual standpoint.
> The type of persons who still go to the spoken drama are not the type who would be menaced by subjects of rather an advanced nature.[1]

That portion of the audience to which Miller referred was, in large part, possibly lost to Broadway when the stage dared little more than did the carefully censored American motion picture screen.

The New York Penal Code was amended in 1967 and again in 1975.[2] Just one year after the prohibition against dramatizing "the subject of sex degeneracy or sex perversion," was dropped, along with the padlock threat to theatre-owners, Boys In The Band was produced in 1968 in an Off-Broadway playhouse. "More than any other single play," William M. Hoffman observed," it publicized homosexuals as a minority group."[3] Critic Eric Bentley said of audiences who, in large numbers, got to see Mart Crowley's drama:

---

[1]Fragment of an untitled, undated New York newspaper article, no publication, in "Censorship: U. S. Stage, 1920-26," file, Lincoln Center.

[2]McKinney's Consolidated Laws of New York, Book 39, Penal Law (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Edward Thompson Company, 1967), p. 1.

[3]William M. Hoffman, Gay Plays: The First Collection (New York: Avon Books, 1979), p. xxvii.

> It was the first time that most of them had gone to a regular theatre (later a movie) and had seen a room with five or six, shall we say, known homosexuals in it. People identified by the author as homosexual were shown talking to each other about their lovers, their tastes, their habits. It was a nice bit of sociology and, for its audience, authentically new territory.[1]

"'Boys in the Band' is doin' the same thing I did,"[2] Mae West reminded an interviewer more than four decades after her planned New York production of The Drag. Except for her own mention of her landmark play, one is hard pressed to find references to either The Drag or The Captive and the sensation they caused in the American theatre in the 1920s. Jonathan Katz included a note on The Drag in eight pages of newspaper excerpts concerning the closing of Bourdet's drama in his massive documentary Gay American History--published half a century after the Broadway police raid. The year before Katz's documentary appeared, Alan Churchill devoted three pages to the raid in The Theatrical Twenties. In 1978 Abe Laufe gave a four page account of the sensation of the 1926-27 Broadway season in The Wicked Stage.

Brooks Atkinson devoted a paragraph to The Captive, but made no mention of The Drag, in Broadway, his cursory study, in 1970, of New York's theatrical activity since the turn of the century. Blaming the District Attorney for closing The Captive

---

[1]Richard Hall, "Conversations with Eric Bentley," Advocate, 23 March 1977.

[2]"Playboy Interview With Mae West," Playboy, January 1971, p. 78.

because he was unable to "tell the difference between literature and hokum,"[1] the retired dean of Broadway critics made no reference to his initial revulsion at the plight of lesbian lovers in Bourdet's play.

Theatre historians have also chosen to ignore the socio-theatrical phenomenon of the emergence of fictitious characters whose appearance had for almost four centuries been taboo in English-language drama. There is no reference whatsoever to the sensation of the 1926-27 Broadway season in Arthur Hobson Quinn's A History of the American Theatre, even though he includes a chapter entitled "The New Decade, 1927-36." Howard Taubman makes a single mention in The Making of the American Theatre to "Bourdet's honest study of homosexuality." which he adds "was ruled off the boards after 160 performances by Mayor James J. Walker's administration."[2] There is no coverage of gay plays and the 1927 police raid in either Garff B. Wilson's Three Hundred Years of American Drama and Theatre, or in Bernard Hewitt's Theatre U. S. A.

Even though his fellow critics voted that Burns Mantle include a resumé of The Captive as one of the best plays of the 1926-27 theatrical season in New York, he decided not to do so in his annual year-book of the drama in America. "So

---

[1]Brooks Atkinson, Broadway (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1970), p. 248.

[2]Howard Taubman, The Making of the American Drama (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1966), p. 162.

far as this book and this editor are concerned," wrote the drama critic for the Daily News, in defending the omission, "the show remains where fate and circumstances have placed it."[1]

[1]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1926-27 (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1927), p. vii.

CHAPTER VI

WILLIAM HURLBUT'S SIN OF SINS (1926) AND THE CAPTIVE ON THE ROAD

During the run of The Captive, Helen Menken told an interviewer:

> There is only one regret she has about the whole thing. Now that "The Captive" is a success, she is afraid that the school of playwrights that copies successes in the hope of catching some of the overflow will begin toying with the theme of "The Captive," and she knows only an artist can handle the subject in such a way. That is, not unpleasant in presentation.[1]

Another lesbian love drama, the very first by an American playwright, had already opened and closed by the time Menken's qualms were being read in Theatre Arts Magazine. The American play was either already written when The Captive premiered, or was dashed off in a great hurry by William Hurlbut who had authored more than a dozen other plays produced on the New York stage. Just one month after the French import proved such a boxoffice sensation, Al H. Woods had opened Hurlbut's Hymn to Venus for its out-of-town try-out in Atlantic City.

Woods was the producer who had successfully fought in the courts to keep The Demi-Virgin running when the License Commissioner attempted to close his slightly risqué hit in

---

[1]Ada Paterson, "Miss Menken Defends 'The Captive,'" Theatre Arts Magazine, February 1927, p. 22.

1921. One would have thought, however, that he would have been the very last producer in the business to mount a gay play. "Oh, Mr. Woods!," a drama critic in Atlantic City chided:

> And you were the sage who predicted Mr. Gilbert Miller would be immediately carted off to gaol if he lifted the Empire curtains on "The Captive."
>
> Nothing encourages like success. So Mr. Woods has followed Mr. Miller's lead and forthwith we have the William Hurlbut play "Hymn To Venus," which emerged from the enshrouding mystery of its advance notices at the Apollo Theatre last evening.[1]

William Hurlbut, who had been writing prolifically for the stage since 1908, had his biggest hit with Bride Of The Lamb starring Alice Brady in New York, the same season [1926-27] that his lesbian drama failed critically and financially in its Chicago debut. Woods selected that city to premiere Hurlbut's lesbian drama because, despite its success in New York, Gilbert Miller had yet to announce plans for a Chicago company of The Captive. Apparently the Shubert brothers who rented him the Empire Theatre had all their Chicago playhouses already booked for that season.

Of course, Abraham Erlanger, who ran the other national theatrical syndicate, would not lease Miller any of his Chicago theatres since he had refused to rent him one on Broadway because of his objections to the dramatization of such subject matter. The breach between Erlanger's syndicate and its long-time lessee, the Charles Frohman Production Company, afforded Woods an opportunity to cash in on the nation-wide publicity

---

[1]George R. Weintraub, "The Play," Atlantic City Union, 2 November 1926.

engendered by the latter's success in producing the controversial French drama. The Chicago Daily News noted:

> In a rather spectacular race between the two producers as to which of them shall first reach Chicago, A. H. Woods has evidently won out. For he announced the production here, at the Adelphi Theatre, of William Hurlbut's sensational play, "Hymn to Venus." The fact that he has his own theatre here while his rivals, producers of "The Captive," like it in theme, had to accept the bookings of a syndicate; these bookings being largely contingent on the plays current in the theatres at their command.[1]

Hurlbut's original title, Hymn To Venus--the title of one of Sappho's poems--was changed to the more provocative Sins of Sins after its Atlantic City try-out. Starring English-born Isobel Elsom and Robert Warwick, the drama disappointed one Atlantic City drama critic who compared it to The Captive.

> Mr. Hurlbut has not displayed the sentiment, the tact, and the reticence of the wary Bourdet. He has preceded the action with lengthy preambles, particularly the first 15 minutes which are intolerably exasperating. . . .
> As long as "The Captive" is playing to capacity houses on Broadway, "Hymn To Venus" may thrive on the overflow.[2]

The critic for Zit's, the show business publication, was no more enthusiastic about Hurlbut's dramaturgy.

> Lesbianism on the stage is a touchy topic, one generally spoken in nervious whispers. Mr. Hurlbut treats the subject relentlessly but rather clumsily.
> He arouses a sympathy for the unfortunate woman, but it is a feeling tinged with horror. Her life has been one of complete inner turmoil, bringing havoc to all those

---

[1]"Amusement Notes," Chicago Daily News, 1 November 1926.

[2]George R. Weintraub, "The Play," Atlantic City Union, 2 November 1926.

living in intimate contact with her.

The play gains speed and interest as it progresses and its absorbing moments, many of them intensely melodramatic, and all leading up to the only possible solution for the poor victim of her own nature--suicide.

The brunt of the performance falls upon Miss Isobel Elsom who carries off the hapless lady with thrilling effectiveness. She has a deep sensitiveness to the character and a realization of its impending doom.[1]

Sin of Sins was advertised in the Chicago papers with a quote from Spinoza's Ethics with which the playwright and the producer obviously hoped to justify the drama's daring subject matter. The philospher had written:

> I have labored not to mock, lament or excoriate but to understand human actions; and to this end I have looked upon passions not as vices of human nature but as properties just as pertinent to it as heat, cold, storm, thunder and the like to the nature of the atmosphere.[2]

While there were fifteen daily drama critics covering the New York stage in the 1920s,[3] Chicago had only three important daily newspapers: the Daily News, the Daily Tribune, and the Herald Examiner. When Sin of Sins opened on November 8, 1926, at the Adelphi Theatre with no advance sale, it was doomed after two of the three daily critics panned the play. John Joseph of the Herald Examiner, was most appreciative of Wood's production and his critique contains a brief plot-résumé that

---

[1]"'Hymn To Venus' Has Some Hymn; Second Lesbian Play Opened by A. H. Woods at Atlantic City," Zit's Weekly, 6 November 1926.

[2]Chicago Daily News, Chicago Daily Tribune, Chicago Herald Examiner, 8 November 1926.

[3]Brooks Atkinson, Broadway (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1970), p. 251.

gives us some idea of the first drama written by an American with a lesbian character. Hurlbut's play was never published.

In his review entitled,"'Sin of Sins' Brings Strange Fish Into Adelphi Aquarium," and subtitled, "Play Sort of Clinical Study But It Is A Drama Whose Power is Enhanced By Fine Cast," Joseph wrote:

> The topic of "Sin of Sins" is one generally discussed in text books, though I believe it might have been mentioned in the Loeb-Leopold drama. In other words, perversion, and what it may lead to was the message that Mr. Hurlbut felt a crying need to express. So the heroine is not quite right, as we say. . . . Indeed, so far from right is the lady (who has had two husbands and is tormenting a third) that all of her mental and physical affection darts towards members of her own sex. She has, poor soul, apparently kept her strangeness to herself. And she has selected a nice girl on whom to shower what everybody considers motherly affection.
>
> When the nice girl falls in love--with a man, I might add, naturally, or rather unnaturally, the lesbian lady is moved to jealousy. And before the "Sin of Sins" has gone an act the girl's sweetheart is dead. Suicide, they think. But it's murder, and murder will out. Which it does in a breathless third act when the strange, female fish confesses her crime and the reason for it. She atones, too, but not, let it be said, by entering a convent.
>
> Weird as all this may sound, "Sin of Sins" is delicately written, acted and staged. There will be, doubtless, many who will see it and not know what it's all about, even in this very public age. There will be others, too, who will see it and dislike it intensely. But I don't feel they'll be offended. . . . In spite of the clinical subject, Mr. Hurlbut manages to create sufficient sympathy for his central character to make her real. In this he is superbly aided by Isobel Elsom, who acts the pathological lady for all the role's pathological power and none of its sensationalism. In fact, throughout a filthy affair, anybody desiring to wallow had better go elsewhere.
>
> "Sin of Sins" will not run as long as "Abie's Irish Rose," but it has power and it brings into the theatre a

new (at least to my big, young eyes) topic for dramatization and it is finely done.[1]

Mathilde Len, reviewing Sin of Sins for the Chicago Daily News, had a mixed reaction. While she detested the subject matter, she appreciated the author's tactful handling of it and applauded Elsom's portrayal of the murderous lesbian. Len wrote in a review entitled,"'Sin of Sins' Fails To Impress Critic; Marvels Only At Daring Of Producer In Presenting So Unclean A Thing":

> Cloaked by a quotation from Spinoza, a horrible thing of soul leprosy stalked its way into the consciousness of a first-night audience at the Adelphi Theatre during the unfolding of "The Sin of Sins" at its world premiere yesterday.
>
> William Hurlbut, its author, and A. H. Woods, the sponsor, are already well enough known for their daring. Having asutely labeled their play "a study" and cannily cast its character delinations into the hands of a seasoned and personable group of actors, they get away with the most unclean thing yet produced in the theatre. . . . Paraphrasing the lines of Robert Warwick, spoken as Byron Carlin, "There are no words to express my disgust"--with an author, and a producer and an actor who, for the sake of the almightly dollar, drag into the glare of the footlights a loathsome disease from out of the psychomedical clinics.
>
> Isobel Elsom, new to Chicago, is an actress of such unquestionable ability that admiration for her art overcomes revulsion for her part. With a sensitive, spiritual beauty and a low voiced, perfect diction of the cultured Englishwomen, she won immediate sympathy by giving the audience the feeling of having to do with one walking on the brink of insanity. . . .
>
> There is nothing salacious about the play, so it has no appeal to the sensationally inclined; so it affords nothing by way of beguilement, so it will fail to please the amusement seeker, and surely there are happier and

---

[1]John Joseph,"'Sin of Sins' Brings Strange Fish Into Adelphia Aquarium, Joseph Reports," Chicago Herald and Examiner, 9 November 1926.

saner avenues of psychological research to furnish plots and an emotional outlet for good acting.[1]

Frederick Donaghey, the critic for the Chicago Daily and Sunday Tribune, liked nothing about Sin of Sins, neither the play itself nor the performances. Accusing all involved with the production of being unscrupulous mercenaries, Donaghey wrote:

> Mr. Woods, in a line carried beneath the title in the playbill, indicates that he regards "Sin of Sins" as "a study"; meaning, perhaps, a study of the boxoffice takings of "The Captive," retailing in New York at five dollars a seat. Three of four persons of proved judgment and controlled enthusiasms who have seen "The Captive" tell me that it is, regardless of its theme, a good play. "Sin of Sins" isn't. It isn't regardless of the theme and of the authorship, which Mr. Woods seems to think should be credited to the late Baruch Spinoza, leaving one to wonder what Mr. Hurlbut had to do with it, but the important aspect of "Sin of Sins" is the proof it conveys that actors may be hired to do anything: the limit, if they knew one, has been kicked across the well-known and highly-lauded horizon. Their employment here is consciously in wilful, deliberate vileness. . . .
>
> The big odor of the piece is supposed to be exuded in a scene of eccentric love-making by a female urning[2] with an ingenue whose fiance the former has murdered. It is, in the writing, and the indicated "business," more nearly explicit than even the episode in "God Of Vengeance" which landed the management and actors in jail; but it is such weak, tawdry drama that it doesn't evoke even the reaction of nausea. . . . special matinees for the children will, maybe, be a matter of later announcement.[3]

---

[1]Mathilde Len,"'Sin of Sins' Fails To Impress Critic," Chicago Daily News, 9 November 1926.

[2]Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, the German historian and sex researcher, coined the word "Urning" since Plato in Symposium wrote that the goddess Urania watched over the "heavenly love" of two males. Through the 19th century, "Uranian" was in general use until, in 1869, Hungarian Doctor Daroly Maria Benkert coined the word "homosexual."

[3]"Theatre," Chicago Daily Tribune, 9 November 1926.

Except for the daily ads for Sin of Sins in all of the Chicago newspapers, there was no follow-up news or publicity, not even in the drama sections on Sunday which ran photos and interviews of stars of current shows. Nor were the city's pressure groups, the politicians or the religious leaders quoted in the papers after the show had opened. It would seem that the press had decided that a news black-out was the best way to cope with a show that the critic for Variety called "not fit for public presentation." Predicting its demise, the same reviewer wrote:

> It is safe to say that one-third of the first night house never understood what it was all about. . . . This one's chances are few. Firstly, the type of audience which will be drawn by the title will be disappointed and bored--and the word spreads fast among that class. Secondly, the theme is revolting and the average playgoer will stay away.[1]

Wood's attempt to profit from the publicity fall-out from The Captive closed for lack of business after a three-week run that ended on December 4, 1926.

That there was some positive response to Hurlbut's drama is evident in Frederick Donaghey's defense of his dismissal of the play and his disdain of the performances which he characterized as "pure ham."[2] In his Sunday column, the Tribune's drama critic wrote the last words Chicagoans were

---

[1]"Plays Out Of Town," Variety, 24 November 1926.

[2]"Theatres," Chicago Daily Tribune, 9 November 1926.

going to read on the subject:

> . . . most of the letters in recent days have to do with the play in the Adelphi, and express either rage with me for not liking the play or rage with the insolence of the producer who put it on. I'm told, in these letters that my inability to admire the piece betrays a lack of background, a comical unsophistication, a Bourbon attitude toward progress in the theatre, an Epworth League outlook on life as it is, an absence of "the social fortitude essential to the task of serving as a judge of art in any form of expression," and "the naivete of a half-wit girl who fancies she has been through all literature after having read the Elsie Dinsmore books." And I'm told, in these letters, that the men who produce such plays are encouraged to do so by the failure of critics to serve as a sort of constabulary of morals in their reports on the theatre, by "the cynicism of much that is printed in the theatrical and editorial columns of the Tribune," and by my own "sneering discouragement of such agencies of betterment as the play-juries instituted in New York and the morals-squad of the Chicago police when they insist that women on the stage should observe some of the decencies in their attire and deportment." . . .
>
> The most temperate of these letters, . . . declares "Miss Elsom's acting has been not equaled since Katherine Cornell's performance in "The Green Hat."
>
> The use of the theme--that of female urning--in the drama or in any other form of art would have to be the ultimate proof of justification. It has such justification in the Yiddish piece named "God of Vengeance": not that the piece, itself, is of importance as art, but that the episode which caused the New York police to put the actors in an English version in jail is integral, and serves the purpose of the drama in the author's clear design, however unlovely and repellant the play and the characters may be. I have not seen "The Captive," and have been unable to obtain real information as to its form and contents from either the twaddle written about it by the New York reviewers or the twitter printed about it in the Continental journals.
>
> But it is not necessary to know anything about any other play dealing with the homo-sexual, as a type or as an individual manifestation of Psychopathic affliction, for the purpose of authentic reporting on "Sin of Sins." Its sole importance resides in Mr. Woods' justified, if leering audacity in putting it before the public. Not even its author can conceivably believe it to be worth three cents a dozen as a play; and all the brains, the wisdom, and the learning of that Spinoza from whom Mr. Woods quotes

> so liberally without knowing who he is could not make the thing appear even to the consciousness of mattoids as other than planned, wilful, eager vileness.[1]

Isobel Elsom, the star of Sin of Sins, remembered very little about the production, understandably, since it had been a failure and only one of innumerable shows in which she had appeared since going on the London stage as a teenager before the First World War. Elsom did say:

> I was simply unaware of gay people who may or may not have been in the English or American theatre working at the same time that I was. So the subject neither interested nor threatened nor had anything to do with me. And I didn't get to know any big name stars, playwrights or producers who might have been gay. One heard very little on the subject--which was simply taboo among show business gossips--except it was said that Katherine Cornell and her husband, director Guthrie McClintic, and Lynn Fontanne and her co-starring husband, Alfred Lunt, were all supposed to be gay, but I don't know if this was so.
>
> I was not at all afraid of playing a lesbian. I thought it was a good role and right for me, what I could do with it on the stage. I wasn't shocked or made uncomfortable playing the love scenes in Sin of Sins. I don't remember receiving either mash notes or any insulting mail. Only the critics' reaction was distressing because it puzzled me.
>
> No, I never did see The Captive in New York before or after doing the show for Al Woods in Chicago. I never met Hurlbut, the playwright, who, I understood, was not gay.[2]

Perhaps because Sin of Sins met with such an unappreciative critical reception and so much hostility from reviewers in Chicago--"the most offensive offering in the annals of the

---

[1]Frederick Donaghey, "This Thing And That Thing Of The Theatre," Chicago Sunday Tribune, 14 November 1926.

[2]Isobel Elsom, interviewed in the Motion Picture Country Hospital, Woodland Hills, California, in April 1978.

theatre in Chicago,"[1] as one of them called it--The Captive did not play the city when a national company took the drama on the road after the night-stick raid on Broadway. Bourdet's play was seen in Baltimore, Cleveland, Detroit, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Baltimore saw it in two different fortnightly engagements and Cleveland, where it had its longest engagement on the road, in a five-week stand. While the performances in Baltimore and Cleveland went on without interruptions, police officers, like their New York counterparts, stepped onstage a second time to halt the dramatization of The Captive when it opened in San Francisco during the summer of 1927. The police also raided the show in Los Angeles and Detroit, piling the cast into paddy-wagons.

One Los Angeles reviewer, a woman, called it "cancerous" and dismissed it as "A Good Play For Medical Students."[2] Harrison Carroll, another Los Angeles critic, on the other hand, was very impressed. "A masterly written, superbly acted, and intelligently directed drama," he wrote of the production starring Ann Davis, but added, "I will not attempt to pass judgment on the advisability of discussing such a subject in the

---

[1]Frederick Donaghey, "The Season In Chicago," in The Best Plays of 1926-27, Burns Mantle, ed. (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1947), p. 19.

[2]Eleanor Barnes,"'The Captive' Good Play For Medical Students," n. d. n. p., fragment in The Captive file, Lincoln Center.

theatre."[1] The man from the San Francisco News wrote a rave review for "the relentless and absorbing tragedy," which he found enthralling despite a police raid in the middle of the opening night performance. Don Wiley wrote:

> But even the ridiculous spectacle of a squad of decidedly unaesthetic looking policemen trampling about the stage, trying to prevent people from saying things couldn't lessen the tremendous dramatic effect of Edouard Bourdet's fascinating drama.[2]

Only nine years after she had been arrested as the star of The Captive, Helen Menken had these thoughts about the reaction to the play:

> I'm absolutely certain that "The Captive" wouldn't create even a ripple of excitement here and now. The subject has been written about since with amazing frankness, and nobody seems the worse for the freedom of discussion. 'Other days--other morals.'[3]

Veteran drama critic Richard Watts, Jr., mused about his initial reaction to The Captive, forty years later.

> I'm afraid that its moderation, reticence and carefulness would cause the present day spectators either to laugh at it for its timidity or to be terribly bored by its tentative manner of beating around the amorous bush. You had to figure it out between the lines.[4]

---

[1]Harrison Carroll, Fragment of review entitled "The Captive In Mayan Bow," n. d., n. p., in The Captive file, Lincoln Center.

[2]Don Wiley, "Rentless And Absorbing Tragedy in 'The Captive,'" San Francisco News, 15 July 1927.

[3]"Helen Menken Recalls 'Captive' and Her Arrest," New York Herald Tribune, 9 June 1935.

[4]Richard Watts, Jr., "Two On The Aisle," New York Post, 17 January 1970.

When Bourdet's drama was revived in San Francisco in 1951, the reviewer from Variety had this disinterested reaction:

> But it's doubtful if it will stir the police to action as it did when it first showed its distorted face 25 years ago. Compared to the atomic problem facing mankind, it is now mild fare, milk and water stuff. The boys and girls of Nethersex Village and farm will just have to work out their perverse problems for themselves, it seems. These are days of bigger revulsions.[1]

In 1959, Arthur Hornblow, Jr. announced plans to make a film version of his translation of The Captive for Columbia Studios which was reportedly considering its super-star sex-goddess, Kim Novak, for the title role. Hornblow and his wife had also written a new version for the stage that director Leland Hayward hoped to produce. Neither the Hollywood film nor the Broadway revival ever materialized. In 1959, the self-consoring Motion Picture Production Code still banned lesbian and gay male characters from the screen, and the New York Penal Code prohibiting such representations on the Broadway stage remained on the books.

---

[1]"The Captive," Variety, 18 July 1951.

CHAPTER VII

CLOSETED GAYS ONSTAGE IN THE 1920S: EUGENE O'NEILL'S STRANGE INTERLUDE (1929) MICHAEL ARLEN'S THE GREEN HAT (1925) AND NOEL COWARD'S THE VORTEX (1925)

Less than a year after politicians drove a lesbian character from one Broadway theatre, a gay male character appeared on the stage of another--despite the newly enacted New York State Criminal Code prohibition--when Eugene O'Neill's Strange Interlude premièred. O'Neill's creation was not only celibate but as carefully closeted as his real-life counterparts of the period. Consequently, Charles Marsden, as the playwright called the character, went unrecognized--or at least unidentified in print--as being gay.

"I've known many Marsdens on many different levels," O'Neill had said, "and it had always seemed to me that they've never been done in literature with any sympathy or real insight."[1] Louis Shaeffer has been able to identify, in one of his biographies of O'Neill, Charles Marsden's real-life counterparts. Shaeffer divulged:

---

[1]Louis Shaeffer, O'Neill, Son And Artist (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), p. 242.

> The character was based on Charles Demuth, the painter, whom O'Neill had known in Provincetown and Greenwich Village; and the playwright also had in mind another noted artist, Marsden Hartley (hence the name "Charles Marsden"), who was a good friend of Demuth's. The two artists were homosexual--as is the play's Marsden, though he flees from himself--and Demuth, like his fictional counterpart, had a strong, protective and jealous mother.[1]

Strange Interlude, a great Theatre Guild hit both in New York and on the road, ran six hours with a dinner-break intermission. O'Neill slowly detailed the life-long suffering of a woman's relationships with her father, romantic lover, gay male-confidante, husband, adulterous lover, and her son. Charles Marsden is very much in evidence throughout all of the nine acts, functioning as a confidante in the tradition of French Classical Drama to the distressed protagonist, Nina Leeds. While she relates to him as she might had he been her older brother, she refers to him as a protective father-figure after losing her own father. Over the years, Nina loses her first-love and her husband in death, her son in marriage, her sexual interest in her long-time lover. At the play's end, she retires emotionally and physically in a marriage of convenience with Marsden, her gay confidante.

Describing Charles Marsden as having "an indefinable feminine quality about him, but it is nothing apparent in

---

[1]Louis Shaeffer, O'Neill, Son and Artist (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), p. 242.

either appearance or act,"[1] O'Neill has other characters in the play react to his creation as if he were almost flagrantly feminine in his manner. Behind his back, Marsden is referred to disparagingly as: "this ladylike soul,"[2] "fussy old woman,"[3] "slacker bachelor,"[4] "an old maid who seduces himself in his novels,"[5] "queer fellow,"[6] "mother's boy,"[7] "like a woman,"[8] "the damned old woman,"[9] "old sissy,"[10] "queer creature,"[11] and "one of those poor devils who spends his life trying not to discover which sex they belong to."[12] O'Neill describes the character as being as "scandalized as an old maid"[13] when he comes upon young lovers petting.

To explain his gay character's celibacy, the playwright used a slightly fictionalized account of his own first traumatic

---

[1]Eugene O'Neill, Nine Plays by Eugene O'Neill (New York: The Modern Library, 1959), p. 186.

[2]Ibid., p. 518.

[3]Ibid., p. 532.

[4]Ibid., p. 534.

[5]Ibid., p. 558.

[6]Ibid., p. 560.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Ibid., p. 605.

[9]Ibid., p. 627.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Ibid., p. 670.

[12]Ibid., p. 516.

[13]Ibid., p. 669.

encounter with a grotesque prostitute.[1] After the episode, as O'Neill dramatized it in Strange Interlude, Marsden confesses that he "sobbed . . . thinking of my mother . . . feeling I had defiled her . . . and myself . . . forever."[2] O'Neill's own sexual experience apparently did not cripple him, for, as his biographers have reported, he enjoyed many successful and satisfying experiences and romantic, long-term heterosexual relationships.

In Strange Interlude O'Neill used a theatrical device, permitting his characters to speak their inner thoughts in lengthy soliloquy-asides while engaging in conversation with other characters. Marsden never has anything to say to the audience about being physically attracted to his own sex. There does not seem to be a single gay thought in his supposedly gay head. No matter how closeted O'Neill intended his creation to be socially, his device might have served to reveal Marsden's most intimate thoughts.

The critics had much to say about O'Neill's novelistic marathon drama in 1927, but there was only passing mention of the Marsden characterization. None of the critics identified it as being gay. Atkinson of the Times dismissed the bachelor

---

[1]Louis Shaeffer, O'Neill, Son and Artist (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), p. 241-242.

[2]Eugene O'Neill, Nine Plays By Eugene O'Neill (New York: The Modern Library, 1959), p. 448.

as a "timid and petty novelist."[1] John Mason Brown referred to him as "Mollycoddle Charlie,"[2] and Theatre Magazine noted that "good Old Charlie suffers from an acute mother complex."[3] Other critics made no mention of Marsden at all.

Thirty-five years after O'Neill created this hopefully sympathetic gay character in a play, many reviewers reacted to Marsden almost as unsympathetically as do the other characters in Strange Interlude. In the 1963 Broadway revival, produced by the Actors' Studio, Charles Marsden is described in reviews as: "spinsterish,"[4] "all but neuter . . . the weak one . . . in his fussy, brittle shallowness,"[5] "a victim of momism,"[6] "undersexed,"[7] "sexless,"[8] and "Oedipal Charles Marsden, the intellectually sterile author who makes a fetish of devotion

---

[1]J. Brooks Atkinson, "The Play," New York Times, 18 December 1928.

[2]John Mason Brown, "Intermission, Broadway in Review," Theatre Arts Monthly, April 1929, p. 238.

[3]"The Editor Goes To The Play," Theatre Magazine, April 1929, p. 40.

[4]Howard Taubman, "Actors Studio Presents O'Neill Revival," New York Times, 13 March 1963.

[5]Whitney Bolton, "'Strange Interlude' Wears Well, Acting Honors to Page, Prince," New York Morning Telegraph, 13 March 1963.

[6]George Oppenheimer, "One Stage," Newsday, 20 March 1963.

[7]Richard Watts, Jr., "O'Neill's 'Strange Interlude' Still Retains Its Dramatic Power," New York Post, 12 March 1963.

[8]Edward Southern Hipp, "King-Size In Spades," Newark Evening News, 12 March 1963.

and descends like a carrion hawk to profit at the presence of death by marrying at play's end."[1] But even in the '60s critics did not identify the character as gay.

Three theatrical seasons before Charles Marsden appeared in Strange Interlude, two other characters were just as effectively closeted in two imported British dramas which opened on successive nights. The first, Michael Arlen's dramatization of his best-selling novel The Green Hat, was staged by Guthrie McClintic. Starring his wife, Katherine Cornell and Leslie Howard, it proved to be a popular hit even though the critics were more impressed with the actors' work than with the playwright's.

The Green Hat concerned a young bachelor who is enraged at his sexually promiscuous twin sister after the mysterious suicide of her bridegroom on the first night of their honeymoon. At the play's climax it is revealed that the groom, called Boy Finwick, killed himself because he was syphilitic, but that his noble bride, Iris March, to protect his good name, added more dishonor to her own tarnished reputation by saying that he died "for purity."[2] Her brother, Gerald, had been led to believe that the dead playboy, whom he idolized passionately,

---

[1]Larry Van Gelder, "Interlude Still Tops," New York Mirror, 12 March 1963.

[2]Michael Arlen, The Green Hat, (Typewritten copy on file), Lincoln Center, p. 20.

killed himself upon learning that his bride had been promiscuous before their wedding. Iris felt that if her brother learned that his tin-god was "dirty," he, too, would have committed suicide. After refusing to talk to her for ten years, Gerald, unable to function after Boy's death, dies an alcoholic.

The brother's supposedly platonic adoration of his twin sister's mate must have seemed suspicious, perhaps even amusing, to gays, at least, in those 1925 audiences, although the Broadway critics made no mention of the hardly usual relationship. Arlen's novel gives no clear indication that he intended the sexually repressed brother to be gay, yet in his dramatization the young bachelor's obsessional idolatry of his friend is certainly as impassioned as Antonio's self destructive devotion to Bassiano in William Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice.

In the first scene of The Green Hat, the brother--played by Paul Guilfoyle who later became a familiar Hollywood character actor--attempts to defend his hysterical, verbal attack on his twin sister to astonished onlookers.

> MARCH. 'Look here.' I want you to understand something--Boy and I were friends. Got that? Friends, friends, friends! . . . I never wanted Iris to marry Boy, I knew it wouldn't do. Boy Fenwich was the cleanest man in the world.[1]

---

[1]Michael Arlen, The Green Hat, (Typewritten copy on file), Lincoln Center, pp. 12-13.

Continuing to scream desperately in the same scene, Gerald March feels the need to explain his strong feelings about his late brother-in-law.

> MARCH. . . . The only person I ever met in my life for whom I had an admiration was Boy Fenwick. That's why I'm so excited now, but you mustn't think I'm mad. Look here, I admired Boy because he was the only person I've ever met who had really clean ideals and wasn't a bit of a prig or anything like that. And another thing: Boy was like a God in his contempt for shoddiness! . . . Mental and physical shoddiness.[1]

None of the critics from the daily papers made any mention about the possible implication of a grown man's hysterical infatuation for his best friend. Most filled their reviews comparing and contrasting Katherine Cornell with the heroine of Arlen's widely-read and much-admired novel from which he adapted the romantic drama. The Green Hat has never been revived. If it had been, especially in the last 25 years, American audiences might have cringed or smirked at Arlen's equating of puritanical sexual self-denial with "cleaniness," and "contempt for physical shoddiness," in the brother's hysterical outburst. Someone in a modern audience might laugh aloud, at the sister's explanation that her bridegroom "died for purity,"[2] by plunging from his hotel window upon discovering that she was not "chaste," especially after her brother reacts

---

[1]Michael Arlen, The Green Hat, (Typewritten copy on file), Lincoln Center, p. 20.

[2]Ibid.

to this lie with a wild cheer, crying,"Bravo Boy! Hurrah, Hurrah!"[1]

The play has never been published, nor included in any anthology other than in brief synopsis in Burns Mantle's Yearbook of The Drama.[2] Because The Green Hat has never been revived, there has been no occasion for contemporary drama critics to identify--as some surely would--what seems to be a rather transparent covert gay characterization.

Had it not been for Michael Arlen, New York audiences may never have seen the second of the two British dramas during the 1925-26 theatrical season with covert gay characterizations. Arlen had become great friends in London with Noel Coward who had completed a run in his first stage hit, The Vortex, a drama which had made him an overnight star and the sensation of the English theatrical scene. Nevertheless, Coward was having trouble with backers after plans had been made to take his London hit, which he had written as a starring vehicle for himself, to New York. When Coward told Arlen of his financial problem, the author of the bestseller, The Green Hat, wrote out a check for £250,[3] and handed it to his friend with no stipulations attached.

---

[1]Michael Arlen, The Green Hat, (Typewritten copy on file), Lincoln Center, p. 20.

[2]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1925-26,(New York: Mean and Company, 1937),pp. 121-159.

[3]Charles Castle, Noel (Garden City, New Jersey: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1973), p. 62.

Both The Green Hat and The Vortex became Broadway hits. Arlen--still a bachelor at 30--and 27-year-old Coward intrigued gossips along the Great White Way because of their friendship. Coward's longtime companion and confidante, Cole Lesley, recalled:

> The smell of success was in the air for Michael Arlen and for Noel, relished by both, though the smarties made up their minds that they were rivals, and must be bitterly jealous of each other. To scotch this they could be seen dining, just the two of them, at least once a week in the most prominently fashionable restaurants in New York until rumours swung the other way and had it that they were having an affair, which of course added to their enjoyment more than ever.[1]

The newspaper critics of half a century ago were no more able to recognize that the drug-addicted protagonist of The Vortex was a closeted gay than they were alert to that possibility concerning the self-destructive alcoholic in The Green Hat. Percy Hammond was the only reviewer among the first-nighters who suggested that the role Coward fashioned for himself was "a little effeminate and neurotic."[2] In but a single slur by his mother's virile, young lover does Coward identify the protagonist of The Vortex as being "effeminate."[3] The Times observed only that Coward's starring vehicle concerns

---

[1]Cole Lesley, Remembered Laughter (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), p. 89.

[2]Percy Hammond,"The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 17 September 1926.

[3]Noel Coward, Play Parade I (London: William Heinemann Ltd. 1950), p. 198.

"ridiculous, effeminate manners," and "effeminate wrangles."[1]

"I play the part of a neurotic misfit," the playwright wrote in his memoirs, "who took drugs, made sharp, witty remarks and was desolately unhappy."[2] In none of his memoirs did Sir Noel ever identify his own gay lifestyle any more than he did--or would be expected to--identify the protagonist of his play, The Vortex, as being just as discreetly and covertly gay. In 1975, after Coward's death, Cole Lesley was the first to write, "He was a homosexual."[3] Dr. W. David Sievers seemed to be the first to recognize "the element of latent male inversion . . . suggested in . . . Noel Coward's The Vortex"[4] in Freud On Broadway published in 1970. Seven years later scholar Martin Green noted that The Vortex was "about drugtaking and homosexuals."[5]

Green had made the observation in a passing reference to The Vortex in Children Of The Sun, his study of the cult of beauty and brilliance among young Englishmen--many of them gay--in the aftermath of the First World War, the same period

---

[1]"The Play," New York Times, 17 September 1926.

[2]Noel Coward, Future Indefinite (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1954), p. 168.

[3]Cole Lesley, Remembered Laughter (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), p. 93.

[4]W. David Sievers, Freud On Broadway (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1970), p. 93.

[5]Martin Green, Children Of The Sun (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1976), p. 171.

when Coward's name was going up in lights on London theatre marquees. The playwright-performer's first hit, The Vortex, is considered by some to be one of the most significant British dramas of this century. In his biography of Coward, Charles Castle wrote of the drama about the sophisticated, witty, decadent upper-middle-leisure class, "It is probably fair to say that this play changed the face of the British theatre in the twenties in the way that Osborne changed it in the fifties with Look Back In Anger."[1]

In both London and New York, The Vortex was particularly popular with younger theatregoers. "Noel Coward was the Beatles of our day,"[2] one Englishwoman recalled, in discussing the impact of The Vortex on the second half of the 1920s. Unlike Private Lives, Design For Living, Blithe Spirit, and Hay Fever, The Vortex--despite its initial success--has not been seen in a revival.

Had Green noted that The Vortex been a play about drug taking and a homosexual, there would be no question but that he was referring to one character: Paucefort Quentin, called "Pawnie," described by the author as "an elderly maiden gentleman."[3] A venomously sarcastic snob, in no way involved with

---

[1]Charles Castle, Noel (Garden City, New Jersey: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1973), p. 65.

[2]Ibid., p. 64.

[3]Noel Coward, Play Parade I (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1950), p. 176.

the play's main plot, Pawnie was obviously meant to add humor to the decadent society Coward was observing. Pawnie is the "bitchy-fag" stereotype, probably the kind of character that Eugene O'Neill contended had been drawn without "sympathy or real insight."[1]

Since no cries of horror went up from either the office of the Lord Chamberlain in London or certain of the drama critics in New York at the sight and sound of Pawnie, the character was probably considered another amusing asexual descendant of the Restoration fop or a close relative of one of Oscar Wilde's drawing room wits. Although he makes no sexual references or innuendoes, certain of Pawnie's lines should leave little question in anyone's mind today--even if they did not in 1925--that he is an original creation inasmuch as there can be no mistaking his sexual disposition.

Feuding for no good reason with one woman within his circle of rather silly acquaintances, Pawnie proves himself a devastating wit, if not a very charitable human being. He remarks: "Poor Clara--she eternally labours under the delusion that she really matters."[2] Distaste for such a character probably provoked the comments from the Times' reviewer about

---

[1]Louis Shaeffer, O'Neill, Son and Artist (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), p. 242.

[2]Noel Coward, Play Parade I (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1950), p. 202.

"ridiculous, effeminate manners," and "effeminate wrangles."[1]

If Noel Coward was surprisingly bold in drawing a gay, however, stereotypical, characterization as obvious as Pawnie in the mid-twenties, he was just as evasive and cautious in defining the role of the protagonist that he originated in The Vortex. Nevertheless, Martin Green probably meant to include Nicky in his plural reference to "homosexuals" in the drama since no other character qualities.

The Vortex concerns a young English pianist who returns home after studying on the Continent, to introduce his English fiancée to his parents. The engaged couple joins other house-guests at the family's country retreat. Nicky's glamorous mother, Florence, has included her young gigolo-lover among her guests.

Soon after arriving Nicky and his fiancée break off their engagement because there seems to be no real feeling or attraction between them. The young lady had once been romantically involved with the gigolo, and the two decide to resume their relationship. There is an embarrassing scene between the rejected, furious hostess and her young lover, witnessed by her hurt and horrified son. Confused at his passive father's obtuseness and tolerance, and enraged at his aggressive mother's blatant infidelity, Nicky turns viciously on her in a melodramatic climactic scene--reminiscent both of the Hamlet-Gertrude

---

[1]"The Play," New York Times, 17 September 1926.

closet scene and Mrs. Alving's final scene with her son in Ibsen's Ghosts.

> NICKY. You've wanted love always--passionate love, because you were made like that--it's not your fault--it's the fault of circumstances and civilization--civilization makes rottenness so much easier--we're utterly rotten--both of us--
>
> FLORENCE. Nicky--don't--don't--
>
> NICKY. How can we help ourselves?--We swirl about in a vortex of beastliness--[1]

Blaming his mother not only for making a mess of her life ("you're an awfully rotten woman, really."[2]), Nicky finally shatters her by showing her a small box. Florence throws it out of the window upon realizing that he uses it for drugs. They confess their love for one another, despite their new awareness of one another's failings. The curtain falls as the son takes his mother in his arms.

> NICKY. . . . --Promise me you'll be different--
>
> FLORENCE. Yes, yes--I'll try--[3]

Perhaps audiences concluded that Nicky suffered from a general malaise or weltschmerz not unfamiliar to many of "the lost generation" during that unsettled decade following the First World War. Coward does not make it clear what is so troubling to the young bachelor--for which he blames his mother--

---

[1]Noel Coward, Play Parade I (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1950), pp. 238-239.

[2]Ibid., p. 244.

[3]Ibid., pp. 244-245.

that has driven him to drugs. It is passionate love-making encouraged by a permissive society that he deplores in Florence. Since he concludes "--we're utterly rotten--both of us--"[1] one can only wonder whether Nicky's own sexual passion has unsettled him, too. No passion is apparent in Nicky's platonic scenes with his fiancée, and there is no mention of any other woman in his past or in his life, except, of course, his mother.

Coward does drop a couple of subtle hints about Nicky's rather curious preference in women. His girl friend is described as being "more attractive than pretty in a boyish way."[2] His mother, with whom he is still very much emotionally involved, even though he is in his mid-twenties, is described in one scene as looking like "an heroic little boy,"[3] at least in one of her photographs.

Whatever Noel Coward's private sexual activity may have been when he was writing his first starring vehicle, his public stance--at least on the stage--was a puritanical denunciation of any but the middle-class, hard-working heterosexual and monogamous lifestyle. This was apparent to only one of the reviewers at the premiere of the play that took

---

[1]Noel Coward, Play Parade I (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1950), p. 239.

[2]Ibid., p. 189.

[3]Ibid., p. 192.

London by storm on Coward's twenty-fifth birthday in 1924. While others damned it or praised it as a reflection of the changing, liberalizing moral attitudes in British society, John Ervine, the playwright and critic, suggested that "The Vortex is a very moral play, dedicated to the old fashioned virtues of hard work and clean living, by which most of the characters are judged and found wanting."[1] Within this moral, middle-class, British frame of reference, Coward paints a damning dramatic portrait not only of a sexually liberated matron, but of his covertly gay protagonist.

---

[1]Sheridan Morley, A Talent To Amuse (Garden City, New York, Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1969), p. 172.

CHAPTER VIII

MAE WEST'S PLEASURE MAN (1928)

While Coward and Michael Arlen had etched with traditional British reserve stage portraits of unhappy, repressed, unattached young bachelors given to drugtaking and alcoholism, Mae West was making plans after The Drag to try once again to put an unmistakably gay male character on the Broadway stage. Coward and a group of male friends, and Constance Collier, the British actress, went to see West in her 1928 hit play, Diamond Lil, which she had written for herself. Coward's biographer, Cole Lesley, remembered that when they all went backstage to see the American comedienne, "Noel, as one playwright to another, asked her about her plans. Sure, I'm wrt'n a noo play, she said; it's about this guy. He's a cocksucker."[1] Constance Collier's face turned pink, then red.

If West ever finished the project, she never produced such a play nor did she have it copyrighted. Instead, that very same year, the actress-author came up with another drama entitled Pleasure Man about a gentleman of more conventional, albeit prodigious sexual predilection. Included in this

---

[1]Cole Lesley, Remembered Laughter (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), p. 121.

production was another climatic party scene, a costume party, at which at least five female impersonating vaudevillians appear in drag. The Don Juan protagonist of Pleasure Man and the other apparently heterosexual costumed guests are also in attendance.

Pleasure Man is a back-stage melodrama about vaudevillians preparing for and performing during an engagement in a theatre in some American city. The main plot concerns one of the performers, an insatiable, brutal womanizer, Rodney Terrill, who is found dead and castrated during the costume party. A murder mystery in its brief, final scene, the irate, alcoholic husband of a woman in love with the libertine comes under suspicion. The seducer has died, however, at the hands of a young stage electrician avenging the honor of his sister, Mary Ann, who had been battered by Terrill while begging him not to leave her.

In structure, The Drag and Pleasure Man are strikingly similar. The main character in both plays is a sexually promiscuous male, ruthless and unfeeling, who is seen battering a cast-off lover. Both cads are murdered after attending a costume party. The two melodramas end with a last minute revelation of the killer's identity clearing an innocent man.

Among the performers seen in the backstage hustle-and-bustle of the first two scenes, and at the party in the third, are five female impersonators on the bill. Four are silly, very effeminate young men referred to by West in her stage

directions as "fags." Two of these individually undistinguishable minor characters who flit about backstage are identified as Bunny and Peaches. These performing transvestites are part of an act headed by one of the play's major characters, Paradise. This tough, vulgar, female impersonator--a sort of gay, old whore with the cliché heart of gold--is seen throughout the play's three acts. Paradise provides most of the humor with his self-deprecating, obsessive sexually suggestive retorts. He is mocked and insulted repeatedly by the stagehands, stage manager and house manager. The bawdy female impersonator proves himself braver and more compassionate than the men who bait him when he gallantly comes to Mary Ann's rescue as Terrill is knocking her about.

During the first scene when the performers are arriving to prepare for the next attraction, one of the men backstage asks Paradise what he does in the show.

PARADISE. O - - - Oh! I'm the Bird of Paradise and my four Many-kins.

STAN. . . . He chases butterflies on the dewy grass. (Illustrates)
And makes delicious fudge on Sundays and holidays. (Up to table)

STEVE. What Kind of an act do you do?

PARADISE. Oh, I get down on my knees--and sing a couple of Mammy songs . . . You see I'm a character imperson-eater.

STEVE. A what?

. . .

(Enter two boys of Paradise Co.)

PARADISE. A female impersonator . . .

STEVE. I guessed as much.

STAN. Have you had your cream puff this morning?
(Down S. R.)

PARADISE. Oh, I always eat early.
(To Steve)
You know it's the early bird that catches the worm, dearie.[1]

The female impersonators are given a dressing room next to the acrobats and have to be told, "And don't push the chewing gum out of the knot-hole."[2] Stan also tells Paradise:

STAN. And don't you annoy the boys, Violet.

PARADISE. Lavender, maybe but violet never.[3]

"They are so queer," Mrs. Riley, one of the vaudevillians says to Mr. Herthington, another performer on the same bill. He replies, "Yes, my dear . . . extraordinarily queer."[4]

In the second act, while a performance is going on, there is other evidence of the vaudevillians discomfort in working with gays. Chuck, a dancer, is disturbed because he suspects his new dancing partner, who makes lampshades in his spare time. It's in his act that Paradise stands up to Terrill

---

[1]Mae West, Pleasure Man (Typewritten copy on file in the Manuscript Division, Thomas Jefferson Building, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., dated 1928), Act I, P. 10.

[2]Ibid., Act I, p. 25.

[3]Ibid., Act I, p. 13.

[4]Ibid., Act I, p. 23.

and comforts battered Mary Ann because he is sympathetic to a "sister" being abused by a man. A backstage visitor named Lester Queen invites the whole company to a costume party given in their honor by an ex-vaudevillian who called himself Toto when he had a dog act. Toto has been able to retire since coming into an inheritance. The party will afford "the pleasure man," as the other performers call him contemptuously, the opportunity to seduce the married woman who is flirting with him behind her suspicious husband's back.

The professional transvestites appear in drag at the costume party, but they are only five among the large company of performers. Among themselves, they chatter about their costumes and their sexual activity.

1ST BOY. I hear you're working in a millinery shop.

2ND BOY. Yes, I trim rough sailors.

3RD BOY. My, what a low-cut gown you've got.

4TH BOY. Why, Beulah, a woman with a back like mine can be as low as she wants to be.[1]

"It is interesting that some of the dialogue duplicates that of The Drag," William M. Hoffman observed after reading the playscript in 1978, "as if West was determined to make sure that New York audiences were going to hear what had been banned earlier."[2] Hoffman also noted that, "In the backstage world

---

[1]Mae West, Pleasure Man, Library of Congress, Act III, p. 1.

[2]William M. Hoffman, Gay Plays: The First Collection (New York: Avon Books, 1979), p. xvii.

that West portrays, gay is usually accepted."[1] That conclusion is hardly supported by remarks made to the transvestite performers or made about them by other characters. They are tolerated, but mocked with unmistakable contempt, shared, it would seem, by the playwright herself, who refers to them as "fags" in her stage directions.

West was so intrigued with her backstage melodrama climaxing with the castration of a vaudeville Lothario that she reworked it for a novel published in 1975, which like the Broadway play seen, however briefly, forty-seven years before, was also entitled Pleasure Man. In 1975 the actress-author could have included the female impersonating vaudevillians from the stage play in the novelization of Pleasure Man with impunity. There is, however, not a single mention of such characters in the novel. The party after which Rodney Terrill is castrated is not a costume party. For reasons best known to herself West had expurgated the sensation of her playscript, the transvestite performers and their appearance in drag at the party, from her published version of the undoing of a vaudevillian rake.

On the night of October 1, 1928, when most of the first-string critics elected to go to one of the other opening performances of two respectable repertory companies, Pleasure Man premiered at the Biltmore Theatre. Seats for

---

[1]William M. Hoffman, Gay Plays: The First Collection (New York: Avon Books, 1979), p. xvii.

the opening had been selling for between $70 and $100,[1] and it looked as if West had another financial bonanza like The Drag, which she claimed made a $30,000 profit on its out-of-town try-out.[2] "That West girl knows her box-office," Variety reported, "and this one is in right now."[3]

"The excitement that the play had created in its break-in weeks had saturated Broadway and theatregoers with great expectations of seeing a sensational piece of entertainment," the playwright recalled forty-five years later. "My name was up in lights as the author, and only two blocks away I was still appearing in Diamond Lil."[4]

Pleasure Man was such a sell-out that the police, out in great numbers on orders to raid the show, had to keep the crowd orderly as hundreds were turned away from the boxoffice, disappointed and disgruntled. Before reaching Manhattan, Pleasure Man had had a two-week try-out at theatres, called Opera Houses, in the Bronx and Queens. The District Attorneys of those two New York City boroughs allowed the play to run without legal harassment or interference after certain lines

---

[1]Jon Tuska, The Films Of Mae West (Secaucus, N.J.: The Citadel Press, 1973), p. 46.

[2]Ibid., p. 36.

[3]Jack Conway, "Pleasure Man," Variety, 19 September 1928.

[4]Mae West, Pleasure Man (Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1975), p. 7.

and situations to which they had taken exception had been eliminated. Stenographers disguised as suburbanites went to the theatre in Queens to jot down objectionable dialogue during a performance in preparation for the reception that Mayor Walker, the Manhattan District Attorney and the Chief of Police were preparing for an attempted intrusion of a show with sex perverts prancing upon the hollowed boards of Broadway.

"Police around the Biltmore Theatre did nothing to break up the first Broadway performance of Mae West's new smutch, 'Pleasure Man,'" reported Gilbert Gabriel of the Sun, the only first-string critic to review the show's opening night. Gabriel continued:

> But, afterwards, fortified by fresh air, a good third of the audience regathered in the stage door alley, passed out cigarettes and latest rumors, and waited to see the actual collison of the actors and the law. This extra act was by far the best of the evening.[1]

A throng estimated to be two thousand strong gathered around the Biltmore Theatre to watch as black marias pulled up to hustle the 55 performers,[2] some still in make-up and costumes, to the police station to be booked, along with the playwright, producer, and theatre-owner for presenting impure entertainment. "At first it was planned to prosecute under the Wales Law, which requires arrest and conviction before it

---

[1]Gilbert Gabriel, "Last Night's First Night," New York Sun, 2 October 1928.

[2]"Mae West and Cast of 55 Players Plead in Court," New York Sun, 2 October 1928.

can be invoked, . . . " wrote a critic of that ammendment to the Penal Statutes.

> Later the District Attorney, with his characteristic good sense, decided that the police had ample powers under the Penal Code without resorting to that new emblem of American liberty, the padlock. . . .
>
> The Wales Law can only be invocated where the theatre manager or owner refuses to alter or eject a play which the police adjudged obscene. In an undefendable case like that of Pleasure Man no producer or owner is going to defy a clear police order. But in a case like that of The Captive it may be the right and the duty of the producer to protest the irresponsible decision of a police official and insist on a fair trial in the courts, . . .
>
> This is the ultimate absurdity of the Wales Law, that it is not, and probably never will be, invoked against downright obscenity; but it is almost certain to be invoked against any sincere producer who, believing his play to have artistic merit, insists on his constitutional right to a fair trial.[1]

Describing the final scene in Pleasure Man, and the police raid immediately afterwards, the Daily News reported:

> All the gentle-voiced boys are holding their merry party when suddenly some sober big rough policemen burst onto the stage and start asking questions.
>
> There is much hysterical giggling and soprano shrieking, and the skirted youths fainted upon each other's powdered shoulders.
>
> The scene was repeated almost in duplicate behind the scenes after the last curtain went down, when the real police came galloping through the stage doors.[2]

According to the Sun:

> The throng in the street included practically the entire audience that had witnessed the show. These evidently had a bad taste in their mouths. They spat

---

[1]Hiram Mothersill, "Sense and Censorship," Theatre Guild Magazine, November 1928, p. 11.

[2]Charles Moran, Police Seize Cast As New Play Opens," New York Daily News, 2 October 1928.

(some of them) upon the pavement and booed and hissed as the "female impersonators" in the cast were brought out of the stage entrance, where here and there was heard a frail falsetto cheer.[1]

At the police station, the World reported:

Some of them tried to laugh it off. Some of them expressed anger at the police. But most of them were silent and nervous.

The women seemed to take it the hardest. Two of three of them sobbed convulsively on the shoulders of other women and looked with frightened glances at the crowd outside which could be seen whenever a door was opened.

The whole affair, from start to finish, was handled without disorder; in this the police were helped by the bravado which most of the prisoners affected.[2]

The night-stick raid on Pleasure Man made front-page headlines--most often accompanied by a photo of the playwright--in all of the New York newspapers. The play itself, according to one police observer quoted by the Daily News, had "to do with the pastimes and preoccupations of female impersonators," and was "the most sinister show ever produced on Broadway."[3] A detective was quoted by the same tabloid as saying, "I couldn't describe the show . . . without using words that I don't like to see used in print."[4] According to Variety, Pleasure Man was

---

[1]"Mae West Cast of 55 Players Plead in Court," New York Sun, 2 October 1928.

[2]"Mae West and 61 of 'Pleasure Man' Cast Are Arrested," New York World, 2 October 1928.

[3]Charles Moran, "Police Seize Cast As New Play Opens," New York Daily News, 2 October 1928.

[4]"Police Planning More Raids to Halt Production," New York Daily News, 3 October 1928.

"the queerest show you've ever seen. All the queens are in it."[1]

Despite the fact that the plot-outline concerning the castration and murder of a heterosexual seducer of young and married women was included, however sketchily, in all newspaper reports of the police raid on Pleasure Man, neither the police nor the press passed judgment on this, the major concern of the drama, but concentrated instead on the single climactic scene in which female impersonators appear at the costume party "in drag." According to some press reports nearly half of the cast were female impersonators,[2] but the playwright herself gave a count of only five out of fifty-five performers.[3] The public reaction that had been fanned to a near frenzy by the press when The Drag seemed headed for Broadway was rekindled at the thought of female impersonators, however many they may have been numbered, on the boards at the Biltmore Theatre when Mae West made a second attempt to present gay transvestites in a legitimate drama. "'The Pleasure Man' threatened us last season," an editorial in one of William Randolph Hearst's papers announced, "but under the name of 'The Drag.' . . . Re-written in parts, Monday it again reared its ugly head and was

---

[1]Jack Conway, "Pleasure Man," Variety, 19 September 1928

[2]New York Daily News, 3 October 1928.

[3]"Mae West Defies Police, Continues to Present Play," New York World, 3 October 1928.

so obnoxious that it disgusted confirmed first nighters and hard-boiled police."[1]

West reacted angrily:

> They are proceeding against "Pleasure Man" simply because word has got around and they believe that it is "The Drag." It is not. There is no part of "The Drag" in "Pleasure Man." "The Drag" was about a homosexualist. Who was married to a doctor's daughter. This play is about a normal man and women. . . .
>
> I have some lady impersonators in the play. In fact, I have five of them. But what of it? If they are going to close up the play and prevent these people from making a living because they take the part of female impersonators, then they should stop other female impersonators from appearing on the Keith Circuit. . . . How many thousand female impersonators do you think there are in the country? Are they going to put them all out of business?[2]

Not every newspaper ran a review of Pleasure Man in its entertainment section, but almost all included a brief synopsis of the plot in detailed front-page accounts of the police raids on it. A second-string critic for the Times dismissed West's drama in a very brief, negative review. "By and large, 'Pleasure Man' is a coarse, vulgar and objectionable specimen of its author's theatrical writings. As a play it is . . . a hodge-podge, scrambled in theme and poorly written."[3] In its news coverage of the play's opening, the Times commented

---

[1]"There's No Place On Stage For Money-Mad Exploiters of Filth," Editorial, New York American, 3 October 1928.

[2]"Mae West Defies Police, Continues To Present Play," New York World, 3 October 1928.

[3]"West Play A Hodge-Podge," New York Times, 2 October 1928.

that, "it must be said that some of the players seemed to glory in the opportunity for exhibitionism."[1]

"No play of our times has had less excuse for such a sickening excess of filth," wrote Gilbert Gabriel in his report subtitled, "'Pleasure Man'--Something Of A Description Of The Somewhat Indescribable," Gabriel continued:

> No play, I warrant, has set out more deliberately to sell muck to the jeerful . . .
> . . . I saw a "drag" and its inhabitants. . . . But seeing was only half of the sickening. The--shall we call them female impersonators?--were many, and were made to go through all sorts of Harlem bacchanales in various stages of robe and disrobe. What they had to speak was worse.
> Perhaps they enjoyed it. The fouler phases of exhibitionism may be interesting to pathologists--but they make for pathetic playgoing.[2]

The critic from the Evening Post, just as outraged as the man from the Sun, subtitled his review, "They Don't Come Any Dirtier." He wrote:

> To the three tiresome and unspeakably slimy acts of 'Pleasure Man"the police, by arresting the entire cast, contributed a fourth, and even the most rabid opponent of official interference would find it hard to protest on this occasion. . . .
> The bulk of Mae West's latest is feeble back-stage melodrama, relieved by some midly amusing characters and local color. If this were all, 'Pleasure Man"would die unnoticed in a few weeks. But it is smeared from the beginning to end with such filth as cannot possibly be described in print, such filth as turns one's stomach even to remember. . . .
> Nearly half of the performers are cast in the roles of what, for lack of a more printable term, may be called

---

[1]"Raid Mae West Play, Seize 56 At Opening," New York Times, 2 October 1928.

[2]Gilbert Gabriel, "Last Night's First Night," New York Sun, 2 October 1928.

> "female impersonators." One scene shows them in women's clothes, dressing and undressing. The final act shows us a "drag," or party given by one of this kind for the other of his kind, and when I add that the dialogue, throughout is full of revolting innuendo of perversion I have said enough.[1]

Two years after his office acted quickly to close it, the Assistant District Attorney gave this assessment of its artistic and entertainment merit:

> This play, . . . was a deliberate attempt to capitalize on the effect of a large number of men on the stage who were portraying perverts. That was relied on to fill the box office. The story of Mary Ann, who was ruined by the Pleasure Man, wouldn't have gotten them $10 a week.[2]

The man from the Brooklyn Eagle, far less revolted than some other gentlemen on the aisle, wrote in his critique: "Mae West Again. 'Pleasure Man' Jewel From Her Pen Proves Tame:"

> A little more than a year ago, Mae West and her associates were given a broad hint that it would not be advisable to bring to New York a play called "The Drag." The objection to the piece, which Miss West proudly acknowledged as one of her brain children, was based upon the fact that its theme was sexual perversion, and that such a theme was without the law. . . . Being evidently enamored with the subject, Miss West wrote another play and called it "Pleasure Man." . . . Although the story is not the same, there are a number of characters in "Pleasure Man" that would have fitted ideally into the cast of "The Drag." Also, it is an open secret that there are lines and scenes in both plays that are very similar. . . . to bring these characters on stage, Miss West hit upon the idea of writing a "Backstage" play. Female impersonators are common enough in vaudeville houses.
>
> . . They are seen on the stage at an early morning rehearsal, and later snapshots are given of the dressing rooms

---

[1]Robert Littell, "The New Play," New York Evening Post, 2 October 1928.

[2]Fragment of an untitled New York newspaper article in "Censorship: U. S. Stage, 1920-26," file, Lincoln Center.

> of the theatre. The humor of the piece--if humor it can be called--is of the same type that one sometimes finds in cheap burlesque houses. It is about the only type of humor that is found in the Mae West stamp. At first, it seemed to meet with some favorable response on the part of the audience. Later it began to pall terribly. In the end, it was a rather tired audience that waited for something to happen. . . . Nothing really happened. In the main they were disappointed. Evidently a blue pencil has been freely used. Little is heard that is objectionable as was heard in "Sex," the play that sent Miss West to jail. Still the whole piece is so common and vulgar that it is not worth considering.[1]

Just as some of the critics were widely divided in their reaction to Pleasure Man, the same was apparently true of audience reaction at the drama's premiere. One critic observed that, "Perversion was never before used to give diversion like it was last evening. People winked both eyes and looked straight ahead. Modesty forbade them to look left or right."[2] According to the World, the audience "at first inclined to shout hilariously at the more suggestive lines, did not seem pleased with the exhibitions of female impersonation which were part of the festivities of the third act."[3] The incensed man from the Evening Post, however, had this to report on apparently another segment of the same first nighters:

> Pretty nearly the most nauseating feature of the evening was the laughter of the audience, or at least that

---

[1]"Mae West Again, 'Pleasure Man,' Jewel From Her Pen Proves Tame," Brooklyn Eagle, 2 October 1928.

[2]"'Pleasure Man,' Mae West Play, Given Premiere," New York American, 2 October 1928.

[3]"Mae West Defies Police, Continues To Present Play," New York World, 3 October 1928.

> part of it which howled and snickered and let out degenerate shrieks from the balcony. If a first-night audience doesn't whistle or throw vegetables or leave the theatre or call for the steward when such muck is put under its nose but laughs and laps it up, there is no sense in taking the performers to the police station. The real culprits are on the other side of the footlights.[1]

Despite a restraining order from New York State's Supreme Court directing the police in Manhattan not to interfere with the production of Pleasure Man until after the case was brought to trial, the night sticks came down again when Mae West continued to present her play in defiance of the New York City police. Mayor Walker was not going to allow a play with characters prohibited by law to reflect adversely on the city, the state or any Democratic politician from New York in an election year when Franklin D. Roosevelt would run for Governor and Alfred E. Smith would try for the presidency. "Persons close to the Mayor," reported the Evening Post, "said that he had told Police Commissioner Warren that any dastardly drama even slightly odorous were not to be tolerated on Broadway this season. New York must be good in Presidential years."[2]

A detective, followed by a squad of police officers, entered the stage of the Biltmore Theatre during the third act of the second and final performance of the first American play

---

[1]Robert Littell, "The Play," New York Evening Post, 2 October 1928.

[2]Milton MacKaye, "Mae West Asks Writ To Block Raid Tonight," New York Evening Post, 2 October 1928.

seen by the general public in which gay males were portrayed by performers. At the sight of the police, one of the actors stepped out on the stage's apron and addressed the audience.

> "This play is being stopped before it has been brought to trial," he said. "Do you folks think it's fair?"
> "NO!" thundered the audience.
> "The newspapers have tried to make it out a play of degeneracy. They have tried to cover the cast with filth and mire. Is that fair?"
> "NO!" cried the audience.[1]

The actor was seized by the police and pushed under the curtain as the audience cried out, "Let him finish!"[2] The actor did not get that opportunity; the second performance of Pleasure Man was never completed.

The leadership of Actors' Equity did nothing to protest the treatment of members of its union. "In general the stand of the Actors' Equity Association on alleged salacious plays is well known," a union spokesman announced to the press. "Equity has preached against them and the columns of its magazine teem with articles condemning them."[3]

Back in court a second time in as many days, West and her company again pleaded not guilty to taking part in an indecent performance, and the show was closed indefinitely. The

---

[1]"Mayor's Filth War Raids West Play," New York Daily Mirror, 4 October 1928.

[2]Ibid.

[3]"Mae West Defies Police, Continues To Present Play," New York World, 3 October 1928.

very long, and highly publicized trial did not take place until a year and a half later. It included one spectacle in which a police officer was asked by the District Attorney to show how female impersonators walked on stage for the benefit of the jury. The man rose, put a hand on his hip, and while swaying mincingly back and forth, explained that they "walked like this."[1]

"Your honor, . . ."[West's] lawyer declared at one point in the trial, "there is nothing indecent in female impersonations on the stage." . . . "No," said the prosecutor, "but it is possible to have an obscene, lascivious performance under cover of a female impersonation."[2]

The jury was told by the Judge:

> A performance based on innuendo and double meaning, as the police say "Pleasure Man" was, is more dangerous to public morals than a "crude strip poker show."
> The latter may arouse impure thoughts, . . . but it is more apt to excite disgust. The greater danger lies in an appeal to the imagination, and, when the suggestion is immoral, the more that is left to the imagination, the more subtle and seductive the influence.[3]

After ten hours of deliberation, the jury found that agreement amongst them was impossible. The charges against West and the players of her Pleasure Man production were dropped when the District Attorney's office decided against a second try at winning a conviction from another jury.

---

[1]"A Blushing Raider Re-enacts Scene of 'Pleasure Man,'" New York Herald Tribune, 22 March 1930.

[2]"Judge Breaks Gravel Over 'Pleasure Man,'" New York Daily News, 27 March 1930.

[3]"Mae West Case Given to Jury," New York Daily News, 27 March 1930.

After the exhausting ordeal of her second trial, Mae West finally gave up on her designs to cash in at the box office by making a public spectacle of gay transvestites. "There was an advance ticket sale of two hundred thousand dollars, which was enormous in those days when the American dollar was worth a lot more," the screen star recollected writing about Pleasure Man in 1975. "The first night drew well-dressed crowds, who paid $10, $20, and $50 a seat."[1] Even though West's two plays which introduced flamboyant female impersonators in legitimate dramas never got to profit by a Broadway engagement, they still earned a profit for her during their try-out engagements.

Over the years Mae West's role in the emergence of gay males as characters on the American stage has never been carefully and clearly examined. In numerous interviews from Hollywood the actress-playwright had been quoted as speaking affectionately of her many fans among gay males, and of boasting of her role in presenting them, as she did, indeed, for the very first time as characters in a legitimate play in America. However, the comedienne's persistence in attempting to theatrically exploit gay transvestites in the 1920s stirred neither public tolerance nor compassion. It reinforced the assumption that gay males are, for the most part, effeminate stereotypes who

---

[1]Mae West, Pleasure Man (Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1975), p. 7.

wear women's clothing if not in public, certainly at their own private drag parties.[1]

The following excerpt from an editorial in the Morning Telegraph testifies to the damage that Mae West wrought in the wake of the police raid on Pleasure Man:

> Everybody knows the kind of boys who inhabit the Broadway Fairyland. They are unfortunate victims of nature . . .
>
> Abnormality in any form is repulsive. It's repulsive in the physical blemish that Providence sometimes places on human beings. It is repellent even in gorging appetites or gaudy showiness. But when it reaches the stage of abnormal passions, it becomes hideously repugnant.
>
> Scientist, psychiatrists and biologists admit that such abnormalities exist. The cause nobody has been able to definitely determine in spite of the fact that many reasons have been provided. A play of this character built from a psychological or philosophical standpoint, with its theme handled by a delicate or refined innuendo, might pass muster, but when done only with the eye on the box office, it becomes a menace to the theatre, its performers and the theatre-going public.[2]

---

[1]The wearing of apparel of the opposite sex is far more widespread among heterosexuals than it is among gays according to W. B. Pomeroy, "The diagnosis and treatment of transvestites and transexuals," Journal of Sex and Marital Theraphy, 1975, Vol. 1, No. 3., as cited by C. A. Tripp, The Homosexual Matrix (New York: The New American Library, 1976), p. 26.

[2]"Now Our Idea Is This," Editorial, New York Morning Telegraph, 3 October 1928.

CHAPTER IX

THOMAS H. DICKINSON'S
WINTER BOUND (1929)

During the last month of the last year of the Roaring Twenties, Broadway audiences got their first look at a female character who might have been crudely and cruelly called a "bull-dyke." Only the playwright seems to have been horrified, even outraged that so many critics reacted to his creation as such, without, however, ever using the insulting slang epithet--at least not in print. The author's widely publicized protests, as well as the fuzziness of his celibate protagonist's characterization, kept the play on the stage for a month, unchallenged by the custodians of public virtue or those responsible for enforcing the Penal Code.

Winter Bound, by Thomas H. Dickinson, the last play in the 1920s to deal with a gay, or semmingly gay character, was seen in thirty-nine performances at the Garrick Theatre on 35th Street just off Broadway.[1] Produced by the Provincetown Players of Greenwich Village, it lost no money, but drew only fair-sized audiences after being greeted by critics confused

[1]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1929-30 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1940), p. 440

for the most part by the playwright's intentions and the contradictory characterization of his interesting, enigmatic heroine in male attire. Burns Mantle, who admired the play, claimed that it failed because "most of its reviewers and the less charitable and intelligent of its patrons read the taint of Lesbianism into it [and] the piece was foredoomed."[1] According to another critic it was, "A curious, glum, muddled play, occasionally interesting, but more maddeningly misleading."[2] It may have been, as Gilbert Seldes contended, that Winter Bound, rather than being doomed by its subject matter, never came into clear focus because the playwright was "inhibited by our censors."[3]

The playwright, Thomas H. Dickinson, had been a professor of English literature and Drama at the University of Wisconsin before retiring with his wife to a farm in Connecticut. Dickinson was well-known in his time, at least to theatre students and historians, as the prolific editor of several authoritative anthologies of contemporary drama and the author of critical works on the theatre. Winter Bound was the professor's first and last effort to reach the Broadway stage.

---

[1]Burns Mantle, "It is a Tough Year for Failures," New York Daily News, 17 December 1929.

[2]Philo Higley, "No-Man's Land, Sappho In Overalls," New York Morning World, 14 December 1929.

[3]Gilbert Seldes, "Second Sights," New York Graphic, 16 November 1929.

A year before Winter Bound was produced, Radclyffe Hall's The Well of Loneliness was published in the United States. The widely-read novel with a lesbian protagonist became a best-seller in this country after a temporary, but highly publicized censorship bout and a long period of suppression in England where it had been written. The Well of Loneliness, authored by a lesbian,[1] concerns a tomboyish woman who falls in love with another woman. At the novel's climax, the latter settles down with the man who has come between the two females. The plot of Winter Bound bears a striking resemblance to that of the international best-seller, as some of the reviewers pointed out. Dr. Dickinson insisted that his play had been written a dozen years before Radclyffe Hall's novel appeared in the United States, and four years before La Prisonnière was produced in Paris.[2]

Set in a farm house in Connecticut, the plot of Winter Bound concerns two women from urban backgrounds who decide to see if they can live compatibly alone in the country, free from the oppression of American society. The idea for such an experiment was Tony's, a sculptress, described as "a virile looking creature in blouse and short trousers; . . . bobbed

---

[1]Una Vincenzo, Lady Troubridge, The Life of Radclyff Hall (New York: Scribners, 1963).

[2]Helen Deutsch and Stella Hanau, The Provincetown (New York: Russell & Russell, 1931), p. 183.

hair under a battered felt hat; . . . no breasts, lanky limbs."[1] Her companion is Emily, "a healthy girl. Throughly feminine," whose "emotions tend to be influenced by the latest strong spirit that comes into her orbit."[2]

Tony, swearing like a man, dressed like one and preferring male, outdoor activities and companionship, is rather unpleasant, gruff and bumptious. She is even physically threatening especially in an early scene in which, wearing a sheep-lined great coat over trousers, with a whip in her hand, she attempts to bully a visiting female friend. "Don't try any of your strong arm stuff on me," the spunky young woman tells Tony, "I'm not married to you, you know."[3]

It almost seems, at least in the first scene, that Emily is "married" to tough Tony. After their company departs, and the two women embark upon their experiment of liberating themselves from male oppression, the sculptress comments:

> TONY. Alone at last. Gosh, that's what honeymooners say, isn't it?[4]

By the second scene it is apparent, however, that Emily and Tony are no honeymooners. Bored and peevish, Emily whines and complains about being left alone all day long while Tony

---

[1]Thomas H. Dickinson, Winter Bound (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, p. 1-1-6.

[2]Ibid., p. 1-1-1.

[3]Ibid., p. 1-1-10.

[4]Ibid., p. 1-1-19.

is out riding with her stable boy. She resents having to sleep alone, after having had a male lover less than a year before. Tony cannot understand Emily's dissatisfaction and her bad humor.

TONY. . . . It's the time of month, eh?

EMILY. Worse luck.

TONY. I might have known it. I forgot. It's too bad. I'm sorry, kid. It's what you women are up against.

EMILY. Don't say "you women" to me. I can't stand it.

TONY. Why not? You are a woman, aren't you?

EMILY. If I am, so are you.

TONY. I'll be damned if I am. Not your kind anyway.[1]

Afraid that Emily is ready to quit her and the country, Tony argues:

TONY. . . . You and I have to make a go of this. We've got to show that two women can get along. I'm tired of the idea that you've got to have a man around. I've got nothing against men. They're better than most women, I'd say. But this little old world has had just about enough of some things I could mention. Just about enough. Women have got to learn to get along with each other, the way men get along.[2]

Annoyed at their constant bickering, and at Tony's preaching feminism to her, Emily will not be placated with words.

EMILY. We might as well be man and wife the way you jaw at me.

---

[1]Thomas H. Dickinson, Winter Bound (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, p. 1-2-6.

[2]Ibid., p. 1-2-7.

TONY. There's one difference anyway, we don't eat each other up with sex passion.[1]

The sculptress is not only a militant feminist, and a misogynist, but also a misogamist and a female Hippolytus. Tony explains to Emily why her young husband killed himself.

TONY. . . . I told him there were higher and better things than going to bed together, and I didn't go to bed with him, do you hear? . . . I haven't found any man yet who is willing to be friends in any way. So until I do I'll stick to women.[2]

At the end of the second scene, Emily goes off to Tony's bed to wait for her there. Tony is going to make supper and bring it to her bedroom so they can eat together. Since Emily is so desperate for physical affection, once again the playwright ends a scene on a note that would seem to indicate an almost inevitable sexual relationship is in the offing.

Back to bickering in the next scene since nothing has changed in the women's sexually empty lifestyle, Emily can not figure Tony out.

EMILY. I know you don't think much of women. What are you but a woman?

TONY. I dunno. I'd hate to think I was a woman.

EMILY. I sometimes think maybe you're not. You're something like a boy--a boy that never grows up, and hasn't got any heart in him.[3]

---

[1]Thomas H. Dickinson, Winter Bound (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, p. 1-2-8.

[2]Ibid., pp. 1-2-11, 1-2-12.

[3]Ibid., p. 1-3-5.

Indeed, Tony does behave like a young boy at times. For instance, once she squares off at Emily as if boxing, calling out "hold up your hands."[1] Like a boy she cannot understand what she cannot feel, saying that she'd like to abolish sex. "Love is rotten. It always wants to own some one,"[2] Tony has decided. She sounds not only like a boy in certain scenes, but a very puritanical one in some of her tirades.

> TONY. . . . Everything is based on woman. Sex. Sex. Sex. And the women are the worst. . . . And everywhere women with their naked bodies showing. As if she didn't have anything but body.[3]

When a stranger comes to the door, it is Emily who objects to his intrusion.

> EMILY. . . . Don't let him in. We've been so happy here. And quiet. Don't spoil it now. Please, Tony![4]

Since the women have been seen doing little more than bickering, Emily's reference to quiet and happiness is puzzling. The stranger, of course, turns out to be a virile, aggressive young man, with a farm down the road. He likes Emily and dislikes Tony whom he mocks by calling her "fella."

---

[1]Thomas H. Dickinson, Winter Bound (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, p. 1-3-5.

[2]Ibid., p. 1-3-7.

[3]Ibid., p. 1-3-11.

[4]Ibid., p. 1-3-9.

The bickering intensifies as Emily meets her suitor on the sly because Tony objects to her involvement with a man. Emily finally turns on Tony viciously before racing off for another tryst with the farmer.

> EMILY. Are you jealous of him? Do . . . you want him for yourself?
>
> TONY. That's not worthy of you.
>
> EMILY. Or do you want me? Tell me that? Do you want me? No thank you, Tony Ambler. No, thank you. . . . Don't touch me.[1]

A scene later, Tony and Emily are engaged in another of their tedious discussions concerning their disintegrating relationship since a man has come into the picture. Always on the defensive, Tony attempts to explain herself.

> TONY. . . . I'm not going to touch you. But I'm going to tell you something you won't understand. I have loved you cleanly and purely. More than I ever loved anyone in this world. I guess with new kinds of love we get new kinds of pain.[2]

Frustrated by Emily's determination to set up housekeeping with the farmer, in the last act Tony destroys the statue she had been working on. Once she realizes that her feminist experiment has failed, Tony turns soft and so incredibly generous that she insists on giving her farm house to Emily and her prospective bridegroom. Emily believes that she finally understands Tony.

---

[1]Thomas H. Dickinson, Winter Bound (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, p. 3-2-6.

[2]Ibid, p. 3-3-5.

EMILY. The trouble with you is you're neither a man or a woman. You're a he-woman.[1]

Tony sees herself in a different light.

TONY. Perhaps I'm a woman who doesn't want to be considered a walking baby basket. Nor to have every man who looks at me think of me as a piece of amusement.[2]

Strange as it may seem from the playwright's description of her, Tony is very attractive to the young stable boy whom she has to fire since he follows her around spying on her when she wants to be left alone. In the last minutes of the drama, it is revealed that the young man was accidently killed when he tried to leave the farm community by hopping on a freight train. The play closes after Tony appraises her relationship to others.

TONY. . . . Every life I touch I spoil. But, maybe in a million years they will find out, I was right.[3]

The drama ends after Tony departs for the big city. Emily and her farmer-fiance watch her go. He stops calling her "fella" in the last scene to show his appreciation for the gift of her farm which Tony insists the couple accept so they can add it to the prospective bridegroom's property.

Six years before Dickinson's drama was produced, D. H. Lawrence's novella The Fox was published. Apparently the work was unknown to the New York drama critics or else they would

---

[1]Thomas H. Dickinson, Winter Bound (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, p. 3-2-6.

[2]Ibid., p. 2-3-7.

[3]Ibid., p. 3-3-10.

have surely mentioned the similarity between Winter Bound and The Fox, a similarity far more striking than that of the play to The Well of Loneliness. In Lawrence's story, a young man succeeds in breaking up the relationship between two women who have been living together on a farm in England during the First World War by marrying one of them. The farm setting, the male intruder's hostility, the women's domestic bickering, and the fact that a youth falls in love with a woman in masculine attire ten years his senior are all to be found in both Lawrence's story published in 1923 and Dickinson's drama produced in 1929.

The critical reaction to Winter Bound was divided between detractors and defenders. Either reviewers compared and contrasted it to The Captive, or, as often as not, to The Well of Loneliness, or saw no such connection and resented that others did so.

One reviewer predicted that the Garrick Theatre was "going to be packed by the same type of morbid[1] audiences that made 'The Captive' so much talked about a season ago,"[2] -- although it had been two seasons since Bourdet's drama was seen on Broadway. Another critic noted about the first nighters that "A few curious ones were there to revel in 'The Captive'

---

[1]The word "morbid" was a euphemism for gay.

[2]"'Winter Bound' is an Unusual Study of a Peculiar Woman," Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 13 November 1929.

theme."[1] Apparently negative word-of-mouth, plus many deprecating reviews, kept the theatre from being filled enough to justify a run any longer than five weeks.

Richard Watts, Jr., of the Herald Tribune, reported:

> There was considerable confusion at the Garrick Theatre last night concerning the intentions of Mr. Thomas H. Dickinson, the author of "Winter Bound," . . . At the end, it retained something of a mystery play, as far as the author's purpose went, with one man's guess as good as another's. What can be stated pretty dogmatically, though, is that "Winter Bound" is a bad play, confused, tedious, hysterical and uncertain.
>
> The safest assumption last night was that Mr. Dickinson's work was a new version of "The Captive" theme without the courage of its ill-fated predecessor. All the evidence was that the author intended to treat the pathological subject of what must be loosely, vaguely and inaccurately described as decadent love.
>
> Certainly when "Winter Bound" is set against such a memorable statement of the same problem as Edouard Bourdet made . . . Mr. Dickinson's attempt cannot but seem colorless and clumsy, not to say tedious.[2]

The critic from the Evening Journal was sure that Dickinson had "penned a play treating homosexualism, withal handling as delicately as possible this more or less 'verboten' topic."[3] John Mason Brown described Dickinson's drama as "lumbering down that Brimstone Path which leads to 'The Well of

---

[1]"'Winter Bound' is Presented by Provincetown Players." New York Evening Journal, 13 November 1929.

[2]Richard Watts, Jr., "'Winter Bound' Is Provincetown Players' Offering," New York Herald Tribune, 13 November 1929.

[3]"'Winter Bound' is Presented by Provincetown Players," New York Evening Journal, 13 November 1929.

Loneliness.'"[1] The man from the Times also saw the drama moving "along Devious Paths," with "A theme of twisted impulses that wander along the path of 'The Captive.'"[2] The reporter from the Morning World described the Winter Bound theme as "usually confined to medical discussions and surreptitious readings in the freer haunts of Greenwich Village."[3]

The reviewer from the Morning World, who entitled his assessment, "No-Man's Land, Sappho in Overalls," wrote:

> It is this reporter's guess that the reason "Winter Bound" had so confusing an effect on its first night audience was because Mr. Dickinson was so unsure where he was driving.
> The shadow of Sappho hovers across the scene, yet in certain dialogue sequences the author seems to be disclaiming such a purpose.[4]

Critic Gilbert Seldes who also felt that the audience was confused at the unfocused, contradictory characterization of Tony Ambler, reported:

> Essentially you have to puzzle out the mystery of a woman who at one time is a crusader for the freedom of her sex, at another is a vicious creature bent on wrecking the lives of other people, at a third is the ordinary invert, and finally is a blight, a sterile woman corrupting and spoiling whatever she touches.[5]

---

[1]John Mason Brown, "The Play," New York Evening Post, 13 November 1929.

[2]"'Winter Bound' Moves Along Devious Paths," New York Times, 13 November 1929.

[3]"Other New Plays," New York Morning World, 13 November 1929.

[4]Philo Higley, "No-Man's Land, Sappho in Overalls," New York Morning World, 14 November 1929.

[5]Helen Deutsch and Stella Hanau, The Provincetown (New York: Russell & Russell, 1931), p. 182.

Professor Dickinson's defenders attempted to dismiss charges or suspicions concerning the nature of his subject matter. One outraged reporter fumed, "Some of the drama writers with their usual hate and seeking labels, compared the play to 'The Captive.'"[1] Another insisted Dickinson wrote "with no trace whatsoever of Lesbianism even though the author composed some dangerous sounding lines."[2] Burns Mantle, the playwright-scholar's most vocal supporter among members of the press, insisted:

> There is neither sign, nor word, nor scene in "Winter Bound" that could by the wildest margin be considered offensive to the most sensitive or even the reasonably clean minded.
>
> It probably is the most highly moral sex experiment the stage has ever entertained.
>
> In "Winter Bound" he had dared assume that certain misunderstood females are none the less clean of mind and purpose.[3]

The Bronx Home News, which reported to its readers that "there is nothing vulgar about the play," commented upon its morality:

> "Winter Bound" is the latest play to deal with the affection of a woman for one of her own sex, but it is far from another "Captive," either in its story or in its telling. . . . In the latter play we have the tale of a woman unable to break away from her unfortunate associations, while the newest offering portrays a woman who

---

[1]Jack Charash, "Circling Times Square," New York Today, 21 November 1929.

[2]"Perplexing Drama," New York Campus, 4 December 1929.

[3]Burns Mantle,"'Winter Bound' Agitates Suspicious," New York Daily News, 23 November 1929.

[4]"New Plays," Bronx Home News, 14 November 1929.

> experiments with such associations, but ultimately revolts against them and finally seeks the seclusion of a normal married life.[1]

The Wall Street Journal reported:

> Mr. Dickinson has written intelligently about questions that have for some time been engaging the attention of more scientists than dramatists. Though the principle issue is always clear, he appears to have found it advisable to make concessions to popular taste; whatever the reason, there are absurdities in the character of Miss Tony.[2]

The playwright had, another paper pointed out, gone "out of his way to emphasize that Tony Ambler's love for Emily Fullbright was a pure and holy love from which sex was entirely eliminated."[3]

Some reviewers believed that the failure of Winter Bound, particularly the characterization of its protagonist, could be attributed to the playwright's timidity in the face of the Penal Code, particularly the Wales Padlock amendment. Professor Dickinson was most certainly aware of the police raids and closing of The Captive less than two years earlier, and also of the highly publicized closing, in 1927, of one of the Shubert's productions entitled Maya which starred Aline MacMahon--who played Tony in Winter Bound--portraying a

---

[1]"New Plays," Bronx Home News, 14 November 1929.

[2]Stirling Brown, "Winter Bound," Wall Street Journal, 16 November 1929.

[3]"'Winter Bound' is an Unusual Study of A Peculiar Woman," Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 13 November 1929.

prostitute. Maya's run was brief because the Shuberts agreed to close it rather than run the risk of a police raid and a session in court for having presented a play with a prostitute-protagonist. Mae West spent ten days in prison for having done that the very same year that the Shuberts quickly closed Maya.

Helen Deutsch and Stella Hanau, in their history of the Provincetown Player's productions, comment that, "However fair the criticism of obscurity, Dickinson was not, with a timid eye to the censors, as some implied, trying to write a watered 'Captive!'"[1]

However, according to Billboard:

> The problem posed in The Captive is studiously avoided by the author. He wavers and teeters on the point of reaching some clarification, but frightened, possibly through fear of the censors, he limns his female protagonist in the ambiguous way which vitiates the protrait.
>
> Winter Bound is a wholly decent study, which will offend no one. But it seems that the author in his unwillingness to give offense spoiled what might have been a fine play.[2]

The Brooklyn Daily Eagle, noted that Winter Bound was "sailing very close to an absurd law,"[3] and Alison Smith, the only woman drama critic to cover the play for the New York papers, observed:

---

[1]Helen Deutsch and Stella Hanau, The Provincetown (New York: Russell & Russell, 1931), p. 183.

[2]"Winter Bound," Billboard, 23 November 1929.

[3]"'Winter Bound' is an Unusual Study of A Peculiar Woman," Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 13 November 1929.

> It is at once less honest and less reticent than "The Captive." From time to time the author seems to pull himself together (remembering that some motifs are not graciously received by Mrs. Grundy) and introduces some line indicating that the two women have fled to their retreat solely in the desire for mild and innocuous serenity.
>
> In the next line, the well of loneliness gushes forth through the frenzied jealousy of the more masterful member of the union whenever a man ventures to court the timid companion. There is nothing actually offensive in the play, but it brings the dreary distaste of prolonged inepitude.[1]

Repeatedly, play reviews not only identified the subject matter of Winter Bound as lesbian love, but also faulted the author for handling it with timidity, if not cowardice. The critic for The Stage wrote:

> This play is curiously open to misinterpretation; for while Dr. Dickinson has not introduced into "Winter Bound" the subject of perversion, the recent vogue of the novel called "The Well of Loneliness" and the less recent performance of "The Captive," and the streaks of masculinity in Tony Ambler, have already led many commentators to jump to the conclusion that "Winter Bound" was a timorous handling of a similar theme.[2]

Dr. Dickinson wrote a letter defending himself, and his protagonist, copies of which were sent to many of the drama critics. The letter read, in part:

> In view of the fact that my play, "Winter Bound," has been subject to false and, I feel, unjust interpretations, I wish to make the following statement in its behalf:
>
> Neither in substance nor intention does my play deal with the subject of lesbianism. . . . Tony Ambler, in "Winter Bound" is simply trying to free herself and womanhood in general from the slavery of sex, . . . it is ridiculous to suppose that a woman of her idealism would be

---

[1]Alison Smith, "Other New Plays," New York Morning World, 13 November 1929.

[2]Untitled fragment from The Stage, dated 15 December 1929 in Aline MacMahon Scrapbook, Lincoln Center.

> the victim of a far worse slavery. As Tony's creator, and as one who knows her well, I deny this outlandish charge that has been made against her.[1]

The reviewer from the Evening Sun supported the playwright's defense:

> Unless the much-used word "abnormal" is to be taken at precisely its meaning, and not as a synonym for one or other of the aberrations with which every one seems so concerned nowadays, Thomas H. Dickinson is entirely justified in the protest he has raised against the use of it as descriptive of his play.[2]

The critic for the Journal, on the other hand, took the time to pen a thorough reply to the playwright blaming him for the controversy:

> Tony Ambler is being mistreated every night at the Garrick by her paternal ancestor, Professor Thomas H. Dickinson. . . who . . . has written an elaborate defense of his child, declaring that she is good, pure, honest and altogether normal. If she seems otherwise on the stage at the Garrick he cannot blame it entirely on those of us who have met her in the theatre. She behaves in a certain way; the critics called her names for it, and instead of correcting her behavior so as to remove all suspicion, Professor Dickinson is content merely to say that they are mistaken.
>
> In their reviews Miss Alison Smith of the World and Mr. Brown of the Evening Post reported that the play deals with the same theme of sexual abnormality that lies in "The Captive." Prof. Dickinson hotly denies this and declares it is a false and unjust interpretation. "Tony," he writes me in a letter, "is an absolutely honest woman trying to work through the sex miasma to rational thinking. She is the synthesis and representation and mouthpiece of many of the finest women who are weary of the age old role to which woman has been limited, the role of biological activity."

---

[1] Bide Dudley, "The Stage," New York World, 18 November 1929.

[2] "Winter Bound and the Mind Bound," New York Sun, 25 November 1929.

> . . . if Prof. Dickinson doesn't mean the plain implications in the play he has done Tony a great injustice himself, a far greater one than his critics did. In word and action he arouses repeatedly the suspicion of abnormal relations. The suspicion is aroused not only in the audience but among the other characters. Tony dresses in men's clothing, is even mistaken for a man by a visitor and three times leaves unchallenged the intimation of aberration. . . . Instead of defending Tony in letters he ought to defend her in his manuscripts, and if the charge is so awful to him, it seems, surer, and more sensibly honest to refute it utterly in the only way it can be refuted, and that is by removing the basis of it. Otherwise, his defense has about as much weight as a letter from Eddie Cantor protesting against the critics because they think he's funny.[1]

The Professor was also taken to task by the critic for Theatre Arts Monthly:

> Mr. Dickinson, in pained form-letters dispatched to the press, has said that in Winter Bound he was concerned not at all with a suggestion of a homosexual relationship between the two women, but with the ideal of a woman's freedom from the slavery of any sex manifestation whatsoever. . . . Mr. Dickinson might have done better to write a play that would stand without an author's post-production footnotes.[2]

Dickinson added further confusion to the Winter Bound controversy by contradicting himself in the press during the run of the play. After having defended his protagonist for "simply trying to free herself and womanhood in general from the slavery of sex,"[3] he altered his earlier, seemingly fair-

---

[1]John Anderson, "Author's Responsibility to His Brain Child, Tony, in 'Winter Bound' Play Suffers From Neglect," New York Journal, 18 November 1929.

[2]John Hutchens, "Mid-Season Show Shop," Theatre Arts Monthly, January 1930, p. 11.

[3]Bide Dudley, "The Stage," New York World, 18 November 1929.

minded feminist stance:

> We are moving inevitably from a man-made world into woman-made world. The feminine struggle for freedom has turned into a struggle for dominance. There is offered to men a dilemma which can be avoided only by men building up a self-protection against women. Either men must grow increasingly subordinate, or they must create a technique by which the masculine principle may again assert its integrity.[1]

Aline MacMahon, who had starred in Winter Bound, somehow managed to have "endowed the role of Tony Ambler with the suffering of a personality divided against itself,"[2] according to the authors of The Provincetown. The Times cited MacMahon for bringing "a well-molded and decisive assurance that illuminates, at least in part, a character that is as ill-defined as the play itself."[3] In an interview during the run of the play in which she discussed the role, the actress made no mention of lesbianism. After accepting the part, MacMahon decided that "it will be extremely difficult to create sympathy for Tony." In rehearsals and during the performances, "there have been times," she said, "when I've hated and despised Tony. She isn't a very lovable person, you know. But I've always found her interesting."[4]

---

[1]Untitled newspaper article from Light, 9 December 1929, in Aline MacMahon Scrapbook, Lincoln Center.

[2]Helen Deutsch and Stella Hanau, The Provincetown (New York: Russell & Russell, 1931), p. 183.

[3]"'Winter Bound' Moves Along Devious Paths," New York Times, 13 November 1929.

[4]"'Winter Bound' Actress Had to Pick Part," New York American, 13 November 1929.

Almost half a century after having originated the role, MacMahon was angered at the suggestion that Tony might in any way be related to the emergence of lesbians in American drama. "Of course, I knew what a lesbian was in 1929, but I never thought of the character as being one!" the veteran actress protested. "The friendship between the two women was very clearly the usual, normal and platonic female relationship." Apparently the director had other thoughts on the matter since MacMahon did remember that, "James Light said he always thought that Dickinson had fallen in love with a lesbian and this was his way of getting even."[1]

When audiences for Winter Bound decreased to half houses, the Provincetown Players were unable to meet the rent asked for by the Shuberts for the Garrick Theatre. To make matters worse, Dickinson's drama was running during the first terrible week of the stock market crash in 1929, and attendance was naturally affected by that national economic trauma. When Winter Bound closed, the Provincetown Playhouse closed with it. Had Winter Bound been done at their famous little experimental playhouse off Washington Square, it might have run longer than it did on Broadway where production costs were so much higher. Those sponsors who encouraged the Provincetowners to move uptown were financially unable to support the group after the shattering break in the stock market. "The death of the

---

[1]Telephone Interview with Aline MacMahon, New York City, November 1977.

Provincetown Playhouse after fourteen years devoted to pioneer experiment in the theatre," one reporter commented at the time, "is the first major fatality in the arts traceable directly to the Wall Street Crash."[1]

Lesbians, as first seen on the American stage in The God of Vengeance and The Captive were in fairer hands than were the mannish women of Winter Bound and The Well of Loneliness. In both Asch's drama and Bourdet's, the lesbian characters were attracted by their own kind and able to consummate their affectional preferences despite social abhorence.

The publication of Radclyff Hall's The Well of Loneliness, labeled "anti-homosexual propaganda,"[2] by Henry Geber, American's pioneer gay activist, was permitted in the United States two years after The Captive, in which lesbian love wins out, was closed. Gerber wrote of Hall's heroine:

> She tried to win the sympathy of ostracising so-called "normal" society and falls in love with a hetersexual girl, who is snatched away from her arms by a male competitor in love. Had she joined her own circle, which is large in every metropolitan city . . . and had she chosen a homosexual girl as her partner, there would have been no morbid story; it would not have been such ideal anti-homosexual propaganda, and the publisher would have rejected the manuscript, well aware of the fact that he could be sent to jail for saying anything in favor of homosexuals.[3]

---

[1]"Footlights--The Stage," Light, 16 December 1929.

[2]Jonathan Katz, Gay American History (New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell Company, 1976), p. 401.

[3]Ibid., p. 405

Since their characterizations and their plots are so similar, Gerber's charges leveled at the best-selling novel might also have been directed at Winterbound. Of course, had Tony tried her feminist experiment with a lesbian, the Provincetown Players might have rejected Dickinson's playscript, the production of which would have been a misdemeanor.

CHAPTER X

SIX PLAYS SEEN IN THE 1930S BEFORE THE VETO OF THE DUNNIGAN CENSORSHIP BILL

GIRLS IN UNIFORM

DESIGN FOR LIVING

THE GREEN BAY TREE

THE CHILDREN'S HOUR

PRISONERS OF WAR

REPRISE

"By the 1930s, people were simply sick of the whole business of stage censorship, theatre people and theatre-going audiences, too. We were fed up with the threat of it,"[1] producer-director Herman Shumlin recalled in discussing his 1934 production of Lillian Hellman's The Children's Hour, America's best-known drama with a lesbian character. The puritanical, self-appointed watchdogs of public morality, and the New York press that publicized their relentless attacks on the American theatre were not, however.

In a headline reminiscent of many others that had helped incite the Broadway Theatre Raid of 1927, one of William

---

[1] Herman Shumlin, interview, New York City, 3 March 1979.

Randolph Hearst's Manhattan dailies reported in December of 1930: "Clean Up Or Be Cleaned Up, Mayor Walker Warns Stage."[1] Throughout the decade there were similar threats by both politicians and religious leaders. The Catholic Church was dissatisfied with the Wales Padlock Law and actively campaigned for a new statute that would give the politically appointed Commissioner of Licenses power to close, at his discretion, any entertainment he might consider unfit for New York theatre-goers.

It was in 1930 that most of New York's, and many of the nation's, newspapers ran daily, detailed accounts of Mae West's lengthy trial for having written and produced Pleasure Man two years earlier. West did not end back in jail, but during that same year the author of the play Frankie and Johnnie and nine members of his cast were arrested, for having given an indecent performance after plainclothes policemen raided the show. "The principal objection to it," the police said, "was the language used."[2] As a consequence, a year later a bill was passed in the Albany Assembly, without a single dissenting vote, to amend the Wales Padlock Law exempting actors from arrest for appearing in an alleged immoral

---

[1]"Clean Up Or Be Cleaned Up, Mayor Walker Warns Stage," New York American, 26 December 1930.

[2]"Play Frankie and Johnnie Raided By Police As Indecent; Fifteen Arrests Are Made," New York Times, 11 September 1930.

show, but Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt vetoed it. When a duplicate bill was sent to him again the following year, Roosevelt relented and approved the amendment.

In 1934 the New York state senators approved another amendment to the Theatrical Padlock Law, providing that the producer of a show and not the theatre owner should be liable if a jury finds the presentation indecent. Roosevelt's successor, another Democrat, Herbert Lehman--and no more a supporter of freedom of expression on the American stage than Roosevelt had proven to be--vetoed that amendment. Ironically enough, just three years later Governor Lehman would be hailed by the New York Times as the savior of the American theatre,[1] an accolate that might have better been accorded Herman Shumlin.

In the spring of 1937, the stage censorship movement begun by Anthony Comstock climaxed after more than sixty years of festering. The once formidable Society For the Prevention of Vice, still headed in the 1930s by John S. Sumner, had lost its impact during his lengthy tenure of office. When Sumner formed a group to fight against repeal of the Wales Law, only four people joined him and three other members of his organization at a meeting in 1930. Fifty invitations had been sent to thirty organizations.[2] Comstock's campaign for stage censorship

---

[1]"An Admirable Veto," Editorial, New York Times, 20 May 1937.

[2]"Sumner Forms Group For A Stage Clean-Up," New York Times, 6 December 1930.

had been taken over by the Roman Catholic Church, which was very powerful politically in New York City.

In October of 1930, Cardinal Hayes of Manhattan told a meeting of the Guild of Catholic Lawyers that the Broadway "stage is reeling with filth, and there seems no power in New York to stop it."[1] In a bulletin of the Catholic Theatre Movement, published the previous summer, Monsignor Michael J. Lavelle, Rector of Saint Patrick's Cathedral, declared the stage in New York had sunk so low as "to become an outrage to public decency."[2] When in 1937, State Senator John J. Dunnigan, "A Terrible Man,"[3] as he was called four years earlier in a Daily News editorial, readied his one-man stage censorship bill for the Albany Assembly, he had the ready support of his church.

One man rallied not only thousands working within the theatre, but many thousands more among theatregoers, in a campaign to defeat the most serious threat to freedom of expression with which the American stage had ever been faced: "Herman Shumlin," reported the New York Times, "who as head of the joint committee, drew the theatre together to fight the Dunnigan Bill."[4] Theatre people, in this campaign spearheaded

---

[1]"New York Stage Indecent, Says Cardinal Hayes," New York Herald Tribune, 10 October 1930.

[2]Ibid.

[3]"A Terrible Man, This Dunnigan," Editorial, New York Daily News, 17 November 1933.

[4]"News Of The Stage," New York Times, 22 May 1937.

by Shumlin, collected some 63,000 or more signatures[1] from Broadway audiences. Petitions urged the Governor to veto a bill passed by the Albany Assembly that would have made one man, a political appointee, as powerful in America as the Lord Chamberlain was in Great Britain.

Shumlin was aided by some of the biggest stars in show business. Chief among them was Helen Hayes, who proved to be one of the most articulate opponents of the bill. Life magazine reported in May of 1937:

> This spring, for the first time, the freedom of the New York stage was seriously threatened. Largely at the instigation of the Catholic Church, which had cleaned up the movies with its Legion of Decency, a bill was hastily passed by the legislature, empowering New York City's Commissioner of Licenses to close any play he deemed "immoral." Since most U. S. drama flows from the fountainhead of the New York stage, this measure would have made a political job-holder the supreme censor of the American theatre.
>
> Actors, playwrights, producers and audiences promptly attacked the bill. Petitions were sent to Albany with audience approval. At a climatic meeting of 2,000 theatre workers and theatregoers in New York's New Amsterdam theatre, Helen Hayes . . . was cheered when she spoke the lines of the historic Queen she acts in Victoria Regina: "We are not amused." Three days later Governor Herbert Lehman vetoed the bill and the U. S. theatre was saved again.[2]

"An Admirable Veto," reported the New York Times in an editorial on 20 May 1937:

> Governor Lehman has earned the gratitude of all liberals, of all who value freedom of speech and of the arts,

---

[1]"Cardinal Backing The Dunnigan Bill," New York Times, 18 May 1937.

[2]"Helen Hayes Helps Save The American Theatre From Censorship," Life, 31 May 1937, p. 17.

> by his veto of the Dunnigan One Man Censorship Bill. . . . There are fully adequate laws for dealing with indecency on the stage.[1]

One such law, alluded to by the newspaper editorial was, of course, the New York State Penal Code, prohibiting any play "depicting or dealing with, the subject of sex degeneracy or sex perversion."[2] Governor Lehman's veto had saved the American theatre from government consorship, but the legal prohibition against dramatic depictions of gay themes and characterizations remained in effect until the New York State Penal Laws were recodified in 1967. This was thirty years after Helen Hayes had commented, "We are not amused," at the possibility of curtailing freedom of expresson on the American stage.

During the ten year period between Governor Alfred E. Smith's signing of the Wales Amendment to the State's Penal Laws in 1927, and Governor Herbert Lehman's veto of an even more constraining statute in 1937, only one play with an admittedly gay character, a lesbian, The Children's Hour, braved the Broadway boards. Herman Shumlin, who had produced and directed Lillian Hellman's drama, credited Jed Harris' handling of the subject matter in an earlier production, The Green Bay Tree, with his success with The Children's Hour. Shumlin recalled:

> The Green Bay Tree was so subtly done that you weren't sure what was going on and what it was really all about until well into the first act. I believed that we could get away with doing The Children's Hour even with its more

---

[1]"An Admirable Veto," New York Times, 20 May 1937.

[2]Jonathan Katz, Gay American History (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1976), p. 90.

> candid handling of the homosexual, or should I say gay, subject matter during those very touchy times if we did it with the intelligence and good taste that the critics appreciated and applauded in Jed's production. I was certain they would recognize the sensitivity and seriousness that went into the script and the performances and that if anybody dared raise a fuss, the critics would come to our defense.[1]

Neither the words "lesbian" nor "homosexual," nor any of the pejorative slang epithets more commonly used to identify the gay minority are to be found in the dialogue of the six gay, or seemingly gay, plays done on Broadwy in the first half of the 1930s before the veto of the Dunnigan Bill. No such language was needed in The Children's Hour, nor in Reprise, also authored by an American, to alert audiences to the nature of obviously gay relationships in the dramas. The critics for the New York dailies passed such information about these two shows along to readers either with complete candour or, with subtle, sometimes snide, references to the subject matter. Nevertheless, outbursts such as appeared both on editorial pages and in critics' columns in the 1920s, when The Captive and The Drag were making headlines, are not to be found in the New York dailies in the decade of the Depression when no less than a dozen gay plays were seen on the American stage.

When more circumspect European dramatists, who had authored four of the six plays produced in the 1930s before the Dunnigan Bill was vetoed, kept their gay creations

---

[1]Herman Shumlin interview, New York City, 3 March 1979.

closeted, the New York critics were not always sure how to describe them. Reactions were often sharply divided. Percy Hammond chided his colleagues' speculations, made even privately, that had not occurred to him when he had sat among the first-nighters to watch an English-imported comedy.[1] Another reviewer warned theatregoers that they would be "disappointed if you expect a course in lesbian suggestiveness,"[2] in a German-imported drama about a schoolgirl's obsessive crush on her teacher. "One may read anything one chooses, or very little if one chooses,"[3] Brooks Atkinson concluded about another English import, The Green Bay Tree, over which there was disagreement.

The Green Bay Tree, the most sensational and successful of all the gay or apparently gay dramas imported from abroad during the first half of the 1930s, had been approved by the Lord Chamberlain's office for public performances in Great Britain. Jed Harris' production is still widely remembered by some who saw it as dramatizing a gay relationship. That appraisal, however, is not so apparent if one examines the playscript. No references are made in Mordaunt Shairp's text

---

[1]Percy Hammond, "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 5 February 1933.

[2]"Girls in Uniform," As A Play Is A Moving and Distinguished Production," New York Morning Telegraph, 1 January 1933.

[3]Brooks Atkinson, "The Play," New York Times, 21 October 1933.

to any sexual implications in the curious relationship between an older, very affluent bachelor and his young, working-class ward. Nevertheless, a gay inference was widely made by many in the audiences, particularly the drama critics. The Lord Chamberlain came to no such conclusion after examining the playscript of The Green Bay Tree, nor did New York's law officers.

The second imported suspect gay drama, Girls In Uniform, produced before the Dunnigan veto, was viewed by most critics in 1932 simply as a study of an not uncommon--except in its intensity--schoolgirl crush, a motherless student develops on her sympathetic teacher. An examination of that playscript might, to more discerning readers today, seem to be a portrait of an ingenuous adolescent, a lesbian, who unwittingly and unwisely identified herself as such. Since the head-mistress of the Prussian school in Girls In Uniform is evil-minded, unfair and cruel, critics and audiences did not identify with her or her reaction to a schoolgirl crush--even if it may have seemed to some to be unusually intense.

A couple of bachelors who lived together, travelled together and openly declared their love for one another went unidentified in reviews of Design For Living in 1933, even though some of the reviewers privately claimed to have recognized their predilection.[1] Both young men in Design for Living

---

[1]Percy Hammond,"The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 5 February 1933.

also enjoyed taking turns cohabiting with a particularly emancipated and somewhat sexually promiscious young woman, who periodically came between them. "Some of my colleagues in drama reviewing," critic Percy Hammond confided in his Sunday column,"decode its manuscript, . . . , and decipher from the most innocent paragraphs hints of degeneracy."[1] The baffling bisexuality of Noel Coward's comedy of manners, coupled with the popularity and prestige of the playwright and his married costars, Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, may have prevented those of the drama critics, who so annoyed Hammond, from writing what they may have shared with one another in private. "Others of minds less penetrating," Hammond concluded about Design For Living, "argue that its misdoings are not of the abnormal type, but merely those of two madcap men and a madcap woman."[2] After dismissing whatever misgivings other reviewers entertained about the relationship of the two men in Coward's comedy as "viciously erroneous,"[3] Hammond enthused, "What a gay time you will have when . . . you attend 'Design for Living!'"[1]

Girls In Uniform was the first of the six shows produced in the first half of the 1930s that merits detailed

---

[1]Percy Hammond, "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 5 February 1933.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid.

examination in this study. The German-imported drama ran only a dozen performances,[1] but not because it met with either a hostile or an indifferent critical reception, nor because it stirred the ire of either the establishment or self-appointed watchdogs of public morality. The timing of Girls In Uniform was so bad for its American debut, that the drama was doomed before it opened at the Booth.

Barbara Burnham's English-language adaptation of Christa Winsloe's Berlin stage hit, Gestern und Heute, was titled Children In Uniform for a London production. With Jessica Tandy portraying the schoolgirl and Cathleen Nesbitt her Prussian persecutor, the play opened in October of 1932 at the Duchess Theatre. Winsloe's drama had "stormed the principle cities of Europe," according to the Morning Telegraph, and "had been turned into one of the great motion pictures of our times."[2] Fifteen weeks before Broadway audiences saw Girls In Uniform, the German-language motion picture opened at the Forty-Fourth Street Theatre, just a block away from the Booth. After being temporarily obstructed by the U. S. Censors, Maedchen In Uniform was released in New York City to unanimous critical acclaim. The film, now legendary, was adapted by Leontine Sagan from Winsloe's playscript.

---

[1]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1932-33 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1933), p. 445.

[2]"'Girls In Uniform' As A Play Is A Moving And Distinguished Production," New York Morning Telegraph, 1 January 1933.

Sidney Phillips' production, titled Girls In Uniform for American audiences, opened on 30 December 1932, the day before the New York film critics named Maedchen In Uniform, the best motion picture of the year.[1] Most of the play's reviews were raves for the film version, to which the Broadway production was compared. The majority of reviewers preferred the motion picture even though they praised the stage production. "As a play 'Girls In Uniform' is still deeply moving," the New York Times reported, adding at the same time, "'Maedchen In Uniform' is a masterpiece of audible screen photography."[2] The reviewer for Theatre Arts Monthly, on the other hand, saluted the Broadway production as being "infinitely superior to the more popular film version with its deliberate evasions and forced happy ending."[3]

The World Telegram noted that "You came away from the motion picture with the joyous assurance that life in the Prussian girls' school was about to become more humane and more compassionate. The theatre with the courage of its convictions, is less obliging."[4] Recommendations for the play made by

---

[1]William Boehnel, "Three Foreign Films First In Ten Best Exhibited in 1932," New York World-Telegram, 31 December 1932.

[2]"The Play," New York Times, 31 December 1932.

[3]"Broadway In Review," Theatre Arts Monthly, January 1933, p. 186.

[4]"'Girls In Uniform' Stages Well," New York World-Telegram, 31 December 1932.

critics appreciative of its tragic, depressing, but more realistic climax could hardly have been expected to help bring the public into the Booth Theatre. It was the winter of one of the worst years of the Great Economic depression when hordes of hungry Americans were lined up at soup kitchens and bread lines even along Broadway's Great White Way.

The reviewer for the Daily Mirror, in another minority report in favor of the stage production, wrote, "'Girls in Uniform' is a meaningful and tense experiment in the theatre which no intelligent playgoer can afford to miss."[1] All too aware that many intelligent theatregoers could no longer afford to patronize the legitimate theatre, the management of the Forty-Fourth Street motion picture theatre cleverly placed a large advertisement for Maedchen In Uniform in the New York Times on the very page that the review for the play appeared. "As Good As The Day They Were Written Fifteen Weeks Ago," the ad read, above excerpts such as: "A work of art! Something to revive one's faith in the cinema," quoted from the many rave reviews for the film. "At Prices Everyone Can Afford," the ad concluded with a list of admission costs which ran as low as 25¢ for a matinee and 40¢ for an evening performance.[2] Orchestra

---

[1]Bernard Sobel, "School Play Proves Impressive," New York Daily Mirror, 1 January 1933.

[2]"As Good As The Day They Were Written Fifteen Weeks Ago," Advertisement, New York Times, 31 December 1932.

seats for Broadway plays in 1933 cost $3.00, although seats at the back of the balcony of some shows did cost only 50¢.[1]

Girls In Uniform, which can be read under the title Children In Uniform in Famous Plays of 1932-33,"[4] concerns a sensitive, highly emotional, motherless fourteen-year-old who is brought to a Prussian boarding school for aristocratic young ladies by the unaffectionate aunt who had raised her. Starved for attention and searching for a mother surrogate, boyish Emanuela develops a schoolgirl crush on Fraulein von Bernberg, a popular, sympathetic, young teacher among a faculty that is rigid, puritanical and impersonal. After drinking some punch that she does not realize has been heavily spiked, the guileless, theatrical and often embarrassingly expansive adolescent publicly declares her affection for her instructor at a school party at which the Headmistress is in attendance.

> MANUELA. . . . I am so happy, so . . . so blissfully happy . . . because now, I know for certain--she loves me (laughs). She . . . opened her wardrobe . . . and took out a chemise . . . one of her own! . . . And gave it to me! I was to wear it and think of her. (softly) She didn't say that. . . . (aloud) But she doesn't need to tell me anything. Her hand on my head tells me everything--sweet, good, dear white hand, that can hold so tenderly. . . . Nothing can happen to me now--nothing in the whole world. . . . She loves me! I know it--I feel it--it gives me strength. . . . it makes me feel holy. . . . (softly)

---

[1]"Amusements," New York Morning Telegraph, 12 March 1933.

[2]Famous Plays of 1932-33 (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1934).

> From now on I will be quite different. I will have only good pure thoughts . . . and I will serve her . . . life has no other meaning. . . .[1]

Horrified at the implications she reads into the slightly tipsy teenager's overwrought tirade, the Headmistress sputters:

> HEAD: Revolting! A scandal! A scandal![2]

For her punishment, Manuela is isolated from the other students and removed from the dormitory to a room of her own. Fraulein von Bernberg visits the girl to tell her that for her own good they must have nothing more to do with one another.

> FR. VON B. (Painfully). You must not love me so much--it is wrong, it is harmful--it is a sin--[3]

After rejecting the devastated teenager, the young teacher confronts the Headmistress to defend herself for having cared about the motherless, affection-starved adolescent and for having given her an undergarment to replace one which was full of holes. In a blistering attack on the suspicious, evil-minded older woman, the young teacher berates her for the way she runs the regimented boarding school.

> FR. VON B. This house is a rat-trip. This is a house of death. You kill the soul, the spirit! This galvanised suppression is spiritual death. Only women can do such terrible things to women![4]

---

[1] Famous Plays of 1923-33 (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1934), p. 69.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 91.

[4] Ibid., p. 95.

Defending her contempt for any deviation from the norm among the student body, and her dedication to the rigid and impersonal Germanic educational system, the Headmistress declares:

> HEAD. . . . here, Fraulein von Bernberg, we remain true to the ideals that made Prussia great and will make her great again. Here it is our sacred duty to rear Spartan women, not weaklings.
>
> FR. VON B. In Sparta the boys and girls competed together naked!
>
> HEAD. This is a Christian community! . . .[1]

The women's heated confrontation is interrupted when a student bursts in to announce that Manuela has killed herself by jumping from a window. Concerned only about the effect news of the suicide might have on the school's royal patroness, the Headmistress's immediate reaction is to devise a cover-up as the drama comes to a close.

> HEAD. . . . Tell the Grand Duchess there has been an accident.[2]

At least two of the drama critics warned potential playgoers against entertaining the same suspicions about Manuela as did, in the words of the reviewer for the Morning Telegraph, "that grim old warhorse, who places an ugly construction on the child's affection."[3] That same gentleman advised:

---

[1] Famous Plays of 1932-33 (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd. 1934), p. 94.

[2] Ibid., p. 95.

[3] "'Girls In Uniform' As A Play Is A Moving And Distinguished Production," New York Morning Telegraph, 1 January 1933.

> I think you should see "Girls in Uniform" but--please with a mind closed to depraved curiosity or vulgar jesting. You will be disappointed if you expect a course in lesbian suggestiveness. It isn't there. The play is real and fine, and touching.[1]

Richard Lockridge of The Sun had this warning lest theatregoers turn as evil and mean-minded as the Prussian Headmistress:

> As was probably inevitable, the play has been interpreted by some who have seen it, on the stages of London and Berlin and on the screen here, as a study of those tendencies described by one of the mistresses as "unhealthy." And, of course, if a schoolgirl "crush" is unhealthy, then Manuela's feeling for her teacher was something to be hushed. But if we are not too regimented by prevailing misinterpretations of "modern psychology"--if we are not unperceptive as Manuela's persecutors--we can see it only as a story of an innocent child cruelly and needlessly murdered.[2]

Lockridge was not the only critic to have noted that there were some who viewed Girls In Uniform as a lesbian love drama. The man from the Morning Telegraph wrote:

> There was complaint the First Night, by those who go about seeking unhealthy implications in affections between persons of the same sex, that Mr. Phillips had borne down too bluntly in the first two acts on the possibility of Sapphic love between the girl and teacher. These surmises, as is customary, were blasted away in the last act when the innocence of the girl's love is made not only plain but heartbreaking.[3]

---

[1]"'Girls In Uniform' As A Play Is A Moving and Distinguished Production," New York Morning Telegraph, 1 January 1933.

[2]Richard Lockridge, "The New Play," New York Sun, 31 December 1932.

[3]"'Girls In Uniform' As A Play Is A Moving and Distinguished Production," New York Telegraph, 1 January 1933.

Those who had blamed producer Sidney Phillips for whatever implications there are in Girls In Uniform that the relationship between the young teacher and her pupil is a sexual one had possibly not read the playscript; otherwise, the finger may have been pointed at the dramatist. Tomboyish Manuela is by no means an ordinary teenage girl, nor is her obsessive crush on her teacher the familiar one that many students may have experienced. Furthermore, Fraulein von Bernberg's reaction to this impassioned infatuation may very well be interpreted as somewhat provocative. In one scene Fraulein says to the fourteen-year-old:

> FR. VON B. . . . You know I mustn't make any distinction between one girl and another, because that might lead to jealousy, don't you? That I mustn't single anyone out?
> (Manuela nods.)
> (Very earnestly) But I want you to know this, Manuela, that I think about you very, very much. I see more than you imagine, and sometimes I am grieved about you, while at other times I am glad. But I mustn't show all this, you know that, don't you, my dear?[1]

Some of the students and instructors sense that Manuela is unusual . One of the girls comments:

> JOHANNA. . . . Fraulein Manuela is different . . . I always said she was different. . . .[2]

One of the instructors uses a word to describe Manuela that implies abnormality.

---

[1] Famous Plays of 1932-33 (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd. 1934), p. 56.

[2] Ibid., p. 59.

FR. VON KESTEN. . . . Manuela is--well--to put it mildly . . . morbid.[1]

Just as others sense something unusual about Manuela, she has similar feelings about Fraulein Von Bernberg.

MANUELA. . . . I believe she is unhappy. . . . I feel she has suffered in some way . . . that . . . there is another side to her quite different from the one she shows us.[2]

Even before the Headmistress learns of Manuela's attachment to a member of the staff, she has eyed the girl disapprovingly. One of the students quotes her in a conversation with Manuela:

ILSE. . . . "Dear me, the little Meinhabis looks just like a boy--" . . .

MANUELA. . . . I'd like to look like a boy. But I don't want her to say it. I hate her.[3]

Manuela becomes the sensation of the boarding school when she appears in a play portraying a knight, a role she sought and feels comfortable in. Talking to one of her friends, she confides:

MANUELA. . . . I'm so terribly happy, for now I shall be able to show her myself--as I really am! When I'm dressed in my silver armour, with my hair quite free, then, then, she will see me properly for the first time. . . .[4]

---

[1]Famous Plays of 1932-33 (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1934), p. 86.

[2]Ibid., p. 47.

[3]Ibid., p. 49.

[4]Ibid., p. 47.

When Manuela gets a chance to declare her love for Fraulein Von Bernberg, we share the intensity of her feelings:

> MANUELA. (first stammeringly, afterwards more freely): I don't know how to say it . . . but . . . every time you say goodnight to me, and then go away, and shut the door of your room, I feel so terribly lost. . . . I stare at your door through the darkness. . . . I keep on staring and staring . . . and I long to get up . . . open your door, creep up to your bed, and kneel beside it. I want to take your hand, and . . . and tell you . . . but I know I mustn't, so I have to clutch hard to my bed--I grip it so tight that it hurts. . . . Oh, I love you! I love you like my mother. But you are always so far away, so distant. I can never talk to you, never come into your room, never be near you. . . .[1]

To those who viewed Girls In Uniform as an examination of the brutal, prudish reaction of an individual personifying the Prussian educational system to nothing more than a harmless, passing schoolgirl's crush on her favorite teacher, the Headmistress must seem solely responsible for the teenager's tragic end. However, to any who might have interpreted the student-teacher relationship differently Fraulein Von Bernberg's rejection of the adolescent--in order to spare them both in a hostile environment--becomes a more significant factor in the girl's decision to kill herself. In the latter interpretation, the young lesbian is destroyed not so much by Headmistress' intolerance--since she is utterly contemptuous of the Headmistress and her values--but by one who is forced to behave expediently rather than compassionately under the circumstances.

---

[1] Famous Plays of 1932-33 (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1934), p. 56.

The time was unquestionably wrong in January of 1933 for a stage version with a tragic, cruel climax of the same story that could be seen with a more positive conclusion, in the already released, widely-acclaimed film version about a teenage girl "charged," in the words of the reviewer for the World Telegram, "with the unspeakable sin."[1] It was the right month and the right year, however, for a refreshingly shocking, and seemingly heterosexual comedy of outrageous amoral manners. Design For Living is about a sophisticated, bohemian trio, untouched by, and unaware of the Great Economic Depression which was still wracking the whole of the Western World that winter.

The adjective "gay," ironically enough, was used in almost every single one of the reviews to describe Noel Coward's Design For Living. In 1933 the word still meant, to most people, an open lightness of heart and mood. In that sense the play was unmistakenly gay, yet it seemed to a number of theatregoers also to be "gay" in the sense that the word was being used in that decade by some American lesbians and gay men, especially in the theatre, to identify themselves.

A week after Coward's comedy opened in Manhattan to unanimous rave reviews, Percy Hammond confided to his readers:

> Design For Living arrived in New York preceded by a scandalous reputation, acquired through its performances in other towns. Mortified playgoers in Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Washington and elsewhere had sent word along

---

[1]G. R., "Girls In Uniform Stages Well," New York World-Telegram, 31 December 1932.

> that the conduct of its heroes was effeminate, and that the heroine was cursed with irregular ideas about love life.[1]

"All of the stories that got about beforehand to the effect that there was going to be a touch of lavender in the thing," scoffed Arthur Pollock of the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, "turned out to be silly."[2] Only Brooks Atkinson of the Times, among the New York drama critics, made any allusion to the possible gay relationship of the two bachelors in the play, but he quickly passed over it because of the nature of Coward's comedy of bohemian bed manners. "Although there is a constant odor of abnormality about this one," Atkinson observed, "it is no more sensuous or erotic than a highly polished blade of steel."[3]

Percy Hammond, who had critized other reviewers for having searched the printed text of Design For Living for "hints of degeneracy,"[4] also noted that other New Yorkers had voiced suspicions about the relationship of the two young men in the play and the credibility of their sexual attraction to the character played by Lynn Fontanne.

---

[1]Percy Hammond, "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 5 February 1933.

[2]Arthur Pollock, "The Theater," Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 25 February 1933.

[3]Brooks Atkinson, "Boiled-Shirt Comedy," New York Times, 29 January 1933.

[4]Percy Hammond, "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 5 February 1933.

> The sophisticated acclaim it is as flagrantly falsetto, sounding none of the masculine chest-notes appropriate to healthy romance . . .
>
> At the risk of being considered an ingenue, I confess that I see nothing in the performance of Mr. Alfred Lunt and Mr. Noel Coward that suggests anything more than a fervent friendship, tinged a little with the bizarre.[1]

Another reviewer, Whitney Bolton, was also annoyed at objections he had heard raised about the play. In an article for the Morning Telegraph entitled, "Moralists Make Jackasses Of Themselves With 'Design For Living,'" Bolton did not specifically identify the nature of the criticism he was replying to when he raged:

> I take it that we will stand for crude suggestiveness, blatant obscenity and coarse characterizations and hail it as realistic drama, but we must not have gaiety and wit and intelligence as ingredients of plays about men and women who are not married.[2]

Dedicated to Alexander Woollcott, a critic renowned for his gaiety and wit, Design For Living concerns a trio of British bohemians: Gilda, an interior decorator, and her two bachelor intimates, Otto, a painter, and Leo, a playwright. Described by the thirty-three year old author as the legend of "three people who love each other very much,"[3] Leo explains

---

[1]Percy Hammond, "The Theatres," New York Herald Tribune, 5 February 1933.

[2]Whitney Bolton, "Moralists Make Jackasses Of Themselves With 'Design For Living,'" New York Morning Telegraph, 26 January 1933.

[3]"This Week's Openings," New York Times, 22 January 1933.

to Gilda that "the actual facts are so very simple. I love you. You love me. You love Otto. I love Otto. Otto loves you. Otto loves me. . . ."[1] Coward had, as the New York Times noted, "taken to fooling around with the eternal triangle."[2]

Gilda is living with Otto, the painter, in a rather shabby studio in Paris at the play's start. While he is out of town, his former roommate, Leo, has arrived in Paris from London where productions of his plays have earned him a great deal of money. Before Leo drops by to visit the couple, a mutual friend of the trio, Ernest, reminds Gilda:

> ERNEST. Otto and Leo knew each other first.
>
> GILDA. . . . I know all about that! I came along and spoilt everything! . . .
>
> ERNEST. I didn't say that.
>
> GILDA (sharply). It's what you meant.[3]

Leo arrives at his ex-roommate's studio flat and spends the night with Gilda. Upon his return home, Otto becomes so enraged when the couple tell him what transpired that he storms out, leaving the man and the women he loves to their own devices.

In the second act Gilda is living with Leo, author of still another hit play, in a London flat. While he is out of

---

[1]Noel Coward, Play Parade (New York: Garden City Publishing Company, Inc., 1924), p. 19.

[2]New York Times, 22 January 1933.

[3]Coward, p. 11.

town, Otto arrives to make peace with his ex-mistress and his ex-roommate. He remains to spend the night with Gilda. Because she feels useless and unfulfilled, herself, now that both men are successful in the arts, Gilda leaves in the company of Ernest, their long-time, mutual friend, a wealthy art dealer headed for New York. When Leo returns and he and Otto learn that Gilda is gone, the ex-roommates get drunk. "They both sob hopelessly on each other's shoulders as the curtain slowly falls."[1]

Gilda, married to Ernest, is living in a New York penthouse at the beginning of the third act. Otto and Leo, who are back living together and have been traveling about the globe for the past two years, arrive in Manhattan to rescue her from the dull and shallow respectability of middle-class married life. Although by now Gilda is a successful interior decorator and has made many friends in New York, she is as restless and discontented with her marriage as she was when she became tired of living with Otto, and then with Leo. After a brief attempt to escape their influence, Gilda agrees to leave her husband and take up with the two bachelors once again. Ernest is shocked and furious,calling the trio "a disgusting three-sided erotic hotch-potch," and "unscrupulous, worthless degenerates."[2] Ernest rushes out of the apartment in a rage,

---

[1]Noel Coward, Play Parade, (New York: Garden City Publishing Company, Inc., 1924), p. 83.

[2]Ibid., p. 111.

falling over something in the hallway. "This is too much for Gilda, and Otto and Leo; they break down utterly and roar with laughter. They groan and weep with laughter; their laughter is still echoing from the walls as the curtain falls."[1]

Robert Benchley, who was reviewing plays for the New Yorker, concluded that the two men and the woman, "all very clever," planned to live happily ever after "getting along under one roof without sex--if they can."[2] "You say, 'Such people don't exist,' and enjoy their pretended unreality,"[3] observed the critic for the World-Telegram. "A jolly menage a trois,"[4] commented the reviewer for the American. One of the playwright's biographers, Sheridan Morley, contended that "American reaction to the play was somewhat guarded,"[5] yet it received unanimous rave reviews and became one of the biggest hits of the 1932-33 theatrical season. "The sleekest

---

[1]Noel Coward, Play Parade (New York: Garden City Publishing Company, Inc., 1924), p. 111.

[2]Robert Benchley, "Goings On About Town," New Yorker, February 1933, p. 4.

[3]"Comedy By Coward Daring and Witty, Too," New York World-Telegram, 25 January 1933.

[4]Gilbert W. Gabriel, "Design For Living," New York American, 25 January 1933.

[5]Sheridan Morley, A Talent To Amuse (Garden City, New York; Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1969), p. 225.

and most persuasive play in town,"[1] raved the Morning Telegraph; "the gayest comedy of Mr. Coward's repertory,"[2] concluded the Herald Tribune.

According to the New York Times, during the comedy's try-out run in Washington, D.C., "They were putting chairs in the orchestra pit to accommodate extra patrons."[3] By the time Design For Living arrived on Broadway for its New York premiere "excited peasants gathered in such throngs about the Barrymore Theatre," Percy Hammond observed as he joined the first nighters, "that mounted policemen were forced to ride upon sidewalks and chase them away."[4]

Noel Coward was the talk of the town in the first month of 1933. The film version of his London success, Cavalcade, had just opened to rave reviews. "The best motion picture in the English language,"[5] Richard Watts, Jr. of the Herald Tribune enthused. A second popular film based on another of Coward's dramas was also playing on Broadway when Design For Living opened: Tonight Is Ours starring Claudette Colbert and

---

[1]Whitney Bolton, "'Design For Living' Sleekest and Most Persuasive Play In Town," New York Morning Telegraph, 26 January 1933.

[2]Percy Hammond, "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 25 January 1933.

[3]"Gossip Of The Rialto," New York Times, 22 January 1933.

[4]Percy Hammond, "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 5 February 1933.

[5]Richard Watts, Jr., "Cavalcade," New York Herald Tribune, 22 January 1933.

Frederic March. "They adore Noel Coward in England," Ursula Jeans, one of the stars of Cavalcade, confided to readers of the Herald Tribune, "He's such a likeable human person, you couldn't help adoring him."[1] Americans were singing, along with the British, songs by Coward such as "I'll See You Again," "A Room With A View," and "Mad About The Boy." Rumors were even flying across the Atlantic that despite his gay prediliction, Coward would soon be knighted because of the sensational success of both the stage and film versions of Cavalcade, his salute to the British Empire.[2]

Despite the Depression, Design For Living played to sold-out houses for the first three months of its run; "When a break did come," Burns Mantle noted, "it was comparatively insignificant and other weeks were added."[3] The comedy was seen in 135 performances,[4] and there was no mention, at least in the press, of it being overtly threatened by the Manhattan police, politicians, the clergy nor by the Society For The Suppression of Vice. Percy Hammond hoped that "Mr. Sumner [head

---

[1]"Film Personalities," New York Herald Tribune, 22 January 1933.

[2]Sheridan Morley, A Talent To Amuse (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1969), p. 213.

[3]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1932-33, (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1933), p. 134.

[4]Ibid., p. 454.

of that pressure group], if he is still abroad, will deal more or less gently with it."[1]

Had Sumner decided to go after Design For Living, he would have had to focus his attack on Gilda's sexual promiscuity since Leo and Otto's relationship as travelling companions, which can be viewed as purely platonic, pales beside the lady's seduction of them and the shockingly off-handed termination of her marriage. That the head of the Society For The Suppression of Vice did not raise his voice in righteous indignation may be attributed not only to the prestige and popularity of the comedy's costars, but to the finesse and charm of their performances. Atkinson of the Times hailed the trio as "Three gay and thoroughly distinctive actors."[2] Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, the most successful husband and wife costars on the English-language stage in the 1930s, were every bit as renowned as Coward. Perhaps no other theatrical presonalities could have gotten away with Design For Living as a costarring vehicle during a period so fraught with censorship threats and restrictions.

If Sumner had picked over the playscript, joining those drama critics cited by Hammond, on a witch-hunt, he might have noted certain lines in Coward's comedy that may have been self-mocking pet names shared by the playwright and his costars in

---

[1]Percy Hammond, "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 25 January 1933.

[2]Brooks Atkinson, "Boiled-Shirt Comedy," New York Times, 29 January 1933.

their intimate, long-time relationship. Gilda, for instance, may be alluding to the stars themselves and their vehicle rather than to the characters in the play in this rather baffling snatch of dialogue:

> GILDA. . . . Look at the whole thing as a side show. People pay to see freaks. Walk up! Walk up and see the Fat Lady and the Monkey Man and the Living Skeleton and the Three Famous Hermaphrodites! . . . [1]

Even if Sumner had been able to point to such cryptic lines in Design For Living, they would hardly have served to support a police raid on the Barrymore Theatre because one of the characters may have been alluding to herself, Otto and Leo--or to the three costars of the show--facetiously as hermaphrodites. There is one speech, ostensibly meant to be a defense of heterosexual free love, that might be understood to be a closeted defense of Coward's own life-style; but, again, it would have been impossible to have cited it in any attempt to prove that the comedy depicted, however esoterically, subject matter prohibited by the New York State Penal Code.

> OTTO. . . . There's no sense in stamping about and saying how degrading it all is. Of course, it's degrading; according to a certain code, the whole situation's degrading and always has been. The Methodists wouldn't approve of us, and the Catholics wouldn't either; and the Evangelists and the Episcopalians and the Anglicans and the Christian Scientists--I don't suppose even the Polynesian Islanders would think very highly of us, but they wouldn't mind so much, being so far away. They could all club together--the whole lot of them--and say

---

[1]Noel Coward, Play Parade (New York: Garden City Publishing Company, Inc., 1934), p. 14.

with perfect truth, according to their lights, that we were loose-living, irreligious, unmoral degenerates, couldn't they?

GILDA (meekly). Yes, Otto, I expect so.[1]

OTTO. But the whole point is, it's none of their business. We're not doing any harm to anyone else. We're not peppering the world with illegitimate children. The only people we could possibly mess up are ourselves and that's our lookout . . . [2]

In 1944, eleven years after Design For Living was running on Broadway, A. A. Brill, a psychoanalyst, was certain after examining Coward's text that Otto and Leo were lovers in the seemingly emotional rather than physical "menage à trois" comedy.

I don't know whether the author of the play knew our psychological concept of homosexuality, but all the essential factors of it were clearly depicted. The narcissism was expressed by making the two men look and dress almost exactly alike; they even kiss each other. The overevaluation of the penis . . . is reflected in the line: "But don't forget, it's in the London Times--it's the organ of the nation."[3]

Robert Wood, a noted English sexologist, after his examination of Design For Living, concluded:

Ostensibly the men are in love with the girl, Gilda, but it is clear that they are even more deeply in love with each other. They approach each other symbolically through her.[4]

---

[1]Noel Coward, Play Parade (New York: Garden City Publishing Company, Inc., 1934), p. 58

[2]Ibid., p. 58

[3]A. A. Brill, Freud's Contribution to Psychiatry (New York: W. W. Norton, 1944), p. 131.

[4]Robert Wood, "Homosexuality On The Modern Stage," in The Third Sex, I. Rubin, ed. (New York: New Books, 1961), p. 88.

Percy Hammond, the critic for the Herald Tribune, might have been very distressed had he lived to read the psychoanalyst's and the sexologist's appraisal of Otto and Leo's relationship, since he dismissed just such speculation about it as "viciously erroneous" after Noel Coward's comedy opened in 1933.[1]

Noel Coward was in large part responsible for bringing New York theatregoers one of the most sensational and successful stage productions of the 1930s with at least one closeted gay character far more discernible than those in Design For Living. Even though he had nothing to do with the play, Variety erroneously reported before its opening that "Some observers figure Noel Coward did the playwriting because many lines are typical of his style."[2] Coward definitely did, however, encourage Jed Harris, the director-producer wonder-boy of the 1920s, to bring The Green Bay Tree to Broadway after both men had seen it performed at King's Theatre, Hammersmith. "No play in recent years in London," the New York Times reported, "has been more widely and vivaciously discussed,"[3] yet Harris had serious reservations about mounting the production for

---

[1]Percy Hammond, "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 5 February 1933.

[2]"Inside Suff-Legit," Variety, 24 October 1933.

[3]A. V. Cookman, "Note On Mordaunt Shairp," New York Times, 12 November 1933.

American theatregoers. The producer told critic Douglas Gilbert:

> I like the theme--the vicious influence of an older man on a younger, but if it hadn't been for Noel Coward I doubt if I should have produced it. The play as it was done in London was atrocious. But Noel liked the script and I went ahead with it . . . Someday a better play will be written on this angle.[1]

The Green Bay Tree, written by Mordaunt Shairp, a forty-five-year-old author of three successful plays and an assistant master at University College and extension lecturer to the universities at Oxford and London, was such a hit in London that, according to the New York Times, "The author was duly entitled to assume a position as one of England's literary lions."[2]

In an interview, the playwright revealed his inspiration for the drama about a very affluent, cultured bachelor's adoption of a motherless, working-class boy:

> The idea which grew into "The Green Bay Tree" came to Mr. Shairp one day when he was walking on Hampstead Heath, near his home, he saw a man and a boy driving together and something in the boy's wistful expression suggested to him the theme which is the basis for the play. When he returned home he told his wife he had found a new subject and then went directly to work.[3]

The Green Bay Tree, set in London, opens in the elegant flat of Mr. Dulcimer, a very wealthy gentleman of leisure. "The

---

[1]Douglas Gilbert, "Jed Harris Flourishes Anew," New York Times, 31 October 1933.

[2]A. V. Cookman, "Note On Mordaunt Shairp," New York Times, 12 November 1933.

[3]Ibid.

atmosphere of the room is one of luxury, fastidiousness and just a touch of the abnormal,"[1] according to the author. Dulcimer is described as:

> A man about forty-five, immaculately turned-out, . . . speaks exquisitely . . . with now and then a slight drawl . . . Though a complete dilettante, . . . an alert, vibrating personality. A man who could fascinate, repel and alarm.[2]

The fussy, rather irritable, anti-proletarian bachelor lives with his butler and a young man whom he adopted fifteen years before. The motherless boy had been turned over to him to raise by a drunken father for a considerable financial settlement. Julian, Dulcimer's ward, is "a handsome boy in his early twenties, charming, well made, but self assured and self indulged."[3] The playwright adds that "there is . . . a rather grotesque likeness between him and Mr. Dulcimer."[4]

Dulcimer is so precious that, in the first few minutes of the drama, he is seen wearing gloves to arrange flowers in a vase while peevishly complaining to his butler that the gardener has cut the stalks not exactly to his liking. Julian arrives announcing to his foster-father that he has fallen in love and plans to marry. Nothing in the ensuing dialogue nor

---

[1]Mordaunt Shairp, The Green Bay Tree (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, Act I, Sc. 1, p. 3.

[2]Ibid., Act I, Sc. 1, p. 3.

[3]Ibid., Act I, Sc. 1, p. 4.

[4]Ibid., Act I, Sc. 1, p. 11.

the directions indicates that Dulcimer has anything but a reasonable, yet somewhat skeptical reaction to this news. Julian, however, thinks him most unreasonable when he gets a negative reaction to his plea that Dulcimer continue supporting him.

JULIAN. I did rather hope you'd increase my allowance.

DULCIMER. I see.

JULIAN. You will, Dulcie, won't you?

DULCIMER. I've always loved your ingenousness, Julian, It's one of your greatest charms. I shouldn't dream of increasing it. In fact, if you leave me, I don't propose to make you any allowance whatever.[1]

JULIAN (laughing). Then you're turning me adrift?

DULCIMER. That's hardly the way I should describe a young man who proposes to support a wife.[2]

Julian has a second surprise for Dulcimer when Leonora, the girl he loves, arrives at the flat. Dulcimer is gracious and hospitable, and the young female veterinarian is at first fascinated by him. In discussing his ward with her, the bachelor confesses in an easy conversation:

DULCIMER. He's more than a son to me, and it will mean more to give him up. . . .[3]

At the end of the first scene the older man is left alone when the young couple go off to see the ballet.

---

[1]Mordaunt Shairp, The Green Bay Tree (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, Act I, Sc. 1, p. 20.

[2]Ibid., Act I, Sc. 1, p. 20.

[3]Ibid., Act I, Sc. 1, p. 29.

Later that night, Julian returns to tell Dulcimer that instead of going to the theatre, they had gone to see his natural father in his working-class neighborhood. The man, now a religious fanatic and part-time preacher, has been sober since buying a small dairy with the money Dulcimer paid him for permission to adopt and rear his only son. Julian tells his benefactor that he now wants to return to live with his natural father. While living with him, the young man plans to study, coached by Leonora, for the entrance examination to a veterinary school so he can someday go into practice with his wife. Dulcimer is hurt and angry at being deserted by his foster-son and blames Leonora for coming between them. Julian wants to retire for the night with a handshake and no ill-will, but the older man ungraciously refuses to take his hand as the first act ends.

The second act begins in Julian's father's small, working-class living room three months later. Julian has been studying very hard for his examination so he is overjoyed when Dulcimer's butler arrives to invite him and Leonora to dinner. Dulcimer has returned to his Mayfair flat after spending the summer in his country house. The young woman does not want to go, and Owen, Julian's father, does not want him to have anything more to do with Dulcimer, whom he blames for spoiling his son by raising him in the lap of luxury. The part-time preacher quotes a passage from the Bible warning Julian of the

wealthy sybarite's decadent influence: "I have seen the wicked in great power and spreading himself like a green bay tree. . . ."[1]

Julian will not listen to his fiancée nor to his father. He is convinced that Dulcimer has grown so lonesome for him and anxious for a reconciliation that he may now reconsider his rejection of the young man's plea for an allowance. Leonora agrees to accompany Julian only after he reveals his true feelings for the wealthy man who had raised him.

> JULIAN. . . . I don't like him, really, anymore than you do. . . .[2]

The next scene takes place in Dulcimer's flat. After dinner, Leonora departs to look after a sick dog thus affording Julian, who has promised to join her later, an opportunity to talk to Dulcimer about an allowance. Julian's pleas for money to buy a house plus an annual income are wasted on the man who once indulged him. Dulcimer makes it clear that he will not support Julian as a married man. Unable to bring himself to return to the grind of studying for the veterinary medical exam while living on the meager subsistance allowance he has borrowed from his father, the hedonistic young man breaks down weeping in frustration, falling upon the couch. Dulcimer smiles and instructs the butler to get Julian's room ready.

---

[1]Mordaunt Shairp, The Green Bay Tree (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, Act I, Sc. 1, p. 13.

[2]Ibid., Act II, Sc. 1, p. 23.

The phone has been ringing. Knowing it is Leonora attempting to reach him, Julian refuses to answer it, as the second act curtain comes down.

Julian announces that he needs a holiday in the first scene of the last act when he comes down for breakfast after spending the night back in his old room. He has decided that he cannot live on his wife's salary while he goes to school. Julian wants to vacation in Italy where Dulcimer has a villa. As they prepare for a departure that night, Leonora arrives at the flat wanting to know why Julian did not join her the night before and why he would not answer the phone. Julian's father, very distraught because his son has remained with Dulcimer, stands outside looking up at the apartment's window, waiting for the young man to come out with Leonora.

Julian will not consider going back to studying with Leonora and living with his father. He is fed up with work and poor surroundings.

> JULIAN. I hate everything that's cheap and ugly and second-rate.[1]

Julian insists that he must have a holiday and leaves Leonora with Dulcimer while he dresses. The young woman admittedly despises the wealthy bachelor who is now just as openly hostile to her. He explains his interest in Julian.

---

[1]Mordaunt Shairp, The Green Bay Tree (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, Act III, Sc. 1, p. 9.

DULCIMER. I didn't adopt him to please my conscience, if I have one, or to give him what was best for him. My aim was to make him like, and unable to do without, what was best for me. . . .[1]

Leonora, angry and hurt at being rejected by the mercenary young man she loves, turns on the millionaire who had perverted Julian's values by raising him to be a parasitic drone in society.

LEONORA. You get what you want simply because you can pay for it. It wouldn't take much to wipe you out. Another convulsion in the world and you'd vanish tomorrow.[2]

William Owen, crazed with anxiety, bursts into the flat demanding that Dulcimer give him back his son.

OWEN. There was nothing in the contract, Mr. Dulcimer, that gave you the right to corrupt my boy![3]

Julian's father has a revolver.

OWEN. . . . once I take him off your hands, he'll forget all about the soft and corrupt way, and curse you as I have cursed you![4]

Owen shoots Dulcimer, then turns to his son, calling him by the name he had been baptised.

OWEN. Now you're free, Davy, at last![5]

The curtain falls.

When it rises again for the final scene, three weeks have passed. Leonora is visiting Julian in Dulcimer's flat.

---

[1]Mordaunt Shairp, The Green Bay Tree (Typewritten copy) Lincoln Center, Act II, Sc. 1, p. 10.

[2]Ibid., Act III, Sc. 1, p. 11.

[3]Ibid., Act III, Sc. 1, p. 12.

[4]Ibid., Act III, Sc. 2, p. 16.

[5]Ibid., Act III, Sc. 2, p. 16.

Once again she begs him to leave and come away with her. The apartment and all of Dulcimer's wealth and property have been left to Julian by his late guardian. We learn from Leonora's conversation with the young heir that his father has been adjudged insane and is now committed to a prison asylumn. Leonora will not marry Julian unless he refuses his inheritance; this he cannot bring himself to do, although he insists that he still loves her and wants her.

Leonora leaves Julian, but the butler, who had warned that he would not stay on if a woman became part of the household, agrees to remain to serve the young man as he did Dulcimer.

There are two endings for The Green Bay Tree. A typewritten copy of the one used in Jed Harris' Broadway production is on file at the Lincoln Center library. In the original New York production, the butler goes out to fetch some flowers so Julian can arrange them as was Dulcimer's habit. The young man is alone smoking as the lights are lowered. A death-mask of Dulcimer with a smile on his lips hangs on the wall behind him. "The death-mask continues to smile. Gradually all the lights fade, leaving only a pin-spot on the death-mask and the end of Julian's cigarette."[1]

We can be certain that ending was used in Harris' production, at least on opening night, since one critic took marked exception to it. Describing the audience's last sight

---

[1]Mordaunt Shairp, The Green Bay Tree (Typewritten copy) Lincoln Center, Act III, Sc. 2, p. 22.

of Julian, Arthur Pollock of the Brooklyn Daily Eagle noted:

> His head sways daintly and his manner is mincing, like the manner of the dead man. From the back wall a mask of the corrupter smiles over at him and on the mask shines a stupid green light such as used to shine on ghosts in the old dramas. Rather clumsy trick, this mask business.[1]

In his abridged version of Shairp's drama published in The Best Plays of 1933-34, editor Burns Mantle used the ending described by Pollock.[2]

Another typewritten copy, also on file at the Lincoln Center Library, was used by director Shepherd Traube for his 1952 Broadway revival of the drama that starred Joseph Schildkraut. Traube used the ending that can be read in Sixteen Famous British Plays, compiled by Bennett A. Cerf and Van H. Cartmell, in 1942,[3] nine years before the Broadway revival. In the Traube production the butler brings flowers into the living room so that Julian can arrange them as was Dulcimer's habit. He does so with the same preciousness as did his late guardian in the first scene of The Green Bay Tree. The death mask is on the wall behind Julian as he puts on a pair of gloves to protect his hands, selects a vase to his taste, and complains about the way the gardener has cut the flower stalks as the curtain falls.

---

[1]Arthur Pollock, "The Theater," Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 21 October 1933.

[2]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1933-34 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1949), p. 414.

[3]Sixteen Famous British Plays, compiled by Bennett A. Cerf and Van H. Cartmell (Garden City, New York: Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., 1942); The Green Bay Tree was also published by Baker International Play Bureau, but copies of it are not to be found in the New York Public Libraries.

"I'd almost swear that, as the curtain came down in the original Broadway production," Herman Shumlin reminisced, "the boy was fussing over flowers the way the old prissy had done earlier in the play."[1] Shumlin was not alone in having been left with such an impression. Jed Harris explained:

> In the last scene the butler never takes his eyes off him. There is not the slightest hint of anything queer, nothing spoken, nothing said. Just the butler quietly watching him. "The flowers have come," he says, and goes out. No reaction from Julian, just sitting there with a cigarette and brandy. Curtain. It knocked the audience flat. He never arranges the flowers as the final curtain comes down. Yet there were many people who were convinced they saw it.[2]

"The theatre has unleased one of its thunderbolts,"[3] Brooks Atkinson reported when Jed Harris' production of The Green Bay Tree, financed by Lee Shubert, opened on 20 October 1933 at Broadway's Cort Theatre. Another critic elaborated:

> Impatiently awaited, promising one of the most interesting evenings of the theatrical season, Jed Harris' production of "The Green Bay Tree" came into the Cort last night. I think that in it Mr. Harris has given us by far the most exciting, arresting and provocative play of the new season--a brilliantly directed, absorbing and adult drama.[4]

Greeted by unanimous critical praise, Shairp's drama became one of the biggest hits of the season, running twenty-

---

[1]Herman Shumlin Interview, New York City, 3 March 1979.

[2]Jed Harris, Television Interview: "The Dick Cavett Show," WNET-TV, Channel 13, 25 March 1980.

[3]Brooks Atkinson, "The Play," New York Times, 21 October 1933.

[4]William Boehnel, "'The Green Bay Tree' Exciting Adult Drama," New York World-Telegram, 21 October 1933.

two weeks during which it was seen in 166 performances.[1] Harris, who had won the "wonder-boy" accolade in the 1920s, producing such hits as Broadway, The Royal Family, and The Front Page, had, after taking an extended leave from show business, been unable to pull his career out of an eclipse upon resuming work in the theatre. Harris had produced five costly flops in a row, but the sensational success of The Green Bay Tree was such that Atkinson of the Times hailed him as "one of the most clairvoyant minds in the theatre."[2]

Harris had picked one of America's most eminent set designers, Robert Edmund Jones, to do the show, and famed interior decorator Elsie De Wolfe to supply the rare antiques seen in Dulcimer's aesthetically stunning salon. The pale green and gold set was so exquistely done that one newspaper columnist was obviously concerned about its deleterious effects on impressionable young theatregoers. The writer for one of New York dailies warned:

> No matter how seductive a vice may become, even though its is surrounded by the excessive beauty of "The Green Bay Tree" atmosphere it nearly always, according to the nature of things, ends in disaster and decay. That scene in the second act when the boy gives way to the anguish is proof enough of the grief, frustration and misery which comes to the man who swerves from the normal pattern.[3]

---

[1]Burns Mantle, Ed., The Best Plays of 1933-34 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1934), p. 445.

[2]Brooks Atkinson, "The Seal of Good Producing," New York Times, 29 October 1933.

[3]Untitled, New York newspaper fragment, dated 18 November 1933, on file in The Green Bay Tree file, Lincoln Center.

Harris had hired the English actor James Dale, seen by New York audiences as the Jew in John Galsworthy's Loyalties, to portray the luxury loving sybarite. Leo G. Carroll, who went on to a busy film career, was engaged to play the butler, and Laurence Olivier and the first of his actress-wives, Jill Esmond, were cast as the young couple.

"There was nothing homosexual or swish in the performances or in the dialogue," Jed Harris said, "yet the suspicion had to be there. That's the only way you can explain what was going on."[1] According to John Cottrell, one of Lord Olivier's biographers, Harris "thought it would be very clever to have such masculine types as Olivier and Dale cavorting on the stage as a couple of classy queens."[2] When the play had been done in London nine months earlier that same year, at least one critic, who wrote for the New English Weekly, attacked actor Frank Vosper for his "exaggerately mincing deportment and his ugly caressing of chairs," in an "excessively hysterical" portrayal of Dulcimer.[3] The reviewer for the London Observer, however, had an entirely different reaction to the very same performance. He wrote:

> We are most of us, I suppose, wearied beyond words with the easy laughter raised by parading effeminate men with all the mincing movement of their kind. Neither

---

[1]Jed Harris. Interview: "The Dick Cavett Show," WNET-TV, Channel 13, 25 March 1980.

[2]John Cottrell, Laurence Olivier (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), p. 86.

[3]Paul Banks, "The Green Bay Tree," London New English Weekly, 16 March 1933.

> Mr. Shairp nor his players stoop to conquer by these methods. The effeminate is either a victim of physiological misfortune or a revolting poseur. Mr. Shairp's Mr. Dulcimer is something, one gathers, of both. But he is not put up to shock us vulgarly or to amuse us basely; he is there as the objectively studied specimen of a rare and unhappy species.[1]

The New York critics' reaction to James Dale's performance was uniformly appreciative. Wolcott Gibbs of the New Yorker gives us some inkling of what the actor and his director made of a role that could have been either "campy" or offensively effeminate:

> James Dale plays it spendidly. Mr. Dulcimer is funny at first in his matronly preoccupation with the arrangement of his tulips and the year of his wine, and then gradually becomes a tragic and even a shocking figure in his murderous urbanity toward his ward's financee, and in his subtle and venomous compaign to get rid of her.[2]

Jed Harris did not share the critics' enthusiastic appraisal of Dale's histrionics. Dismissing the English performer as "a lousy actor,"[3] the director recalled having had to resort to technical trickery to enhance Dale's performance. "In the scene in which Olivier tells Dale he is going to get married," Harris revealed, "he reacts by going pale, but actually he didn't. I had the man on the lights hit his face with a pin-spot so it seemed that way."[4]

---

[1]Ivor Brown of the London Observer quoted in "The Green Bay Tree for America," New York Evening Post, 2 March 1933.

[2]Wolcott Gibbs, "The Green Bay Tree," New Yorker, 28 October 1933, p. 26.

[3]Jed Harris. Television Interview: "The Dick Cavett Show," WNET-TV, Channel 13, 25 March 1980.

[4]Ibid.

Dale had reservations about the effectiveness of Olivier's work in The Green Bay Tree, even if the critics did not concur with him. The English actor felt that his costar:

> wasn't nearly as successful . . . as the man who played the part in London--Hugh Williams.
> Of course, Larry is a man of action. . . . The character in The Green Bay Tree was a limp, wet, lackadaisical, rather effeminate lad--the very last thing that Larry Olivier was, is, or ever will be. I understand he didn't like himself in the part.[1]

"It's a terrible thing for an actor to say isn't it?" Olivier confessed about his performance as Julian, "but honestly I've never hated playing any part so much before."[2] The actor also loathed working with ruthless, exacting, and sarcastic Jed Harris, so much so that some years later "he thought about him and about Adolph Hitler in preparing his characterization of Richard III."[3] Apparently Olivier's unhappiness with Harris and uneasiness in the role of Julian did not diminish his effectiveness as a performer, most particularly in the estimation of one critic, Florence Fisher Perry, who raved:

> In the horrifying scene where he is beaten in slavish submission by his benefactor's abnormal attraction for him, his acting becomes not acting, but an exhibition of emotional collapse so painful to witness that the eyes of the audience are torn away; the spectacle of his ignominy actually becomes too terrible to bear.[4]

---

[1]John Cottrell, Laurence Olivier (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), pp. 86-87.

[2]Felix Barker, The Oliviers (New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1953), p. 82.

[3]John Cottrell, Laurence Olivier (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), p. 209.

[4]Ibid., p. 87.

"He is the best actor in England," Jed Harris said of Olivier, but "he has no mind at all." The director remembered:

> In the scene in which he tells his girl he is going back to see the older man who had kept him, I told him to play it like a whore telling her pimp, "Don't worry. I'm not going to get involved. I'm just going over to get the money out of him." Olivier was shocked, offended.[1]

"'The Green Bay Tree' has come from London tagged with the report that it is a sort of 'Male Captive,'"[2] Burns Mantle informed his readers. The Daily News' first-nighter continued:

> Recalling that the police closed the local performances of "The Captive" after it had flourished abundantly for a matter of months, some seasons back, there was an eager and receptive audience at the Cort Theatre last night prepared to absorb what "The Green Bay Tree" had to offer before other censors decended upon it.
>
> Well, there is little danger that this play will be attached.[3]

There is not a single line of dialogue, nor a single compromising scene or situation, that can be cited as having a sexual implication, which might reflect upon the nature of the bachelor's relationship with the boy he adopted. The Green Bay Tree was approved for production in Great Britain by the office of the Lord Chamberlain. In New York, there were no charges of breaking the state law prohibiting dramas depicting sex degeneracy or perversion. Shairp dramatized the emasculating and demoralizing effects of luxurious aestheticism according to Burns Mantle.

---

[1]Jed Harris. Television Interview: "The Dick Cavett Show," WNET-TV, Channel 13, 25 March 1980.

[2]Burns Mantle, "'Green Bay Tree' Highly Emotional," New York Daily News, 21 October 1933.

[3]Ibid.

> It is in effect a revealing study of a certain social decadence, a habit of luxurious living, the tendency of which is to weaken the moral fiber and corrupt the souls of its practioners.[1]

"No doubt psychology has much to say on the subject," wrote the reviewer for Stage:

> but as it is acted on the New York stage the play can be taken at its face value: a highly special type of man, who receives his emotional stimuli from color, form, design, and luxury in the outer world, and seeks to bring up a young man in his image.[2]

With the single exception of the drama critic for the London Times, who made no reference whatsoever to a possible gay motif in The Green Bay Tree, all of the other influential drama critics writing for newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic were not so sure that the drama was as asexual as it must have seemed to the Lord Chamberlain. One English publication reported that it was "advertised by dramatic critics as having to do with that beastly but fascinating topic of homosexuality."[3] New York's reviewers all addressed themselves to that possibility with divided and diverse reactions.

Robert Garland of the World-Telegram described The Green Bay Tree as a study of the sexual perversion of a basically normal, but weak-willed boy.

---

[1]Burns Mantle, ed. The Best Plays of 1933-34 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1934), p. 381.

[2]K. McK, "Shapes Of The Soul," The Stage, December 1933, p. 21.

[3]Paul Bank, "The Green Bay Tree, New English Weekly, 16 March 1933.

> My brothers of the First Night garden, remembering the bad luck of "The Captive," are prone to pretend that Mr. Shairp's play deals with a couple of things.
>
> Mr. Dulcimer's admiration for Julian's wavy hair, for instance. Or the manner in which that personable young fellow occupies a couch, purring like a cat in the lap of luxury. Reading the reviews printed while I was out of town, I gather that "The Green Bay Tree" has nothing to do with the way of a man with a man. Well, if it has nothing to do with that it has nothing to do with anything.
>
> If it has nothing to do with that (and "that" is an incident not unknown to the public in general and to patrons of revues in particular) Mr. Shairp's play is the most meaningless play ever written by anybody.
>
> But Mr. Shairp's play isn't the most meaningless play ever written by anybody. It is, as London has known week after week, month after month, a poignant study of a not-infrequent peculiarity in the relationship of one human being to another. Centuries back the Greeks had a word for it, a nicer word than we have today.[1]

Brooks Atkinson preferred to take the text literally. His first-nighter's report read, in part:

> (It may as well be noted that one may read anything one chooses, or very little if one chooses, into Dulcimer's feeling for his ward. The author more or less lets the point go by default, devoting himself in the main to an attack on luxury.) . . .
>
> The relationship is abnormal, since Mr. Dulcimer, with all his petty sensuousness is an abnormal person, but there is nothing in the play to indicate that the relationship is more than passively degenerate.[2]

A week after seeing the play, Atkinson added similar concluding thoughts on the matter:

> Whether or not "The Green Bay Tree" is a tragedy of sexual degeneracy is a technical question. Those who are interested can paw over it as much as they choose.

---

[1]Robert Garland, "Fine Fusion Of Arts Is The Play At The Cort," New York World-Telegram, 29 October 1933.

[2]Brooks Atkinson, "The Play," New York Times, 21 October 1933.

> Although the relationship existing between the two men characters is at least potentially degenerate, Mr. Harris has steadfastly focused attention upon the human tragedy of the characterizations and upon the inhumanity of the dilettante's scheme of living.[1]

Percy Hammond of the Herald Tribune did not feel that either the director or the playwright had focused on a single asexual theme, but were both responsible in the way they handled the subject for all the speculation about the play.

> I am not one of those who believe everything they hear about the exquisite Mr. Dulcimer in "The Green Bay Tree." As you know, "foul whisperings are abroad" concerning his character, and he is accused of impurities too serious to be charged against him without evidence less fallible than that offered in the play. . . .
>
> I cry that Mr. Dulcimer's addiction to embroidering, double-breasted evening jackets and the companionship of an attractive young man is no excuse for putting him on the spot for depravity. Acquaintance with him will prove to any just drama-lover that at his worst he is merely an asexual voluptuary, . . . he may make you suspicious when, for instance he dons an apron and white gauntlets while arranging a bowl of tulips. But I can remember that not so long ago George M. Cohan, and other super he-men, regarded the wrist watch as an emblem of pansiness. . . .
>
> If there is aught that is "queer" in his attitude toward Julian, Julian obviously does not know it, and neither does keen Leonora. It is beyond belief that either of these normal and experienced persons would not have detected and have fled from any such vile shenanigan. . . .
>
> Of course he is being corrupted, but not the way that Mr. Shairp, the British author, and Jed Harris, the American producer, shrewdly and slyly intimate for purposes of argument.[2]

Mordaunt Shairp was both commended and faulted for the ambiguousness of his dramaturgy; yet none of the reviewers

---

[1]Brooks Atkinson, "The Seal Of Good Producing," New York Times, 29 October 1933.

[2]Percy Hammond, "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 5 November 1933.

mentioned the necessity of such a treatment since the subject matter was illegal on the public stage on both sides of the Atlantic. Nevertheless, John Mason Brown was uncomfortable with Shairp's expedient reticence:

> In "The Green Bay Tree" it is somewhat difficult at times to discover what <u>is</u> at the bottom of Mr. Mordaunt Shairp's garden. . . .
>
> Mr. Shairp's drama, which has been the center of much discussion in London, is certain to provoke the same discussion here. It is an inspiring study of the disintegration of character, and one which is capable of several interpretations. . . .
>
> . . . one may wish that Mr. Shairp had been more forthright in clarifying his issue and had not hesitated to call a spade a spade.[1]

Wolcott Gibbs, writing for the <u>New Yorker</u>, felt that the dramatist had been very clear in drawing his characterizations. In sharp disagreement with John Mason Brown, he wrote:

> The subject of abnormality is usually discussed on the stage with such a misty delicacy that is hard to tell just exactly what the author had on his mind, or else with a humor hearty and explicit enough to engage the indignant attention of the Police Department. It is a relief to see it treated for once, in "The Green Bay Tree," at the Cort, without either coyness or the nasty joviality of a Minsky blackout.[2]

"It seems to me wasting time to ponder the literalness of Dulcy's relationship to the young man," Stark Young commented.

> There is a type of person seeing "The Green Bay Tree," who, either by sheer lack of sophistication or some subconscious self indulgence, will not quite divine this theme in the play. There is, also, a type that, enjoying the play, would choose to deny it; . . .

---

[1]John Mason Brown, "The Play; By John Mason Brown," <u>New York Evening Post</u>, 21 October 1933.

[2]Wolcott Gibbs, "The Green Bay Tree," <u>New Yorker</u>, 28 October 1933, p. 26.

> If the homosexual theme, with its unaccustomed stage possibilities, had been used crudely, the whole would be merely risque or raw. If used singly, a great play would have been necessary to give it embodiment and point.[1]

The reviewer for the Newark Evening News, who called The Green Bay Tree "a Freudian thriller for adults,"[2] when it played that city, did not consider Shairp's work a great play compared to another play that was the sensation of the previous decade:

> If it is to be taken, in any serious degree as a study of abnormality there can be no comparison between "The Green Bay Tree" and such a masterpiece of stage craftmanship as was Edouard Bourdet's "The Captive," which dealt with vagaries in the behavior of the opposite sex.[3]

"Commentators who enjoy pasting on labels have termed it 'a male version of 'The Captive,'" noted Wilella Waldorf of the New York Post,[4] even before the play opened on Broadway. "If The Green Bay Tree were only, as has frequently been said, a variant of The Captive," the reviewer for The Stage wrote after it opened, "it would have but a limited dramatic interest. But as the play is here presented, it acutely analyses the epicene influence in society."[5]

---

[1]Stark Young, "Cort Laurels," New Republic, 15 November 1933, p. 17.

[2]P. J. D., "'The Green Bay' Tree Now At The Broad Street Theatre," Newark Evening News, 24 April 1934.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Wilella Waldorf, "Forecasts and Postscripts," New York Evening Post, 15 September 1933.

[5]K. McK, "Shapes Of The Soul," The Stage, December 1933, p. 21.

Percy Hammond felt that Shairp's drama kept "its revelations at a discreet though an interesting distance, whereas, for instance, The Captive was unrelenting in its discussion of sister (sic) idiosyncrasies,"[1] and Variety noted that Shairp's drama was "even more subtle in exposition" than Bourdet's work. Arthur Pollock, on the other hand, came to a contrary conclusion in contrasting the two plays. Pollock contended:

> "The Green Bay Tree" is a franker play than "The Captive." Not that it calls a spade heavily a spade. It doesn't. But it does not, either, sentimentalize its subject matter nor utilize it to such melodramatic effect. . . .
>
> If it does not create so much comment, cause so great a whispering as the Bourdet play, it will be for that reason, the reason that its author cannot or does not choose to make it so beguiling as a play. He makes it healthier, however.[2]

Since The Green Bay Tree was never known to be under surveillance by the Office of the Manhattan District Attorney, no reports from police spies have come down to us through legal procedures that would give some idea of the make-up of audiences at the Cort Theatre in the winter of 1933-34. In the 1920s some of the drama critics made it a point to mention the appearance or the predominance of that portion of the audience often referred to as "morbid" at performances of The Captive, The Drag, and Pleasure Man, but none of the reviewers made any

---

[1]Percy Hammond, "The Theater," New Herald Tribune, 21 October 1933.

[2]Authur Pollock, "The Theater," Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 21 October 1933.

reference to audiences at The Green Bay Tree. That the gay underground community was out in force for at least one particular performance of Shairp's drama seemed evident to a veteran and inveterate theatregoer. Reginald Cockburn of Manhattan remembered, "looking back and up at the balcony audience when a companion called my attention to it. 'My God, would you look at them!' he whistered laughing. 'The gay bars must all be empty tonight.'"[1]

The Green Bay Tree was seen on Broadway, in its out-of-town try-out and in a road-show company without ever inciting the local police to action, but not surprisingly since Mr. Dulcimer was so discreetly closeted. No legal action was taken, amazingly enough, the very next autumn when an overt lesbian character appeared in a Broadway show in open violation of the State's Penal Code. "They wouldn't have dared come near us, after we got such rave notices!"[2] said Herman Shumlin, bristling even at the thought of that possibility forty-five years after he produced and directed Lillian Hellman's The Children's Hour. "My real problem was how to keep them from going after us before the show opened. I had to devise a way to handle that very real threat."[3]

---

[1]Reginald Cockburn, Telephone interview, New York City, 10 October 1978.

[2]Herman Shumlin, Interview, New York City, 3 March 1979.

[3]Ibid.

Shumlin was determined that Hellman's drama was not going to be harassed or closed during rehearsals or during an out-of-town try-out at the instigation of some coercive pressure group just because it contained a scene in which a character confesses her love for another woman. "After all," Shumlin said, "that was just one element, however shocking it may have seemed to some, of a larger, more univeral consideration the playwright was concerned with: the devastating effects of vicious slander."[1]

Shumlin's initial reaction to a play concerned with lesbian love was negative. Writing for the New Yorker, Margaret Case-Harriman reported:

> At a party given by Ira Gershwin in the fall of 1933, Hellman asked Shumlin, "What would you think of a play about a couple of school teachers accused of being lesbians by a brat student?" "I wouldn't waste time on it," Shumlin answered kindly.[2]

Twenty-seven year old Lillian Hellman, a New York University graduate who had been working as a press-agent and a play-reader for MGM Studios, had already spent several months on such a project. Hellman had written only one other play, on which she collaborated with critic Louis Kronenberger, an unproduced farce entitled, "Dear Queen." While living with mystery story writer Dashiel Hammett, Hellman had read a true

---

[1]Herman Shumlin, Interview, New York City, 3 March 1979.

[2]Margaret Case Harriman, "Profiles. Miss Lilly of New Orleans," New Yorker, 8 November 1941, p. 25.

account of a couple of slandered Scottish schoolmarms in a collection of crime stories published just two years before.

Robert Benchley, reviewing plays for the New Yorker, did some research of Hellman's source material for The Children's Hour:

> It may be pointed out that Miss Hellman has court records to substantiate her story, records on which she must have based it, so identical are the main circumstances.
>
> In Edinburgh, in 1810, two school mistresses, the Misses Woods and Pirie, were similarly accused by a girl pupil, who had even less to recommend her than the young villainess of Miss Hellman's play. A suit for slander was instituted (and, by the way, shouldn't this one have been for slander instead of libel? It was all done by word of mouth.) against the girl's grandmother, and after ten years of losing, appealing, winning, appealing, and endless legal haggling, with no evidence other than that of the already discredited viper, the case finally came before the august House Of Lords. Here a technical verdict was awarded the schoolmistresses, but further legal haggling set in and there is no record of their ever having received a shilling for their ruined lives.
>
> So, to doubters, Miss Hellman may offer as evidence (as she already must know) pages 111-146 of a reputable volume called "Bad Companions," by William Roughead, published in 1931 by Duffield and Green.[1]

Hellman's failure to publicize the source of The Children's Hour seemed less than professionally ethical to some critics and theatregoers. Richard Moody reported in his biography of the playwright:

> Neither the program, the advance notices, nor the published text, which appeared the day after the opening, indicated that the story was not original. John Mason Brown, in his New York Post review (November 21, 1934), was the first to refer to the source. A letter to the Saturday Review (March 16, 1935) reported that after the opening Miss Hellman said that the satanic

---

[1]Robert Benchley, "The Theatre," New Yorker, 1 December 1934, p. 34.

> "imp came out of my own head." She should have said that the imp came out of my own Roughead. But perhaps Miss Hellman doesn't like wisecracks.[1]

Unaware of her source material, Arthur Pollock of the Brooklyn Daily Eagle speculated:

> Lillian Hellman has apparently wondered what would be the effect on the lives of two nice girls who found pleasure in each other's company if gossips took it into their heads to spread about precise whispers concerning the nature of their morals. In New York it would not matter too much. In a small town it might matter enormously.[2]

Despite Shumlin's initial reaction to her idea, Hellman worked for another six months on the script. While employed as a play reader in his office in 1934, "she had written five drafts . . . ," according to the New York Times:

> Then she handed her boss the sixth, . . . and he read it while she waited. . . .
> "Swell," Mr. Shumlin said after the first act. "I hope it keeps up," he said after the second. After the third, he said simply, "I'll produce it."
> In the months that followed, Mr. Shumlin and Miss Hellman worked painstakingly over the production, with occasionally brooding silences, they recalled, with some arguing about the title.[3]

"Miss Hellman loved its irony," Gary Blake noted in his study of Shumlin's directing techniques, "while Shumlin feared audiences would mistakenly misjudge the title and buy tickets thinking they would be witnessing a children's play."[4]

---

[1]Richard Moody, Lillian Hellman, Playwright (New York: Pegasus, 1972), pp. 56-57.

[2]Arthur Pollock, "The Theater," Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 21 November 1934.

[3]Eric Pace, "Herman Shumlin, 80, Dies; Leading Producer-Director," New York Times, 15 June 1979.

[4]Gary Blake, "Herman Shumlin: The Development of a Director," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The City University of New York 1973), p. 38.

The playwright borrowed her title from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1860 poem, "The Children's Hour," in which children are described as being innocent and angelic.

Casting The Children's Hour posed quite a problem for the producer-director. Anne Revere, who played the schoolmarm who confesses her love for another women, remembers that "The stars that rejected these roles could fill a book."[1] Revere recalls:

> I wasn't shocked when I read the script. Nothing in the theatre shocks me. My agent Jane Broder showed me the play and I wanted to do it, but I had trouble with Lillian Hellman. She wanted to go for the stars. They turned it down because of the kid's part. It wasn't because of the lesbian thing. They simply didn't want to do a play with a little girl taking over, which they knew would happen. At any rate, Herman liked my reading from the start, but Lillian, who is a real monster, fussed about my hair being fuzzy and too short. It wasn't really but I think I'd just been to the hairdresser. "What would you do with your hair?" she asked me. "Wear a wig, if I have to!" I shot back at her. I ended up simply adding a switch, I think, to settle the matter.[2]

Shumlin had gone to Suffern, New York, in the summer of 1934 to see a young actress, twenty-four year old Florence McGee, performing in a straw-hat theatre production. Reveve and Katherine Emery were in the same cast and impressed Shumlin. McGee, who had played one of the Prussian school girls in Girls In Uniform, was set to portray Mary, the schoolgirl brat in

---

[1]Gary Blake, "Herman Shumlin: The Development of a Director," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The City University of New York, 1973), p. 39.

[2]Anne Revere, Interview by telephone, Locust Valley, New York, 28 May 1979.

Hellman's drama. Katherine Emery won the role of Karen, and Revere that of Martha.

Dedicated to Dashiel Hammett, the mystery story writer, whom Hellman credits with grooming her as a playwright,[1] Act One of The Children's Hour is set in the living room of a farmhouse, converted by two young teachers into a boarding school for girls. "Karen is an attractive women of twenty-eight, casually pleasant in manner, without sacrifice of warmth or dignity,"[2] according to the author, and Martha, the other school teacher, "about the same age as Karen. She is a nervous, high-strung woman."[3] Because the school is such a success, and the women expect to be out of debt by the end of the term, Karen begins talking about marrying Joe, a doctor. Martha becomes very nervous and insecure when the subject comes up. Karen insists that marriage will not interfere with her work.

The women's conversation is interrupted by the arrival of Joe. Karen's fiance is so fond of Martha that he has agreed to Karen's plans that the three of them take their vacation together. When told of this, Martha is disappointed.

> MARTHA. I had been looking forward to some place by the lake--just you and me--the way we used to be at college.
>
> KAREN (cheerfully). Well, now there will be three of us. That'll be fun, too.[4]

---

[1]Lillian Hellman, Introduction to Four Plays by Lillian Hellman (New York: Random House, 1942), pp. XIII, XIV.

[2]Ibid., p. 10.

[3]Ibid., p. 14.

[4]Ibid., p. 16.

Martha becomes more edgy when her Aunt Lilly reacts badly to her niece's suggestion that she return to live in London where she had worked in the theatre. The former actress, a shallow, selfish woman who is always complaining, cannot get along with Karen and is an inadequate elocution teacher.

Martha generously offers to support her after she leaves the school but Mrs. Mortar so resents being turned out that she makes a personal attack on her niece while Joe is visiting the school to check on one of the students, his troublesome cousin Mary, another nuisance Karen and Martha want to be rid of.

MRS. MORTAR. Any day he's in the house is a bad day.

MARTHA. When who is in the house?

MRS MORTAR. Don't think you're fooling me, young lady, I wasn't born yesterday.

MARTHA. Aunt Lily, the amount of disconnected unpleasantness that goes on in your head could keep a psychologist busy for years. Now go take your nap.

MRS. MORTAR. I know what I know. Every time that man comes into this house, you have a fit. It seems like you just can't stand the idea of them being together. God knows what you'll do when they get married. You're jealous of him that's what it is.

MARTHA. (her voice is tense and the previous attitude of good-natured irritation is gone). I'm very fond of Joe, and you know it.

MRS. MORTAR. You're fonder of Karen, and I know that. And it's unnatural, just as unnatural as it can be. You don't like their being together. You were always like that even as a child. If you had a little girl friend, you always got mad when she liked anybody else. Well, you'd better get a beau of your own now--a woman of your age.

MARTHA. The sooner you get out of here the better. Your vulgarities are making me sick and I won't stand for them any longer. I want you to leave--[1]

Unfortunately, a couple of students have been eavesdropping on this conversation and they repeat what they have overheard to Mary, the spoiled, mendacious cousin of Karen's fiance. Because she has been caught lying again, Mary won't be able to see the boat-races on Saturday. She hates the school and, as the first act comes to a close, tells her chums that she is going to go home to her grandmother who lives eighteen miles away. The other schoolgirls are shocked.

PEGGY (appalled). You're just going to walk out like that?

EVELYN. What are you going to tell your grandmother?

MARY. Oh, who cares? I'll think of something to tell her. I can always do it better on the spur of the moment.[2]

In the first scene of Act Two, set in Mrs. Tilford's elegant living room, Mary tries unsuccessfully to coax her grandmother not to send her back to school. She claims that her teachers pick on her because they are afraid she will tell her grandmother that they have some terrible personal secret. Mary repeats what the other school girls overheard Mrs. Mortar say to Martha, but Mrs. Tilford dismisses it as gossip. She becomes desperate because her grandmother does not react as she had hoped she would at other things bearing on Martha and

---

[1]Lillian Hellman, Four Plays by Lillian Hellman (New York: Random House, 1942), pp. 21-22.

[2]Ibid., p. 31

Karen's relationship that Mary claims she and the other students have overheard coming from behind closed doors. She decides to tell a more egregious lie, suggested, perhaps, by a novel she has just finished: Theophile Gautier's Mademoiselle de Maupin in which a woman falls in love with another woman who wears male attire.

> MARY. And we've seen things, too. Funny things. (Sees the impatience of her grandmother) I'd tell you, but I got to whisper it.
>
> MRS. TILFORD. Why must you whisper it?
>
> MARY. I don't know. I just got to. (Climbs on the sofa next to Mrs. Tilford and begins whispering. At first the whisper is slow and hesitant, but it gradually works itself up to fast, excited talking. In the middle of it Mrs. Tilford stops her.)
>
> MRS. TILFORD (trembling). Do you know what you're saying? (Without answering Mary goes back to the whispering until the older woman takes her by the shoulders and turns her around to stare in her face) Mary! Are you telling me the truth?
>
> MARY. Honest, honest. You just ask Peggy and Evelyn and-- (After a moment Mrs. Tilford gets up and begins to pace the room. She is no longer listening to Mary, who keeps up a running fire of conversation) They know too. And maybe there're other kids who know, but we've always been frightened so we didn't ask, but I got scared and we went to bed early so we wouldn't hear, but sometimes I couldn't help it, but we never talked much, because we thought they'd find out and--Oh, Grandma, don't make me go back to that awful place.[1]

Mrs. Tilford assures her adored grand-daughter that she does not have to go back to the boarding school and the pathological liar kisses her and runs happily from the room.

---

[1]Lillian Hellman, Four Plays by Lillian Hellman (New York: Random House, 1942), pp. 42-43.

The distressed old lady goes to the phone and after asking her nephew, Dr. Joseph Cardin, to come and see her right away, dials another number.

> MRS. TILFORD. . . . Mrs. Munn, please. This is Mrs. Tilford. Miriam? This is Amelia Tilford. I have something to tell you--something about school and Evelyn and Mary--[1]

The curtain comes down on her conversation.

In the second scene of the Second Act, Rosalie, one of the schoolgirls, arrives to spend the night with Mary because her mother asked if she could after Mrs. Tilford had phoned her. Rosalie says that all of the girls are being taken out of school and is confused, wondering if someone has scarlet fever. When Mary says that she may have quoted Rosalie when telling her grandmother the secret that is responsible for the exodus of students, Rosalie announces that she is going to tell Mrs. Tilford that it is not so and starts for the door. She is stopped in her tracks when Mary threatens to inform her grandmother that Rosalie stole another student's bracelet. Terrified that she will go to prison, the girl promises to do and say whatever Mary tells her.

Joe arrives to see his aunt just as she is sending the girls off to bed. After asking him why Karen and he have decided to marry now after such a long engagement and wondering why Martha is sending her aunt away, she tells him:

---

[1]Lillian Hellman, Four Plays By Lillian Hellman (New York: Random House, 1942), p. 44.

MRS. TILFORD. You must not marry Karen.

CARDIN (shocked, he grins). You're a very impertinent lady. Why must I--(imitates her) not marry Karen?

MRS. TILFORD. Because there's something wrong with Karen--something horrible.[1]

Before Mrs. Tilford can say any more, Karen and Martha break into the room, very upset. The two women tell of the chaos at their school all evening as chauffeurs and parents came to take girls home. One woman finally told them what it was all about.

KAREN. That--that Martha and I are--in love with each other. In love with each other, Mrs. Tilford told them.[2]

Mary's grandmother not only admits that it was she who spread the story, but insists that both young women leave her house at once; but they remain to rage at her. Joe turns to his aunt:

CARDIN (carefully). You have already done a terrible thing.

MRS. TILFORD. I have done what I had to do. What they are may possibly be their own business. It becomes a great deal more than that when children are involved.

KAREN (wildly). It's not true, Not a word of it is true; can't you understand that?[3]

The old woman refuses to believe they are innocent. Finally Martha tells her:

---

[1]Lillian Hellman, Five Plays By Lillian Hellman (New York: Random House, 1942), pp. 50-51.

[2]Ibid., p. 52.

[3]Ibid., pp. 53-54.

MARTHA. . . . (quietly) Tomorrow, Mrs. Tilford, you will have a libel suit on your hands.

MRS. TILFORD. That would be very unwise.

KAREN. Very unwise--for you.

MRS. TILFORD. It is you I am thinking of. I am frightened for you. It was wrong of you to brazen it out here tonight; it would be criminally foolish of you to brazen it out in public. . . .[1]

Joe insists, despite his aunt's objections, to bring Mary into the room to be questioned. His cousin claims she was telling the truth, repeating many of the things she told her grandmother about hearing conversations and noises at night.

MARY (hastily). I saw things, too. One night there was so much noise I thought somebody was sick or something and I looked through the keyhole and they were kissing and saying things and then I got scared because it was different sort of and I--

MARTHA (her face distorted, turns to Mrs. Tilford). That child--that child is sick.

KAREN. Ask her again how she could see us.

CARDIN. How could you see Miss Dobie and Miss Wright?

MARY. I--I--

MRS. TILFORD. Tell him what you whispered to me.

MARY. It was night and I was leaning down by the keyhole.

KAREN. There is no keyhole in my door.

MRS. TILFORD. What?

KAREN. There--is--no--keyhole--in--my--door.[2]

---

[1]Lillian Hellman, Five Plays By Lillian Hellman (New York: Random House, 1942), p. 55.

[2]Ibid., pp. 59-60.

Caught in the lie, Mary changes her story a couple of times but unsuccessfully. She begins crying hysterically.

MRS. TILFORD. I want the truth.

MARY. All--all right.

MRS. TILFORD. What is the truth?

MARY. It was Rosalie, Grandma, she told us all about it. She said she had read about it in a book and she knew. She'll tell you. We used to talk about it all the time. That's the truth, that's the honest truth. She said it was when the door was open once and she told us all about it. I was just trying to save Rosalie, and everybody jumps on me.[1]

Rosalie is brought into the library and obviously does not know what Mary has quoted her as saying when she is being questioned.

KAREN. . . . She says that you told her that you saw certain--certain acts between Miss Dobie and myself. She says that once, when the door was open, you saw us kissing each other in a way that--(Unable to bear the child's look, she turns her back) women don't kiss one another.

ROSALIE. Oh, Miss Wright, I didn't, didn't. I never said such a thing.[2]

Mary makes reference to Helen Burton's missing bracelet, and then turns to Mrs. Tilford:

MARY. Grandmother, there's something I've got to tell you that--

ROSALIE (with a shrill cry). Yes. Yes. I did say it. I told Mary. What Mary said was right. I said it, I said it--(Throws herself on the couch, weeping hysterically; Martha stands leaning against the door; Karen,

---

[1]Lillian Hellman, Five Plays By Lillian Hellman (New York: Random House, 1942), p. 61

[2]Ibid., p. 62.

Cardin, and Mrs. Tilford are staring at Rosalie; Mary slowly sits down as the curtain falls.)[1]

Act Three takes place in the living room of the school. The two young women have become recluses since they lost their libel suit. They are even afraid to go into the town to shop. A grocery boy, who stares and giggles at them, drops by to bring some things they ordered. Then Mrs. Mortar arrives, much to Karen and Martha's astonishment.

MARTHA. Where the hell have you been?[2]

It seems that her Aunt Lily has been on the road travelling with a theatrical company.

MARTHA. Why didn't you answer my telegrams?[3]

Mrs. Mortar had refused to come back and testify for her niece.

> MARTHA. . . . Listen, Karen Wright and Martha Dobie brought a libel suit against a woman called Tilford because her grandchild had accused them of having what the judge called "sinful sexual knowledge of one another." (Mrs. Mortar holds up her hand in protest, and Martha laughs) Don't like that, do you? Well, a great part of the defense's case rested on the telling fact that Mrs. Mortar would not appear in court to deny or explain those remarks.[4]

Martha orders her aunt to leave town on the next train as Joe comes to visit them. The young physician announces that he had sold his practice and intends to return to Vienna, where

---

[1]Lillian Hellman, Five Plays By Lillian Hellman (New York: Random House, 1942), p. 63,

[2]Ibid., p. 68.

[3]Ibid., p. 68.

[4]Ibid., p. 79.

he had studied, taking both Karen and Martha with him. He even plans to take Martha with Karen and himself when they go on their honeymoon. When the young couple is alone, Joe chides Karen for her defeatist's attitude.

> CARDIN. And you've got to stop talking like that. (Takes her by the shoulder) We've got a chance. But it's just one chance, and if we miss it we're done for. It means that we've got to start putting the whole business behind us now. Now, Karen. What you've done, you've done--and that's that.
>
> KAREN. What I've done?
>
> CARDIN (impatiently). What's been done to you.
>
> KAREN. What did you mean? (When there is no answer) What did you mean when you said: "What you've done"?
>
> CARDIN (shouting). Nothing. Nothing. . . .[1]

Karen is aware that her relationship with Joe has been spoiled by the scandal. "Say it now, Joe," Karen insists, "Ask it now."[2]

> CARDIN. I have nothing to ask. Nothing--(quickly) All right. Is it--was it ever--
>
> KAREN (puts her hand over his mouth). No. Martha and I have never touched each other. . . .[3]

Karen knows that she can never really be sure Joe believes her.

> CARDIN. . . . We love each other. (His voice breaks) I'd give anything not to have asked questions, Karen.[4]

---

[1]Lillian Hellman, Five Plays By Lillian Hellman New York: Random House, 1942), pp. 72-73.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., p. 75.

[4]Ibid., p. 75.

She asks Joe to leave, to go away for a couple of days and to think things over all by himself. "I'll be coming back,"[1] he says as he exits. "No, you won't. Never, darling."[2] Karen says to herself.

When Martha asks where Joe has gone, Karen tells her:

KAREN (in a dull tone). He won't be back anymore.[3]

Martha is confused and wants to know what happened.

KAREN. He thought that we had been lovers.[4]

Both young women are deeply distressed at Joe's departure and want to flee but their libel suit had gained such national publicity, they don't know where they can go without being recognized.

KAREN (as a child would say it). Is there anywhere to go?

MARTHA. No. There'll never be any place for us to go. We're bad people. . . .[5]

KAREN (shivers, listlessly gets up, starts making a fire in the fireplace). But this isn't a new sin they tell us we've done. Other people aren't destroyed by it.

MARTHA. They are people who believe in it, who want it, who've chosen it. We aren't like that. We don't love each other. (Suddenly stops, crosses to fireplace, stands looking abstractly at Karen. Speaks casually) I don't love you. We've been very close to each other, of course. I've loved you like a friend, the way thousands of women feel about other women.

---

[1]Lillian Hellman, Five Plays By Lillian Hellman (New York: Random House, 1942), p. 76.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid., pp. 77-78.

KAREN (only half listening). Yes.

MARTHA. Certainly that doesn't mean anything. There's nothing wrong about that. It's perfectly natural that I should be fond of you, that I should--

KAREN (listlessly). Why are you saying all this to me?

MARTHA. Because I love you.

KAREN (vaguely). Yes, of course.

MARTHA. I love you that way--maybe the way they said I love you. I don't know. (Waits, gets no answer, kneels down next to Karen) Listen to me!

KAREN. What?

MARTHA. I have loved you the way they said.

Stunned by Martha's confession, Karen sits alone for a few minutes without moving. When a shot is heard, she springs to her feet and rushes into the room Martha had entered. Mrs. Mortar, highly excited, also runs in to see what has happened. There is nothing they can do for Martha.

Mrs. Tilford arrives to speak to Karen so Martha's aunt leaves them to converse alone during the denouement of the drama. The rich old lady wants to make financial amends for the damage she has done. She has learned that Mary and Rosalie lied. After telling her that Martha is dead, Karen rages at the culprit for a few minutes, then turns compassionate and agrees to allow Mrs. Tilford to help her, perhaps even to attempt to reconcile her with Joe. The curtain falls as Karen smiles and waves goodbye to the departing character assassin.

Lillian Hellman had found a wealth of plot and character details for her dramatization in "Closed Doors, or The Great

Drumsheigh Case," one of eight crime stories in William Roughead's Bad Companions. Among other things concerning the slanderous accusations against the Scottish teachers, Marianne Woods and Jane Pirie, whose boarding school stood somewhere in the corner of Drumsheigh Gardens in the West of Edinburgh, Professor Moody pointed out in his biography of Hellman that:

> Miss Wood's aunt, a former actress, lived with them and earned her keep looking after the girl's wardrobes . . .
> Among the pupils, all from Edinburgh's first families, was the black grandaughter of Lady Cumming Gordon. Lady Gordon's son had died in India, "bequeathing to his aristocratic parent a bastard, borne to him by a black woman." . . .
> . . . One bit of evidence that weighed strongly against the teachers was supplied by Charlotte Wiffin, a maid at the school. She swore that "looking through the keyhole of the drawing room door, [she] beheld her mistresses in a compromising situation on the sofa." The Judges, disturbed by this charge, went to Drumsheigh to investigate and found that there was no keyhole in the drawing room door.[1]

Even the blackmailing of Rosalie by Mary in The Children's Hour follows the actual case history since Jane Cummings had coached a fellow student to support her in her slander against their innocent teachers.[2] Perhaps fearing that she might be suspected of some racial inference, Lillian Hellman chose not to use the details of Jane Cummings' background as possible motivation for the disturbed behavior of Mary Tilford.

It took six months for Herman Shumlin and Lillian Hellman to cast The Children's Hour.[3] The task was made especially

---

[1]Richard Moody, Lillian Hellman, Playwright (New York, Pegasus, 1972), pp. 39-40.

[2]Ibid., p. 39.

[3]John Chapman, "The Right People," New York Daily News, 23 December 1934.

difficult since they not only had to sign two little-known actresses capable of handling roles that ordinarily would have been played by stars, but they had to find experienced actresses who looked young enough to pass as schoolgirls onstage. During their summer search, a threat appeared on their horizon in the person of License Commissioner Paul Moss who had announced, earlier that year, "I don't want to be a censor, but certain indecent performances should not be permitted."[1] The New York Times reported, "In the fall Mr. Moss expects to have representatives of his department inspect plays during the rehearsal period. Realism on the stage has reached an unnecessary and often offensive point, Mr. Moss said."[2]

Herman Shumlin recalled:

> Just as soon as I read The Children's Hour, I not only decided I wanted to produce it, but that no one was going to ruin it on me with a lot of nasty, controversial pre-production publicity that would stir things up. I wasn't going to have it labeled a homosexual play and start a fuss because it was more than just that. I decided not to allow anyone in the theatre during rehearsals except those working on the production. Nobody got near it to label it before we opened. We did not go out of town either for the usual try-out. All rehearsals were done in the Maxine Elliott Theatre, a little jewel of a play-house perfect for intimate dramas.
>
> I got a phone call from Lee Shubert, who never read a play himself and gave me $20,000 or whatever it was, sight unseen, because a friend of Lillian's, a publicist, had recommended it to him.
>
> "Herman," he said, "what's this I hear about your show? There's not going to be a problem, is there, that will cost me the license on the theatre?"
>
> "There will be no problem," I said emphatically. "You

---

[1]"Clean-Up Of Stage, Dance Hall and Poolrooms Ordered By Moss," New York Times, 21 January 1934.

[2]"Film Heads Make A New Concession," New York Times, 12 July 1934.

> have nothing to worry about and you'll be proud to be financing such a show." That seemed to be the end of that until I got another phone call from that Paul Moss who was the Commissioner of Licenses.
>
> "Shumlin," he said, "I think I ought to see a rehearsal of that show you're doing. I hear I ought to."
>
> "No, you won't. You won't come near it," I replied, "until opening night. I'll send you tickets." I never heard from him again.[1]

Despite Shumlin's assurance that he had nothing to be concerned about, Lee Shubert--who produced the first drama to be affected by the Wales Padlock Law, Maya--came to see a rehearsal. Lillian Hellman remembered:

> Mr. Shubert, who had been standing back watching the play for which he had put up the money, came down and sat behind me.
>
> "This play," he said to the back of my head, "could land us in jail." He had been watching the confession scene, the recognition of the love of one woman for another.[2]

"I was always deeply moved by that scene," Shumlin said, "no matter how many times I watched it. Tears actually came to my eyes every time."[3]

Shumlin had decided how he wanted to see Martha portrayed in The Children's Hour based on an experience he had while one of his earlier hits, Grand Hotel, was running on Broadway.

---

[1]Herman Shumlin, Interview, New York City, 3 March 1979.

[2]Lillian Hellman, Pentimento (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), p. 153.

[3]Shumlin Interview.

> One day Eugenie Leontovich, who was the star of Grand Hotel, asked me if I would like to meet Katherine Cornell whom I had much admired. There were some very sordid stories about her husband, Guthrie McClintic, carrying on--even something about having boys in the back of the balcony while she was performing--but I had never heard anything about Cornell. We went to her house on the East Side and watching Leontovich and Cornell together--there was a certain subtle intimacy in their rapport from which I was excluded--I understood why she would be married to a man like McClintic.
>
> Of course, a woman can be as flagrant as he was as I found out while rehearsing Tallulah Bankhead in The Little Foxes; she was so coarse and campy about it. I wanted none of that obvious element in Martha's character any more than it was obvious in Leontovich or Cornell, on stage or in private, or in others I directed like Margaret Webster and her good friend, Eva LeGalliene, all of them refined, very feminine gentlewomen.[1]

Anne Revere, who played Martha in Hellman's drama, had some very different and definite ideas of her own about the character yet they did not conflict with Shumlin's concept of the role he understood to be that of a congenital lesbian. Revere recalled:

> I did not play the role as a lesbian, that is like gals I had seen who were slightly "butch." Of course, I never thought that Martha was a lesbian. She and the other girl were just good friends, in my mind, nothing more. Under stress she cracks and thinks she is. She felt guilty and would have thought or said anything under the circumstances, done anything to take the blame on herself for what happened to them.
>
> When Hellman directed the revival in 1952 she had Patricia Neal play Martha very "butch," going around lighting other women's cigarettes. What a mistake! It didn't work and the revival was a flop. Hellman had talent and intelligence, but she never really knew what she had come up with in a play. Monster that she was, she'd botch things up if she got her hand in a production. Herman stood up to her. It was her first show and she wasn't so sure of herself. Later on, she cruelly dropped

---

[1]Herman Shumlin, Interview, New York City, 3 March 1979.

> Herman and turned her scripts over to someone with whom she could have her way.
>
> I made a prediction, when I was starring for her in Toys In The Attic, that if her boyfriend, Dashiell Hammett ever died, she'd never write another play. She never did and never could after her editor and advisor weren't around anymore. She needed Hammett and Herman to come up with her biggest hits.[1]

For the second time in little more than a year a drama with a gay motif again "struck Broadway," in the words of Whitney Bolton "like a thunderbolt."[2] The Children's Hour had its world premiere on 20 November 1934 at the Maxine Elliott Theatre on Thirty-Ninth Street off Sixth Avenue. Shumlin's production proved an even greater hit than his boyhood chum Jed Harris had had the season before with The Green Bay Tree. Hellman's drama played 691 performances in New York[3] and more than one hundred performances on tour. "We did the show over 800 times," recalled Anne Revere.[4]

There wasn't a single negative critical reaction to the play, and most of the notices were outright raves. Robert Benchley reported in the New Yorker:

> "The Children's Hour" came in, without one initial fanfare, and quietly set itself up as the season's high-water mark. . . .
>
> It tells a story which would have been impossible of

---

[1]Anne Revere, Interview by telephone, Locust Valley, New York, 28 May 1979.

[2]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1934-35, (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1935), p. 33.

[3]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1936-37, (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1937), p. 501.

[4]Revere Interview.

> telling in public in the days when "Rain" was considered daring, and "The Captive" was being banned by the police.
>
> The language is frank, franker than we have yet had on the subject, but it is immaculate. I doubt if there will be any giggling, even at nervous matinees. Certainly there can be no offense to the adult mind. On the contrary, the effect should be highly salutary in the horror aroused at the enormity of irresponsible slander in such matters. . . .
>
> In producing "The Children's Hour," Mr. Herman Shumlin has shown not only courage but a fine sense of casting and direction (it is a marvellous job he has done).
>
> "The Children's Hour" is possibly not for the children, but for any grown up with half a mind, it is almost obligatory."[1]

Walter Winchell declared in the Daily Mirror, "A theme that once excited the law to action is handled with such good taste and restraint . . . [it] probably will attract Playgoers for a long, long run."[2]

"The earnestness with which it was produced and the honesty with which it was written, cannot fail to impress," reported Variety.[3]

Although lesbian love was referred to by one critic as a "monstrous sexual perversion,"[4] and Percy Hammond could not bring himself to spell it out, writing "l-----n" in his review and calling it a "naughty word,"[5] a number of the critics were

---

[1]Robert Benchley, "The Theatre," New Yorker, 1 December 1934, pp. 34 and 36.

[2]Walter Winchell, "Tense Drama At Elliott, A New Hit," New York Daily Mirror, 21 November 1934.

[3]"The Children's Hour," Variety, 22 November 1934.

[4]John Anderson, "How Children's Lie Brought Ruin to 2 Teachers' Lives, Told In Play," New York Evening Journal, 21 November 1934.

[5]Percy Hammond, "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 21 November 1934.

struck by a noticable lessening of America's public reactions, and their own, to certain aspects of the play.

Robert Garland wrote in the World-Telegram:

> Eight years have passed since M. Edouard Bourdet's "La Prisoniere" was produced as "The Captive" at the Empire. An almost equal number of years have passed since Miss Radclyffe Hall's "The Well Of Loneliness" was the literary sensation of the day.
>
> At Maxine Elliott's Theatre "The Children's Hour" dwells even more determinedly on the affection that passes normal understanding and the wreckage it is able to create in otherwise well-ordered lives.
>
> . . . Even when the onlooker's tears are falling, he has a suspicion that the not-like-other-girls up on the stage are taking their alleged aberration somewhat too seriously.
>
> After all, certain things have been true about certain people, and they manage to keep their heads, to hold their horses.
>
> . . . When all is said and sobbed, you wonder if people are as blindly intolerant as that nowadays.[1]

From Brooklyn, Authur Pollock observed:

> Many things have happened to increase the national breadth of mind since Bourdet's "The Captive" having enjoyed several fat months of success, was suddenly discovered to be improper and hurried from the stage, and "The Children's Hour," a more sincere and less mysterious treatment of the same topic, should now be safe.[2]

Percy Hammond wrote:

> Its subject has been forbidden in the theatre as unfit for public illustration and a previous attempt to discuss it in "The Captive" was discouraged by the forces of law and order. That drama and the novel "The Well Of Loneliness" were, in comparison to "The Children's Hour," mere timid hints. Miss Hellman, with a gallant indifference to what has been termed the proprieties, speaks out, although with artistic discretion, and she leaves not even

---

[1]Robert Garland, "Children's Hour A Moving Tragedy," New York World-Telegram, 21 November 1934.

[2]Arthur Pollock, "The Theater," Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 21 November 1934.

> the most innocent drama lover in the dark. No tot, attending a matinee with its mother, will need to inquire, "Mama, what is it all about?"[1]

Richard Lockridge of the Sun questioned the young teachers' dilemma after they lost their court case. He wrote, "'There is not anywhere we can go,' one of the characters laments. You immediately think of half a dozen, including the city of New York."[2] Arthur Pollock also thought Hellman exaggerated the women's plight in implying there was nowhere they could make their living. "They never think of the stage!"[3] the critic exclaimed.

George Jean Nathan questioned Hellman's honesty in dealing with the subject of lesbian love. Nineteen years after the drama's première, Nathan complained:

> There has always been one element in the otherwise cunningly written play that has bothered me. It is the business of having the child whisper her accusations of perversion against the two school mistresses into her grandmother's ear because, she insists, she cannot bring herself to speak them aloud. Why can't she? Everything in her character would not only allow her to speak them openly but would indeed gratify her in the proclaiming of them. It isn't the child that is hesitant about articulating them; it is the playwright, who evidently has qualms about putting them into words and who shrinks from possible censorship (vide "The Captive.") Miss Hellman has cheated.[4]

---

[1]Percy Hammond, "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 21 November 1934.

[2]Richard Lockridge, "The New Play," New York Sun, 21 November 1934.

[3]Arthur Pollock, "The Theatre," Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 21 November 1934.

[4]George Jean Nathan, "George Jean Nathan's Theatre," New York Herald Tribune, 11 January 1953.

Some of the critics, Brooks Atkinson chief among them, faulted Hellman for adding an anti-climatical denouement to an otherwise skillfully constructed drama. The critic for the Times, who praised the work as "a venomously tragic play of life in a girl's school,"[1] added:

> Please, Miss Hellman, conclude the play before the pistol shot and before the long arm of coincidence starts wobbling in its socket. When two people are defeated by the malignance of an aroused public opinion, leave them the dignity of their hatred and despair.
> . . . Instruct the guardian of the curtain to ring down when the two young women are facing a bleak future. That will turn "The Children's Hour" into vivid drama.[2]

In 1942 the playwright read The Children's Hour for the first time since completing it twenty years before.

> There are, of course, many things wrong with The Children's Hour. (Even with my new clarity I have not seen them all, which is just as well, and better for my health.) The play probably should have ended with Martha's suicide: the last scene is tense and over-burdened. I knew this at the time, but I could not help myself. I am a moral writer, often too moral a writer, and I cannot avoid, it seems, that last summing-up. I think that is only a mistake when it fails to achieve its purpose, and I would rather make the attempt, and fail, than fail to make the attempt.[3]

"I remember that I used to get a lot of mail while I was doing the show, none of it hostile or critical, but one letter in particular distressed me," Anne Revere, who played the tragic suicide, recalled. "A woman wrote and asked me if

---

[1]Brooks Atkinson, "The Play," New York Times, 21 November 1934.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Lillian Hellman, "Introduction" to Four Plays By Lillian Hellman (New York: Random House, 1942), pp. XII-XIII.

that was the only answer for lesbians--suicide? I answered her immediately to assure her it wasn't. That reaction to the play really upset me."[1]

While Hellman would, if she had to do it over, still keep Martha's suicide in the script, Herman Shumlin, like Atkinson, would have attempted to dissuade the author from retaining it if he had the play to do over.

> Today I find that suicide unconvincing and unrealistic, but even in the 1930s, it seemed like something a woman might very well do even if she thought she was a lesbian. Why I remember how stunned everyone was in the 1920s when Le Gallienne's affair with Josephine Hutchinson hit the headlines. People thought it was simply frightful and I wondered how they would have the courage to go on with their careers or simply to go on. But they did and Martha probably would have and should have--gone on living as best she could.[2]

"That Hellman had great difficulties winding up The Children's Hour," observed her biographer, Richard Moody, "are obvious from a study of the collection of her manuscripts at the University of Texas."[3] Critic Joseph Wood Krutch found the third act so improbable and boring that, Moody reports, "He was amazed that 'anything so inept was ever allowed to reach production.'"[4] Dr. Annette Bergman Johnson concluded

---

[1]Anne Revere, Interview by telephone, Locust Valley, New York, 28 May 1979.

[2]Herman Shumlin, Interview, New York, 3 March 1979.

[3]Richard Moody, Lillian Hellman, Playwright (New York, Pegasus, 1972), p. 56.

[4]Ibid.

in "A Study Of Recurrent Character Types in The Plays of Lillian Hellman," that the author drove Martha to suicide to punish her for being a lesbian. Johnson wrote:

> . . . if Martha's action during Act Two was motivated by a fear that there might be some truth to Mary's charges, Karen's actions may well stem from the same fear. When Martha tells Karen that there can be no tomorrow for herself, Karen cries and tells her to "Go and lie down." (p. 80) This is the first time Karen has commanded Martha or attempted to direct her life. Surely Karen knows that she is sending Martha to her death. After Martha has left the room, Karen sits motionless, certainly she is waiting for the shot. She does not move and she does not cry, it is easier for her also to believe that Martha was guilty.[1]

Only once during the 691 Broadway performances given by Shumlin's cast were the police involved with the show. Brooks Atkinson reported after The Children's Hour had been playing for more than a year:

> For all the talk about the sinster charges against the teachers in the play, "The Children's Hour"has been honored by but a single visit from the gendarmerie. Because the Police Department must take official recognition of any complaint, no matter how ill advised, two interpreters of the law visited Maxine Elliott's Theatre of a Saturday afternoon and sat through the tense proceedings. They both emerged, better men, they said, for what they heard.[2]

After being seen in 691 performances during its eighty-six week Broadway engagement,[3] Herman Shumlin toured The

---

[1]Annette Bergman Johnson, "A Study of Recurrent Character Types in the Plays of Lillian Hellman," (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Graduate School of University of Massachusetts, 1970), p. 24-25.

[2]Brooks Atkinson, "8,752 Children's Hours," New York Times, 22 November 1935.

[3]Richard Moody, Lillian Hellman, Playwright (New York: Pegasus, 1972), p. 38.

Children's Hour for a year. It played many of the country's more cosmopolitan cities, but the Mayor of Boston banned it when he "insisted it violated the regulation against the portrayal of perverts." Moody reported in Hellman's biography:

> Shumlin volunteered to bring the entire production to Boston at his expense for a private showing for the mayor and his board of censors. When that was refused, he filed a suit in Federal Court for $250,000 in damages. He lost.[1]

The drama acclaimed "the season's high-water mark"[2] by Robert Benchley in the New Yorker, did not receive the Pulitzer Prize. In The Wicked Stage, Abe Laufe's history of theatre censorship and harassment in the United States, the author explains that:

> The Children's Hour by Lillian Hellman was rumored to be a leading contender for the Pulitzer Prize for 1934-35, but it was bypassed, presumably because it dealt with charges of lesbianism. . . . its supporters denounced the Pulitzer Committee for cowardice and censorship.[3]

Hellman's drama did not stand a chance, according to Moody, because "William Lyon Phelps, who dominated the committee, was revolted by advanced reports and refused to see it."[4]

The Lord Chamberlain banned The Children's Hour from the British public stage since it depicted a lesbian character,

---

[1]Richard Moody, Lillian Hellman, Playwright (New York: Pegasus, 1972), p. 38.

[2]Robert Benchley, "The Theatre," New Yorker, 1 December 1934, p. 34.

[3]Abe Laufe, The Wicked Stage (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1978), p. 87.

[4]Richard Moody, Lillian Hellman, Playwright (New York: Pegasus, 1972), p. 56.

but it was eventually produced at a private playhouse, London's Gate Theatre, in November 1936. Like the Parisian production, it proved to be, Moody noted, "more than a success, it was a sensation, particularly for audiences and censors who were shocked by the subject matter."[1] "The critics complained vigorously," Hellman's biographer reported, "why should a play dealing with Sapphism--their word--be forbidden when the London stage was filled with bedroom farces, crude and vulgar jokes, and half-nude girls?"[2]

When Hollywood producer Samuel Goldwyn purchased the screen rights to Hellman's drama, he hired her to do the screenplay while the show was still running in New York. Entitled We Three, the 1936 release costarred Merle Oberon and Miriam Hopkins, caught up in a heterosexual slander suit with Joel McCrea. It was not until 1962 that Hollywood dared film the original stage version, directed by William Wyler--who had also directed We Three--which starred Shirley MacLaine as Martha and Audrey Hepburn as the woman she loved.

"Twenty or thirty years ago," commented the book reviewer for the Saturday Review of Literature in 1934:

> Miss Hellman's play, enthusiastically received in New York, would have been stopped by the police. As it is both engrossing drama and a sincere study of abnormal

---

[1]Richard Moody, Lillian Hellman, Playwright (New York: Pegasus, 1972), p. 38.

[2]Ibid.

psychology, this change may imply a certain progress in the public's discernment.[1]

"In Hellman's source, Bad Companions, the author-editor, William Roughead, had declared emphatically (his italics), 'My interest in the case resides in the fact that the charges were false,'" Doris Falk pointed out in her 1978 biography of Lillian Hellman.

> Roughead was apologizing for handling such a distasteful subject at all, but this is just the kind of statement that would inspire Hellman to react with the opposite view. What if the charges were not false? What if, after all, one--or even both--women had such feelings, consciously or unconsciously? Would the "guilty" deserve destruction at the hands of society? Changing mores between 1934 and 1978, the open treatment of homosexuality on the stage and elsewhere today, make the answer of most audiences, clearly, no; in fact, it is ironic that this most outspoken and revolutionary play in its time should now seem so old fashioned.[2]

The sensational success of both The Green Bay Tree in 1933, and The Children's Hour the following season, made possible the American production of the very first English-language drama with an unmistakably gay protagonist written for the London stage since Christopher Marlowe's Edward II was premièred 332 years before in 1593. J. R. Ackerley, who some say became the greatest London literary editor of his day,[3]

---

[1]H. S. C., "The New Books," Saturday Review of Literature, 2 March 1934, p. 523.

[2]Doris V. Falk, Lillian Hellman (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1978), p. 41.

[3]J. R. Ackerley, The Ackerley Letters, Neville Braybook, ed., (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975) book jacket.

had written the first draft of The Prisoners of War while still in his twenties and himself a British prisoner of war interned in Switzerland during the early months of 1918.

Ackerley was gay, identifying himself as such in My Father and Myself, his memoirs, published posthumously in 1968. Ackerley's autobiography was highly acclaimed by the critics;[1] his sexual autobiographical drama, however, was mocked at and rejected by the American critics. Arthur Pollock reported after the American premiere of Prisoners of War in 1935, "it gave its first night audience a number of laughs, none of them intended."[2]

Brooks Atkinson of the Times dismissed the Broadway production of Prisoners of War, which had been seen in London in a private theatre ten years before.

> A decade ago, before the Depression turned values upside down again, the bare mention of those neuroses and the suggestion of homosexual attachments were sufficient for an evening of speculation in the theatre. "Prisoners of War" falls in that category. . . . such themes need deeper clarification today. They are no longer fascinating in themselves.[3]

Rejected by the other reviewers from the nine New York dailies as well, Prisoners of War--as it was entitled for its

---

[1]J. R. Ackerley, The Ackerley Letters, Neville Braybrook, ed., (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), p. xxvii.

[2]Arthur Pollock, "The Theater," Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 29 January 1935.

[3]Brooks Atkinson, "The Play," New York Times, 29 January 1935.

Broadway production--was seen in only eight performances at the Ritz Theatre where it opened on 28 January 1935.[1] Predicting its early demise, Percy Hammond concluded,"'Prisoners of War' is not so deep as 'The Children's Hour,' nor so wide as 'The Green Bay Tree,' and in my guess it will not quite serve."[2]

When London audiences got their first look at the unmistakably gay character in Ackerley's drama, the reaction from the prestigious London Times was as awed and appreciative, at least initially, as New York's reception a decade later was unimpressed and mocking. The reviewer for the London Times hailed Ackerley's drama as "an arresting and dreadful story,"[3] after witnessing its première performance, on Sunday night, 5 July 1925, by the avant-garde Three Hundred Club. The club had been founded the year before to present "drama of distinguished merit . . . likely to appeal in the first instance to a small public."[4]

The Times concluded in a rather lengthy critique:

> . . . it is impossible to imagine that the play could have been better produced, or better acted. Let me add my voice to the many which are asking that the performance shall be repeated.[5]

---

[1]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1934-35 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1935), p. 445.

[2]Percy Hammond, "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 29 January 1935.

[3]"Three Hundred Club," London Sunday Times, 12 July 1925.

[4]J. R. Ackerley, The Ackerley Letters, Neville Braybrook, ed., (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), p. 13.

[5]London Sunday Times, 12 July 1925.

Siegfried Sassoon, the well-known English author, was even more enthusiastic than the Times after seeing the Three Hundred Club's single summer Sunday night performance of The Prisoners of War, declaring it "the most powerful . . . and the most impressive play that he had ever seen."[1]

Two months later, Ackerley's drama was produced at the Playhouse, a private theatre club, in an engagement beginning on 1 September 1925, and limited by law to a few weeks. With some second sober thoughts concerning the artistic merit of young Ackerley's first play, the same reviewer for the Times reacted to it less enthusiastically in its Playhouse production. Calling it "unusual and sincere," the critic concluded that The Prisoners of War, "moving though it was, had all the air of being a record."[2] A reference to the play's protagonist being "afflicted by a romantic attachment"[3] was the only hint given in either of the Times's reviews as to the main plot of Ackerley's fictionalized and dramatized recollections of having himself been not only a prisoner of war but in love with a young man during his internment in Switzerland.

Captain Conrad, the protagonist of The Prisoners of War, is a twenty-four year old virgin whose sexual orientation

---

[1]J. R. Ackerley, The Ackerley Letters, Neville Braybrook, ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), p. xxi.

[2]"The Playhouse," London Times, 1 September 1925.

[3]"Three Hundred Club," London Sunday Times, 12 July 1925.

is apparently obvious to the other four officers, three British and one Canadian, who have been quartered with him in the same hotel in Mürren, Switzerland, for half a year. "I have heard you do not like the fair sex," a flirtatious Swiss widow visiting the officer says to Conrad. "The fair sex?" the young officer retorts, "Which one is that?"[1] Foul humored, anti-social, and hostile ever since handsome Lieutenant Grayle has rejected him, Conrad confesses to another, older soldier that being imprisoned has psychologically unsettled him. The frustrated young officer confides that he finds himself "attracted to others in a way that terrifies me."[2]

In a futile attempt to affect a reconciliation with the teenage officer with whom he had once been on friendly terms, Conrad speaks to young Grayle about his unhappiness while he "strokes the curly head affectionately,"[3] according to the stage directions.

> GRAYLE (who has been educated at a Good Public School). Look out! Someone might come in![4]

Conrad's plea for the affection and the companionship of the teenager serves only to further alienate them. Opportunistic Grayle, who is described by one of the officers as

---

[1]J. R. Ackerley, The Prisoners Of War (London: Chatto and Windus, 1925), p. 68.

[2]Ibid., p. 86.

[3]Ibid., p. 24

[4]Ibid.

being "terribly heartless,"[1] wants nothing more to do with Conrad personally, but still continues to help himself to the Captain's cigarettes and to use his large room to entertain friends when he is not around. The London Times described Grayle as "a thorough-going little cad, impervious alike to kindness and snubbing."[2]

In Act Two we learn that another officer, Canadian Captain Rickman, "seems to have taken a great fancy to young Grayle lately."[3] This distresses not only Conrad, but also twenty-two year old Lieutenant Tetford who is jealous that Rickman, his best friend and constant companion, is interested in the handsome teenager. Tetford is placated by Rickman who assures his buddy that he is interested in rich young Grayle only so that he can fleece him at cards. Tetford's jealousy flares again when the Canadian cancels their usual standing engagement to have tea together so that he can join Grayle for tea instead. The squabble is settled when Grayle announces his preference to have tea that afternoon with the lively Swiss widow. Conrad, who can no longer deal rationally with Grayle's treatment of him picks a quarrel with him, hitting the handsome cad so hard on the mouth that he goes sprawling on the floor.

---

[1]J. R. Ackerley, The Prisoners of War (London: Chatto and Windus, 1925), p. 27.

[2]"Three Hundred Club," London Sunday Times, 12 July 1925.

[3]J. R. Ackerley, p. 42.

Tetford and Rickman are reconciled in a scene in the last act in which they vow not only to stick together for the duration of their internment, but to go into partnership after the war, operating a farm in Rickman's native Canada. During this scene, Tetford slips his hand on Rickman's shoulder. Responding to this gesture, the older officer links a finger in Tetford's dangling hand. They shake, and while holding hands, according to the stage directions, they contemplate life together in Canada, caring no more how much longer they will be interned. In striking contrast to the happy resolution of this relationship, Conrad goes mad and begins carrying around a wilted pot of azaleas. The rejected lover reaches out and touches Grayle's sleeve before going out on the verandah to sit with the plant in his lap as the final curtain falls.

"The hero Captain Conrad," Ackerley confessed in his memoirs, My Father and Myself, is "myself of course."[1] The veteran literary editor also posthumously identified the inspiration for his characterization of the handsome, young cad, Grayle. He was, Ackerley wrote, "a consumptive boy who died of his complaint soon after the Armistice."[2] Half a century after writing The Prisoners of War Ackerley felt badly that he had shown the play's first draft to the object of his affection and frustrations before the youth died, which:

---

[1]J. R. Ackerley, My Father and Myself, (London: The Bodley Head, 1968), p. 116.

[2]Ibid.

> the poor fellow, having identified himself in it, thought awfully unkind, as well he might, since I accuse him, in the character of Grayle of a heartless unresponsiveness to love without, in reality, ever having made my own feelings toward him plain--if indeed I knew what my own feelings were.[1]

Ackerley also felt badly and became irritated when, some London reviewers identified The Prisoners of War "as a homosexual play"[2] after it was revised in the autumn of 1955 at the Irving in the West End of London. "The rest of the characters," he insisted, "are entirely normal."[3] Ackerley wrote to a friend:

> As for homosexuality, I'm sorry you thought that there were 'one or two' homosexual characters. If that were so I would certainly be at fault, but it was not intended, and production is always at pains . . . to emphasize the normality of the Rickman-Tetford set-up. There is only one homosexual character, Conrad himself. The rest are entirely normal. And although Tetford regards Rickman as his pal, the notion of them going to bed together ought to be as unthinkable to the audience as I mean it to be to them. . . . If I had more of a hand in the production (which had a lot to be said for it anyway) the relationship would, I think have been less ambiguous.[4]

The American critics who rejected Prisoners of War after its opening-night Broadway premiere in 1935 also found the relationship of Rickman and Tetford as sexually suspect as Conrad's unrequited passion for Grayle. Only Brooks Atkinson

---

[1] J. R. Ackerley, The Ackerley Letters, Neville Braybrook, ed., (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), p. 132.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., pp. 112-113.

used the word "homosexual" to identify the young prisoners' troubled relationships.[1] The other reviewers relayed such information to readers euphemistically. One used the word "epicene,"[2] another referred to "the middle sex,"[3] and a third wrote of men who were "a little on the distaff side."[4]

Some of the New York newspapermen mocked the characters they assumed to be gay with pejorative allusions to colors, flowers, and slang synonyms commonly used to identify gay males. The reviewer for Hearst's Journal American observed that the officers in the play "are all supposed to be wearing the usual olive-drab clothes of their army, but Mr. Ackerley, the author, prefers to paint them in such a light that these uniforms look utterly, utterly lavender."[5] The same Hearst critic added, "Most of them wear silver wings on their tunics, to symbolize aviation . . . but this may indicate the elfin strain in them, too."[6] Burns Mantle suggested that when the play's protagonist transfers his affection from a heterosexual, understandably

---

[1]Brooks Atkinson, The Play," New York Times, 29 January 1935.

[2]Arthur Pollock, "The Theater," Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 29 January 1935.

[3]"Prisoners of War," Variety, 5 February 1935.

[4]Percy Hammond, "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 29 January 1935.

[5]"Prisoners of War," New York Journal American, 29 January 1935.

[6]Ibid.

unresponsive teenager who rejected him to a potted plant, the flower ought not to have been an azalea, but a pansy.[1]

Just ten years before Mantle mocked the climactic mad scene in the Broadway production of Prisoners of War, the drama critic for the London Times had been deeply moved by it. "Not for a long time have I seen anything more wholly beautiful," the British reviewer wrote, "than that last scene in which the wretched man, now beyond human companionship, sought communion with his plant."[2] The scene in the Broadway production in which the Captain strikes Grayle, according to Percy Hammond, caused "a ribald first night audience to hoot up its sleeves at it."[3] When Grayle runs out of the Captain's room crying, "Leave me alone, you beast! It was a foul blow!"4--"Loud laughter at the Ritz,"[5] John Mason Brown noted in the Post.

There was more "snickering in the audience,"[6] according to Percy Hammond, when New York theatregoers got to see another drama with a gay motif six months after the failure of Prisoners of War. Reprise, by W. D. Bristol, was so

---

[1]Burns Mantle,"'Prisoners of War,' Aimless Drama," New York Daily News, 29 January 1935.

[2]"Three Hundred Club," London Sunday Times, 12 July 1925.

[3]Percy Hammond, "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 29 January 1935.

[4]J. R. Ackerley, The Prisoners of War (London: Chatto and Windus, 1925), p. 72.

[5]John Mason Brown, "The Play," New York Post, 29 January 1935.

[6]Percy Hammond, The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 2 May 1935.

"sophomoric,"[1] in Robert Garland's estimation, and "one great big yawn,"[2] in John Mason Brown's judgment, that it is no wonder the drama of a family disrupted by a suicidal intruder closed after a single performance at the Vanderbilt Theatre on 1 May 1935.[3]

"A tragic drama of a brother and a sister who compete for the affection of the same man,"[4] according to Brooks Atkinson, Reprise concerned the Carters, an affluent Southern family living in a penthouse in Manhattan: Roy, a bachelor, Julie, his sister recently divorced from her husband, and their brandy-drinking, tough-minded old grandmother. A despondent young man named Peter attempts to commit suicide by jumping from the building in which the Carters reside, but is saved by Roy when he falls onto the terrace of the penthouse. John Anderson noted:

> Roy's interest was somewhat less than, shall we say, philanthropic. He wished, I gathered, to save Peter for worse than death, but poor Peter, alas! fell in love with Roy's sister, Julie. Roy was jealous, and his jealousy flourished as the green bay trees, as Roy struggled to make Peter, to make him, I mean, captive.[5]

Apparently the bachelor brother's designs on Peter were not obvious to most of the audience during the first act, but

---

[1]Robert Garland, "'Reprise' New Play At The Vanderbilt," New York World Telegram, 2 May 1935.

[2]John Mason Brown, "The Play," New York Post, 2 May 1935.

[3]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1934-35 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1935), p. 476.

[4]Brooks Atkinson, "The Play," New York Times, 2 May 1935.

[5]John Anderson, "Reprise," New York Evening Journal, 2 May 1935.

Arthur Pollock reported that a:

> handholding episode, however, which came in the second act, saved the show. At least it persuaded the audience to come back for a third, hoping to discover just what was the meaning of it. The play, however, did not turn out to be anything like "The Captive" or "The Green Bay Tree."[1]

In order to marry Julie, the suicidal intruder betrays Roy in a dishonest business transaction. When this comes to light, both brother and sister turn their back on the man they had been fighting over, in John Mason Brown's words, "like two fishwives over a herring."[2] Their brandy-guzzling grandmother gets even by talking Peter into making a second try at a suicide. At the final curtain she joins Roy and Julie, neither of whom are aware that Peter had plunged to the pavement while they were listening to a recording of their favorite composer, DeBussy.

As had been the case with Mae West's The Drag and Pleasure Man, and J. R. Ackerley's Prisoners of War, both the inadequate script and presentation made the drama critics reporting on Reprise particularly uncomfortable and intolerant.

---

[1]Arthur Pollock, "The Theater," Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 2 May 1935.

[2]John Mason Brown, "The Play," New York Post, 2 May 1935.

CHAPTER XI

SIX PLAYS SEEN IN THE 1930S
AFTER THE VETO OF THE DUNNIGAN CENSORSHIP BILL

WISE TOMORROW

THE LOVE OF WOMEN

WHITEOAKS

THE GOOD

WALTZ IN GOOSE STEP

OSCAR WILDE

The highly publicized uproar among theatre people and the support they were given by thousands in their audiences who signed petitions in the spring of 1937 demanding that Governor Lehman veto the Dunnigan One Man Censorship Bill obviously did much to dampen the ardor of those--such as the Knights of Columbus--who had actively worked to promote the legislation. For the rest of the decade, and halfway into the next, it almost seemed as if the Wales Padlock Law had been rescinded by the Assembly in Albany since it was "more honour'd in the breach than the observance."

Half a dozen plays with gay themes or characters were seen on Broadway within a two year period immediately following the Dunnigan Bill veto, yet the press reported no outraged

voices being raised either from the pulpits, the legislature, or from pressure groups. No individual wearing the mantle of Anthony Comstock rose up to decry the blatant violations of the New York Penal Code. William Randolph Hearst was understandably silent at the liberties being taken by certain playwrights during this period. Near bankruptcy, the seventy-five-year-old press lord had relinquished control of his publishing empire to the banks in 1937. Hearst ceased composing patriotic and moralizing editorials protesting the failure of the District Attorney, the Commissioner of Licenses and the Chief of Police to act on infractions of the law. George Jean Nathan, whose critical strictures were cited to justify the police raid on The Captive in 1927, was, a decade later, ridiculing moralists still protesting, even in private, the sight of lesbian and gay male characters on the stage.[1]

Four of the six plays with gay motifs or gay characters, developed in varying degrees, and seen in the last third of the 1930s--after the veto of the Dunnigan Bill--did not last long enough to test the tolerance of the establishment. Only two were successful. Oscar Wilde, the last of these plays produced in the decade, was such a critical sensation and a commercial success in 1938, that it seemed that gay characterizations could now be seen, despite the Wales Law, in the

---

[1]George Jean Nathan, undated, untitled, magazine article from unknown publication in Oscar Wilde file, Lincoln Center.

American theatre. By the mid-1940s, however, they would be driven once again off the Broadway stage.

In the 1930s, when legal prohibitions in the American theatre seemed to have abated, Lillian Hellman was not the only woman intrigued with the dramatic possibilities of the lesbian's dilemma in society. A couple of less talented--at least in the estimation of most New York critics--female playwrights tried to write about lesbians. Both were British dramatists: Mrs. Guy Bolton, wife of the successful playwright, and Aimee McHardy Stuart, who collaborated on her play with her far-less successful playwriting spouse, Philip Stuart. The Broadway productions of Bolton's and the Stuarts' London hits were rejected by the New York reviewers.

Like Hellman's drama--and every other play with a gay theme seen up until that time on the American stage--the two British imports concerned a seemingly or admittedly gay character's emotional or sexual involvement with an attractive, often younger, character either engaged to, married to, or interested in a heterosexual. Because Wise Tomorrow and Women In Love needed the approval of the Lord Chamberlain before they could be produced on a public stage in Britain, both plays were, of necessity, sexually ambiguous. And perhaps because of the touchiness of the subject matter both plays were billed and performed as comedies, which they weren't.

Wise Tomorrow, Bolton's effort written under the

pseudonym Stephen Powys,[1] had met with success in its original London production, starring Marita Hunt at the Lyric Theatre in the winter of 1937. "Roars of applause," according to the London Daily Telegraph, "greeted the final curtain."[2] "Piece was received with considerable warmth at the premiere," reported Variety, "and ticket agencies have made a buy."[3]

The title Wise Tomorrow--inspired by Alexander Pope's observation, "Tomorrow's wiser than today," from his Essay on Criticism--confused at least one critic who could not relate it to anything in the play.[4] Although the play has never been published, reviewers have given us some idea of the plot. John Anderson provided this resumé of Wise Tomorrow which:

> tells of a young woman, Joan Campion, with a modest talent for the stage, who is happily engaged to a young man named Peter Marsch, but who falls under the influence of an elderly actress whose sex desires . . are fanned by winds from Lesbos Isle, "Where burning Sappho loved and sang." Mme. Dracula sets out to destroy the simple, normal happiness of the girl, and just when Joan's sweetheart seemed to be saving her from worse than death he ups and falls in love with her sister Tony. . . . Anyway Mme. Dracula dies conveniently . . . and at the end Joan is going off with the lady friend of Mrs. Hideous to what seems to be a life of shame, leaving Tony and Peter to live happily ever after.[5]

---

[1]"Rehearsals Today For 'Gibson Girls,'" New York Times, 26 October 1937.

[2]W. A. Darlington, "A Well Acted Play," London Daily Telegraph, 18 February 1937.

[3]"Wise Tomorrow," Variety, 10 March 1937.

[4]Richard Lockridge, "The New Play," New York Sun, 15 October 1937.

[5]John Anderson, "New Drama Strikes Old Sour Note," New York Journal American, 16 October 1937.

Diana, the aging former star who falls in love with a younger actress, "left a good husband for the companionship of her poisonous secretary."[1] This secretary according to Variety, "dresses and walks and conducts herself in a masculine fashion."[2] The same reporter noted that at the conclusion of Bolton's idea of a comedy about an aspiring young actress:

> She is at last freed by the pursuer dying and willing her house and fortune to her. Equipped with wealth, the young woman seems to have inherited the characteristics of the deceased, and proceeds to conduct herself in a similar manner, even to engaging of the mannish secretary.[3]

Although the London Times did eventually report that "Mr. Powys's plot is one which Sappho would have enjoyed,"[4] in a follow-up evaluation of Wise Tomorrow, there was no hint in its first-nighter's review that the show had to do with a probable lesbian attachment.[5] "The play from the English reviews," Burns Mantle noted, "carried no such taint."[6] A Hollywood studio was as oblivious as the Lord Chamberlain's office and

---

[1]Robert Coleman, "Powys Play At Biltmore," New York Daily Mirror, 16 October 1937.

[2]"Wise Tomorrow," Variety, 10 March 1937.

[3]Ibid.

[4]"Wise Tomorrow," London Times, 21 February 1937.

[5]"Entertainments," London Times, 18 February 1937.

[6]Burns Mantle, "'Wise Tomorrow' Is a Drama About a Couple of Harpies," New York Daily News, 16 October 1937.

the London drama critics to what seemed obvious to most New York critics. Warner Brothers not only bought the film rights to Bolton's work but made plans to produce it on Broadway. This prompted columnist Wilella Waldorf to comment:

> It has been whispered the theme has a touch of Lesbianism about it, which sounds a little odd when you consider that the Warners, presumably, have in mind a picture version eventually. However, as Samuel Goldwyn or somebody once said, "We can always call them Bulgarians."[1]

Erin O'Brien-Moore dropped out of the ill-fated Broadway-bound production after three days of rehearsals, replaced by Edith Barrett in the role of the aging actress. During its Baltimore try-out "audiences found it interesting and provocative,"[2] reported the New York Times, and Variety predicted that, "New York audiences would be likely to receive the piece with as much fervor as the first-night West-Enders [of London]."[3]

Wise Tomorrow opened at the Biltmore Theatre on 15 October 1937. It played three performances after a critical reception that was either indifferent or hostile. The play was called "poor . . . and dull,"[4] "dismal,"[5] and "terrible."[6]

---

[1]Wilella Waldorf, "Edith Barrett To Play A Role In 'Wise Tomorrow,'" New York Post, 17 September 1937.

[2]"Powys Play In Baltimore," New York Times, 5 October 1937.

[3]"Wise Tomorrow," Variety, 10 March 1937.

[4]John Mason Brown, "Two On The Aisle," New York Post, 16 October 1937.

[5]Sidney B. Whipple, "Powys Brings A Play," New York World-Telegram, 16 October 1937.

[6]Richard Watts, Jr., "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 4 December 1937.

"The topic is sufficiently malodorous," Brooks Atkinson wrote. "The author does nothing to redeem it in the frowziness of his playwriting."[1]

A couple of the New York drama critics detected nothing sexual in the older actress's interest in her protégée,[2] but most found it obvious despite the author's device of keeping the character closeted in a "so-called" comedy. Burns Mantle, who was unable to recognize the closeted "bull-dyke" characterization eight years earlier in Winter Bound,[3] was somewhat piqued at those who had suspicions about the two actresses in Bolton's play.

> There has been a more or less determined effort to read a suggestion of Lesbianism into "Wise Tomorrow," . . . There really isn't much excuse for that. . . . It is pretty easy to read abnormality into almost any provocative drama dealing with any unconventional relationship of the sexes. If that is the way your mind runs.[4]

"It is the subject of homosexuality,"[5] John Anderson bluntly concluded. Variety tagged Bolton's work "an unvarnished tale of a woman's yen for another,"[6] and Robert Coleman wrote,

---

[1]Brooks Atkinson, "The Play," New York Times, 16 October 1937.

[2]Robert Francis, "The Theater," Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 16 October 1937; Burns Mantle, "'Wise Tomorrow' Is A Drama About A Couple of Harpies," New York Daily News, 16 October 1937.

[3]Burns Mantle, "'Winter Bound' Agitates Suspicions," New York Daily News, 23 November 1929.

[4]New York Daily News, 16 October 1937.

[5]John Anderson, "New Drama Strikes Old Sour Note," New York Journal American, 16 October 1937.

[6]"Wise Tomorrow," Variety, 16 October 1937.

"'The Captive' theme reared its ugly head last night in 'Wise Tomorrow.'"[1] Variety's man in London reported:

> Program announces this play as a comedy, which it is in treatment, although it has an underlying story constantly touching on homosexuality, but never quite saying so. Hints and situations continually recur, but a meticulously exacting censor could not legitimately raise any objection.[2]

Sidney B. Whipple of the World-Telegram also noted the care the author had taken to avoid a prohibition of the work by the British government censors:

> Those students of abnormal psychology who buy 49-cent editions of Havelock Ellis and Krafft-Ebing may find something suspiciously interesting in "Wise Tomorrow," . . . but the play is neither daring enough to inspire controversy nor sound enough to attract sober patronage. . . .
>
> There's nothing forthright about "Wise Tomorrow." The unfortunate situation is hinted at rather than explained. There are inuendoes and hints and implications, plus certain pauses in the conversation that are intended to convey to the audience what the actors don't care or don't dare to say.[3]

Two of the first-night reviewers made mention of the striking resemblance of Wise Tomorrow to The Green Bay Tree. Variety noted that "there was a similar strain in the story, a sort of 'Green Bay Tree' with the sexes in reverse."[4]

---

[1]Robert Coleman, "Powys Play At Biltmore," New York Daily Mirror, 16 October 1937.

[2]"Wise Tomorrow," Variety, 10 March 1937.

[3]Sidney B. Whipple, "Powys Brings A Play," New York World-Telegram, 16 October 1937.

[4]"Wise Tomorrow," Variety, 18 October 1937.

Richard Watts, Jr., elaborated:

> Someone was foolish enough to believe that since "The Green Bay Tree" was an admirable play, a distaff version of the same theme would be even better. It isn't. . . . The chief difference between the two plays, outside of the change in the sexes, is that "The Green Bay Tree" was a powerful and beautifully written drama, which had dignity as well as force, and that "Wise Tomorrow" is a weak and fumbling work that has no possible virtue to recommend it. There is a wide-eyed attempt to express the Lesbian theme in the new play, but it doesn't even give the drama the boxoffice quality of being shocking.[1]

The second weak play with a covert gay theme in the 1930s, Love of Women, failed less than two months after Wise Tomorrow closed. Like Bolton's effort, Aimee and Philip Stuart's collaboration, according to Variety, "flies over, under and around the Lesbian theme, but never alights directly on it."[2] The character in Love of Women of the older, stronger woman, for example, in an undefined attachment had, of necessity, to be closeted to escape detection by the Lord Chamberlain, but because the authors included so many contradictory clues to her character, the role made little sense. Many of the critics were as confused and annoyed by Vere in Love of Women as they had been by another contradictory and inconsistent character, Tony seen in Winter Bound eight years before.

Brooks Atkinson gave readers this brief plot-summary of the Stuart's play:

---

[1]Richard Watts, Jr., "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 16 October 1937.

[2]"Love of Women," Variety, 15 December 1937.

> "Love of Women" is the story of two young women who have lived together for five years and have started the gossips to gabbling. They have made their mark in the world by writing a successful drama. A brilliant surgeon has fallen in love with one of them. For her it is a choice between love and a successful career at dramatic collaboration. For her comrade of five industrious years it looks like calamity. It turns out that way, for the brilliant surgeon captures his bride and her comrade is left frightened and alone.[1]

Burns Mantle noted, "It was done three years ago in London and caused a bit of talk over there, without exciting great boxoffice interest."[2] Robert Coleman heard otherwise, claiming it was "one of London's biggest recent hits,"[3] The Shuberts brought the comedy to Broadway which had already seen at least three of Scottish-born Aimee McHardy Stuart's plays: Lady Clara, Sixteen and Birthday.

The British cast in the Broadway production was headed by Valerie Taylor and her husband, Hugh Sinclair, and Love of Women marked the Broadway debut of pretty English film star, Heather Angel. Leo G. Carroll, who appeared in The Green Bay Tree, directed and played a supporting role. Their American reception was better than that accorded their vehicle. "Clumsily written. . . . plot rickety. . . . characters implausible,"

---

[1]Brooks Atkinson, "The Play," New York Times, 14 December 1937.

[2]Burns Mantle, "'Love of Woman' Interesting Discussion of a Sex Problem," New York Daily News, 14 December 1937.

[3]Robert Coleman, "Love of Women," New York Daily Mirror, 14 December 1937.

complained John Anderson.[1] Variety identified it as "a dull drama,"[2] while the Brooklyn Daily Eagle terms it "a very pale and anemic comedy."[3] Atkinson, familiar with the Stuarts' work, wrote:

> It needs considerably more vigor than the Stuarts can summon to the crisis of any play. . . . The mechanics of writing absorb so much of their strength that they have precious little left over for drama.[4]

Love of Women, which opened on 13 December 1937 at the Shubert's John Golden Theatre, lasted five days.[5] John Mason Brown called the Stuarts' work "the story of a cure"[6] since the two female playwrights living and working together so successfully, the critic noted, "are shown the psychological dangers they run,"[7] by the virile young doctor who breaks them up, thus preventing their relationship from evolving into a sexual one. Yet, according to the Stuarts, this would have been unlikely since, as Brown notes, "the authors would have us know that the girls are healthy and normal."[8] To prove

---

[1]John Anderson, "'Love of Women' Debuts at John Golden Theatre," New York Sun, 14 December 1937.

[2]"Love of Women," Variety, 15 December 1937.

[3]Robert Francis, "The Theater," Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 14 December 1937.

[4]Brooks Atkinson, "The Play," New York Times, 14 December 1937.

[5]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1937-38 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1938), p. 402.

[6]John Mason Brown, "Two On The Aisle," New York Post, 14 December 1937.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Ibid.

just how heterosexual the older, more agressive woman actually is, "There is an odd moment at the end of the second act," Richard Lockridge points out:

> when the man and the possessive woman suddenly interrupt their argument to fall into an embrace, thus proving there is nothing out of the way about her, and completely reversing the apparent direction of the drama.[1]

"It is always possible," the reviewer from the Sun added, "incidentaly, that someone has been doing house cleaning on the play, and left behind the confusion and muddle characteristic of house cleaning."[2]

Citing the same confusion and contradictions especially in the characterization of one of the two women, Richard Watts, Jr. concluded that Love of Women is

> a hollow and aimless work that has been so carefully cleansed of its dangerous sex matters that it has lost whatever dramatic point it may once have possessed. In the current version it is a very mild little comedy.[3]

Watts also reported:

> In an early scene of the drama, one of the characters suggests that children born in England during wartime, having been raised while their fathers were in the trenches and their mothers were doing men's work, tend to become effeminate if they were boys, and masculine if they were girls. However, the idea is immediately cast aside and we should do the same, pausing to remark that the play toys gingerly with its lesbian theme and pushes it, too, aside carefully.[4]

---

[1]Richard Lockridge, "The New Play," New York Sun, 14 December 1937.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Richard Watts, Jr., "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 14 December 1937.

[4]Ibid.

Just as there was considerable confusion as to the genre of the drama, there was divided reaction among some of the critics as to the nature of its resolution. Atkinson mentioned the older woman being left "frightened and alone"[1] at the final curtain, yet the reviewer for the Brooklyn Daily Eagle--who, incidently mentioned nothing about lesbian inuendoes in his critique--remembered:

> The final tableau leaves her broken and weeping on the stage alone, as the happy couple take their departure. Still, things are not as bad as they sound, for we are led to suppose that a very pleasant neighbor is ready and willing to make everything up to her.[2]

John Anderson's report of the play's conclusion, on the other hand, would seem to support Atkinson's version. The older abandoned woman tells her neighbor, who has a school-girl crush on her, to go away, according to Anderson. "Go away and love a man, and have children and build a home, and leave me alone."[3] Anderson thought this, "a handsome moral lesson,"[4] but to John Mason Brown it was another incongruity in characterization which surprised him when the woman, "suddenly mounts the rostrum to preach a three--or four--line anti-Lesbian sermon to another girl who has a crush on her."[5]

---

[1]Brooks Atkinson, "The Play," New York Times, 14 December 1937.

[2]Robert Francis, "The Theater," Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 14 December 1937.

[3]John Anderson, "'Love Of Women' Debuts At Golden Theatre," New York Journal-American, 14 December 1937.

[4]Ibid.

[5]John Mason Brown, "Two On The Aisle," New York Post, 14 December 1937.

Robert Coleman, writing for the Daily Mirror, wished that neither Wise Tomorrow nor Love of Women had been seen by the public, not only because they were poorly written, but because of the subject matter. Of Wise Tomorrow, Coleman wrote, "such matters as those with which it concerns itself are best left to the consulting rooms of psychiatrists. They do not add to the health and well-being of the theatre."[1]

After panning Love of Women, Coleman stated that the subject matter of gay emotional or physical involvements were more than dramatists writing about them could handle. "Somehow it baffles playwrights and usually fails to stimulate box office patronage in New York," Coleman concluded. "The exceptions to the rule can be numbered on half the fingers of one hand."[2]

The drama critic's count in 1937 of the number of hit plays with gay motifs since such characterizations were first introduced on the American stage in the 1920s was not quite accurate. Four: God of Vengeance, The Captive, The Green Bay Tree and The Children's Hour of the nine shows unquestionably gay in theme that had been produced over a period of fifteen years had been hits. Coleman suspected that the failure of Winter Bound, The Prisoners, Reprise, Wise Tomorrow,

---

[1]Robert Coleman, "Love of Women," New York Daily Mirror, 14 December 1937.

[2]Ibid.

and Women in Love, could be attributed to the subject matter. It would seem more likely, upon examination of the critical evaluations of these plays, however, that their authors not only lacked dramaturgical skills but were also handicapped by censorship prohibitions. The controversial theme of those well-written plays that won rave notices from the critics could not but have contributed to the strong patronage they attracted.

With the single exception of Irene, perhaps, in The Captive, all the other emerging lesbian characters in the 1920s and 30s met with misfortune at the hands of their creators. One was forced into prostitution; another driven to suicide. Two were abandoned by the heterosexual object of their affection, and one succumbed to a heart attack. Gay male characters fared a little better during the same time period. While Marsden in Strange Interlude ended up with the leading lady in their dotage, two other closeted gays became addicts, one to alcohol, the other to drugs. Three gays were shot to death, one imprisoned as a sodomist, and another maddened by rejection. However, a pair of seemingly gay travelling companions did manage to go on their merry, bisexual way, and a gay good samaritan went on listening to Debussy recordings while the would-be-suicide he saved but could not seduce succeeded in a second attempt to end his life.

In the last third of the 1930s Broadway audiences finally saw two gay characters who ended up happily. One teenager escaped an unhappy, loveless home by running away with his lover.

In a play that served as a vehicle for Ethel Barrymore, another teenager inherited a coveted, considerable fortune allowing him to escape his family and study abroad.

"Ethel Barrymore Triumphs in Matriarch Role at Hudson,"[1] reported the World-Telegram on 24 March 1938, the morning after the veteran actress appeared as an old lady of 101 in Whiteoaks by Mazo de La Roache, fashioned from her novel Whiteoaks of Jalna. According to Variety, "try out showings in Canada, the drama's setting, were well supported. Play clicked on the London stage, too."[2] A modest success at the Hudson Theatre on Broadway with 104 performances,[3] Barrymore's performance was appreciated by the critics more so than de La Roache's playscript. Burns Mantle gave this brief synopsis of Whiteoaks:

> Gran Whiteoak, still alive and active at 101, is completely aware of the subtle scheming many of her relatives are doing in the hope of being named in her will. Her interest in the career of the least stable of her grandchildren, young Finch, who would devote his life to a study of music, is stimulated by visits with that young man. The old lady makes Finch her heir, causing considerable consternation when she dies.[4]

Complaining that "so much of the boy's character and

---

[1]Sidney B. Whipple, "Ethel Barrymore Triumphs in Matriarch Role at Hudson," New York World-Telegram, 24 March 1938.

[2]Ibee., "Whiteoaks," Variety, 30 March 1938.

[3]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1937-38 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1938), p. 434.

[4]Ibid.

problem is left out,"[1] critic Arthur Pollock found it difficult to assess the character of the lucky heir. Richard Watts, Jr. thought the young piano player "might well have been psychoanalyzed,"[2] and Variety called him "an almost pathological case."[3] Possibly, the author had to keep her creation closeted to avoid detection by the Lord Chamberlain's Office. Nevertheless, as Critic Pollock noted, "There is a hint, . . . that Finch has fallen among evil companions, such young men as write love letters to each other. That is not gone into."[4]

The three children and five grandchildren of old Ma Whiteoaks are a dull, mercenary lot. They typify Toronto's "horsey upper-middle class," except for the seemingly weakest member of the clan. "Finch is a musician and, externally, at least, a weakling," Sidney B. Whipple observed.

> How far the mass persecution of the others may have beaten him into a sort of pulp of effeminacy and how much of it is congenital is a question, but it is there, as is demonstrated when the brothers (smelling strongly of dogs and horses, no doubt) discover a letter, couched in terms of endearment, that has been sent to him by a friend named Arthur.[5]

---

[1]Arthur Pollock, "The Theater," Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 24 March 1938.

[2]Richard Watts, Jr., "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 24 March 1938.

[3]Ibee., "Whiteoaks," Variety, 30 March 1938.

[4]Pollock, Ibid.

[5]Sidney B. Whipple, "Ethel Barrymore Triumphs in Matriarch Role at Hudson," New York World-Telegram, 24 March 1938.

Piers, a brother who is habitually tormenting Finch, picks up a letter the teenage pianist has dropped from his pocket. Renny, an older brother Finch adores, has been asking the boy where he had been all night.

> PIERS. A letter of yours, eh? Listen to this Renny! "Darling Finch." My God! That this sort of muck should be written to a brother of mine! Here, Renny, read it yourself. Who the hell is Arthur?
>
> FINCH. He's a friend of mine; he helps me with my music.
>
> RENNY (after reading the letter). I'm disgusted with you!
>
> (Finch feels annihilated. His face is drawn.)
>
> FINCH. I don't understand!
>
> PIERS. He doesn't understand
>
> RENNY. Do you know what this leads to?
>
> FINCH. To the orchestra?
>
> RENNY. No, not the orchestra! (Striking the letter.) I'd rather you spent last night in a brothel than to find you carrying that sloppy letter about! (He tosses the letter into the fireplace.) . . .[1]

Renny warns his younger brother to stay away from Arthur, and the subject is never alluded to again. Finch announces at the play's end, that he is going off to Europe to pursue his ambitions to be a pianist as soon as he comes into the great fortune left him by his protective grandmother. He had spoken

---

[1]Mazo de La Roache, Whiteoaks (London: MacMillian and Co., Limited, 1936), pp. 66-67.

to her of his desperate need to escape. Finch in Whiteoaks is the very first gay characterization seen on the English-speaking stage rewarded rather than punished or condemned because he is recognized as being in some sense different. "I know you're a queer boy," Ma Whiteoaks told her grandson, "but I like you--yes, I like you very much."[1]

A male playwright, as sympathetic as de La Roache's very old lady, also aided a desperately unhappy, tormented teenager to escape an oppressive homelife in the 1938 Broadway production of Chester Erskin's The Good. The drama with as much suffering as is generally found in a popular soap opera and with a harsh, unsympathetic protagonist, left the critics uniformly unenthusiastic. The Good was seen at the Windsor Theatre in just nine performances.[2] Nevertheless, Chester Erskin's play is worthy of note in the emergence of gay characterizations on the American stage.

Erskin handled the subject matter of a gay emotional and possibly sexual involvement explicitly and sympathetically. More significantly, however, the attachment involved two gay males. The couple in The Good do not feel either shame or guilt because of their emotional and/or sexual preference. On the contrary, one character defends his orientation in the face of physical violence. While the American teenager's

---

[1]Mazo de La Roache, Whiteoaks (London: MacMillian and Co., Limited, 1936), p. 42.

[2]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1938-39 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1939), p. 411.

defense in The Good was heard in only nine performances, Oscar Wilde's far more eloquent defense in a show that opened just four days after Erskin's would be heard by no less than 274 Broadway audiences.[1] Such dramatized defenses, as time would tell, could not but have had some mollifying effect on uncomfortable or hostile audiences, and on drama critics who saw the shows that failed, as well as those that succeeded.

The Good concerned, in the words of John Anderson, "the evil that a good and pious woman may do."[2] "Harriet, like her minister father before her, is a hard, unyielding and thoroughly 'good' person," Burns Mantle observed, "who would hold all her neighbors to a strict accounting of the moral laws."[3] During the course of the dramatic action, the audience learns that the frigid woman drove her bitter, frustrated husband to find comfort in a mistress's arms. She drives a young Jewish boy to suicide because of her lack of compassion for the failings of others. The minister's daughter is also held responsible, in part by the author, and in whole by some of the critics, for overprotecting and emasculating her own child. "Her coldness," Burns Mantle concluded, "drives

---

[1]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1938-39 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1939), p. 413.

[2]John Anderson, "'The Good' Presented At Windsor Theatre," New York Journal American, 6 October 1938.

[3]Mantle, p. 411.

her sensitive son into an abnormal friendship with a choir master."[1] Brooks Atkinson also held the frigid, religious mother wholly responsible for "the homosexual practices of her son."[2]

In the first act, Howard is described by the author as "a slender, sensitive working lad, about sixteen or so. An emotional boy. Earnest. Sincere. Gentle."[3] The choir master, Francis Duncan, is "a trim, well-built man somewhere in his thirties. He is a man of culture and education. A quick and alert mind. A complete absence of the flamboyance usually found in men of his type."[4] The man and boy have one scene together in the play during which, Variety reported, "Conversations between them clearly indicates an unnatural affection."[5] The choir master's "attitude toward Howard is wholly sincere and honest,"[6] according to Erskin in his stage directions. The teenager is emotional and rash, anxious to escape his loveless home and his artistically stifling, individually repressive home town:

---

[1]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1938-39 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1939), p. 411.

[2]Brooks Atkinson, "The Play," New York Times, 6 October 1938.

[3]Chester Erskin, The Good (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, p. I-38.

[4]Ibid.

[5]"The Good," Variety, 12 October 1935.

[6]The Good, I-38.

HOWARD (suddenly in a burst of emotion). Francis, let's not wait any longer! Let's run away from here. You and I, tonight! Let's start to do all the things we've planned to do.[1]

The choir master is a cautious, calm and steady man. He wants Howard to finish his senior year of high school and go on to college.

MR. DUNCAN. Howard! Please, you're making things so difficult, we must be patient. That's part of our understanding. Isn't it? We've so much ahead of us, we can afford to wait a while, can't we? Think of our whole lives full of adventure and excitement and all the things we've planned. You don't want to throw them up just for a silly mood, do you? We've so much to gain, what do a few months, or even a few years matter?[2]

Duncan is aware in his conversation with Howard that the teenager has been unusually unsettled since, earlier in the day, he went for a physical check-up to the family doctor. Howard admits that at Dr. Ten Broek's "something happened." Duncan immediately suspects the worst.

MR. DUNCAN (tensely). You didn't tell him?

HOWARD. I didn't have to. He told me.

MR. DUNCAN. Oh, God! Howard! Oh, God! That was a terrible thing! Why didn't you tell me?

HOWARD. I am telling you.

MR. DUNCAN (a little frantic). A terrible thing. You should have told me right away. You denied it, of course.[3]

---

[1]Chester Erskin, The Good (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, p. I-41.

[2]Ibid., I-42.

[3]Ibid., I-43.

HOWARD (looking at him strangely). No, I didn't. I thought it was a senseless thing to do. I told him the truth, I'm not ashamed of us, so I told him the truth.

MR. DUNCAN. You told him about me, too?

HOWARD. He guessed.[1]

The choir master is deeply distressed at the teenager's candour and guilelessness, but Howard is convinced that professional ethics will keep the confession safe. Duncan thinks the situation is dangerous and dreadful.

The scene between the teenager and the choir master ends the first act; Duncan is never seen again in the play.

In Act Two, Howard and his mother, and then his father, have scenes together exploring their strained relationships. Rather incongruously it would seem, Duncan has sent a dozen roses to the boy's mother with a note apologizing for having taken up so much of her son's time. In a scene very reminiscent of the famous flower arranging scenes in The Green Bay Tree, Howard insists on arranging the roses, fussing over the length of the stems and being very particular about the color of the vase he selects.

When the boy's father comes home, he notices the roses and is openly contemptuous that the arrangement is so exotic. The man complains that his son never played baseball as a boy. Howard blames his mother's overprotectiveness as well as his own lack of physical coordination. Attempting to establish

---

[1]Chester Erskin, The Good (Typewritten copy), Lincoln enter, p. I-43.

some sort of a rapport with his scholarly, artistic son with whom he has never been comfortable, Mr. Eldred admits that he, too, wrote poetry, only once when he was infatuated with a girl, but the father warns his son not to take poetry too much to heart.

"Mr. Erskin, in a sentence, offers a pale, male version of 'The Captive,'" Walter Winchell reported in the Daily Mirror:

> . . . the outstanding scene, perhaps, arrives just before the second act curtain descends when the family doctor tells Malcom and Harriet Eldred . . . that their 17 year old son is abnormal and that there is no hope for him. . . .[1]

DR. TEN BROEK. A type, both of them. A baffling type.[2]

Enraged to hear their son's friendship with a man twice his age described by the doctor as "unnatural," the couple turn in frustration on one another. Malcom blames Harriet for over-protecting the boy; while she blames him for rejecting Howard. In a screaming scene, the father announces that he is going to find and kill the man who ruined his son. Howard cannot help but overhear the raucous scene in the living room and comes downstairs to face his hostile parents. Beside himself with rage and revulsion, Mr. Eldred strikes his son, throwing the teenager to the floor.

---

[1]Walter Winchell, "The Good," New York Daily Mirror, 7 October 1938.

[2]Chester Erskin, The Good (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, p. 2-38.

In a later scene, Howard turns to his mother for help and understanding.

> HOWARD. Will you defend me against them? Will you? Will you tell them you were wrong and that I'm right. Will you do that? No, you can't. You believe what they do too. You see?
>
> MRS. ELDRED. No matter what I believe, I want to help you.
>
> HOWARD. You couldn't. There's no changing me. I told you that. I'm not so sure I'd want to if I could. From one ugliness to another. It's all vulgar. The whole of life. Vulgar and stupid. . . .[1]

In the last scene of the drama, when Mrs. Eldred learns about an abortion her husband's mistress had, and is blamed for driving the Jewish boy to suicide, she finds solace only in having a son whom she hopes will someday become a Protestant minister like her late father. Howard, however, has run away, her embittered husband informs her, with the choir master. Puritanical Protestant rigidity, flower arranging, writing poetry and not playing baseball had all contributed, according to playwright Erskin, to Howard's attraction to another man.

The young choir master and his teenage companion in Chester Erskin's The Good were the first admittedly gay male characterizations ever seen by the critics and the public on the Broadway stage since the single, by invitation only performance of Mae West's The Drag in 1927. Considering the reaction at the possibility of West's production on Broadway just eleven years before, the reaction of the critics to Erskin's

---

[1]Chester Erskin, The Good (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, p. 3-6.

creation was surprisingly benign. The reviewer for The Daily Worker credited the performers for making the debut of two gay characters inoffensive. "Jarvis Rice and Eric Kalkhurst, as the homosexuals," wrote John Cambridge, "were able to spare the audience as much embarrassment as possible."[1] Brooks Atkinson, too, praised Jarvis Rice for managing "to make something palatable out of the unsavory character of the abnormal son."[2] Sidney B. Whipple added his appreciation of Rice in his column for playing "the part of the confused young man without making it offensive."[3]

Only one reviewer, of the eight writing for the New York dailies, Sidney Whipple of the World-Telegram, objected to the inclusion of gay characters in a play. Whipple protested:

> It has always been my belief, or prejudice if you will, that explorations into the field of abnormal sexual psychology were better left to the scientific world and not forced upon the public. . . . This is not prudery, human abnormalities are subjects for serious and sincere study. Public demonstration of them becomes dangerous in two phases--when they are burlesqued and when they are exposed for the satisfaction of morbid and unthinking curiosity.
>
> . . . I think it is a futile, disappointing, inconclusive attempt to drag certain case histories from Krafft-Ebing or Havelock Ellis before the footlights. . .

---

[1]John Cambridge, "'The Good' At The Windsor Saved By Competent Acting," Daily Worker, 7 October 1938.

[2]Brooks Atkinson, "The Play," New York Times, 6 October 1938.

[3]Sidney B. Whipple, "Miss Starr, Jarvis Rice Play Difficult Roles," New York World-Telegram, 6 October 1938.

> Continuing the parallel with a medical treatise, we have, in this play:
> Case One: Howard E--, 16, mother frigid and unresponsive in all marital relations. Both parents had hated each other since their wedding night. Boy is of unstable emotional nature and has fallen under influence of an older man, a choir leader. Runs away with him.[1]

Despite Whipple's warning that it was dangerous to display case histories of "human abnormalities" before the footlights, two plays, based mainly on case histories of two internationally-known gay personalities, were produced before the end of the decade. While one failed, the other was a great critical and popular success. In both, the protagonists end badly, as had all other gay characters seen on Broadway in the 1930s, with the possible exceptions of the teenage boys in Whiteoaks and in The Good.

Ernst Roehm, one of Adolph Hitler's earliest supporters and the founder of the National Socialist Militia, provided the inspiration for Oliver H. P. Garrett's portrait of a diabolical gay Nazi in Waltz In Goose Step. Despite the fact that it was staged by Arthur Hopkins, considered one of the most accomplished directors in the American theatre, the anti-Nazi propaganda piece by the New York newspaperman turned Hollywood scenarist was not a success.

Four years before Garrett's drama was staged, Nazi Captain Ernst Roehm was arrested with several of his officers

---

[1]Sidney B. Whipple, "Miss Starr, Jarvis Rice Play Difficult Roles," New York World-Telegram, 6 October 1938.

in a small vacation resort near Munich. Richard Plant, who has done research on lesser-known aspects of the Nazi regime, such as the extermination of countless gays throughout Europe, gives this account of Roehm's arrest, a man Plant describes as "a 'butch lover' of handsome boys:"[1]

> . . . A few SS bullies stormed into the hotel in the early morning hours, broke down the doors, arresting everyone. SA General Edmund Heines, Roehm's ally, was allegedly found in bed with a young SA man. Neither Roehm nor any of the SA men knew why they were arrested and put into prison. Heines and a few others were machine-gunned right away; Roehm, invited to shoot himself, refused and was killed a few days later by a special extermination squad.[2]

Roehm was so powerful at the time of his murder that he had posed a threat to Goering, Goebbels and Himmler with whom he differed on political policies within the Nazi party after Hitler took office. According to Plant, in order to explain Roehm's death:

> . . . Goebbels had concocted a cover story: not only had Roehm schemed up a "putsch" to overthrow the Fuehrer, but his moral conduct had become unacceptable to true Swastika standards. Therefore, Hitler himself had stormed into the rooms of Roehm and Heines, disarmed and arrested them single-handedly. Hitler was so shocked by the depraved scene he uncovered, he ordered "the ruthless extermination of this pestilent tumor." Since the putsch story didn't go over well--how could the SA have planned it when most of them were on vacation--Goebbels stressed "the homosexual horror."[3]

---

[1]Richard Plant, "The Men With The Pink Triangles," Christopher Street, February 1977, p. 6.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

Newspaperman Garrett had obviously been familiar with Goebbel's propaganda releases when he sat down to write his anti-Nazi and anti-gay, Waltz In Goose Step.

"For the first half of its First Act I would have sworn that Mr. Garrett had written the inevitable play about the Nazis," critic John Anderson wrote, "but after that it veered off into a fragile and rather foolish little melodrama, concerning not Der Fuehrer so much as the effeminate leader of what I suppose you could call the Lavender Shirts."[1]

Waltz In Goose Step begins in the interior cabin of a private plane used by August, a character called The Leader, as his flying office. The hysterical, clownish madman is "returning without shame," as John Mason Brown recognized, "from such a bloody expedition as the Roehm Purge represented."[2] The young pilot, son of a Jewish mother who denies his background, becomes very upset. He holds his passengers at gunpoint and threatens to crash the plane.

> STRAUB. . . . you shot them down like dogs. Unarmed men. Your own friends.[3]

The angry, almost hysterical pilot is finally placated by the drama's anti-heroic protagonist, Count Gottfried von

---

[1]John Anderson, "Waltz In Goose Step," New York Journal-American, 2 November 1938.

[2]John Mason Brown, "Two On The Aisle," New York Post, 2 November 1938.

[3]Oliver H. P. Garrett, Waltz In Goose Step (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, p. 1-9.

Laidi, one of The Leader's top two accomplices travelling with him. The Count asks the mutinous pilot:

> VON LAIDI. What would you say if I told you they were a perverted little clique--[1]

The fifty-year old aristocrat enrages The Leader, already suspicious of him, when he attempts to hide a locket on his person that he had taken from the corpse of a young man named Tony, slaughtered in the purge. Von Laidi, who ghoulishly licks Tony's dried blood from his fingers, admits that he had given it to the youth, and simply wanted it back.

The second and third acts take place in Von Laidi's sumptuous apartment suite. Although the playwright never really identified Von Laidi's depraved gay lifestyle, most of the critics called the Count "effeminate," while some, like Richard Watts, Jr., were more specific in categorizing him. "A sardonic, cultured, piano-playing homosexual,"[2] wrote Watts of the play's protagonist. "He might be a proper character in a Noel Coward social drama, but is an ineffective focal point for the burning indignation of Mr. Garrett's editorial thesis."[3] Even though Von Laidi is a treacherous, despicable Machiavelian,

---

[1]Oliver H. P. Garrett, Waltz In Goose Step, (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, p. 1-9.

[2]Richard Watts, Jr., "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 2 November 1938.

[3]Ibid.

John Anderson also saw him as "a Noel Coward character playing with perfumed firecrackers."[1]

The very evening of the mass slaughter of the leaders of the Blue Shirts, Heit, their former Commander, visits Von Laidi in his apartment. An intimate of the Count's, and of the same sexual persuasion, Heit is on the run. Saved from being cut down with the others in his command by an anonymous tip which he learns had come from Von Laidi, Heit rages at the Count for not also saving Tony, the youth they had both known intimately. The fugitive loved the youth whom Von Laidi speaks contemptuously of as a waterfront hustler probably responsible for tipping The Leader off to their planned putsch.

Von Laidi refuses to help save Heit from August and his henchmen who are combing the city for him. The Count explains:

> VON LAIDI (Flinging the homosexual's worst insult). You bore me![2]

Before The Leader and his lieutenants come bursting into the room, the Count tells Heit where he can find a gun in his bedroom as he flees. The Blue Shirt Commander is gunned down as he is going down the rear staircase of the residence. Von Laidi denies ownership of the weapon found on the dead man,

---

[1]John Anderson, "'Waltz In Goose Step' Trip Up On Theme," New York Journal American, 2 November 1938.

[2]Oliver H. P. Garrett, Waltz In Goose Step (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, p. 2-12.

but he realizes that once that is established, he will be doomed.

August has come to realize that the effeminate Count was one of the organizers of the Blue Shirt's plans to assasinate him. Von Laidi informed on his co-conspirators, and then, as Head of the Secret Police, planned their execution in a surprise attack in order to cover up his involvement in the counter-revolutionary plot.

Unsuccessful at enlisting August's mistress, the anti-Semitic pilot of The Leader's private plane, the pilot's unwed Jewish mother, and a dissentient group of religious and political activists in his plans to overthrow The Leader, the Count is given an opportunity by August to kill himself, as had actually happened to Ernst Roehm in real life. Von Laidi is too cowardly to commit suicide, but is shot gladly by his former valet, whom he had betrayed, along with everybody else. "The Von Laidi," Burns Mantle observed, "should you miss the suggestion in the name, is a rather precious person who is fierce enough to bite his hangnails but not his enemies."[1]

According to Variety, Von Laidi was "a thinly disguised prototype of Putzi Hanfstaengel," and August's mistress, "a thinly disguised Leni Riefenstahl, ex-actress now head of

---

[1]Burns Mantle, "'Waltz In Goose Step,' Leaves Nazi Problem Where It Was," New York Daily News, 2 November 1938.

Germany's film industry."[1] Hanfstaengel was one of Hitler's earliest financial backers, and one of the first members of the upper class to support him politically. Like Von Laidi, the clownish Munich millionaire played the piano and was shallow, eccentric and sardonic,[2] so Garrett's creation may be a composite of both Roehm and of Hanfstaengel, whose piano playing often placated Hitler.

Variety delineated a plot outline of Waltz In Goose Step with details that follow more closely Goebbel's version of the Roehm affair than was reported by the first-night critics from the New York dailies. Whereas, according to typewritten script used for the Broadway production[3] and Arthur Pollock's review,[4] Von Laidi is executed by his ex-butler, Variety reported another ending that may have been seen in rehearsals before cuts and changes were made eliminating material that could have provoked the police or politicians. According to the trade paper, The Leader warns Von Laidi at the end of the first act, after they talk the pilot out of killing

---

[1]"Waltz In Goose Step," Variety, 9 November 1938.

[2]William Shirer, The Rise And Fall Of The Third Reich (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), p. 47.

[3]Oliver H. P. Garrett, Waltz In Goose Step (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, p. 3-28.

[4]Arthur Pollock, "The Theater," Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 2 November 1938.

them, "to keep his hands off the good-looking kid."[1] The play ended when Variety's reviewer saw it, when "the kid is killed along with Von Laidi when the dictator breaks in and catches them together,"[2] just as Hitler was supposed to have caught Roehm according to Goebbel's fabricated report.[3]

"'Waltz In Goose Step' is stale stuff destined for immediate failure,"[4] Walter Winchell accurately predicted in the Daily Mirror. Arthur Hopkins' production of Waltz In Goose Step lasted only seven performances[5] at the Hudson Theatre during the first week of November, 1938. Never before, nor since have Broadway audiences seen a more despicable, depraved gay male characterization than that of Count Von Laidi.

People flocked to see Oscar Wilde, the second case history of an actual personage in 1938, filling the Fulton Theatre for forty weeks.[6] While Garrett based his Waltz In Goose Step on Goebbel's propaganda release explaining the elimination of Ernst Roehm, Leslie and Sewell Stokes used material considerably more reliable for their biographical drama of the trial and tribulations of the Irish playwright.

---

[1]"Waltz In Goose Step," Variety, 9 November 1938.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Richard Platt, "The Men With The Pink Triangles", Christopher Street, February 1977, p. 6.

[4]Walter Winchell, "Waltz In Goose Step," New York Daily Mirror, 2 November 1938.

[5]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1938-39 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1939), p. 423.

[6]Ibid., p. 413.

Edmond Rostand's son, Maurice, had written a play about Oscar Wilde that managing director Norman Marshall planned to produce in 1936 at the Gate Theatre, a 200-seat private rather than public playhouse in London whose programs did not come under the jurisdiction of the Lord Chamberlain. It was at the Gate--whose audiences were made up "mostly of barristers and doctors" according to the News Review[1]--that American plays such as The Children's Hour were first produced in London for runs limited by law to only six weeks.

Oscar Wilde's most intimate friend, Lord Alfred Douglas, whose father brought about the playwright's downfall, was still alive in the 1930s. After reading Rostand's playscript, Douglas was so distressed he considered a lawsuit for libel.

> I intervened and objected to the production. My objection, as I explained it to Mr. Marshall, . . . was simply because Monsieur Rostand's play was a travesty of the truth and a deliberate misrepresentation of well-known and often recorded facts.
> . . . The whole idea of Rostand's play was based on the false assumption that I have never seen or spoken to Oscar Wilde again after he came out of prison.[2]

The wealthy English nobleman had, in fact, housed Wilde at his villa in Naples for several months and had seen him constantly for three years in Paris, but Wilde's estranged wife and Douglas's mother threatened to cut off their allowances if they ever lived together. Wilde's friend supplied him with

---

[1]"Theatre," London News Review, 12 November 1936, p. 28.

[2]Lord Alfred Douglas, "A Preface To Oscar Wilde," New York Post, 10 October 1938.

money and paid for his funeral at which he was the chief mourner.

The Rostand production was cancelled, but the manager-director of the subscription playhouse still felt the time was right for a dramatization of Wilde's tragedy. According to Sewell Stokes:

> Norman Marshall suggested to my brother Leslie and myself that we write a play about Oscar Wilde for his Gate Theatre. . . .
> After we read together everything written on the subject of Wilde, and came to the inevitable conclusion that the dramatist, apart altogether from the scandal of which he became the center, was a very great wit, and a very great gentleman. . . . We went to see Lord Alfred Douglas . . . and the play was based largely upon evidence which he very kindly placed before us. Rather inaccurately, several persons have declared the play to be based on Frank Harris's celebrated "Life" of Wilde.[1]

Douglas was pleased with the work the Sewell brothers had done for the Gate Theatre. "I agreed at once to its performance, with a few minor alterations in the text," the sixty-seven year old poet wrote. "As it now stands it represents an historically true story, allowing, of course, for dramatic license."[2]

Actor Robert Morley, newly successful as a playwright, was not particularly keen about playing the title role that was to make him a star on both sides of the Atlantic. According to an American interviewer for Colliers magazine:

---

[1]Sewell Stokes, "Writing of 'Wilde,'" New York Times, 20 November 1938.

[2]"London's 'Wilde' Drama Stars Robert Morley," New York Journal American, 9 October 1938.

> When Oscar Wilde was being cast, producer and playwrights sent for Morley, thinking that at least he'd be delighted at a chance to try for the part. He wasn't but he agreed just out of a genial desire to help them out in a tight spot, but he felt rather doubtful about the whole thing.[1]

Morley's stunning performance became the talk of London despite the cool reception accorded the play by the London Times. "Upon Wilde the artist the play has no comment of importance to make, and of Wilde the man it merely relates what were best forgotten."[2] The London Daily Telegraph also attempted to dismiss the play, reporting that "'Oscar Wilde' which the Gate Theatre studio presented last night, left a slight unpleasant taste in one's mouth."[3] Playwright Sewell Stokes remembered similar reactions from the British public. "In England," he said, "when we did 'Oscar Wilde' in 1936 at the Gate Theatre, anyone you mentioned the play to would simply lift an eyebrow and murmur 'Do you really think it's wise to write a play about Wilde?'"[4]

The Stokes brothers begin their drama, which has been published by Random House,[5] on the terrace of an elegant hotel

---

[1]Katherine Roberts, "Least Effort," Colliers, 17 December 1938, p. 11.

[2]"Gate Theatre," London Times, 30 September 1936.

[3]"'Oscar Wilde' At Gate Theatre," London Daily Telegraph, 30 September 1936.

[4]Richard Manely, "These Brothers Pull As A Team Even When Yoke Spans Oceans," New York Herald Tribune, 4 December 1938.

[5]Sewell and Leslie Stokes, Oscar Wilde (New York: Random House, 1938).

in Algiers in 1895 where the thirty-nine year-old author and his twenty year-old protégé, Lord Alfred Douglas are vacationing. There are no explicit references to their lifestyle other than that Wilde delights in roaming the streets throwing money to the Algerian boys. The dialogue sparkles with Wilde's witty epigrams, which were taken from his writings. There is an ominous threat which Wilde takes lightly at the end of the First scene of Act One when a letter arrives for young Douglas. His father, whom he claims is mad, has written forbidding him to stay with the famous poet and playwright.

The second scene takes place in a private room of a London restaurant. Wilde arrives after the triumphant première of The Importance of Being Ernest. In the same evening that he has become the toast of London, he has been insulted by the eccentric Marquis of Queensbury, Douglas's father, who brought a bouquet of vegetables to the première to present to the playwright. Wilde is unperturbed by a warning, given to him by his friend, the London editor, Frank Harris, that rumors about his scandalous, unconventional lifestyle might be used by his enemies to hurt him. The scene ends with the blithe, foolhardy and somewhat supercilious celebrity dancing out of the room with a teenage Cockney, named Charlie Parker, stable-boy whom he had invited to join him for an after-the-theatre supper.

Wilde's study is the setting for the third scene of the First Act. Again Frank Harris advises Wilde to be more circumspect. The editor is appalled that the playwright is mixed up

in a family feud, suing Queensbury, with young Douglas's encouragement, for having written that Wilde "poses as a sodomite."[1] After Harris's departure, Wilde cleverly gets back a compromising letter he wrote to Douglas by outwitting rather than paying a blackmailer.

Both scenes of the Second Act take place in the Old Bailey Courthouse in London with Wilde in the witness-box. Carson, Queensbury's defense attorney, cross-examines Wilde about his numerous relationships with working-class young men to whom he has given presents and money. He had taken one on a trip to Paris with him. In the exchange, taken verbatim from excerpts of the actual trial in 1895, Wilde replies as frivolously and flippantly as the characters usually do in his comedies. One such flip reply compromises him. Quizzing him about one young man, Queensbury's barrister asks:

CARSON. Did you ever kiss him?

WILDE. Oh, dear no, he was a peculiarly plain boy, he was. Unfortunately, extremely ugly. I pitied him for it.

CARSON. Was that the reason you did not kiss him?[2]

Aware of the implications of his reply, Wilde suddenly becomes flustered, apologizing for his flippant manner. He loses his composure and becomes tongue-tied as the lawyer hammers relentlessly at his witness for having mentioned that the

---

[1]Sewell and Leslie Stokes, Oscar Wilde (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, p. 1-3-27.

[2]Ibid., 2-1-14.

boy was ugly. There is a blackout.

When the lights comes up:

> THE JUDGE. I shall have to tell the jury that justification was proved, and that it was true in substance and fact that the prosecutor had "posed as a sodomite."
> (The Judge raps with his gavel.)
> I must add that in view of the evidence which has come to light it will be my duty to send the papers in the case to the Public Prosecutor. Gentlemen of the jury--your verdict will be--not guilty.

CURTAIN[1]

In the second scene of the Second Act, Wilde is being tried for sodomy. After one of his young friends, nineteen year-old Charlie Parker, appears as a witness for the prosecution, Wilde is back in the witness box, this time to be interrogated by the Solicitor-General. He is doomed before he attempts to defend himself because of the testimony of the teenager.

In the last act of Oscar Wilde, the playwright is a defeated, broken man after spending two years at hard labor. In the first scene, at his house in Chelsea, Wilde comes home to find some loyal friends waiting to greet him. He has decided that he must have a new name for his new life and hopes to call himself Sebastian Melmoth. Within minutes after he is back home, whatever optimism he has been able to muster in facing the world again is shattered when he learns that his request to spend time at a Catholic retreat has been rejected.

---

[1]Sewell and Leslie Stokes, Oscar Wilde (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, p. 2-1-18.

WILDE (Takes the letter and crumbles it in his hand.)
They won't receive me. Even they won't receive me.
(He sinks into the packing box.)
I thought my punishment was ended. It has just begun.[1]

Wilde is last seen in a small cafe in Paris in the drama's final scene. He has turned to heavy drinking and is in need of money since he survives on a very meager allowance from his estranged wife. Frank Harris pays the waiter what Wilde owes the cafe and Alfred Lord Douglas drops by to leave some money for him. All alone and half-drunk Wilde calls to the waiter just before the curtain comes down.

WILDE. Waiter! Ask the orchestra to play something gay.

WAITER. Something gay? Oui, M'sieur.[2]

Not surprisingly, Lord Alfred Douglas was pleased with the production at the Gate Theatre. In it, he is shown generously and graciously leaving money with the waiter for the man who was destroyed because he unwittingly allowed himself to be used as a pawn by the young nobleman seeking revenge on his despised father.

> I could have wished that poor Wilde had not been shown in the last act drunk on the stage. On the other hand, it is idle to deny that he was drunk, on occasions, at that period of his life, ...I did not see the play myself, because I thought that it would be too painful for me, . . . I am glad to know from the evidence of numerous people who witnessed it that it aroused great sympathy for a man whom

---

[1]Sewell and Leslie Stokes, Oscar Wilde (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, p. 3-1-7.

[2]Ibid., p. 3-2-20.

> I consider to have been cruelly and unjustly treated. . . Let England bear the responsibility for what she did to him.[1]

Frustrated by the Lord Chamberlain's power over the British stage, the proprietor of the Gate Theatre, Norman Marshall, turned to the American stage where, despite the Wales Padlock Law, The Children's Hour had not stirred up any censorship threats--at least in New York City. Calling the American theatre, "the 'white hope' of the English stage," Marshall told an interviewer:

> The latitude permitted on the American legitimate stage, . . . is a tremendous tonic to the English theatre. By latitude I don't mean promiscuous indulgence in bad taste, but rather the tolerance of political and social themes which are impossible under the regulations and traditions as they are in the English theatre. . . .
>
> In the United States you are singularly fortunate in your type of theatre audience whose general sophistication and knowledge of the world make any form of censorship quite unnecessary.[2]

In deciding to put up the money for Oscar Wilde, Marshall's silent American partner, Gilbert Miller, obviously thought it was risky business breaking the New York law by presenting a play about the most famous and infamous internationally known personality ever convicted under British law of being a sex pervert. The Daily News revealed that:

---

[1]Lord Alfred Douglas, "Lord Alfred Douglas Praises Play As Truthful To His Friend," New York Herald Tribune, 9 April 1939.

[2]Lucius Beebe, "Stage Asides," New York Herald Tribune, 25 September 1938.

> Although Gilbert Miller has a financial interest in the successful "Oscar Wilde," it is reported that he is being meticulously careful about allowing his name to be officially mentioned. Mr. Miller thought, before the play was produced, that there may be some hue and cry as there was years ago when he produced "The Captive" which was ultimately closed by the courts.[1]

Gilbert Miller's fears proved unfounded. Except for a rather humorous incident, nothing was heard, during the run of Oscar Wilde, from the individuals and pressure groups who provoked the Broadway police raid in the winter of 1927. Only the United States Navy took exception to Oscar Wilde,--to a single reference that made some service-connected men uncomfortable. "Quip Out," reported the World Telegram:

> A second look at "Oscar Wilde" revealed that the one loud gaffaw in the script has been deleted. In the trial scene, a stable boy, one of Oscar Wilde's proteges turned witness for the prosecution, testified opening night that he had given up the friendship of his strange benefactor and joined the navy.
>
> Some Navy League or other requested the trim. It was made, though Playwright Sewell Stokes cannot understand why it offended "intellectual" New Yorkers, since it concerns the British Navy and thirty years ago.[2]

Walter Winchell reported, "The first night audience may have witnessed theatrical history, at any rate, all of them were spellbound by a fine document, consumately interpreted by a masterful cast. A typically blase first-night carriage trade attendance voted it about ten curtain calls."[3]

---

[1]"Shumlin Gets Wilde Play; WPA Rushes Sillar Drama," New York Daily News, 16 October 1938.

[2]"Quip Out," New York World Telegram, 19 November 1938.

[3]Walter Winchell, "Robert Morley Star," New York Daily Mirror, 11 October 1938.

The New Yorker magazine hailed Oscar Wilde, which opened at the Fulton, 10 October 1938, as an "astonishingly successful attempt to bring the fanciest of all literary figures to life. Heartily recommended, especially for Robert Morley's impressive performance."[1] The same magazine's first-nighter, Wolcott Gibbs, added, "By sticking respectfully to their sources, the authors, Leslie and Sewell Stokes, have succeeded in showing us a traditional wit who is actually witty and a psychopath who is pitiable, but neither is comic or embarrassing."[2]

"There is no smutty leering," John Anderson assured his readers, "nor any attempt to capitalize the abnormality of a perverted genius."[3]

"A very sad story," the Christian Science Monitor reported. "The authors treat it and Wilde with the greatest gentleness, asking their hearers to pity above all."[4] With the single exception of Richard Lockridge, who dismissed Oscar Wilde as "almost overpoweringly unimportant,"[5] the British production was enthusiastically welcomed by the critics for

---

[1]"Goings On About Town," New Yorker, 22 October 1938, p. 2.

[2]Wolcott Gibbs, The Theaters," New Yorker, 22 October 1938, p. 34.

[3]John Anderson, "Robert Morley Stars in 'Oscar Wilde,'" New York Journal American, 11 October 1938.

[4]Arthur Pollock, "The Stage is Very Much Alive," Christian Science Monitor, 18 October 1938.

[5]Richard Lockridge, "The New Play," New York Sun, 11 October 1938.

Manhattan's eight dailies and played 274 performances[1] on Broadway prior to a successful eight week limited-engagement in Los Angeles.

While Oscar Wilde was one of a number of hit dramatic shows of the 1938-39 New York theatrical season, Robert Morley's acting was the single most impressive performance seen on Broadway during that period. The critics for the daily New York newspapers and Gibbs of the New Yorker voted Morley the season's best actor.[2] Five of the first-nighters used the adjective "brilliant" to describe the Englishman's impersonation.

John Mason Brown reported, "Both actor and play came in on gumshoes, but on the following morning the air was filled with the critics' hats." One reviewer said, "For all I know, the audience at the Fulton Theatre may still be cheering Robert Morley."[3]

"Such an ovation as Mr. Morley received has not been heard this season,"[4] Brown noted. The Post reviewer has left us this appraisal of the work of the English actor previously known in America only from his celebrated performance as the

---

[1]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1938-39 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1939), p. 413.

[2]"Name Morley as Season's Best Actor," New York Daily News, 19 January 1939.

[3]"Cheers Greeted Robert Morley As 'Oscar Wilde,'" New York Post, 23 November 1938.

[4]John Mason Brown, "Two On The Aisle," New York Post, 28 October 1938.

effete, pathetic and plump Louis XVI in the MGM motion picture, Marie Antoninette which starred Norma Shearer:

> His assignment is not an easy one. It is fraught with uncommon dangers. One false step, one gesture that went too far, and the ever precarious subject of homosexuality with which the Stokeses deal would become objectionable. But Mr. Morley avoids every pitfall into which a less sensitive actor might have been led.
>
> . . . His is no static creation depending upon its uncanny resemblance to Wilde's photographs. . . . He suggests Wilde in the full arrogance of his wit, in the collapse of his self-confidence, and the pathetic stupor of his final days in Paris.[1]

Oscar Wilde brought overnight stardom to another corpulent actor who bore a striking resemblance to the Irish playwright. In 1940 Laird Cregar played Wilde at the El Capitan Theatre in Hollywood. "The first-night audience went commendably ga-ga over the performance,"[2] reported the Herald-Tribune. As a result, Cregar was signed to a studio contract and zoomed to motion picture stardom. In London, Francis Sullivan also did the title role in a revival at another private playhouse, the Arts Theatre,[3] within days after the Stokes' play proved such a boxoffice sensation on Broadway.

Three years after Oscar Wilde completed its financially lucrative Broadway run, Gilbert Miller ran into trouble because of his connection with the play, but not from either the police

---

[1]John Mason Brown, "Two On The Aisle," New York Post, 28 October 1938.

[2]"Wilde Finally Discovered," New York Herald Tribune, 28 April 1940.

[3]"Arts Theatre," London Times, 26 October 1938.

or pressure groups. Variety reported:

> Frank Harris's widow was awarded $57,767.36 as a result of the infringement of copyright by the 1938 hit play "Oscar Wilde" which ran 40 weeks in New York and eight in Los Angeles. . . . estimated profits were around $75,000 . . . since the author and Marshall . . . are not in this country, it looks as if he (Gilbert Miller) is left holding the bag.[1]

Recalling the hysteria reported and engendered by the press little more than a decade earlier when Mae West attempted to introudce a gay male character to Broadway audiences, one can only wonder at the reception accorded the Stokes' drama. The change is apparent in the variety of reactions of the New York drama critics.

Sidney Whipple of the World-Telegram confessed:

> Plays dealing with deviations from normal relationships between humans generally leave me either in a state of anger or nausea. This one doesn't, first because it is excellently written, second because it shows a shrewd appreciation of the psychology involved in the case, third because it is neither sly nor vicious.[2]

Richard Watts admitted, "Theatrical exhibits on such a theme are generally embarrassing to watch," but "even its detractors could hardly call it an immoral play, since the central character certainly suffers bitterly for his sins even though he doesn't repent them."[3]

---

[1]"Confirms Award On 'Oscar Wilde' Life," Variety, 18 November 1942.

[2]Sidney B. Whipple, "Play On Oscar Wilde Sparkles With Wit," New York World-Telegram, 11 October 1938.

[3]Richard Watts, Jr., "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 11 October 1938.

Burns Mantle wrote, "I question the wisdom of doing the play at all, but I admit freely that it has been well done. Wilde, to Morley, and to the dramatists who have written of him, Leslie and Sewell Stokes, is an unfortunate genius against whom the cards are stacked. Not by man, but by Nature."[1]

Two of the most prestigious of the critics were still using language in the discussions of the Stokes' play that had been in more widespread use in earlier years by reviewers reporting on The Captive and The Drag. Brooks Atkinson, of the Times, in two separate critiques of Oscar Wilde referred contemptuously to the playwright's courtroom ordeal as "unsavory,"[2] a "malodorous scandal,"[3] and a "ghastly case."[4] Wilde's gay orientation, Atkinson called a "disease,"[5] "squalid,"[6] and "pathological infirmities."[7] Describing the Stokeses' drama as enjoying "the fetid odor of one of the world's most pitiful dramas,"[8] the critic for the Times held--as his colleague Richard Watts, Jr. pointed out--"that a play about Wilde should not be presented because it can only bring additional contempt

---

[1]Burns Mantle, "'Oscar Wilde' A Sympathetic Retelling Of An Old Scandal," New York Daily News, 11 October 1938.

[2]Brooks Atkinson, "The Play," New York Times, 11 October 1938.

[3]Brooks Atkinson, "Language's Lord," New York Times, 16 October 1938.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid.

[7]New York Times, 11 October 1938.

[8]Ibid.

and opprobrium upon an unhappy man of genius who suffered enough in his time."[1]

George Jean Nathan did an about-face on the appropriateness of gay themes and characterizations as subject matter for dramatization. Differing with Atkinson on the issue, Nathan still shared with the Times' reviewer similar sentiments concerning gay men.

> Leslie and Sewell Stokes's Oscar Wilde, another English importation, aroused a degree of moral mortification in certain quarters because it treated, naturally and obviously enough, with homosexuals.
>
> To write a play about Oscar and leave out homosexuality would plainly be like writing a play about Florence Nightingale and putting it in. But, aside from the moral aspect of the thing, the point, argued the sensitive ones, is that the spectacle of male phoebes is offensive, distasteful and disgusting.
>
> This seems to me to be defective criticism. That the sons of swish may not in facie curiae constitute an endearing picture, it takes no heated argument with the bartender to prove. But in a world drama that has freely presented almost every other form of abnormal and perverted humanity, most often without objection, they may--if treated honestly and without cheap sensationalism--be allowed their clinical place. In Oscar Wilde they are treated thus frankly, honestly and with no attempt to cheap sensationalism, and it is the rankest kind of hypocrisy to protest against their presentation. If they are, as the moralists insist, offensive, distasteful and disgusting, that is the moralists' business. But it has nothing to do with their dramatic validity or the validity of the playwrights' effort and purpose.[2]

However mortified those moralists of whom Nathan wrote may have been at the dramatization of the trials and tribulations

---

[1]Richard Watts, Jr., "The Theater: Applause and Cheers," New York Herald Tribune, 23 October 1938.

[2]George Jean Nathan, undated, untitled, magazine articule from unknown publication in Oscar Wilde file, Lindoln Center.

of a convicted sodomite, they were strangely mute throughout the show's extensive, highly praised and publicized Broadway engagement.

CHAPTER XII

SIX PLAYS SEEN IN THE 1940S

LADY IN THE DARK

PROOF THROUGH THE NIGHT

OUTRAGEOUS FORTUNE

TRIO

THE DANCER

NO EXIT

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

THE RATS OF NORWAY

The state of the legitimate theatre during World War II, rather than the enforcement of the Wales Padlock Law, accounts for the fact that only three shows with gay characterizations were seen on Broadway from 1939--when Oscar Wilde was such a success--until Trio--about the breakup of a lesbian relationship--was closed in 1945. To begin with, theatrical productions had been drastically reduced during the two decades between the start of the Depression and the start of the Second World War. While there had been as many as 264 productions in the all-time best theatrical season (1927-28),[1]

[1]Harold Clurman, "What Was Broadway's All-Time Best Season?" New York Times, 16 March 1980.

only 72 shows were seen in the 1940-41 season.[1] There was simply little or no place for gay roles during wartime in the paucity of plays being offered on Broadway.

Wartime audiences flocked to musicals such as Oklahoma! and to family comedies such as Life With Father seen in 3,224 performances[2] on Broadway. Serious dramas, with a few notable exceptions, concerned either Allied service personnel on duty abroad or individuals caught up in the political and emotional upheavals that racked Nazi-occupied Europe. Since lesbians and gay men are excluded from serving in the armed forces--if they are identified or identify themselves as such--they were not apparent as characters in World War II dramas about Allied personnel with the single exception of Proof Through the Night about army nurses.

When Thornton Wilder,[3] Tennessee Williams,[4] Emlyn Williams,[5] Noel Coward,[6] and Terence Rattigan[7] turned out Skin of

---

[1]Brooks Atkinson, Broadway (New York: The MacMillian Company, 1970), p. 44

[2]Ibid., p. 394.

[3]Karl Maves, "Samuel M. Steward," Advocate, 24 August 1977.

[4]Mel Gussow, "Tennessee Williams on Art and Sex," New York Times, 3 November 1975.

[5]Herman Shumlin, Interview, New York City, 3 March 1979.

[6]Cole Lesley, Remembered Laughter, The Life of Noel Coward (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), p. 93.

[7]Charles Faber, "On Stage and Screen: Anne Baxter Is Back From Outback," Advocate, 6 March 1980.

Our Teeth, The Glass Menagerie, The Corn Is Green, Blithe Spirit and O Mistress Mine! during this period, none contained characters paralleling these playwright's gay lifestyles.

"During the whole period of almost half a century during which I was a Broadway producer, I suppose homosexual playwrights were always on safer, surer ground writing about heterosexuals, at least personally if not artistically," Herman Shumlin said in discussing Emlyn Williams whose play The Corn Is Green he had directed in 1940. Shumlin continued:

> I remember a conversation I had with Edith Evans who was annoyed at homosexual playwrights for being evasive when they did dramatize material that was obviously a homosexual consideration. "Why can't they come right out with it?" Miss Evans said. She was particularly piqued with Williams, whom she knew, for having been actually dishonest, she felt, in writing a play called Accolade that had failed in a 1950 production in London probably because it did not ring true. It was still very fascinating. About this novelist, happily married with a family, as Williams was, who got mixed up with girls on occasions when he periodically left his family for a weekend.
>
> Williams wanted me to do it since my production of his Corn Is Green worked out so well. Like Miss Evans, I, too, sensed that the play was actually about a homosexual father's dilemma, especially in a very moving scene during which the man tries to explain to his son what he was all about. Williams didn't want to risk being identified by the public with homosexual material that could reflect on his private life anymore than the other homosexual playwrights did. It would have been the end of him not only as a playwright but as a performer.[1]

Apparently some critics and theatregoers also thought they recognized covert gay characters in other plays seen during this same period. Unlike Accolade, some of these plays

---

[1]Herman Shumlin, Interview, New York City, 3 March 1979.

were very successful if, indeed, they involved gay characters. According to critic Kenneth Tynan, "In the plays of Terence Rattigan an obvious homosexual theme was transformed into a heterosexual one to placate the Lord Chamberlain."[1] In his introduction to Gay Plays: The First Collection, editor William M. Hoffman writes:

> Gay theatregoers interpreted two of John Van Druten's comedies of the forties and fifties, The Voice Of The Turtle and Bell, Book and Candle, as hidden gay plays. They saw the first as a disguised pickup situation involving a "straight" soldier, and the second, which is set in an imaginary witch-cult in New York, as a parable of gay underground life.[2]

Sir John Gielgud did not name John Van Druten, who was London-born but a naturalized American citizen, nor any other dramatist when he exclaimed in 1977, "The American playwrights are closet queens and won't come out!" The famous English actor and director told an interviewer:

> In a way, America has protected them and they've all had to cover it up because the public would be a bit shamed if it were out in the open, if they started waving their flags on the battlements.
>
> It's when people die. It was openly stated about Maugham and Coward right after their deaths, but when they were alive, which was before the permissive period, it was always a questionable thing.[3]

---

[1]Kenneth Tynan, Interview on the Dick Cavett Television Show, Channel 13, 13 August 1980.

[2]William M. Hoffman, ed., Gay Plays: The First Collection (New York: Avon Books, 1979), p. xxii.

[3]Clarke Taylor, "Contemporary Elegance At 74: Sir John Gielgud," The Advocate, 1 June 1977.

There was nothing "closeted" about the role Moss Hart wrote for and Danny Kaye portrayed in Lady In The Dark. Kaye was the first performer to appear on the Broadway stage in the 1940s doing a gay impersonation. The comedian, little-known at the time, played a swish-stereotypical "fag" role in the enormously popular Kurt Weil-Ira Gershwin musical starring Gertrude Lawrence. Kaye played Russell Paxton, an effeminate magazine photographer in the 1941 musical in which Hart "transmuted a long, agonizing experience under psychoanalysis into a spectral fantasy."[1] Just a fragment of Russell Paxton's outrageous, "screaming queen" dialogue gives one some idea of what audiences and critics found so humorous:

> RUSSELL. Girls, he's God like! I've taken pictures of beautiful men, but this is the end! He's got a face that would melt in your mouth. . . .[2]

Russell Paxton in Lady In The Dark was little different--except that he was seen in a musical with a plot--than countless other comic "faggot" characters seen for more than half a century in burlesque and vaudeville skits in this country, and in Music Hall entertainments in Britain. During the Trio uproar, George Jean Nathan was outraged because the so-called "moralists" did not appear to be disturbed at the sight of such caricatures as seen in Lady In The Dark, yet petitioned

---

[1]Brooks Atkinson, Broadway (New York: The MacMillian Company, 1970), p. 236.

[2]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1941-42 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1942), p. 141.

the law to stop performances of plays with serious gay character studies. Citing "Laffing Room Only," a musical revue by and starring Ole Olsen and Chic Johnson, produced by Lee and Jay Shubert in 1944, Nathan wanted to know why License Commissioner Paul Moss had not closed that show. The critic wrote, "There is a homosexual episode that should properly be offensive to him, yet . . . he has done nothing about it."[1]

Another comic talent who rose to superstardom on the American stage--as Danny Kaye did in motion pictures--played the only suspect lesbian role seen on Broadway during World War II. Carol Channing, who went on to portray the oversized, kewpie-doll in the musical version of Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, and the matchmaking widow in Hello Dolly, was seen as a lesbian called Steve, described by the author as "a large, raw boned muscular girl who carries herself like a man,"[2] in her second dramatic role on Broadway.

"This is the play that has been causing considerable excitement in Hollywood the last several weeks," Burns Mantle informed readers of the Daily News. "'Cry Havoc' was its original title and it is on its way to a picture production, having been bought by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer."[3] When the studio did film

---

[1]George Jean Nathan,"George Jean Nathan's Theatre Week," New York Journal American, 12 March 1945.

[2]Allan R. Kenwood, Proof Through The Night (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, p. I-i-5.

[3]Burns Mantle, "'Proof Thro' The Night' Is A Vivid Drama Of Woman In War," New York Daily News, 26 December 1942.

"Cry Havoc" with an all-star cast, no lesbian nurse appeared in the motion picture version.

The Broadway production of Cry Havoc, retitled Proof Through The Night for New York theatregoers, was by no means the success it had been in its Hollywood premiere. Negative and lukewarm reviews from Manhattan's newspapermen ended its Broadway engagement 11 performances after it opened on Christmas day, 1942, at the Shubert Theatre.[1] Proof Through The Night had been staged by its author, Allan R. Kenward, and was produced by Lee Shubert; the same year another producer, ailing with a heart condition, was sentenced to six months in the penitentiary for having presented "Wine, Women and Song" in one of the Shubert's theatres.

Since Lee Shubert did not read the scripts he produced, he probably had no idea that one of the group of nurses in the Hollywood hit play was a possible lesbian. Only several of the New York reviewers mentioned the character. "Carol Channing, in spite of some stagy directions, manages to give the hulking, confused Steve some real humanity," the Journal American reported.[2] "A pathetic girl," noted the World-Telegram, "who doesn't know she is abnormal until the cause of her tenderness and solicitude is brutally hurled at her by Miss Locke in a

---

[1]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1942-43 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1943), p. 454.

[2]John Anderson, "Kenward War Play At Morosco," New York Journal American, 26 December 1942.

later regretted outburst of hysteria."[1]

In the second act, Steve, in the scene referred to by the World-Telegram, attempts to comfort another nurse, Grace, who has been hurt.

STEVE (Stroking her head). You've got a fever, honey. Now just relax and let Steve take care of you.

GRACE. Take your big hands off me . . . You can't paw me like you do Connie.

STEVE (Believes her sicker than she really is). Easy, easy, honey . . . Come on now, let's get those clothes off . . . I'll help you . . .

GRACE (Struggling). Take your hands off me, I tell you. Go maul your Connie.

STEVE (Realizing Grace means trouble). What's bothering you, honey?

GRACE. Honey hell--take your paws off me.
(She pushes Steve off balance and the girl falls to the floor)
Always wantin' to put your arms around people . . . Callin' 'em "Honey" and strokin' their hair . . . Why don't you go out there and fight with the rest of the men, . . . you . . . you Freak!

(Steve is stunned. After a moment she gets up stiffly, looking into Grace's face. Unable to believe what she's heard. Slowly the meaning of the accusation hits her. . . .[2]

After Steve goes, Grace tells another nurse to run after her to say that she didn't know what she was saying. When Grace does see Steve in a later scene, she apologizes.

STEVE (Interrupting again). Do the other girls say those things about me?

---

[1]Burton Rascoe, "Theater," New York World-Telegram, 26 December 1942.

[2]Allan R. Kenward, Proof Through The Night, (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, pp. 4-5.

GRACE. Of course not, Steve, it doesn't make any sense.

STEVE. Pat does, doesn't she?

GRACE. Honestly Steve, it was my leg, and you were there just when I didn't want anything more to touch me.

STEVE. Do they really call me a . . . a . . .

GRACE. Please stop talking like that, the whole thing's ridiculous.

STEVE (Moving as though to leave). You shouldn't have said what you did. . . .[1]

Steve cannot forget Grace's attack on her and continues to worry about her sexual identity. She talks to an older nurse.

STEVE. Is there anything wrong with me, Smitty? Am I different from them, Smitty?
(Smitty hesitates and Steve mistakes her pause for embarrassment)
Tell me honest, Smitty, I gotta find out. I'm so confused.

SMITTY. If there was anything wrong with you . . anything you'd be ashamed of, you'd know it. You'd know it here, Steve . . .
(Touches her heart)
. . . long before anybody else.

STEVE. But, I don't, Smitty. I've never even thought . . .

SMITTY (Interrupting). And you mustn't. Right now you're confused . . . hurt . . . Cancers grow from that kind of hurt, Steve--It's a word that hit you below the belt. . . Shake it off while it's still a word, Steve, because accepting it makes it real and gives it a chance to grow. . . .[2]

Steve never does come to terms with herself sexually during the course of the dramatic action. Before the climax

---

[1]Allan R. Kenward, Proof Through The Night, (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, p. 2-8.

[2]Ibid., p. 2-14.

of Proof Through The Night, the unhappy woman is killed attempting to reason with an armed nurse who had been in communication with the Japanese enemy.

An interesting but muddled drama appeared on Broadway in 1943 that faulted the American Jewish minority for its traditional rejection of the gay minority. Rose Franken's Outrageous Fortune contained a dramatized plea for gay tolerance, possibly a first in the English-language public theatre. At the same time, the playwright reiterated the traditional Judiac-Christian concept that lesbian and gay men were deserving of social and personal contempt since most are sick or crippled moral weaklings capable of mending their deviant ways. "By virtue of a facile style," Wolcott Gibbs wrote in the New Yorker, "the author occasionally makes it seem as if she is really saying something about homosexuality and intolerance, but I'm afraid that in the end you just get the idea she is against them."[1]

Outrageous Fortune, George Freedley of The Morning Telegraph reported:

> is the story of a wealthy Jewish family which lives on the nearby shore in a handsome house which is afflicted with anti-Semitism and homosexuality, neither of which the author seems to understand completely, or if she does, she can't communicate it to an audience.[2]

---

[1]Wolcott Gibbs, "The Theatre," New Yorker, 13 November 1943, p. 36.

[2]George Freedley, "Stage Today: New Franken Play Is Confused Piece," New York Telegraph, 5 November 1943.

Robert Garland observed of Franken's drama, "The initial worry is anti-Semitism, while the final worry is homosexuality. Just as if the one had anything to do with the other."[1] To resolve both conflicts the playwright brings a very unusual woman into the Harris' summer home who, during the weekend, also has to deal with a heterosexual marital estrangement. Rose Franken, a popular novelist who had had two Broadway hits: Another Language and Claudia, provoked Burton Rascoe of the World-Telegram to protest that in dealing with matters sexual, "her solutions (such as they are) are more glib and more questionable that those any pseudo-Freudian quack would dare offer."[2]

Crystal Grainger, the playwright's raissoneur, is a handsome, internationally renowned celebrity of uncertain age, "a 'celebrity,'" as Wilella Waldorf noted in the Post, "a somewhat vague distinction having to do chiefly with the fact that she seems to have had a prodigious number of lovers in her time, and once attended a first-night accompanied by her colored maid."[3]

One character enthuses in the play, "Oh, she just happens to be the most talked of woman in America--," to which

---

[1]Robert Garland, "Rose Franken Play Bows On Broadway," New York Journal American, 4 November 1943.

[2]Burton Rascoe, "Theater," New York World Telegram, 4 November 1943.

[3]Wilella Waldorf, "Two On The Aisle," New York Post, 4 November 1943.

another adds, ironically,"Why stop with America--."[1] The author permits none of the characters in Outrageous Fortune to identify this celebrity's claim to fame. "Crystal Grainger is famous not because of what she does, but because of what she is--,"[2] comments a young lady. Not even the young man who introduces Crystal to the rest of the characters knows why she is so internationally acclaimed.

> BARRY. I don't know what you are. I don't know anything about you. Nobody does really. You're an enigma. (His voice deepens almost to tragedy.) But I wish I did know the secret of you, Crystal. I wish to God I could be in love with you. . . .[3]

Crystal Grainger--along with her black maid, Cynthia--is brought to spend a weekend in the summer of 1941 at the Harris' New Jersey beach house by a handsome, twenty-six-year old bachelor who is her neighbor in Greenwich Village. Sensitive, artistic Barry Hamilton, a far-from-successful violinist, is not only suspected of being gay by two other characters in the play, but even comes to suspect himself although he has never been so sexually involved.

Crystal is not the only older female confidante-companion in bachelor Barry's life. His hostess, Madeleine Harris,

---

[1]Rose Franken, Outrageous Fortune, (New York: Samuel French, 1944), p. 39.

[2]Ibid., p. 86.

[3]Ibid., p. 55.

a middle-aged, middle-class Jewish mother of teenagers, has managed to invite him into her home by hiring him as her daughter's violin teacher after meeting him at a concert in Manhattan. Madeleine's husband, Bert, accepts his wife's "protégé" because he does not feel threatened by the relationship which seems to him professional and platonic. "Don't worry," Madeleine's brother-in-law, Julian, says of her friendship with Barry, "he's not interested in girls his own age."[1]

Kitty, who is the fiancée of Julian, Bert's brother, is sexually suspicious of Barry and criticizes him for kissing the frustrated, naive matron.

> BARRY (without guilt). It's no crime to kiss a woman.
>
> KITTY. It is if it doesn't mean anything to you, and it happens to mean a lot to the woman--Poor Madeleine, she was walking on air when she came in.
>
> BARRY. I wish I knew what you are driving at--
>
> KITTY. I'll write it out for you.[2]

Bert Harris is a very successful, self-made stockbroker from a conservative, fundamentalist working-class Jewish family. He is stodgy, insular and suspicious of gentiles. During her weekend with Harris and his family, Crystal Grainger serves not only as a practical psychotherapist and a philosopher who advocates living life to the fullest, but she acts as a sexual therapist as well. In the first act the glamorous gentile.

---

[1]Rose Franken, Outrageous Fortune (New York: Samuel French, 1944), p. 133.

[2]Ibid., p. 112.

who has boasted that, "Some of my best lovers were Jews,"[1] completely captivates both Bert and his sweet, old, emigrant mother.

Crystal's enigmatic character, like the play itself, confused and annoyed some critics. She does not always make sense nor is she philosophically consistent. Throughout Outrageous Fortune, there are clues to Crystal's obvious symbolic identity. When she comes downstairs dressed for dinner and ready to work her sensuous magic on stodgy Bert and shy, sexually insecure Barry, the author describes her stunning entrance. Like a goddess, "CRYSTAL appears on stairs, statuesque as a Grecian figure in a white gown draped in large simple lines."[2]

"You seem to love everybody," Bert remarks to the love goddess in mortal guise. "That's my reputation--,"[3] Crystal replies lightly.

Despite her reputation, the visiting lady does not even like Bert's younger, better-looking and better-educated brother, Julian. Because the young composer does not understand the exclusiveness of "Aphrodite's" amorous activities and appreciation, he is confused that she should reject his idolizing overtures. Crystal is sitting alone in the Harris' living room

---

[1]Rose Franken, Outrageous Fortune (New York: Samuel French, 1944), p. 54.

[2]Ibid., p. 64.

[3]Ibid., p. 104.

when Julian seeks her out. During their strained conversation, she remains guarded and evasive.

JULIAN. Why do you dislike me?

CRYSTAL. Have I said I do?

JULIAN. You don't need to. Your technique is superb.[1]

Because he believes, mistakenly as it turns out, that Barry is not only gay but sexually active, Julian cannot comprehend why Crystal rejects him but accepts her Greenwich Village neighbor. "What has Barry got that I haven't?" he asks her. "So many things,"[2] Crystal replies.

CRYSTAL. I don't deny you've an excellent mind.--Why don't you use it?

JULIAN. What makes you think I don't?

CRYSTAL (weighing her words). Because if I were to ask you a certain question, I know you would give me a certain answer.

JULIAN (rises, a little uncomfortable). You intrigue me. What's the question?

CRYSTAL. It's none of my business to ask it.

JULIAN. At least tell me the answer, and I can work backwards.

CRYSTAL (levelly). The answer would be. What have you got to offer that's better?

JULIAN (after a small pause). Well, what have you?

CRYSTAL (simply). I could weep for you.

JULIAN (with deliberate insolence). That, from you, is very amusing.[3]

---

[1]Rose Franken, Outrageous Fortune (New York: Samuel French, 1944), p. 96.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., pp. 97-98.

Julian has a young, gay lover--as Crystal is well aware--with whom he is collaborating on an operetta. His engagement to a spirited ambitious Jewish girl, Kitty, is a platonic arrangement to which she has agreed for mutual social convenience and financial betterment.

When Bert joins them, he asks his brother and his house-guest, "Oh, you two know each other?"[1] As confused at her contradictory character as is Julian--along with most of the drama critics--Bert asks Crystal, "What doctrine are you preaching, anyway?" She replies, "Purity."[2]

Julian had planned to go into Manhattan to spend the weekend in "conference" with the young lyricist, but changes his mind when he learns that Crystal and Barry will be overnight guests. Kitty, his frustrated fiancée, is pleased with his change of plans until she realizes that the man to whom she is engaged is interested in Barry. Kitty turns viciously on the Greenwich Village violinist.

> KITTY. . . . I bet you played with dolls when you were young, didn't you, darling?
>
> BERT. Kitty! Stop that!
>
> BARRY (quietly). No, Kitty, I didn't play with dolls. But I did housework and cooking, because after my father died there wasn't any money, and my mother, who had never worked before, had to get a job. The boys on the block used to call me sissy. Maybe I was. Maybe I am, according to the way you see things.[3]

---

[1]Rose Franken, Outrageous Fortune (New York: Samuel French, 1944), p. 98.

[2]Ibid., p. 102.

3Ibid., pp. 128-129.

Barry is such a generous, magnanimous gentleman that even after Kitty has insulted him, he offers to take her home. He leads her away sobbing and screaming that she hates her fiancé, much to the Harris family's confusion and dismay.

While Barry is taking the hysterical neighbor home, Julian and Madeleine, who have never been compatible, become involved in a conversation during which it becomes apparent that she is aware of his sexual predilliction and he is becoming increasingly open about it. After telling his sister-in-law that she is not everything a wife ought to be, he softens his attack:

> JULIAN. Face it, Madeleine. We're both misfits, only you're afraid to admit it.
>
> MADELEINE (bloodlessly). Perhaps you're right.[1]

Fed up with his family, Julian rages:

> JULIAN. But God damn it, why suffer about it! What's so rotten about loving or not loving that you're all ashamed of it? You make love rotten--you damn it back into a half light that distorts it and makes it ugly. There isn't one of you who's fit to throw the first stone at me. No--not even Bert--[2]

He concludes their uncomfortable exchange exasperated:

> JULIAN. . . . Christ, I'd rather be what I am--and know it![3]

Everyone has retired for the night, except Julian, when Barry returns. After refusing to join him in a nightcap, Barry

---

[1]Rose Franken, Outrageous Fortune (New York: Samuel French, 1944), p. 141.

[2]Ibid., p. 142.

[3]Ibid.

suggests that Julian get in touch with his financée in order to resolve their differences.

> JULIAN. I'm not interested in Kitty. She knows it. And you know it.[1]

Barry does not know what Julian is talking about, nor is he aware of the other man's designs on him. With increasing candour, Julian explains why it is all for the best that the wedding be called off since Kitty does not interest him physically.

> JULIAN (with implication). That's why she'd be a fool to go through with it. So would I.
>
> BARRY (stiffening). What are you trying to say?
>
> JULIAN (gently). I'll explain it to you in the garden--
>
> (He puts his hand on BARRY's arm. Barry finally gets the full significance of the overture, and steps back quickly, knocking over a bronze ashtray. It falls to the floor with a heavy thud. CRYSTAL enters . . .
>
> JULIAN (grinding it out). In the future keep your hands off me--[2]

Crystal, who has overheard the end of the men's conversation, is not fooled by this ruse. After Julian storms off with feigned indignation, she turns to bewildered Barry. He is shaken by the incident in which the unscrupulous cad tried to get away with the impression that it was Barry who had provoked the disturbance by making an unwelcome sexual advance. While Barry talks candidly to Crystal about his sexual insecur-

---

[1]Rose Franken, Outrageous Fortune (New York: Samuel French, 1944), p. 143.

[2]Ibid., p. 144.

ities, she, appropriately, sits on a love seat.

BARRY. . . . maybe Kitty was right in what she said tonight! If she isn't, why should these things happen to me?

CRYSTAL (unemotionally). No mystery about it. You were born with a few too many F cells in your body.

BARRY (passionately). I didn't ask to be made that way!

CRYSTAL. Do any of us? Did Bert ask to be born a Jew? Or Cynthia, a negress--Or me?--What I am? It's the thing that brings us together, I wouldn't be surprised. We all have to beat our stars.

BARRY. What happens if we don't?

CRYSTAL. Julian.--And maybe Madeleine?[1]

The twenty-six year old bachelor admits that he is not a virgin. Once, he made love to an older woman, who, when he was a youngster, had been his violin teacher.

BARRY. . . . Years later, I met her again, right after my mother died. I was lonesome, I guess-- . . .

CRYSTAL (broodingly). There was no one in your life you really loved--

BARRY. My father.

CRYSTAL. And no one else--ever?

BARRY (with increasing difficulty). Yes--A boy who lived on our block. In one of those big private houses. He went to France the second summer I knew him. My mother found a letter I was writing to him. She thought it was to a girl.--I never finished the letter. I never wanted to see him again. (With suppressed intensity) And I hated my mother for what she did to me. She made me ashamed for no reason. She frightened me about myself.[2]

CRYSTAL. Be glad. If you didn't feel the pain of conflict, you'd be like all the poor young men, who wouldn't help

---

[1]Rose Franken, Outrageous Fortune (New York: Samuel French, 1944), pp. 145-146.

[2]Ibid., pp. 147-148.

themselves if they could. Boys of twenty and twenty-five without a ground tone in their voices, poor darlings. There's hope for all of them--while they suffer.--There's even hope for Julian now.[1]

Crystal is ready to help Barry escape the gay underworld.

BARRY (in humility). I told Madeleine tonight that it took a certain greatness to be your lover--I wish I had that greatness.

CRYSTAL. You have. (She bends to lay her cheek against his head for a fleeting instant, BARRY, motionless, watches her as she moves across the room to the stairs. He rises slowly to follow her, as

THE CURTAIN FALLS[2]

Act III takes place the following evening. Before leaving for Manhattan earlier in the day, Julian has, as Crystal predicted, spread the slander that Barry had made offensive sexual advances to him. To make matters worse, Kitty has made an unsuccessful attempt at suicide, and there are rumors implicating Barry in the breakup of her engagement to Julian. Mrs. Harris discusses her bachelor son with Andy, the family doctor, who tries to allay her anxieties.

MRS. HARRIS. . . . Something is wrong between Julian and Kitty.

ANDY. You certainly are imagining things, Mother Harris.

MRS. HARRIS. No, Andy. Julian was always a strange boy.--I could see it more than Bert.

ANDY (acknowledging it). If Bert loves a person he's blind.

---

[1]Rose Franken, Outrageous Fortune (New York: Samuel French, 1944), p. 148.

[2]Ibid., p. 149.

MRS. HARRIS. But I am not blind. I do not know what it is in Julian, but I know he cannot make a woman happy.

ANDY. That's a brave thing for a mother to say.[1]

While Mrs. Harris is suspicious about her son, Gertrude, the doctor's wife, is certain that Barry is not gay.

GERTRUDE (bridling). Listen, I was a trained nurse--I know a thing or two.--Anyway, Barry's no more that kind than the man in the moon. Andy says he's a borderline case--why push him all the way?[2]

Crystal, who does not think highly of Barry's musical talents, has gotten Bert to offer him a job in his office. Gertrude and Andy fear that nothing will come of Bert's promise of employment.

GERTRUDE (skeptically). That was before this mess. He's not going to believe Barry against his own brother.

ANDY. I'm afraid Gertrude's right. Bert thinks Jews were born with morals in place of sex.[3]

By seducing Barry and making "a real man" of him, and by causing Bert to fall in love for the first time, Crystal succeeds in resolving both men's relationships with Madeleine, which in turn, solves her emotional and sexual frustrations. Madeleine is grateful to Crystal for teaching Bert about love. Now he is ready to be a real husband, and Madeleine is no longer afraid that she will become either mad or sexually promiscuious by "having lovers in the astray (sic)."[4]

---

[1]Rose Franken, Outrageous Fortune (New York: Samuel French, 1944), p. 158.

[2]Ibid., p. 167.

[3]Ibid., p. 166.

[4]Ibid., p. 182.

MADELEINE. . . . I want to be married to a man . . ., a full man with the capacity to love me--even if he had to love another woman first to learn the art of love.[1]

Crystal's liaison with Barry is so miraculous that he is no longer interested in relationships with older women. Overnight Kitty has become the object of his affection.

BARRY. I thought I'd like to take a run over to see Kitty. --God, I felt sorry for her last night.

MADELEINE. I think it's a beautiful idea, Barry.-- . . .[2]

Another of Outrageous Fortune's conflicts comes to a climax when gay, and guilt-ridden Julian announces to Bert, the Jewish family man, naive, rigid and conventional, that he is moving away from the East Coast.

BERT. Alone?

JULIAN (raucously). No, I'm taking a nurse maid with me.

BERT (in stunned realization). You're going with that boy--Russell Train--

JULIAN (defiantly). So what? We're doing a musical--

BERT (stunned). God--

JULIAN. I shouldn't have come back in the first place. I hate like hell doing this to you. (Picks up his hat)

BERT (heavily). It's not what you've done to me. It's what you've done to yourself. To your race.

JULIAN (harshly). I've got no obligations to my race. What's it ever done for me except to be a millstone around my neck--[3]

---

[1]Rose Franken, Outrageous Fortune (New York: Samuel Franch, 1944), p. 182.

[2]Ibid., p. 172.

[3]Ibid., p. 189.

Old Mrs. Harris enters. Julian informs her that he is leaving. He kisses his mother goodbye, and turns to his brother.

JULIAN. If there was anything else to do except what I'm doing, I suppose I'd do it. But there isn't.--

(He exits)

MRS. HARRIS (quietly). Do not close the door on him.

BERT (thickly). What do you mean, Mom?

MRS. HARRIS. This time, when he comes back, I will not be here.

BERT (robustly). Nonsense!

MRS. HARRIS. Always, ever since you were a little boy, you did not like to think about things that you did not want to happen. That does not keep them from happening--You are still a little boy.[1]

During his final conversation with Crystal in the last scene of Outrageous Fortune, Bert claims that he understands his wife's passing, romantic but platonic infatuation with a handsome, attentive young man.

CRYSTAL. I'm glad you understand her. Try to understand Barry, too. He's a poor lost lad, looking for the mother he never had in the woman he wants to love.--and Madeleine? She doesn't know what she's looking for. Perhaps it's you.

BERT (a little solidly, a little resentfully). I've been here.

CRYSTAL. She couldn't find you. Your soul was too shrouded in virtue.

BERT. What are you preaching now? The value of sin?

CRYSTAL. Some of us need to sin to become sinless.[2]

---

[1]Rose Franken, Outrageous Fortune (New York: Samuel French, 1944), p. 190-191.

[2]Ibid., p. 194.

Bert finds it easier to accept his wife's romantic interest in a younger man than he does to accept his brother's sexual preference. Crystal tries to reason with him.

CRYSTAL. . . . Have courage to realize that your goodness holds the seeds of all the Barrys and the Julians in the world.

BERT (numb). Julian?

CRYSTAL. A part of you has always known about Julian for a long time. A part of you is responsible for Julian.

BERT (rousing to violently). That isn't true! He's my own brother but I'd rather see him dead than the thing that he's become. He's betrayed his race at a time when we need all our strength and honour!

CRYSTAL. He's betrayed himself. That's the real pity of it. He needs you, Bert, and your answer to his need is your salvation.

BERT. I tell you, I'd rather see him dead.

CRYSTAL (austerely). If he were ill or crippled, would you turn against him?[1]

Barry comes into the room.

BERT. Julian was here. If there's anything you want to say, I'll try to understand.

(There is a short silence in which BARRY realizes that he has a chance to clear himself of JULIAN'S implications. He makes his choice.)

BARRY. No, Bert, there isn't.

BERT (with an effort that leaves him drained). . . . it would be nice if you could commute with me from the office.

BARRY (in full significance). Thank you, Bert.[2]

---

[1]Rose Franken, Outrageous Fortune (New York: Samuel French, 1944), pp. 194-195.

[2]Ibid.

By confirming Barry's acceptance of the job offer he has made to the young violinist, Bert, apparently recognizes that magnanimous Barry is innocent of Julian's calumny. His reference to commuting indicates his approval of Barry's interest in Kitty.

With Crystal's guidance, Bert and Barry are now ready to respond to the love of the two women who have suffered so much from want of masculine affection in Outrageous Fortune. The mysterious visiting lady is unable to reach Julian since he has rejected the love of women. She is also unable to reconcile Bert to his brother's lifestyle for which she inexplicably holds him responsible. In the final moments of the play, Crystal slips into the next room to expire. The lady who gave her heart to so many dies of heart failure.

In her autobiography, When All Is Said And Done, Rose Franken wrote, "Because I had something to say that I felt needed saying during those early war years, I started to write Outrageous Fortune."[1] Reviewers, almost without exception, however, both in Boston and New York, employed the words "confused," "confusing," or "muddled," in reacting to Franken's work. The playwright replied in an interview almost a month after the play's premiere:

> I haven't gotten over being astonished when some of the critics said the play was confusing. If I've chosen to let the public do its own chewing on the theme, instead of handing out a predigested package, neatly labeled,

---

[1]Rose Franken, When All Is Said And Done (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1963), p. 277.

> does it matter, as long as our audiences are entertained and absorbed? . . . It's all there. Once you're born, its settled what your handicaps are going to be. Maybe you're a Jew, maybe you have too many F cells in your body. The only question is: what are you going to do with yourself as you are? "It doesn't hurt us to be hurt," says the old grandmother in the play.[1]

The character in the play with too many F cells--as Franken diagnosed gay sexual propensities--went to bed with a female, as she suggested to "beat his stars." Bert overcame his outrageous fortune of being born Jewish, according to the Jewish-born author, by rejecting traditional, puritanical Jewish concepts of morality. In her recommendation that American minorities assimilate by rejecting their racial heritage or their sexual preference, Franken seemed to have no solution, however, for blacks since Crystal's maid, Cynthia, in Outrageous Fortune is afforded no opportunity to "pass for white."

Producer John Golden rejected the script because he could not understand the characters.[2] Gilbert Miller, who produced Outrageous Fortune, announced its closing after reading the adverse reviews in the Boston dailies. "The Boston intellects . . . " Franken recalled, "agreed with John Golden that they didn't know what I was talking about in my latest play."[3] Only L. A. Sloper of the Christian Science Monitor

---

[1]Helen Ormsbee, "Rose Franken Says Playwrighting Like Piecrust Needs Light Hand," New York Herald Tribune, 28 November 1943.

[2]Rose Franken, When All Is Said And Done (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1963), p. 277.

[3]Ibid., p. 297.

dissented, hailing it as "a brilliant, subtle, moving drama."[1]

Outrageous Fortune went on to Broadway when the author-director's husband, William Brown Meloney, took over the production from Miller. It opened at the Forty-eighth Street Theatre on 3 November 1943. Elsie Ferguson, the veteran stage and screen star, "who at the peak of her stardom," Variety reminded theatregoers, "was generally regarded as America's most beautiful actress,"[2] came out of a fourteen-year voluntary retirement to play Crystal. The New York premiere sold out as the curious flocked to see the sixty-year-old star's return to the Broadway stage. Franken recalled that on opening night, "the play came across without a flaw in the performance, and the applause at the final curtain was deafening. Nevertheless, the reviews the next morning were not unamimously enthusiastic."[3]

Burns Mantle reported that, "The press reception of 'Outrageous Fortune' was surprisingly friendly. Even those reviewers who could not generously approve of it admitted its interest-exciting qualities and the excellence of the performance given it."[4] Mantle thought so well of Franken's contro-

---

[1]L. A. Sloper, "Outrageous Fortune," Boston Christian Science Monitor, 19 October 1943.

[2]Ibee., "Outrageous Fortune," Variety, 10 November 1943.

[3]Rose Franken, When All Is Said And Done, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1963), p. 305.

[4]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1943-44 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1944), p. 8.

versial drama, that he included a synopsis in The Best Plays of the 1943-44 Season.[1] Seventeen years earlier the veteran critic for the Daily News had refused to include The Captive in his annual yearbook of the drama.

Outrageous Fortune, which the author called, "a good play, although a little ahead of its time,"[2] impressed Richard P. Cooke of the Wall Street Journal for this very reason.

> Miss Franken has tackled, among others, two of society's most troublesome subjects: The place of the Jew in his environment, and that of the abnormal male. She succeeds in treating these problems, which most people discuss in whispers, if at all, with good taste and aplomb. She does not offer a solution, or contribute a great deal that is original, but she says it rather originally.[3]

Among the playwright's critical detractors, Burton Rascoe contended that she "has bitten off more than she can chew,"[4] while Robert Garland complained that Franken, "bit off more than I could chew last night at the Forty-eight Street theatre."[5] Lewis Nichols of the Times called Outrageous Fortune, "confused and complex," because the author "touches upon middle-age, normal love, profane love between members of the two sexes,

---

[1]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1943-44 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1944), pp. 198-235.

[2]Rose Franken, When All Is Said And Done (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc. 1963), p. 305.

[3]Richard P. Cooke,"The Theater," Wall Street Journal, 4 November 1943.

[4]Burton Rascoe, "Theater," New York World-Telegram, 4 November 1943.

[5]Robert Garland, "Rose Franken Play Bows On Broadway," New York Journal American, 4 November 1943.

homosexuality, the tradition of the family, fear, sickness and anti-Semitism."[1] Howard Barnes concluded:

> The result is an ungainly dramatic structure, with almost no resolution of the themes she sounds at the outset of the piece. The fact remains that it is good to find an author trying to communicate something of consequence to an audience.[2]

Of all the critics writing for the New York dailies, Louis Kronenberger of PM was the harshest:

> She not only confuses, she falsifies. Her people talk elaborate folderol, but never shed any light. Her wise lady, in particular, is a trial and an absurdity, really wise women don't come to strange houses and spend the weekend playing god.[3]

Louis Kronenberger's denunciation of the popular author of numerous romantic stories about a young housewife named Claudia--who later became the protagonist of a successful Broadway play and of a couple of Hollywood movies--unsettled Franken. Twenty years later she was still smarting at Kronenberger's evaluation of her talents and intelligence.[4] "Such as they are, Mrs. Franken's real gifts lie in a far more housefrauish direction, when, for example, she talks about food, she makes sense."[5]

---

[1]Lewis Nichols, "The Play," New York Times, 4 November 1943.

[2]Howard Barnes, "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 4 November 1943.

[3]Louis Kronenberger, "'Outrageous Fortune' Very Fancy BUT VERY FOOLISH," New York Newspaper PM, 4 November 1943.

[4]Rose Franken, When All Is Said And Done (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1963), p. 307.

[5]New York Newspaper PM, 4 November 1943.

Wolcott Gibbs reported in the 13 November 1943 issue of the New Yorker, "Broadway is enjoying one of the greatest booms in history."[1] Gibbs cited four plays reviewed negatively by the critics, Outrageous Fortune among them, that were boxoffice hits.[2] "Her play," Burton Rascoe predicted on opening night, "will be violently denounced, violently upheld, liked and discussed with heat--which will attest to its vitality and to its interest as sheer entertainment."[3] Variety reported that, "After premiere, Fortune jumped to capacity, and surprised even Broadway."[4] "For ten weeks," Burns Mantle recorded, "arguments for and against the drama's statements and conclusions were freely spoken. When by that time a paying response on the part of the public had not developed, 'Outrageous Fortune' was withdrawn."[5]

The New York critics were as unanimous in their raves for Elsie Ferguson in her triumphant return to the Broadway stage, as they were divided as to the meaning and the worth of the vehicle provided her by Rose Franken. Incredibly enough, the character of Crystal Grainger was as puzzling to the actress

---

[1]Wolcott Gibbs, "The Theater," New Yorker, 13 November 1943.

[2]Ibid., p. 36.

[3]Burton Rascoe, "Theater," New York World Telegram, 4 November 1943.

[4]Rose Franken, When All Is Said And Done (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company,Inc., 1963), p. 302.

[5]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1943-44 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1944), p. 8.

who created it on the stage as it was to critics and audiences. Ferguson confided to an interviewer before the play's New York opening:

> I really don't know what it's all about, but I shall manage I guess. I've never been really baffled by a play yet. . . . Rose Franken is of a mind that one of the best advertisements for a show is an audience that is slightly baffled when it leaves the theatre.[1]

Two decades later the playwright still remained closed-mouth about the most puzzling aspect of her drama when she recalled its production in her memoirs.[2] Also puzzling is the fact that in her autobiography, Franken, in explaining how she went about casting the show, wrote that she selected an ex-prize fighter to play "the sensitive homosexual,"[3] yet Barry is not presented as being gay in the play, only a "borderline case,"[4] with "a few too many F cells."[5]

Dean Norton, the ex-prize fighter and baseball player, who played the thankless part of Barry failed to impress the critics. "After all," George Freedley explained, "a character can be too much praised in a play."[6] An actor named Brent

---

[1]Lucius Beebe, "Stage Asides: If We Recall 'Such A Little Queen,'" New York Herald Tribune, 31 October 1943.

[2]Rose Franken, When All Is Said And Done (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1963), pp. 277-308.

[3]Ibid., p. 286.

[4]Rose Franken, Outrageous Fortune (New York: Samuel French, 1944), p. 146.

[5]Ibid., p.167.

[6]George Freedley, "Stage Today: New Franken Play Is Confused Piece," New York Morning Telegraph, 5 November 1943.

Sargent, on the other hand, was singled out by many of the reviewers for his impressive performance as the defiant, promiscuous and caddish Julian. "Brent Sargent making his Broadway debut," Robert Garland wrote, "handled the trying and tricky role of the boy who meets boy with taste and skill."[1] Ward Morehouse observed that Sargent's was, "one of the most forceful performances you'll see in many months of playgoing."[2] Only the man from Variety had a complaint about the actor Franken selected to play her overt gay character. "Brent Sargent may be a bit too handsome as the erring Julian, but plays the part well."[3]

Julian Harris, Rose Franken's guilt-ridden yet defiant American-Jew, was the only unmistakably and admittedly gay male character seen in a serious drama produced on the Broadway stage in the 1940s. Outrageous Fortune in which her handsome cad appeared was also the only play seen by New York audiences during that whole decade that addressed itself to the status of the gay American male. "As a drama of ideas, it belongs in the kindergarten,"[4] scoffed critic Wolcott Gibbs, while

---

[1]Robert Garland, "Rose Franken Play Bows On Broadway," New York Journal American, 4 November 1943.

[2]Ward Morehouse, "The New Play," New York Post, 4 November 1943.

[3]Ibee., "Outrageous Fortune," Variety, 10 November 1943.

[4]Wolcott Gibbs, "The Theatre," New Yorker, 13 November 1943, p. 36.

the author countered that it was "a little ahead of its time."[1] Indeed, its subject matter, as the reviewer for the Wall Street Journal reminds us, was still discussed "in whispers, if at all,"[2] as late as 1943.

"The novel upon which Outrageous Fortune was based," the playwright revealed for the very first time almost three decades after her play was produced on Broadway, "was suppressed, withdrawn from circulation, after it was published in 1935. That's how far ahead of its time I was with the subject of homosexuality."[3]

Franken bristled at the observation that Outrageous Fortune contained the very first plea for tolerance of the gay male ever heard on the English-speaking stage. The author protested indignantly:

> I intended no such thing! I was not sympathetic to homosexuals back then, and I'm still not--only to those who want to change. Only those will I tolerate. I was sympathetic to women who unhappily became involved with them. That's what my novel, Twice Born, was about: three such women. I've never revealed that before, but Outrageous Fortune was the dramatization of my novel which was suppressed in the mid-thirties when the subject of homosexuality was hardly mentionable in normal conversation.
>
> Read Twice Born and you'll understand how I feel about homosexuals. The men are in the novel, but they became more important in my stage version, especially that awful pervert Julian. And I did not mean to equate Jews and blacks with homosexuals in the play. My family was partly Jewish, and I always considered it to be an

---

[1]Rose Franken, When All Is Said And Done (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1963), p. 22.

[2]Richard P. Cook, "The Theatre," Wall Street Journal, 4 November 1943.

[3]Rose Franken, Interview by telephone, New York City, 15 January 1980.

> advantageous, a very special thing to be part of a minority. But the homosexuals aren't. They are sick and their liberation movement, like the women's, almost makes me sick. I never needed to be liberated by anyone! Neither do the homosexuals--they just need to change their ways.[1]

In her eighty-fifth year, Rose Franken does not recall including a plea by both Crystal and old Mrs. Harris for tolerance of gay men in Outrageous Fortune. "The only plea I wanted to make was that they straighten themselves out," the author reiterated, "and stop hurting women who fall for them."[2]

Eighteen years after the passage of the 1927 state law prohibiting the dramatization of sex perversion on the New York stage the statute was finally challenged. The resulting public clamor became a theatrical cause célèbre. The controversy centered around Commissioner of Licenses Paul Moss, a political appointee, who would have become Broadway's first censoring Lord Chamberlain had not the Dunnigan Bill been scuttled. Deprived of that position of power in 1937, Moss made a bid for it eight years later when he closed Trio, a drama about the breakup of a lesbian relationship.

Seemingly the most vulnerable of all shows puritanical Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia objected to seeing on Broadway, Trio had been running for two months at the Belasco Theatre in clear violation of the New York State Penal Code.

---

[1]Rose Franken, Interview by telephone, New York City. 15 January 1980.

[2]Ibid.

When the Commissioner of Licenses, who had never seen the show, abruptly terminated its engagement, there was an immediate outcry by theatre people--from stars to stagehands, from producers to playwrights--as well as from such supporters as the American Civil Liberties Union.

The closing of Trio in 1945, and the aftermath, made those who had provoked it so uncomfortable that never again in the history of the American theatre did any individual or pressure group instigate legal or political action to shut down a Broadway show because it contained a gay character though the law remained on the statute books prohibiting such stage portraits until 1967. Both LaGuardia and his License Commissioner, whom he had supported, were not only criticized, but they were roundly ridiculed by the press and other politicians.

Legitimate theatre mogul Lee Shubert instigated the crisis by insisting that Moss approve of the drama with a lesbian role before booking it into his theatres even though the License Commissioner was not legally empowered to make such a judgment. The Protestant minister whom Moss claimed to have accommodated by closing Trio was at least devious if not downright dishonest in drafting his petition complaining to the mayor about lesbianism as the subject matter of the play.[1] Both Shubert and the Protestant minister were faulted for their involvement in the case. Ultimately Moss was chastised by

---

[1]Wolcott Gibbs, "The Theatre," New Yorker, 10 March 1945, p. 40.

politically expedient LaGuardia--who had probably put him up to it[1]--for unilaterally closing a show. The mayor even proposed an amendment to the Penal Code that would, in future, as Actors' Equity predicted, "spare the theatre a reign of terror through the illegal and irresponsible action of a city official."[2]

"A United Theatre Defeats Official Censorship,"[3] announced Equity magazine in February of 1945, but the victory did not help those involved in the production and performance of the ill-fated show. Public performances of the lesbian love drama were still in clear violation of Section 1140-A of the Criminal Code. Nor was the support by theatre people, drama critics, and civil rights activists of a drama with a lesbian antagonist sufficient to abet the continuing emergence of gay characterizations on the American stage.

The fate of Trio and the financial loss suffered when the show was closed,[4] served to remind producers, playwrights, and financial backers that censorship was still possible under the Wales Law. Until Lee Shubert brought that fact to public attention again, the Penal Law's 1927 prohibitions had simply

---

[1]"Critical and Amusements," New York Newspaper PM, 2 March 1945.

[2]"A United Theatre Defeats Official Censorship," Equity, February 1947, p. 7.

[3]Ibid., p. 5.

[4]"Sues For $1,000,000 In Closing of 'Trio,'" New York Times, 3 March 1945.

been ignored ever since the success of The Green Bay Tree in 1933.

One year after Trio was closed, a lesbian character was seen again on Broadway in No Exit by Jean Paul Sartre. Nothing was heard from "the morality forces,"[1] according to Burns Mantle, during the month long engagement of Sartre's drama; still there was one very good reason why other plays with gay motifs or gay characters were not to be seen on Broadway until a few years into the next decade.

Lee Shubert's understandable fear, not only of losing the license on one of his theatres, but of being sent to prison for breaking the Penal Code, appears to have had a weighty role in the hiatus during the post World War II period of gay genre dramas,even after No Exit was performed without harassment. In 1942 the Shubert brothers had leased one of their theatres to the producer of "Wine, Women and Song," a revue consisting of classic vaudeville and burlesque acts. Despite his heart condition, the producer of the revue was sentenced to a six-month penitentiary term[2] in the only court case in which the Wales Padlock Amendment to the Criminal Code was cited in revoking the license to operate a theatre for a period of a year.

---

[1]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1944-45 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1945), p. 9.

[2]"Producer Of Show Is Sent To Jail," New York Times. 18 December 1942.

Until 1956, when the government ordered the breakup of the Shubert monopoly, the corporation controlled the major number of legitimate theatres in the United States. The Padlock Law was not rescinded during Lee Shubert's lifetime. Only after his death in the early '50s did producers begin to present additional plays with gay themes and characters, again ignoring, as they had over a period of a dozen years, the law that had so intimidated the theatre mogul in the 1940s. In his biography of the Shubert brothers, Jerry Stagg wrote, "The New York Times remarked that there seemed to be two kinds of censorship in the theatre: one was the Wales act, on the statute books, and the second was a Shubert fist."[1]

Perhaps because no mention was ever made of its gay motif in the advertisements for Outrageous Fortune, Franken's drama was never threatened by officers of the law during its 77 performances.[2] Two years later when ads for Trio identified the drama's subject matter, those advertisements provoked the controversy that climaxed with the termination of the show's engagement. When Fiorello H. LaGuardia was mayor of New York City it did not pay to advertise a show that was breaking a state law, especially when the ads themselves were prohibited by New York's Criminal Code.

---

[1]Jerry Stagg, The Brothers Shubert (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 353.

[2]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1943-33 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1944), p. 423.

Two of the three lesbian characters seen in Broadway productions during the 1940s were even more personally unattractive than vindictive Julian Harris in Outrageous Fortune. The pathetic, affectionate and confused nurse played by Carol Channing in Proof Through the Night, with, as one critic noted, "real humanity,"[1] stood in striking contrast to the two other lesbian portraitures seen during the decade of the Second World War. In Trio, Dorothy and Howard Baker wrote of an evil and corrupt female Svengali. Jean Paul Sartre's lesbian in No Exit stole a man's wife and then drove her to suicide.

Dorothy Baker, who had written a popular novel, Young Man With A Horn, was aided by her husband, Howard, in dramatizing another, less successful novel, Trio, which, critic John Chapman noted, "won prizes in California from sobersided judges as the work of a native daughter."[2] The stage version of Trio was never published, but the novel on which it was based is structured very much like the play. Divided into three parts with only two settings, it has a small cast of characters. Since the reviewers' references to the drama's plot and characterizations match those in the rather brief novel, the book gives us a very good idea of the play that was performed trouble-free in Philadelphia, Boston and Los Angeles, but became the cause célèbre of the 1944-45 theatrical season

---

[1]John Anderson, "Kenward War Play Opens At Morosco," New York Journal American, 26 December 1942.

[2]John Chapman, "'Trio' Marks Time As Shubert Stands On Landlord Rights," New York Daily News, 8 November 1944.

in New York.

The reviewer for Women's Wear Daily provided this synopsis of Trio's very simple plot.

> The story concerns a young girl student at the university who belongs body and soul to an older woman, a sophisticated and fascinating French woman endowed with charm and intellect. A young boy falls in love with the girl and hopes to marry her, but when he realizes the abnormal attachment the two women have formed for each other, his reaction is instantaneous and natural. He is repulsed and horrified, and turns his wrath upon the girl. A few hours later, however, he reconsiders and returns to take the girl away from the woman and to eventual security and happiness.[1]

Producer Lee Sabinson hired Bretaigne Windust, director of the comedy hits Life With Father and Arsenic and Old Lace, to stage Trio. There was nothing very funny about the drama of a pretty, young student falling into the perverted clutches of one of her instructors, yet the authors did provide audiences with a single amusing line of dialogue. "The premiere afforded one solid laugh," reported Robert Coleman of the Daily Mirror, "'I came to college to get an education,' avowed the prof's victim, 'and I got it!' The first nighters howled."[2]

Czech-born actress Lydia St. Clair--seen previously on Broadway in 1940 in Flight To The West--played the lesbian villainess. Richard Widmark and Lois Wheeler, who had also made favorable impressions on the critics in their Broadway

---

[1]Eleanor Monroe, "Belasco," Women's Wear Daily, 2 January 1945.

[2]Robert Coleman, "'The Captive' Theme Restated by 'Trio,'" New York Daily Mirror, 30 December 1944.

debuts, were cast by Windust as the tough-fibred young man and the professor's so-called protégée. Cue magazine reported:

> When he and the girl fall in love the scene becomes rich with conflicts and excitements that make for audience interest. Having this much in hand, unfortunately, the authors haven't always chosen to make the most of it. Actually, you are more interested in Pauline Maury herself, than in the resolving struggle. She is a powerful, ambitious, ruthless and shockingly opportunistic woman, and Lydia St. Clair brings to the role a brilliant falseness, as fascinating as it is unpleasant. Turning, twisting, moving with a nervous tension from bullying to charm all within the same moment, she makes the other characters pale and frail in comparison. Richard Widmark and Lois Wheeler as the man and girl are never quite believable, possibly because their characterizations aren't to begin with.[1]

The authors' attitudesare revealed in a line of dialogue from the play and another from the novel. When the brash young photographer criticizes a surrealistic painting because it "attempts to attain excitement before reality,"[2] critic Burton Rascoe believed it summed up the playwrights' moral since the picture symbolized the lesbian.[3] In the novel, the photographer says to the girl he is wooing, "Did you ever hear of a fairy that wasn't artistic? The main thing wrong with the arts is that they attract so many degenerates."[4]

Philadelphia drama critic Edwin H. Schloss described the Bakers' characterization of a degenerate educator:

---

[1]"Trio," Cue, 6 January 1945, p. 21.

[2]Burton Rascoe, "'Trio' Is Good But Fails Buildup As Sensations," New York World-Telegram, 30 December 1944.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Dorothy Baker, Trio (New York: Houghton Miffin Company, 1943), p. 163.

> Pauline Maury, . . . is sick of an old and classic sickness, . . . a thoroughly detestable figure, slightly overlaid with horror, and ripe for the loathing of any audience. For Pauline not only falls heir to the normal contempt of the sexually healthy for the sexually ill, she is a thoroughly despicable human being aside from her allegiance to the third estate of sex, She is a snob, a plagiarist, a complete egomaniac and a corrupter of youth.[1]

The play begins with a cocktail party given by the French-born Professor in her home to celebrate the critical success of a recently published book which she has plagiarized. Critic Frank S. Leyendecker observed that this "sideline to the main theme, dealing with plagiarism is probably necessary to blacken the older women's character in the eyes of the more narrow-minded play-goers . . ., after her protectress has been exposed as a plagiarist, . . . the girl escapes from the unhealthy atmosphere of lesbianism forever."[2] That escape is made possible only with the help of the brash young man since Pauline Maury once put her student-lover into a sanitarium after the girl had had a mental breakdown after unsuccessfully attempting to run away from the older woman. In the end, the corrupter of youth prepares to kill herself in, according to the Times, "a rather gaudy, anti-climatic scene."[3]

---

[1]Edwin H. Schloss, "'Trio' Bows In At Locust St. Theatre," Philadelphia Record, 26 October 1944.

[2]Frank S. Leyendecker, "Theatre," About Town, 19 January 1945.

[3]Lewis Nichols, "Trio," New York Times, 30 December 1944.

The Shuberts leased producer Lee Sabinson their Locust Street Theatre for Trio's preview engagement in Philadelphia. Since that city had no state or municipal prohibition against gay themes or characterizations dramatized on the public stage, there was no problem with the law. The only complaints came from two of the city's reviewers. The Evening Bulletin dismissed it as bland, and recommended drastic cutting.[1] The Philadelphia Record complained about one of the dullest first acts in the reviewer's memory, but he liked the rest of the play, and praised the direction and the performances.[2] The Daily News, on the other hand, called Trio "highly literate, intelligently performed and completely absorbing,"[3] and the Inquirer gave it a rave review:

> "Trio" is not a play for any tot of 16 to take her simple-minded old grandmother to see. Dealing with pathological perversion, it isn't, indeed, a drama for the typical playgoer in quest of hearty, wholesome humor, or idle, if normal and natural, entertainment.
>
> Yet the superb and sensitive direction of Bretaigne Windust, the flawless and intense acting of the three all-important principals hitherto unfamiliar here, and the compelling craftsmanship of the drama of decadence defeated which Dorothy and Howard Baker have transferred to the stage virtually intact from the former's novel, save for an altered ending, gave singular fascination to the first performance anywhere of 'Trio' at the Locust last night, making it an unforgetable event in the theatre.[4]

---

[1]Fragment of Review from Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, 26 October 1944, in Trio file, Lincoln Center.

[2]Edwin H. Schloss, "'Trio' Bows At Locust St. Theatre," Philadelphia Record, 26 October 1944.

[3]Jerry Gaghan, "'Trio' In Locust Debut. Sabinson Play Scores," Philadelphia Daily News, 26 October 1944.

[4]Linton Martin, "'Trio' Makes Its Debut On Locust Stage," Phiadelphia Inquirer, 26 October 1944.

The New York Times reported: "No complaint had been received during the last ten days of the attraction's Philadelphia try-out. Every reviewer there," the paper quoted Producer Lee Sabinson as saying, "commented on the delicacy and sensitiveness with which the play treated its subject."[1]

When a real complaint about Trio did materialize, it came from New York and Lee Shubert, owner of Locust Street Theatre who had promised Sabinson Broadway's Cort Theatre before he found out the subject of the Bakers' drama. License Commissioner Paul Moss had revoked the license of Shuberts' Ambassador Theatre for a whole year after a jury found the producer of "Wine, Women and Song," guilty of presenting an illegal burlesque show. Shubert did not want his Cort Theatre padlocked because of Trio. "Mr. Shubert told us yesterday," theatrical columnist Sam Zolotow reported, "he would not permit 'Trio,' which deals with lesbianism, to open at this house on Wednesday, as advertised, unless License Commissioner Paul Moss gives the play a clean bill of health."[2]

Saying he "was not a censor, but merely handled licenses,"[3] Moss declined at first to become embroiled in such a controversy. Lee Shubert and not Moss was attacked initially from a number of different quarters for attempting to make of the License Commis-

---

[1]Sam Zolotow, "Shubert Refuses Theatre to Trio," New York Times, 6 November 1944.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Abe Laufe, The Wicked Stage (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1978), p. 105.

sioner a one-man stage censor when no such position was provided by the city. The Times reported, "A petition, authored by Will Geer and John McGovern, protesting Mr. Shubert's action as censorous, began circulating yesterday among performers in current Broadway shows for the purpose of presenting it to council of Actors Equity Association."[1]

Critic Jesse Zunser of Cue magazine reminded readers of the Shubert's monopoly, which the Federal government finally broke up but not until seven years later.

> Mr. Shubert is quite right within his legal rights to refuse a lease of his theatres to whomsoever he pleases. But Mr. Shubert owns or controls 80% of the legitimate theatres on Broadway. Such a monopoly verges on developing into a public utility--and as such, there also grows upon those in control a definite responsibility to see that that power--wittingly or unwittingly--is not abused.[2]

George Jean Nathan came to Shubert's defense, pointing out that he was afraid not only of having one of his theatres padlocked, but of "the chance of being thrown into the hoosegow."[3] The New York City Committee of The American Civil Liberties Union, on the other hand, urged Shubert to reconsider.

> Such a position invites censorship, a practice which you undoubtedly deplore. Your refusal is all the more significant in view of your eminent and predominant status

---

[1]"Barring of 'Trio' Arouses Players," New York Times, 11 November 1944.

[2]Jesse Zunser, "New Plays: Furror Over 'Trio,'" Cue, 18 November 1944, p. 21.

[3]George Jean Nathan, "George Jean Nathan's Theatre Week," New York Journal American, 12 March 1945.

> in New York Theatre, and your action here makes it increasingly difficult for the public to see plays uncensored.[1]

In an attempt to extricate himself from his poorly received plea to Moss, the theatre mogul turned to the press for help. "Shubert suggested Sabinson invite the N. Y. drama critics to Philly," reported PM, "to see if the play would endanger his Cort license,"[2] Seven critics[3] took Sabinson up on Shubert's suggestion; in the meantime, Trio, unable to move onto Broadway as planned, switched from the Locust to the Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia, also owned by the Shuberts. "Broadway last week found itself unable to see a play which Philadelphia sat through for several weeks," Lewis Nichols of the Times commented, "apparently without coming to any harm."[4]

Reporting on the results of the only instance in which all of the critics from the New York dailies went to another city to see if a play was fit for Broadway audiences, Nichols wrote:

> On a couple of frenzied excursions to Philadelphia a good many reviewers saw "Trio," and it was their concensus that, regardless of its merits as a play, the drama could

---

[1]Sam Zolotow, "Violet To Close Saturday Night," New York Times, 8 November 1944.

[2]"Broadway Report," New York Newspaper PM, 6 November 1944.

[3]Authur Pollock, "Theater," Brooklyn Eagle, 13 November 1944.

[4]Lewis Nichols, "The Case of Trio," New York Times, 19 November 1944.

> not be charged with being offensive, suggestive or objectionable. It was, as its sponsors said from the beginning, a serious and honest work.[1]

Burton Rascoe of the World-Telegram was very suspicious after having gone on the junket in Philadelphia. The reviewer wrote, "this all seems like a gag to me; I can't believe it; it looks like a publicity stunt to whip up public interest in a nice, quiet, very moralistic play."[2]

Despite such reactions from the press, no Broadway playhouse was made available by the Shubert brothers for Trio. Finally, producer Sabinson was able to get one of the few theatres along Broadway not owned by the Shuberts for an opening in the last week in December of a play that had had its Philadelphia première in October.

During the uproar over Trio, Dorothy and Howard Baker released a statement regarding the subject matter of their drama.

> The booking troubles that 'Trio' has run into have started the misleading and damaging rumor that 'Trio' is a drama about Lesbianism. This report falls short of the truth. We, the authors, would have had no interest in dramatizing anything so special, so chaotic, or so finally uninteresting as Lesbianism, and the attachment between the two women in our play is a very small part of a much larger pattern of psychological domination.[3]

---

[1]Lewis Nichols, "The Case of Trio," New York Times, 19 November 1944.

[2]Burton Rascoe, "'Trio' Is Good But Fails Buildup As Sensation," New York World-Telegram, 30 December 1944.

[3]Dorothy and Howard Baker, "'Trio' Clarified by Authors," press release by Samuel J. Friedman, dated 8 November 1944, in Trio file, Lincoln Center.

Mrs. Baker elaborated on the matter in another interview. According to PM, the novelist said:

> Janet Logan, the girl in Trio--it's a little of the silver-cord thing--she broke the knot and that's all to the good. I think she'd be a better person for having known these things and having had the will to break free and the nerve to stand on her own feet. Against someone who'd done everything for her and made her know it.[1]

After Trio opened on Broadway, one critic commended the playwrights for their dishonesty in describing their drama. Maurice Stoller wrote:

> Last night's admission by the heroine to her newfound male sweetheart that she had had "an affair" and "lived with" the other woman left no doubts. Nevertheless, the authors' game was a justifiable game of deceit, inasmuch as it helped bring to the local boards a truly terrific psychological drama.[2]

Trio began its two month engagement[3] at the Belasco Theatre on 29 December 1944. Sabinson declared:

> The proscribing of 'Trio,' is but an indication of the inherent dangers in self assumed censorship. There were many of us who condemned the book burning in Germany as barbarism. Now, as we fight fascism abroad, we find undeniable signs of it in the Shubert attempt to utilize his rights as a landlord to prevent the performance of any play, whatever its values may be. It is for the people to decide whether or not they are interested in any play.[4]

---

[1]"'Critical and Amusements,' PM Visits: The Two Who Wrote 'Trio,'" New York Newspaper PM, 24 September 1944.

[2]Maurice Stoller, "Stage Today," New York Morning Telegraph, 1 January 1945.

[3]Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1944-45 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1945), pp. 407-408.

[4]Arthur Pollock, "Theater," Brooklyn Eagle, 13 November 1944.

Critic Howard Barnes wrote, "Praise be that 'Trio' has opened at the Belasco Theatre, . . . it would have been shocking had Lee Shubert's premonition of censorial wrath kept this Lee Sabinson production from the local boards."[1] Burton Rascoe gave this report of the first-nighters' reaction:

> When the final curtain went down on "Trio" last night, bedlam broke out in the audience and resounded up and down 44th St. for half an hour. There were shrieks and yells of approval. Many of a claque had apparently brought wooden clappers, so noisy was the din. . . . I looked for them to tear down the marquee and do a snake dance up the street in frenzied triumph.
>
> I have no doubt that some of the "ovation" had something to do with the play and its merits and the histrionism of Mlle. St. Clair, . . . but, for the most part, I think this demonstration was the natural reaction of Americans against any threat of official censorship--against any form of regimentation."[2]

Equity magazine reported that in Trio's Philadelphia tryout, "the critics gave it a mixed reception . . . in New York again the reviews were neither wholly favorable, nor completely unfavorable. It settled down to a profitable, but by no means sensational business."[3]

"The most exciting event of the current season,"[4] according to the Morning Telegraph, elicited less than exciting

---

[1]Howard Barnes, "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 30 December 1944.

[2]Burton Rascoe, "'Trio' Is Good But Fails Buildup As Sensation," New York World-Telegram, 30 December 1944.

[3]"A United Theatre Defeats Official Censorship," Equity, February 1945, p. 6.

[4]Maurice Stoller, "Stage Today," New York Morning Telegraph, 1 January 1945.

reviews, even among the minority of critics who had most appreciated it. "This piece is an engrossing drama and it has some powerful moments," wrote Ward Morehouse of the Sun.[1] Louis Kronenberger of PM called it, "an honest and serious drama,"[2] and Jesse Zunter of Cue found it "while not a good play, this is certainly an absorbing one."[3] According to the World-Telegram, "the play is unpleasant but it is tense, dramatic and moral."[4]

On the less favorable side of the critical ledger, the Times concluded that, "'Trio' is straight-forward and unsensational; it just isn't a very good play."[5] Arthur Pollock dismissed it as being "hollow and artificial,"[6] and Jack O'Brien called it "almost interminably dull in its effort to avoid any blatant consideration of the unhealthy love affair it traces."[7] "It hasn't any message," complained John Chapman of the Daily

---

[1]Ward Morehouse, "The New Play," New York Sun, 30 December 1944.

[2]Louis Kronenberger, "Critical and Amusements," New York Newspaper PM, 30 December 1944.

[3]Jesse Zunter, "Trio," Cue, 6 January 1945, p. 21.

[4]Burton Rascoe, "'Trio' Is Good But Fails Buildup As Sensation," New York World Telegram, 30 December 1944.

[5]Lewis Nichols, "The Play," New York Times, 30 December 1944.

[6]Arthur Pollock, "Theater," Brooklyn Eagle, 30 December 1944.

[7]Jack O'Brien, "The Theater," AP News Features, 11 November 1944.

News, "and it hasn't any moral."[1]

Almost every play with a gay motif produced after The Captive and The Green Bay Tree was inevitably compared and contrasted by some of the critics to those two shows.."An undistinguished restatement of 'The Captive' theme," contended Robert Coleman of the Daily Mirror. "We hope it doesn't start a move toward censorship of the theatre, as did 'The Captive' and other plays of its era."[2] "A honest and sensitive account of elliptical human relationships, which does not compare with 'The Captive,'"[3]wrote Howard Barnes. Wilella Waldorf concurred: "Compared to such works as 'The Captive,' and 'The Children's Hour,' and 'The Green Gay Tree,' 'Trio' is a minor dramatic effort."[4]

By 1944, almost a quarter of a century after the subject matter first unsettled so many reviewers, only one drama critic objected in writing to seeing a play with a lesbian character. The staff correspondent for the Christian Science Monitor complained:

---

[1]John Chapman, "'Trio' Finally Arrives and Proves Talky But Strangely Fascinating," New York Daily News, 30 December 1944.

[2]Robert Coleman, "'The Captive' Theme Restated by Trio!'" New York Daily Mirror, 30 December 1944.

[3]Howard Barnes, "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 30 December 1944.

[4]Wilella Waldorf, "Two On The Aisle," New York Post, 30 December 1944.

> Just why anyone should feel the urge to present a stage story dealing with feminine degeneration is a mystery. The legitimate theatre has deservedly attained a high repute in providing entertainment within the boundaries of good taste, and 'Trio' most certainly strays boldly beyond these standard limits.[1]

Audiences, like the critics, with but that single exception, had also grown somewhat more tolerant since The God Of Vengeance was driven from the stage of the Apollo Theatre in 1923. "Had this piece treated of Lesbianism for salaciousness sake," commented the reviewer for Stage Today, "it would have failed to shock today's sophisticated audiences in the sense that 'The Captive' shocked Broadway some years back."[2] According to About Town magazine, "Audiences were amazed that all the unnecessary fuss had been stirred up about a drama which is totally lacking in sensationalism."[3]

"It is incredible that the theme of 'Trio' should ever have been questioned," Eleanor Monroe wrote in Women's Wear Daily.[4] "Intensely moral," concluded critic Arthur Pollock; "moral to the point of being contrived,"[5] concurred Howard Barnes in the Herald Tribune. Cue magazine assured the public:

---

[1]"Broadway: Trio Is Play On Sordid Theme," Boston Christian Science Monitor, 30 December 1944.

[2]"Trio," Stage Today, 1 January 1945, n.p.

[3]Frank Leyendecker, "Theater," About Town, 19 January 1945.

[4]Eleanor Monroe, "Belasco," Women's Wear Daily, 19 January 1945.

[5]Howard Barnes, "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 30 December 1944.

> By no stretch of the imagination can Trio be considered "immoral." Certainly, it is not as immoral, let's say, as The Voice Of The Turtle--which, for all its delightful wit and hilarious humors, does play around with well bred adultery.[1]

George Jean Nathan, who eighteen years before had called Edouard Bourdet's The Captive, "the most subjective, corruptive and potentially evil-fraught play ever shown in the American theatre,"[2] referred to Trio as "a fine play," in 1945 when he warned that not all segments of Manhattan's social structure had, through the Depression and World War II, changed as radically in their reactions to the sight of the gay minority represented on the stage as did he and many others who made up Broadway audiences. Nathan cautioned:

> If the police and their mufti stooges saw fit in their infinite lack of wisdom to look askance at the excellent Bourdet play, I don't see why they might not have been expected to look equally askance at the Baker's second-rate one dealing with exactly the same subject.[3]

One week before Trio was scheduled to close after a disappointingly brief two-month run, License Commissioner Paul Moss refused to transfer the license of the Belasco Theatre from the lessee who had rented it to Lee Sabinson back to its owner unless the Bakers' drama ended its engagement there. The Times reported:

---

[1]Jesse Zunser, "New Plays," Cue, 18 November 1944, p. 21.

[2]George Jean Nathan, "Theatre," American Mercury, March 1927, p. 373.

[3]George Jean Nathan, "George Jean Nathan's Theatre Week," New York Journal American, 8 January 1945.

> The commissioner is said to have taken the action following complaints from the Rev. John Sutherland Bonnell, pastor of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church. Last night Dr. Bonnell admitted having sent the complaint to Mayor LaGuardia . . .
>
> Dr. Bonnell declared he regarded "Trio" as "most offensive because it deals primarily with an abnormal perversion and therefore is especially dangerous to the public morals and especially in the case of the young."[1]

Insisting that he had a right to censor plays, Moss, who had been appointed Licenser of Theatres by LaGuardia in 1934, concluded, according to the Times, that Trio was, "in the words of the complaint, 'lewd and lascivious.'"[2] The Herald Tribune reported:

> Moss pointed to Section 1140-A of the Penal Code of the state of New York which prohibits obscene and indecent plays as misdemeaners and also provides penalties for advertisements relating to such plays. He contended that its sponsors had advertised it "as a play dealing with Lesbianism and the unnatural relationship between two women."[3]

"You have seen what Mr. Moss thinks is a lewd and obscene exhibition. If you disagree with him, write, telegraph or telephone the Mayor in protest,"[4] producer Lee Sabinson said in a curtain speech to a capacity audience at the close of the final performance of Trio on the night of 24 February 1945.

---

[1]"'Trio' To Close Tonight," New York Times, 24 February 1945.

[2]Lewis Nichols, "On Censorship," New York Times, 4 March 1945.

[3]Moss Insists He Has Right To Censor Plays," New York Herald Tribune, 23 March 1945.

[4]"Moss Shuts 'Trio' And Warns Others," New York Times, 25 February 1945.

Mayor LaGuardia was besieged with protests, not only from members of Trio's final audience, but from thousands of people in and out of show business who deeply resented the censoring of a Broadway show.

In a column entitled, "Moss Keeps Things Humming In Theatre By Making Mistakes," John Chapman of the Daily News made this comment about the closing of Trio which received more press coverage in the New York dailies than any Broadway play other than that given to the closing of The Captive eighteen years earlier:

> Now the play has become a cause celebre. It must be this way, too, for the liberalization of the New York stage is worth fighting for. But "Trio," as a drama, isn't worth all this fuss. I think if it had been let alone it would have died all by itself pretty soon; it was curiosity, rather than its dramatic splendors, which kept it going.[1]

Moss's refusal to renew the Belasco license when it expired until Trio had been evicted from the premises provoked immediate, widespread and highly publicized protests from people in show business and their supporters among civil libertarians. Special emergency meetings and mass rallies were held to devise a strategy for dealing with the License Commissioner's attempt to set himself up as a one-man stage censorship authority even though the Dunnigan Bill providing for just such an official had been vetoed seven years before.

---

[1]John Chapman, "Moss Keeps Things Humming In Theatre by Making Mistakes," New York Daily News, 27 February 1945.

Margaret Webster, the actress-director, followed the example of playwright Elmer Rice by resigning from the City Center's Board of Directors rather than serve with Moss in operating that municipal institution for the performing arts. A group of prominent producers and playwrights, Herman Shumlin, Howard Lindsay and Russell Crouse chief among them, joined the head of Actors Equity and the President of the League of New York Theatres, the American Civil Liberties Union and the Critics Circle in their insistence that "the theatre is entitled to the same freedom allowed the press."[1] The A. F. of L. International Board of Associated Actors and Artists of America adopted a resolution addressed to LaGuardia which concluded:

> We respectfully appeal to you as Mayor that you do not allow any of New York City's public officials to set themselves above the courts and proper legal procedures by exercising unwarranted dictatorial authority which is one of the things that the United Nations and our American men and women in service are fighting to eliminate throughout the world.[2]

At a mass meeting of representatives of eighteen theatrical organizations and affiliated groups, Mayor LaGuardia was criticized for having supported Moss's action.[3] In some quarters it was believed that the License Commissioner--who had once coproduced a play on Broadway by Noel Coward that was

---

[1]"Moss 'Trio' Closing To Get Court Test," New York Times, 1 March 1945.

[2]"A United Theatre Defeats Official Censorship," Equity, February 1945, p. 7.

[3]"Mayor Backs Moss In Closing of 'Trio,'" New York Times, 2 March 1979.

banned in London--was simply fronting for the mayor. By so staunchly supporting Moss in the face of so much vocal and widespread criticism, a columnist for PM suggested that, "the mayor has shown his hand. All along, however, one might have guessed that though the voice was the voice of Paul Moss the hand was the hand of LaGuardia."[1] The Daily News also reported: "Burns Mantle Tags LaG. As Real Censor; Warns of Dangers."[2]

LaGuardia was ridiculed by members of the press such as Wilella Waldorf of the Post:

> Mayor LaGuardia has cut a very sorry figure in the controversy so far. His reply to Russell Crouse of the Author's League was a childish attempt to camouflage the issue that could hardly have deluded anybody but a Hearst editorial writer.[3]

In his defense of the closing of Trio when many other Broadway shows were far more daring and unconvential in their treatment of sex, albeit wholly heterosexual in nature, LaGuardia provoked this editorial reaction from PM:

> As for absurdity, the Mayor's comments on lesbianism (which he is too delicate to mention by name) betray some mighty strange ideas. He seems to think that lesbianism requires (what he isn't too delicate to mention by name) "defective genital organs"--and that it is a "habit," like

---

[1]"Critical and Amusements," New York Newspaper PM, 2 March 1945.

[2]Burns Mantle, "Burns Mantle Tags LaG. As Real Censor, Warns of Dangers," New York Daily News, 5 March 1945.

[3]Wilella Waldorf, "Two On The Aisle," New York Post, 10 March 1945.

sleeping on your right side, and not a condition like suffering from insomnia.[1]

State Senator Fred G. Moritt, Democrat of Brooklyn, offered a bill in Albany that would permit a producer to get injunctive relief against the closing of a show pending a speedy court trial. The liberal politican, at the same time, released a statement "which paraphrased the well-known verse from the Mikado as follows:

> The Little Flower that bloomed
> in the spring, tra, la.
> Has something to do with the case.
> He's forced to take under his
> wing, tra, la,
> A most unattractive old thing
> (The License Commissioner)with a
> caricature of a face (censorship).[2]

While the New York Drama Critics were unanimously outraged at the curtailing of Trio's engagement, some were consequently at odds with their more conservative publishers and editors whose views were made known on their editorial pages. For example, William Randolph Hearst's Journal American used capital letters in an editorial to declare that Trio was closed "BECAUSE IT WAS A BAWDY SHOW, WHICH NOBODY CAN DENY."[3] When George Jean Nathan, employed at that time by Hearst, called the

---

[1]"An Editorial,'The Mayor and Trio,'" New York Newspaper PM, 2 March 1945.

[2]"Mayor Approves Plan To Curb Moss," New York Times, 8 March 1945.

[3]"A Question of Morality," New York Journal American, 16 March 1945.

License Commissioner "Fuehrer Moss" in a column, his editor felt the need to print a statement above it declaring that, "The views expressed in the following article are those of Mr. Nathan and not of this newspaper."[1] In that column the critic pointed out:

> While it is true that "Trio" does deal with such a perversion, the Fuehrer along with his complainants, overlooks the clear fact that it deals with it in terms of acute disgust, leads one of the parties there violently to condemn the other, and leads this other in turn to suicide as the only way out. Just how, accordingly, it could be especially dangerous in encouraging immorality in the public, young or old, is not easy to determine. If the subject were handled sympathetically, things conceivably might be different, but it is handled in such a way as to make it thoroughly odious and contemptible.[2]

"We are sure that Mr. Moss is actuated by excellent motives,"[3] an editorial in the New York Times pronounced in defense of Sec. 1140-A of the New York State Penal Code that prohibited the dramatization of gay themes and characterizations. However, the Times, while supportive of Moss and the existing law, still suggested that in future stage censorship should be handled by a board. "A more dignified process than the impulse of one official,"[4] the editorial writer concluded. Lewis Nichols, the Times's drama critic who covered the Trio controversy, differed with the publication's editorial writers.

---

[1]George Jean Nathan, "George Jean Nathan's Theatre Week," New York Journal American, 12 March 1945.

[2]Ibid.

[3]"Mr. Moss and Trio," New York Times, 22 February 1945.

[4]Ibid.

In an attack on the Wales Law, the reviewer concluded that "The state legislature did not spread the net of the Wales Law to catch such efforts as 'Trio,' and the misfortune this time is that under a strict reading of the 'Padlock Clause' there is no distinction between dignity and disgrace."[1]

LaGuardia and Moss drew their most vigorous support in the press from two Catholic newspapers which, according to the Times, indicated their advocacy editorially of the License Commissioner's actions and roundly criticized the protesting groups of theatrical organizations.[2] The Tablet declared that the banned play "had no more right to existence, than a disease-breeding sewer on Broadway."[3] According to the Catholic News, "Right-thinking moral persons with their traditional American as well as Christian convictions on morality have no intention of allowing the anti-moral, pagan minority to dictate to the law on the point."[4]

Two weeks after Trio was closed, Mayor LaGuardia finally bowed to demands from his critics that he meet at City Hall with representatives of eighteen different organizations

---

[1]Lewis Nichols, "Trio," New York Times, 30 December 1944.

[2]"Sues For $1,000,000 In Closing of 'Trio,'" New York Times, 3 March 1945.

[3]Ibid.

[4]"A Question Of Morality," Editorial, New York Journal American, 16 March 1945.

which had become involved in the stage censorship furor. As a result, the Mayor agreed that the Commissioner of Licenses should, in future, be able to close a show only after the producer was convicted in court before a jury of presenting a performance prohibited by the Penal Code. "He did express a desire to speed that trial," Equity magazine reported, "to deprive any producer of the possibility of reaping a financial harvest during a long-drawn out trial, and with this the theatre was in agreement."[1]

Paul Moss and Fiorello LaGuardia were not the only principals primarily responsible for the Trio closing to suffer public reprimands before the matter was settled when, as Equity magazine had boasted, "A United Theatre Defeats Official Censorship."[2] The Reverend Dr. John Sutherland Bonnell, of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, was proven by drama critic Wolcott Gibbs of the New Yorker to have been dishonest in drafting the petition to the mayor that instigated the ban on the Bakers' lesbian love drama. Otis L. Guernsey, another reviewer, was the first to check when he became suspicious of the resolution signed by sixteen Protestant clergymen. "When this department phoned one of the ministers at random last week," reported the man from the Herald Tribune, "he admitted that

---

[1]"A United Theatre Defeats Official Censorship," Equity Magazine, February 1945, p. 5.

[2]Ibid.

he had never seen 'Trio.'"[1] Wolcott Gibbs contacted all sixteen ministers writing that "it appears that only one, the Reverend Dr. John Sutherland Bonnell, . . . had bothered to see the darn thing."[2] The critic for the New Yorker also learned that six of the clergymen were from New Jersey and Long Island. One minister from Brooklyn told Gibbs:

> I haven't seen "Trio," but Bonnell saw it. I was particularly interested in the fact that one or two people Bonnell knew had very definite Lesbian tendencies--he probably ran into them in his advisory work--well, the play had a deleterious effect on them. Of course, nobody wants censorship, but it's a question, actually, of the protection of the people.[3]

Fiorello H. LaGuardia's term of office expired the same year that Trio was closed and Paul Moss lost his job as Commissioner of Licenses with the change in the municipal administration. The Wales Padlock Amendment remained the law in New York state for more than two decades after the Trio cause célèbre, but never was tested again; however, it was never forgotten by Lee Shubert, the individual who had instigated the skirmish. The "Shubert fist,"[4] as the New York Times had titled the stage censorship emanating from the office of the

---

[1]Otis L. Guernsey, Jr., "The Playbill: A Gentleman By The Name of Moss," New York Herald Tribune, 4 March 1945.

[2]Wolcott Gibbs, "The Theatre," New Yorker, 10 March 1945, p. 40.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Jerry Stagg, The Brothers Shubert (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 353.

two, tough old men, Lee and Jay Shubert, remained raised against the presentation of any gay plays in any of their Broadway theatres until after Lee Shubert's death in 1953.

For more than a year after the closing of Trio, no play appeared on Broadway with a character identified by the critics as being gay. Then late in the 1946-47 season George Abbott produced The Dancer by Milton Lewis and Julian Funt. Burns Mantle gave a brief plot outline of the play about

> . . . a famed ballet dancer whose mind gave way. Living under the protection of a wealthy dilettante, the dancer devoted his off time to murdering village prostitutes, puzzling the local gendarmerie greatly. Pursued by his wife, who wants his supposedly hidden fortune, and his daughter, who would like to be sure that his madness is not hereditary, the dancer's life is not a happy one. The law finally catches up with him.[1]

Almost without exception the critics noted the relationship between the mad ballet dancer and his patron, as as the Times tactfully put it, "something odd."[2] Howard Barnes in the Herald Tribune was more precise, calling the deranged killer in The Dancer "A homocidal homosexual," and his patron protector "an old fruit."[3]

Following a cool reception Abbott's production of The Dancer closed after six performances.[4] "There Are More Broken

---

[1]Burns Mantle, ed., Best Plays of 1945-46 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1946), pp. 7-8.

[2]Lewis Nichols, "Melodrama of Abnormal," New York Times, 6 June 1946.

[3]Howard Barnes, "Ballet Plus Murder," New York Herald Tribune, 6 June 1946.

[4]Mantle, p. 414.

Backs Than Chilled Spines In 'The Dancer,'"[1] reported John Chapman in dismissing the melodrama in which the former ballet star periodically visited the local house of ill-repute to break the back of one of the prostitutes.

Two theatrical seasons after Trio's engagement was cut short because it contained a lesbian character, another such role was seen on the Broadway stage without stirring any controversy. No Exit, Paul Bowles' adaptation of Jean Paul Sartre's Huis Clois, opened in New York on 26 November 1946. "For more than two years," reported the Post, "Paris playgoers have been flocking to see it."[2] Sartre's dramatic concept of hell and damnation excited few Broadway theatregoers or critics, and none of the "moralists." "It lasted a month," Brooks Atkinson recalled, "before the production was consigned to that hell that receives all stage failures."[3]

Jean Paul Sartre's long one-act philosophical fantasy, No Exit, concerns a man and two women--"three characters lifted from newspaper scandals,"[4] according to Ruby Cohn, who have been condemned to eternal punishment by having to remain in one

---

[1]John Chapman, "There Are More Broken Backs Than Chilled Spines In 'The Dancer,'" New York Daily News, 6 June 1946.

[2]Richard Watts, Jr., "Two On The Aisle," New York Post, 27 November 1946.

[3]Brooks Atkinson, Broadway (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1970), p. 404.

[4]Ruby Cohn, intro., Jean Paul Sartre, No Exit, trans., Stuart Gilbert (New York: Random House, Inc., 1967), p. vii.

another's company. "Hell is just . . . other people,"[1] Cradeau, the man, declares. He had been a coward and a deserter. Estelle had killed her baby, and Inez was responsible for the deaths of a young couple after she seduced the wife. "Sensuality, cowardice and perversion, each provides its own punishment,"[2] the Christian Science Monitor observed.

At one point in the play, Estelle, the heterosexual woman, tortured by the man's rejection of her, spits contemptuously in the face of the lesbian. Sartre's lesbian reveals herself to be particularly unsympathetic as she explains to the other two what she is all about:

> INEZ. Well, I was what they call back there, one of those women, already damned, you know? . . .[3]

Inez tells of living with her cousin and his wife during which time she poisoned the wife's mind against the helpless man, who is eventually killed in an accident with a trolley car after the two women had left him to live together.

> INEZ. . . . I'm really bad. I mean I need to see other people suffer to exist at all. A torch. A torch in their hearts. When I'm alone I go out. For six months I flamed in her heart, burned in her heart. Then she got up one night and turned the gas on. I didn't hear her. She got back into bed beside me. That's all.[4]

---

[1]Jean Paul Sartre, No Exit, trans. Paul Bowles (New York: Samuel French Inc., 1945), p. 52.

[2]Thelma Rantillo, "'No Exit' From France," Boston Christian Science Monitor, 27 November 1946.

[3]Jean Paul Sartre, No Exit, trans. Paul Goodman (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1945), p. 29.

[4]Ibid., pp. 30-31.

Although Inez has a couple of brief scenes during which she admires, and is rejected by the heterosexual woman, her impact in the drama is less than those other destructive lesbian seducers: the plagiarizing professor in Trio, and the unseen, irresistable phone-caller in The Captive. Both French-born actress Annabella, who played Inez, and John Huston, who directed No Exit, were faulted by the Morning Telegraph for being intimidated and inhibited by the lesbian role.

> John Huston has staged the play with a careful eye on the censors, but in doing so has robbed the play of much of the vigor which a freer production would have granted. Both in Paris and London the physical aspects of the play were granted more leeway and the pivotal role of Inez ran rampant. Frankly, if Monsieur Sartre's play is to have the vitality which is inherent, then prudery must have no part. It is essential to have an untrammelled theatre if one is to have a free theatre at all. A stage trimmed by the church's prudery, or by politician's intimidated by back-stage pressure, can never have a healthy theatre development. The business of "Trio" must not be repeated or we might as well reinstitute the Inquisition, with no disrespect intended toward liberal opinion in any church.
> . . .
> Annabella makes the Lesbian a sleek and tailored soul who is rather too feminine, lacking some of the masculinity the role requires. Nonetheless, she handles the love scenes with Ruth Ford with sufficient explicitness to hold an audience.[1]

Except for the reviewer for the Morning Telegraph, none of the critics reacted to the lesbian character in No Exit as it related to the censorship strictures. Nor did the drama critics, with the exception of Brooks Atkinson, single out the lesbian character among the damned threesome as being, in the

---

[1]George Freedley, "The Stage Today," New York Morning Telegraph, 28 November 1946.

words of the Time's reviewer, particularly "loathsome."[1]

During a thirty-five-year period when the appearance of gay people as characters in plays was unimpeded by legal harassment--even though Section 1140-A of the Penal Code was still on the state's statute books--there were very few productions seen on the New York stage with lesbian roles. However, plays with gay male characterizations presented during much of that same period, 1950 until 1975, numbered no less than 153, according to Dr. Donald L. Loeffler.[2]

In his study, "The Theme Of Homosexuality In Selected Theatrical Events Produced in The United States Between 1969 and 1974," Dr. Stephen Shapiro wrote:

> Very few of the plays which were included in this study concern themselves with female homosexuality. . . . This situation corresponds to society's general apathy with regards to female homosexuality as compared to male homosexuality. It is doubtful that the presence of a lesbian in a play would be more repugnant to an audience than the presence of a male homosexual. Therefore, it appears that the paucity of plays which deal with female homosexuals is a result of a general unconcern toward lesbianism. Also, in spite of the efforts of the women's liberation movement, the theatre is still predominantly controlled by men. A majority of those who purchase tickets are male, and most of the plays are still written by men, this fact is reflected in the homosexually oriented theatrical productions through a preponderance of

---

[1]Brooks Atkinson, "The Play In Review," New York Times, 27 November 1946.

[2]Donald Lee Loeffler, An Analysis of the Treatment of the Homosexual Character in Dramas Produced in the New York Theatre from 1950 to 1968 (New York: Arno Press, 1975), pp. 43-47 and pp. 47A-47D.

scripts which concern male homosexuals rather than lesbians.[1]

Only two of the twenty-four plays Dr. Gene Touchet examines in his study, "American Drama and the Emergence of Social Homophilia, 1952-1972,"[2] have lesbian roles: Frank Marcus's The Killing Of Sister George, and Johnathan Katz's gay agitprop, unpublished script for Coming Out!

Although no known lesbian has ever written a play about a lesbian for the Broadway stage, Carson McCullers did successfully dramatize her novel Member Of The Wedding in 1948, and Edward Albee adapted her Ballad Of The Sad Cafe in 1963, both of which were covert portraits of females with sexual dispositions not unlike her own.[3] Whenever Broadway audiences have seen lesbian roles in a play, they have always been that of aggressive characters enamoured of younger, seemingly heterosexual women. Most often these lesbian creations were female Svengalis preying upon vulnerable maidens. All such lesbian characterizations have been written by playwrights not identified with a gay life style.

When William M. Hoffman selected eight gay plays for an anthology published in 1979, the editor chose only three

---

[1]Stephen R. Shapiro, "The Theme Of Homosexuality In Selected Theatrical Events Produced In The United States Between 1969 and 1974," (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1976), p. 188.

[2]Gene R. Touchet, "American Drama amd the Emeregence of Social Homophilia, 1952-1972," (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Florida, 1974).

[3]Virginia Spencer Carr, The Lonely Hunter A Biography of Carson McCullers (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Comapny, Inc. 1975).

about lesbians. In his introduction to Gay Plays, The First Collection, Williams explained:

> . . . This imbalance reflects the fact that there are very few plays about lesbians. This is probably so because the people most likely to write about them are women, and female playwrights, gay and straight, are rare. Until recently playwriting was an almost all-male profession. A bias against women in this field is still strong. Since being a female playwright can count as one strike against them to begin with, lesbians are understandably leery of provoking a second strike by writing about their own group. Also, since many lesbians identify themselves as feminists first, they often put their energies into material that concerns the straight majority of women.[1]

Until Tennessee Williams appeared on the scene in the mid-1940s, gay male playwrights generally avoided writing about their own lifestyles. By his own admission[2] Williams was so terrified of rejection that in his earlier and his best work gay characters important either to the theme or to the plot die before the curtain rises on the dramatic action. In 1947 Williams broached the subject of gay sexual proclivity in A Streetcar Named Desire, but he did so with caution. Even eleven years later when the author was internationally acclaimed he still worried about having written another play in which the gay character is dead before the play gets started. "I thought I would be tarred and feathered and ridden out of the New York theatre," Williams wrote after the Off-Broadway opening of

---

[1]William M. Hoffman, ed., Gay Plays, The First Collection (New York: Avon Books, 1979), p. x.

[2]Georges-Michel Sarotte, Like A Brother, Like A Lover (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978), p. 118.

Suddenly Last Summer, "with no future haven except in translation for theatres abroad."[1]

In A Streetcar Named Desire Blanche speaks in one brief but moving scene of having insulted and rejected her adolescent husband after having inadvertently discovered him with a male lover. "He came to me for help. I didn't know that,"[2] guilt-ridden Blanche confesses. Williams's first off-stage gay creation was a suicidal boy-bridegroom. "In 1947 novels were depicting homosexual 'men,'" Georges-Michel Sarotte wrote, "but the theatre-going public was not prepared to accept such a character on the stage--or even in the wings."[3]

Professor Sarotte's appraisal of the absence of gay male roles on the American stage in the 1940s in his study of "Male Homosexuality in the American Novel and Theatre From Herman Melville to James Baldwin," is less than accurate. First and foremost, it was Lee Shubert and other theatre-owners who, understandably, did not wish to accept the financial and personal risk involved in participating in any illegal production of plays depicting gay characters in the aftermath of the closing of Trio. Broadway audiences had flocked to see

---

[1]Georges-Michel Sarotte, Like A Brother, Like A Lover (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978), p. 118.

[2]Tennessee Williams, The Theatre of Tennessee Williams (New York: A New Directions Book, 1971), p. 354.

[3]Georges-Michel Sarotte, p. 110.

Oscar Wilde in 1934, but in the 1940s, not only were theatre owners and producers afraid of gay plays, but so were gay playwrights. Gore Vidal's The City And The Pillar, published in 1948, was, according to literary critic Steven Marcus, "the first American novel to represent openly and on a full-scale homosexual experience and the homosexual subculture in contemporary society."[1] Twenty years passed before Mart Crowley dared the same thing in the theatre with Boys In The Band.

Tennessee Williams would wait until 1953 before he included a gay character borrowed from Marcel Proust's Remembrance Of Things Past in a revised version of Camino Real, "at a time," Professor Sarotte contends, "when the public was prepared for a 'pervert' on stage--five years after the Kinsey Report and during an avalanche of homosexual novels."[2] Not until 1972, did Williams write a play, Small Craft Warnings, that included a character who survived with a gay lifestyle, something the unseen, closeted gays could not do in A Streetcar Named Desire, Cat On A Hot Tin Roof and Suddenly Last Summer.

Only four audiences saw performances of The Rats of Norway, the last Broadway production of the 1940s which included one unmistakenly gay, but closeted and probably continent secondary character. Ostensibly Keith Winter's play concerns two

---

[1]Steven Marcus, "A Second Look At Sodom," New York Herald Tribune, 20 June 1965.

[2]Georges-Michel Sarotte, Like A Brother, Like A Lover (Garden City, New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1978), p. 110.

heterosexual romantic involvements among members of a faculty in an English boys boarding school in Northumberland. Playgoers on either side of the Atlantic had trouble relating the rather provocative title to the text and the playbills of both the original London production and the belated Broadway version of the Rats Of Norway contained the following explanation:

> In the play, the story centers around two pairs of lovers, one young and romantic, the other mature and passionate. Both are seeking blindly and with increasing desperation for a perfection of love which the very violence of their search prevents them from finding. So, like "The Rats of Norway," they finally drown their spiritual selves in their quest for the impossible.[1]

The two contrasting types of couples destroy themselves because of the demands the lovers make on each other. Although engaged and respectable, young Stephen Beringer and Tillie are not sexually intimate. The other, older couple, Hugh Sebastian and Jane are carrying on an adulterous affair behind her naive husband's back. The tension of the school year and the lovers' personalities render both couples incompatible after they have committed themselves romantically.

The two women in The Rats Of Norway are so superior that they make their men uncomfortable. The men are more relaxed with one another in a seemingly, rather casual platonic relationship. Sebastian, an alcoholic war veteran with a heart condition, tells his young friend:

---

[1]The Rats of Norway Playbill, The Playhouse, Charing Cross, London, 6 April 1933.

SEBASTIAN. It's an old thing, Beringer, they're far better than us. I couldn't live without Jane, and yet as far as contentment goes I'm far happier with you.

STEPHAN. Yes, we're far happier being unbetter. . . .[1]

Jane, the headmaster's wife, recognizes the rapport between her alcoholic lover and the younger teacher. When Sebastian dies in her bed before the drama's final curtain, she turns to Stephan who is helping her remove the body from her boudoir:

JANE. You loved him too, didn't you?

STEPHAN. Yes.

JANE. More than Tilly?

STEPHAN. Yes.

JANE. It's a pity we couldn't be happy.[2]

While Stephan and Sebastian's relationship, at least as the roles were apparently interpreted by the American actors, made them sexually suspect in the minds of a number of the New York critics, there could not have been any question about the sexual make-up of at least one secondary character in The Rats Of Norway. Chetwood, one of the younger members of the faculty, is unmistakenly a closet gay. Described by the author as "a slim, effeminate-looking youth with a sullen and rather silly sort of beauty which fails only to impress,"[3] Chetwood becomes

---

[1]Keith Winter, The Rats Of Norway (London, William Heinemann Ltd., 1933), p. 80.

[2]Ibid., p. 104.

[3]Ibid., p. 16.

annoyed when other members of the school's staff notice that he has powder on his face[1] and tease him about wanting to play the role of Guinevere in a school production.[2]

Produced by Gladys Cooper and Raymond Massey, who co-starred as the adulterous couple, The Rats Of Norway, which twenty-three year old Keith Winters based on his novel, was seen at the Playhouse, Charing Cross, in the spring of 1933. "It received good press and ran six months," Massey wrote in his memoirs, A Hundred Different Lives.[3] Remembering it as "a first-rate drama," concerning "two ill-starred, contrasted love affairs," Massey makes no mention of the two men's sexual attraction for one another. None of Laurence Olivier's biographers refer to the role of the younger instructor, which he originated, as being gay. One author refers to it briefly as being that of "an idealistic young schoolmaster corrupted by his elders,"[4] but he does not identify either the corruption or the corrupters.

Fifteen years after its successful London engagement, The Rats Of Norway, opened at Broadway's Booth Theatre on 15 April 1948. Produced and directed by a twenty-three year old,

---

[1]Keith Winter, The Rats Of Norway (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1933), p. 3.

[2]Ibid., p. 4.

[3]Raymond Massey, A Hundred Different Lives (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), p. 160.

[4]John Cottrell, Laurence Olivier, Englewood Cliffs, New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), p. 79.

self-styled, and self-publicized theatrical genius, James S. Elliot, the American version featured John Ireland--who went on to film stardom--as the alcoholic veteran in a cast of players far less accomplished than the London company. After a single try-out performance at the San Gabriel Playhouse in California, the play met with a uniformly hostile reception from the New York drama critics.

"The biggest bore of the season,"[1] Robert Coleman announced in the Daily Mirror. "One of the most frightful performances a cast of professional grownups has given in my time,"[2] Ward Morehouse warned his readers. Described as talky and static, The Rats Of Norway lasted four performances.[3]

The Broadway critics were almost as unanimous in their suspicions about the nature of Sebastian and Stephan's friendship as they were on the worth of Winter's dramaturgy and Elliot's presentation. Brooks Atkinson made a brief, undefined reference to "sexual abnormalities,"[4] but his colleagues were far more explicit. Richard Watts, Jr., wrote in the Post:

> It may have been my imagination which made me suspect that the two young men were more interested in each other

---

[1] Robert Coleman, "Rats Of Norway," New York Daily Mirror, 16 April 1948.

[2] Ward Morehouse, "The New Play," New York Sun, 16 April 1948.

[3] Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1947-48 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1948).

[4] Brooks Atkinson, "The Theatre," New York Times, 16 April 1948.

than in either of the women, but, anyway, none of the romances came out well.[1]

Wolcott Gibbs reported in the New Yorker:

> Since there seemed to be no more than an outside chance that Hugh and Stephan really like each other much better than they did their respective ladies, it was, as you can see, a remarkably disorderly situation all around.[2]

"There is a slightly off-center young man," Howard Barnes observed, "who cannot make his mind up whether he loves the female piano teacher or the lush [Sebastian]."[3]

The man from the World-Telegraph reported:

> . . . at the time I left the performance I was beginning to think that some of the other instructors were falling in love with the other instructors. Even the two ladies of the cast were beginning to act effeminate.[4]

Ibee reported in Variety that the "author appears to have coddled the title, which has nothing to do with the story, unless he thinks the characters, several having homosexual inclinations, are rats."[5]

That is exactly what W. David Sievers thought of the characters in The Rats Of Norway. In Freud On Broadway, the author made this observation:

---

[1]Richard Watts, Jr., "Theater," New York Post, 16 April 1948.

[2]Wolcott Gibbs, "The Theatre: 'Passion in Dotheboys,'" New Yorker, 24 April 1948, p. 50.

[3]Howard Barnes, "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 16 April 1948.

[4]William Hawkins, "'The Rats Of Norway,' Limns The Lemmings," New York World Telegram, 16 April 1948.

[5]Ibee., "Plays On Broadway," Variety, 21 April 1948.

> ... Winter's analogy drawn from the lemmings who swim out to their death toward an island that has long since sunk beneath the sea. The sunken island is homosexuality, and although the young instructor tries valiantly to reciprocate the love of a young girl, it is a man to whom he is irresistibly drawn--a man who has fought and lost his own battle against his desire for the wife of the headmaster.[1]

It may be that in his 1933 study of romantic and sexual frustrations among the faculty of a British public school for boys, Keith Winter intended the two male instructors to be erotically involved since this seemed so obvious to many Broadway critics even though the characters were, at least as they appear in the playscript, no more sexually identifiable than they would have dared to be in real life. That the London critics did not mention gay suspicions about The Rats Of Norway suggests either that they were too naive to recognize or too reserved to identify a gay intrigue, or that, in their performances, Raymond Massey and Laurence Olivier gave the reviewers no reason to believe that the two men's relationship was anything but platonic. Fifteen years later, the American performers apparently brought to the roles sexually suggestive or effeminate mannerisms that provoked considerable critical ridicule and contempt.

Jed Harris had seen Gladys Cooper's little theatre production of Rats Of Norway in the spring of 1933 when he was talent scouting for the American production of The Green Bay

---

[1]W. David Sievers, Freud On Broadway (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1970), p. 412.

Tree. Harris hired Olivier giving him "his first real part,"[1] and recognizing him even at that early stage of his career as "the best actor in England."[2] Portraying one young man engaged to a young lady and attached to an older man under somewhat suspicious circumstances in a London little theatre production led to Olivier's playing another young man with a fiancée and an attachment even more sexually suspicious in his Broadway debut--both within the very same year.

---

[1]Jed Harris, Interview, "The Dick Cavett Show," WNET-TV, Channel 13, 25 March 1980.

[2]Ibid.

CHAPTER XIII

TEN PLAYS SEEN IN THE 1950S

SEASON IN THE SUN

THE GREEN BAY TREE

THE CHILDREN'S HOUR

TEA AND SYMPATHY

BILLY BUDD

END AS A MAN

CAMINO REAL

THE SMALL HOURS

LADIES OF THE CORRIDOR

THE IMMORALIST

During the first half of the 1950s when lesbian and gay male characterizations emerged without fear of legal prohibition on the Broadway stage, thousands[1] of gay people were subject to surveillance or overt attack by American governmental agencies. There were no repercussions from the public, the police or the politicians when showman Billy Rose produced Ruth and Augustus Goetz's free adaptation of André Gide's novel, The Immoralist in 1954. In the middle of a decade of gay oppression, no police officers stormed onstage

[1]Sal J. Licata, "The Emerging Gay Presence," Los Angeles Advocate, 26 July 1978.

to stop the show at the Royale Theatre in which a gay apologist, the playwrights' raissoneur, defined immorality as sexual dishonesty. No Washington interrogators subpoenaed Billy Rose to answer charges that his production threatened the nation's security by sympathetically portraying gays whom the head of the Republican party had warned were "as dangerous as reds."[1]

In his anti-Communist crusade during the first half of the 1950s, Senator Joseph McCarthy linked lesbians and gay men to the country's fear of communism. "Conducted in the name of national security," Dr. Sal J. Licata noted in an article entitled, "The Emerging Gay Presence," "this campaign resulted in the expulsion of numbers of homosexuals from public and private employment."[2] At McCarthy's instigation the State Department and various branches of the Armed Forces began witch-hunts which resulted in thousands of suspected lesbians and gay men being branded as security risks and summarily being dismissed from their government jobs or dishonorably discharged from the services.[3] "Perverts Called Government Peril," reported the New York Times on 19 April 1950. "Gabrielson,

---

[1]"Perverts Called Government Peril," New York Times, 19 April 1950.

[2]Sal J. Licata, "The Emerging Gay Presence," Los Angeles Advocate, 26 July 1978.

[3]Jonathan Katz, Gay American History (New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell Company, 1976), pp. 91-104.

G.O.P. Chief, Says They Are As Dangerous As Reds."[1]

The anti-Communist purges of the Cold War touched both Hollywood and Broadway as early as 1947. Motion picture personalities testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee that "Communists Taint The Film Industry."[2] In the same page-one article Charles Moffitt, motion picture critic for Esquire magazine, was quoted by the Times as declaring that:

> "Broadway is practically dominated by communists." . . . He asserted that forty-four plays out of 100 produced on Broadway between 1936 and 1946 furthered the Communist Party line and that thirty-two others favored that line.[3]

Since plays with gay themes and characters were rare on the American stage during World War II and its aftermath, and never seen on the motion picture screen, Washington investigators were unable to cite entertainment supportive of a tolerant or sympathetic stance on behalf of "subversive-prone" gays. Washington watchdogs of public patrotism were far too preoccupied, apparently, in 1954 inciting communist and gay witch hunts within the federal government to pay any heed to a single Broadway play with several harmless, fictitious French and Arabic gay characters.

Both William Randolph Hearst and Lee Shubert, who had played major roles in keeping plays with gay characters off the Broadway stage, died in the early 1950s. John S. Sumner,

---

[1]New York Times, 19 April 1950.

[2]Anthony Leviero, "Menjou Testifies Communists Taint Film Industry," New York Times, 22 October 1947.

[3]Ibid.

too, retired at the beginning of the decade as the unofficial guardian of public morals. The Society For The Prevention Of Vice, founded in 1873 by Anthony Comstock and financially supported by J. Pierpont Morgan and John D. Rockefeller, Jr., among others, expired with Sumner's retirement.

No other politician, religious leader or public personality appeared on the New York scene after World War II eager to continue the cause of Sumner, Hearst, LaGuardia and Shubert. Under attack from neither Manhattan "moralists" nor Washington red and gay baiters, gay characterizations emerged with impunity in the landmark production of The Immoralist in 1954. The Mattachine Society convened the first assembly of gay people in America the year before the play premièred; the year after, the first lesbian organization, the Daughters of Bilitis, was formed. But there was no connection between the emerging homophile movement and the final chapter of the emergence of gay characterizations in the American theatre.

Before The Immoralist was produced, earlier in the 1950s, there had been revivals of two famous plays with gay motifs and six productions of new plays with secondary gay, or suspiciously gay characters. The revivals, The Green Bay Tree and The Children's Hour, had been performed legally unmolested some twenty years before and the gay characters in the half dozen new plays were truly secondary ones, some of whom were never identified in print by the critics as being gay. The Immoralist served as an indicator of the tolerance within the establishment with which gay theatrical roles would be accorded

when, in future, they were included in American plays.

There was a striking difference between the two silly, effeminate males in the comedy hit Season In The Sun, which gave Broadway theatregoers their first look at gays in the 1950s, and the two sober, masculine men of The Immoralist. Critics described the gay protagonist of The Immoralist as a "well-bred, intellectual young homosexual,"[1] and his Arab confidant as "a gentle, deeply philosphical deviate,"[2] while the gay couple in Season In The Sun were identified as "two men who should have been women,"[3] "two very amusing effeminates,"[4] and "two . . . queens (a type which flourishes on Fire Island like Eel-grass)."[5]

It was not the dialogue that identified the male couple, who come to romp about Fire Island on their vacation in Season In The Sun, as being effeminate. The dialogue provided the characters by Wolcott Gibbs, Drama Critic for the New Yorker, is mundane and asexual and does not offer a clue to the men's

---

[1]Whitney Bolton, "Stage Review: 'The Immoralist' Outstanding Example of Theatrical Courage," New York Morning Telegraph, 10 February 1954.

[2]Brooks Atkinson, "'The Immoralist,' By Ruth and Augustus Goetz, Made From Andre Gide's Novel," New York Times, 9 February 1954.

[3]John McClain, "'Season In The Sun': Full of Wonderful and Painful Laughs," New York Journal American, 29 September 1950.

[4]John Chapman, "'Season In The Sun' Is Humor At Its Best, and Beautifully Acted," New York Daily News, 29 September 1950.

[5]Whitney Bolton, "'Season In The Sun' Nice Piece of Funny Writing," New York Morning Telegraph, 30 September 1950.

sexual identity. However, Burgess Meredith, who directed Gibbs's comedy, had only to read the author's description of the characters to understand how he wanted the roles performed. "They would have no trouble at all," the critic turned playwright wrote, "flying in and out of windows."[1]

The first sight of gay characters, dressed identically and gesturing with limp wrists, on the Broadway stage in the 1950s amused rather than offended Wolcott Gibbs's colleagues with but a single exception. Joseph T. Shipley of the New Leader protested:

> Those who enjoy laughing at others, instead of with them, will find ample opportunity in Season In The Sun. Homosexuals are apparently still regarded in some quarters as funny per se, and two of them flutter across the stage a few times for no purpose other than to solicit a thoughtless laugh.[2]

Joseph Schildkraut was not going to be laughed at in 1951, nor sneered at either, in a suspiciously gay stage role when he agreed to star in a Broadway revival of The Green Bay Tree. The stage and film star explained:

> I've always wanted to play Dulcimer, but diametrically opposite to what he was played in the first production. We do not see Dulcimer as an active homosexual. It's a possessiveness. He needs youth, charm and companionship. It's a neurotic necessity, never must the audience feel he has ever touched the boy.[3]

---

[1]Wolcott Gibbs, Season In The Sun (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 27.

[2]Joseph T. Shipley, "On Stage," New Leader, 14 October 1950.

[3]Joseph Schildkraut, "A New Conception of 'The Green Bay Tree,'" New York Post, 31 January 1951.

The Green Bay Tree had been revived with decidedly gay Dulcimers in 1946 for four performances at the Equity-Library Theatre, and for very limited engagements in 1947 and 1950 by Off-Broadway groups.[1] Schildkraut and director Shephard Traube's decision to play the elegant bachelor "straight" seemed to some critics, as Variety noted, "to be one of the major weakness of the production."[2] "They [the star and his director] have blunted the play and caused it to lose much of its edge . . ," the Morning Telegraph reported. "Mr. Dulcimer is not at his evil best, and the sinister base essential to the completeness of the play is gone."[3] Richard Watts, Jr., wrote in the Post:

> All the atmosphere of quiet, almost unspoken terror is gone from it now. Apparently Shephard Traube, who produced it, and Joseph Schildkraut, who now acts the leading role, shied away from the ominous note of the homosexual and tried to substitute for it a considerably healthier menace of a desire for luxury. I can understand their discomfort over that suggestion of the epicene, but, if they felt that way they shouldn't have produced "The Green Bay Tree." As it is, they have produced a drama that isn't about much of anything.[4]

Despite Schildkraut's determination not to portray the role as an overt gay, the New Leader reported that the veteran

---

[1]Robert Garland, "'The Green Bay Tree' By Off-Broadway Group," New York Journal American, 17 July 1947; Robert Garland "'Green Bay Tree' Impressively Staged at Mews Playhouse," New York Journal American, 17 July 1942; "Green Bay Tree," Equity-Library Theatre: no publication, 1950; "Green Bay Tree," Triangle Players of West Side Y.M.C.A." both on file in "The Green Bay Tree," Lincoln Center.

[2]"The Green Bay Tree," Variety, 7 February 1951.

[3]Whitney Bolton, "'The Green Bay Tree' Revived With Character Alterations," New York Morning Telegram, 3 February 1951.

[4]Richard Watts, Jr., "Decline Of 'The Green Bay Tree,'" New York Post, 2 February 1951.

star "plays Dulcimer with too obvious homosexual mannerism."[1] John McClain of the Journal American also reacted to Schildkraut's performance as if he were playing at being a lecherous old gay who uses his wealth to seduce a luxury-loving young man to his perverted lifestyle. After seeing the opening night performance on 2 February 1951 at the John Golden Theatre, McClain complained:

> After all, there are people like this in the world and I suppose a consideration of their problems falls within the scope of the theatre. My objection is the simple old fashioned one of being slightly revolted by the spectacle of corruption in triumph.[2]

A year after Joseph Schildkraut played The Green Bay Tree in its 1951 Broadway revival--seen in only 20 performances[3]--by playing Dulcimer in a way that "never must the audience feel that he ever touched the boy,"[4] Lillian Hellman also blunted the effectiveness, according to many of the critics, in her staging of a Broadway revival of The Children's Hour co-starring Hollywood film star Patricia Neal and Kim Hunter. "By having Patricia Neal play Martha in so mannish a fashion," George Freedley of the Morning Telegraph complained,"Miss Hellman tele-

---

[1]Joseph T. Shipley, "On Stage. Two Revivals Disappointing," Cue, 12 February 1951, p. 26.

[2]John McClain, "A Strong Though Rather Soiled Play," New York Journal American, 2 February 1951.

[3]John Chapman, ed., The Burns Mantle Best Plays of 1950-51 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1951), p. 346.

[4]Joseph Schildkraut, "A New Conception of 'The Green Bay Tree,'" New York Post, 31 January 1951.

graphs her punches."[1] Walter Kerr also objected to Neal's work which he found "markedly mannish from the outset, a suggestion which tends to cloud the issue before it can be joined."[2] George Jean Nathan concurred with Kerr, protesting that "Patricia Neal's physical aspect with its wayward suggestion of heness rebelliously plants what should gradually come out later."[3] Whitney Bolton, still another dissatisfied reviewer, wrote:

> I do not believe a stride and a hair-do comprise the whole of characterization. . . . there was a stride, there was a Cornellesque hair-do and there was a voice which seemed deliberately pitched into low tones.[4]

"This is a somber play about a subject termed 'difficult' in polite society."[5] George Freedley reported after seeing the Off-Broadway Equity Library Theatre production of The Children's Hour in 1945, seven years before Hellman staged the Broadway revival. Critics and theatregoers were far less squeamish about seeing a lesbian character in a play in 1952, according to the reviewer for Women's Wear Daily:

> Gossip about sexual aberations, actual and implied, has become more prevalent in our depraved plays of 1952 than it ever was in 1934. The implied Lesbianism between

---

[1]George Freedley, "On Stage--and On," New York Morning Telegraph, 26 December 1952.

[2]Walter Kerr, "The Theatres: 'The Children's Hour,'" New York Herald Tribune, 19 December 1952.

[3]George Jean Nathan, "George Jean Nathan's Theatre," New York Journal American, 11 January 1953.

[4]Whitney Bolton, "Stage: 'Children's Hour' Still Taut, Powerful Drama," New York Morning Telegraph, 20 December 1952.

[5]George Freedley, "The Stage Today," New York Morning Telegraph, 29 May 1945.

> the teachers and the nasty gossip-mongering by the patrician grandmother of the malicious little girl seem completely topical and valid today.[1]

Hellman, who had been blacklisted during the McCarthy purge because of her longtime support of Stalinism,[2] was unable in those years to find work as a Hollywood screenwriter. "In need of some income," Professor Richard Moody wrote in his study of her dramaturgy, "and prepared to raise her voice against the outrages of HUAC [The House Un-American Activities Committee] and McCarthy, [producer Kermit] Bloomgarden persuaded her to revive The Children's Hour."[3]

"In 1952, the play was successfully revived," Doris V. Falk wrote in her biography of Lillian Hellman, "then it spoke to audiences about the events of those times--the ruin of careers and lives by the 'McCarthy' technique of the smear, the blacklist and 'The Big Lie.'"[4]

In reviewing the revival of The Children's Hour, critic Eric Bentley faulted the playwright for failing to generate more indignation at Martha's suicide. After Martha shoots herself, Karen is quickly reconciled with their nemesis, Mrs. Tilford, almost as if her companion's lesbian love confession

---

[1]Thomas R. Dash, "'The Children's Hour,'" Women's Wear Daily, 19 December 1952.

[2]Michiko Katutani, "Hellman-McCarthy Libel Suit Stirs Old Antagonisms," New York Times, 19 March 1980.

[3]Richard Moody, Lillian Hellman, Playwright (New York: Pegasus, 1972), p. 238.

[4]Doris V. Falk, Lillian Hellman (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1978), p. 8.

had changed the gravity of the initial charges. Bentley wrote in indignation:

> The material from which A Children's Hour [sic] is made suggests two stories, The first is a story of heterosexual teachers accused of Lesbianism! The enemy is a society which punishes the innocent. The second story is a story of Lesbian teachers accused of Lesbianism, the enemy is a society which punishes Lesbians. Now, since either of these stories could make an acceptable indignant play, one could scarcely be surprised if a playwright tried to tell them both at once. This is quite what Miss Hellman does. She spends the greater part of the evening on the first story. In fact the indignation she arouses in us has but one source--our impression that the charge of Lesbianism is unfounded, an impression reinforced by everyone's holy horror whenever the subject comes up. Then, in the last few minutes, we learn that one of the teachers is a Lesbian. But it is too late for Miss Hellman to tell story two and spell out its moral. The "guilty" teacher kills herself, and the curtain comes down. Taking the play as a technical exercise, we could praise this ending as clever, or damn it as clumsy, but if we are interested in Miss Hellman's indignation, and especially if during the evening she induced us to share it, we are bound to feel cheated.
>
> We are told that the play has been revived because of the current red scare. Now suppose it had been about teachers accused of communism, that for over two hours we had been asked to boil with indignation at the wrongness of the accusation, only to find, towards the close of Act Three, that one of the pair did harbor communist sympathies? . . . Admittedly, the audience at the Coronet was not concerned with the moral abiguities I find inherent in The Children's Hour. As far as I could observe, they were being delightedly shocked at two phenomenon: Lesbianism and wickedness in a child.[1]

The Broadway revival of The Children's Hour is listed as a failure by Louis Kronenberger in The Best Plays of 1952-53, even though it was seen in 189 performances.[2] No other play

---

[1]Eric Bentley, "Lillian Hellman's Indignation," The Dramatic Event (New York: Horizon Press, 1954), pp. 74-75.

[2]Louis Kronenberger, ed., The Best Plays of 1952-53 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1953), p. 313.

with a gay character has been seen in as many Broadway performances, 877 in all, when the playwright's 1952 revival is added to Shumlin's premiere production in 1934.[1] The second most frequently seen Broadway play with a gay character, however closeted he may be, Tea and Sympathy, played 712 performances.[2] The author, Robert Anderson, wanted to make the point that sissies do not always turn out gay anymore than tomboys always turn out to be lesbians. Anderson's comfortable, and perhaps for some comforting theme, worked well with the American public. Tea and Sympathy was not only a great hit on Broadway, but was seen in countless other stage productions all over the country, and was made into a motion picture in 1956. It has been published both by Random House and Samuel French.

Tea and Sympathy bears a striking resemblance to an earlier, British play also set in a boys' boarding school. John Van Druten's Young Woodley, produced in 1925, had been banned from the public stage in London because it concerned a romantic, but sexually unconsummated relationship involving a teenage boy and the wife of a headmaster. Twenty years later that same concept was seen in Tea and Sympathy but added was a sexual seduction, a closeted but obviously gay homophobe, and--as the Daily News reported--the prime consideration of

---

[1]Richard Moody, Lillian Hellman, Playwright (New York: Pegasus, 1972), p. 38.

[2]Louis Kronenberger, ed., Best Plays of 1953-54 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1954), p. 401.

"homosexuality--or the suspicion thereof."[1] Britain's Lord Chamberlain banned Anderson's drama, but the New York production encountered no problems with the censors after it opened at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre on 30 September 1953 to unanimous rave reviews.

The climactic scene in Tea and Sympathy has the respectable, sympathetic headmaster's wife give herself to an artistic and seemingly effeminate teenager, who suspects that he is gay because his father, the headmaster, and some of his classmates entertain the same suspicion. Since the final curtain comes down as the woman is unbuttoning her blouse, there is really no way of knowing whether or not the sexual therapy proved as effective as the very reminiscent remedy had been in Outrageous Fortune when Barry the "borderline" bachelor is cured instantly of his gay inclinations by sleeping with Crystal. Laura, a mere mortal, had not achieved the same success when she gave herself to a gay bachelor years before she gave herself to Tom, hoping that in marriage he would find adjustment and satisfaction in a heterosexual relationship. Bill Reynolds, her husband, the headmaster, remains gay in orientation, though closeted and continent, protecting himself from suspicion by his marriage, a brusque, macho manner and a particularly vicious and vindictive homophobic stance.

---

[1]John Chapman, "'Tea and Sympathy' A Beautiful Play. Deborah Kerr Magnificent," New York Daily News, 1 October 1953.

Throughout the play, Tom Lee, the suspect teenager, and his distraught father are terrified that the youth's mannerisms and interests are, indeed, indications of a gay predisposition. Nothing could be more tragic, more shameful in the character's minds than that their worse fears might be realized. "The play is rife with homophobia," Dr. Gene R. Touchet concluded in his dissertation, "American Drama and The Emergence of Social Homophilia," "though it contains no overt homosexuality and only one implied homosexual character."[1]

Bill Reynolds hates the sight of gentle, aesthetic Tom Lee. "A man knows a queer when he sees one,"[2] the headmaster tells his wife. "Bill probably has homosexual tendencies himself, which he has worked very hard to suppress,"[3] Dr. Touchet concluded after analyzing the very masculine misogynist who is most comfortable in the company of other males, particularly teenagers, while engaging in outdoor, athletic activities. If Bill's sexual repression is not apparent to the audience before the last act, the playwright makes certain that it will be in the attack of the headmaster's wife.

---

[1]Gene R. Touchet, "American Drama and The Emergence of Social Homophobia, 1952-72" (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Florida), 1974, p. 8.

[2]Robert Anderson, Tea and Sympathy (New York: Random House, 1953), p. 48.

[3]Touchet, p. 13.

LAURA (quietly, almost afraid to say it). Did it ever occur to you that you persecute in Tom, that boy up there, you persecute in him the thing you fear in yourself? (BILL looks at her for a long moment of hatred. She has hit close to the truth he has never let himself be conscious of. There is a moment when he might hurt her, but then he draws away, still staring at her. He backs away, slowly, and then turns to the door.) Bill!

BILL (not looking at her). I hope you will be gone when I come back from dinner.

LAURA. I will be . . . Oh, Bill, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that . . . it was cruel. This was the weakness you cried out for me to save you from, wasn't it. . . .[1]

Robert Anderson was not the first to present such a gay male character in a Broadway play. Two years before Tea and Sympathy began its long engagement, Herman Melville's Billy Budd, adapted for the stage by two college professors, Louis O. Cox and Robert Chapman, opened on 10 February 1951 at the Biltmore Theatre where it was seen in 105 performances.[2]

Herman Melville offers no explanation in his last, posthumously published novel, Billy Budd, for the hatred which impels Claggart, master-at-arms aboard H. M. S. Indominitable, to persecute the young, handsome, good-natured sailor, Billy Budd. None of the critics for the New York dailies suggested that the petty officer's bearing of false witness against the attractive sailor might have been sexually motivated, yet that conclusion seems indisputable to Dr. W. David Sievers.

---

[1]Robert Anderson, Tea and Sympathy (New York: Random House, 1953), pp. 176-177.

[2]John Chapman, ed., The Burns Mantle Yearbook of Best Plays of 1948-49 (Garden City, New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1949), p. 349.

> The unmistakable hint of homosexuality comes when Claggart, who had been comfortable with the knowledge that all men hate him, is baffled by Billy's friendliness. "Do you--like me, Billy Budd?" he asks searchingly, and when Billy picks up the whip Claggart had dropped, Claggart stares at Billy and then exclaims, "No, no! Charm me, too, would you! Get away," Claggart has no choice but to destroy Billy.[1]

The master-at-arms in Billy Budd and the housemaster in Tea and Sympathy were not the only male characters seen on the American stage who until 1951 turned against others of similar sexual persuasion. The ghoulish Nazi Von Laidi in Waltz In Goose Step betrays his gay comrades in order to escape suspicion that he was involved in their political plot to assasinate the Hitler-like Leader. The cockney male hustler in Oscar Wilde testifies with impunity as a witness for the prosecution when the playwright is being tried on sodomy charges. Villianous Claggart and vindictive Bill Reynolds, on the other hand, are the first dramatic representations of gay males who persecute other males because they are either physically attractive, discernably gay or seemingly effeminate, and, thus seem to pose a threat to them.

Before Broadway audiences were to see and hear the first truly overt and important gay character in 1954 in The Immoralist, since Robert Morley portrayed Oscar Wilde in 1937, there were four other new plays--besides Season In The Sun, Billy Budd, and Tea and Sympathy--produced during the 1950s

---

[1]W. David Sievers, Freud On Broadway (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1970), p. 409.

with secondary gay characters. Three were written by well-known authors: Tennessee Williams, George S. Kaufman and Dorothy Parker. The three plays failed to impress the critics or attract theatregoers. The fourth new play, End As A Man by Calder Willingham, based on his novel, was such a success in an Off-Broadway theatre in Greenwich Village that it was moved to Broadway's Vanderbilt Theatre where it had a moderately successful run of 105 additional performances beginning on 22 October 1952.[1]

End As A Man merits little mention in any consideration of the emergence of gay characters in American theatrical productions. The minor character suspected or cited as being gay by some of the critics and Dr. Donald Loeffler in his dissertation,[2] is not identified as such by the playwright. Willingham wrote of Perrin McKee, a teenage sadist and voyeurist, "his manner can hardly be described as altogether masculine. However, he is really more creepy and weird than effeminate."[3]

In an ugly scene in End As A Man in which a teenage bully named Jocko threatens another student at a military academy, McKee's behavior, and the author's description, probably seemed clues to his sexual disposition:

---

[1]Louis Kronenberger, ed., The Burns Mantle Yearbook of The Best Plays of 1952-53 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1953), p. 339.

[2]Donald Lee Loeffler, An Analysis of the Treatment of the Homosexual Character in Dramas Produced in the New York Theatre from 1952 to 1972 (New York: Arno Press, 1975), p. 43.

[3]Calder Willingham, End As A Man (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1953), 1-2-11.

> (McKEE wets his lips eagerly, eyes wide open-literally jumping up and down with nervous excitement and eagerness. Gleeful, joyous, he can hardly contain himself. . . . He is like a maniac child with the prospect of going to the zoo. His tone is effeminate, very much like a young lady.) Beat him! Beat him terribly Jockoo! O-h-h-h . . . Beat him savagely . . . Beat him, beat him, beat him, Ooooh Jocko with a coat hanger . . . Oh yes. Yes! Hit him. Now hit him! Hit him hard. Don't show any mercy on him," . . .[1]

While it is not clear that McKee in End As A Man is a gay sadist just because the author refers to him as being effeminate in tone, "very much like a young lady,"[2] there is no question but that the very first covert gay character Tennessee Williams created in his plays was a gay masochist. Williams had borrowed Baron de Charlus from Marcel Proust's novels published under the general title, A La Rerche du Temps Perdu, and placed the notorious gay aristocrat into his surrealistic play, Camino Real, seen in 60 performances at the National Theatre after it opened on 19 March 1953.[3]

"A strong homophobic statement is embodied in the character of Baron de Charlus," Dr. Touchet noted in his dissertation, "The Baron, a man of mordid desires, is dedicated to the pleasures of the body. But he is inflicted with a deep sense

---

[1]Calder Willingham, End As A Man (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1953), p. 2-2-24.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Louis Kronenberger, ed., The Burns Mantle Yearbook of the Best Plays of 1952-53 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1953), p. 295.

of guilt because of his homosexuality."[1] Novelist and playwright Gore Vidal, once an intimate of Williams', wrote of the admittedly gay dramatist.[2]

> He was--and is--guilt-ridden, and although he tells us that he believes in no afterlife, he is still too much the puritan not to believe in sin. At some deep level Tennessee truly believes that the homosexualist is wrong and that the heterosexualist is right.[3]

In Camino Real, Williams' guilt-ridden character appears briefly along with an assortment of other troubled characters such as Casanova, Lord Byron, and Marguerite Gautier, all borrowed by the playwright from history and literature. Proust's creation appears in the first scene in front of a tacky hotel run by a manager named A. Ratt. "The Baron de Charlus," according to the playwright, is "an elderly foppish sybarite . . .".

> On his trail is a wild-looking young man of startling beauty called LOBO. CHARLUS is aware of the follower and, during his conversation with A. RATT, he takes out a pocket mirror to inspect him while pretending to comb his hair and point his moustache. . . .
>
> A. RATT. Vacancy here! A bed at the "Ritz Men Only!"
> A little white ship to sail the dangerous night in . . .
>
> THE BARON. Ah, bon soir, Mr. Ratt.

---

[1]Gene R. Touchet, "American Drama and the Emergence of Social Homophilia, 1952-1972" (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Florida, 1974), p. 6.

[2]Tennessee Williams, Memoirs (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975), p. 9.

[3]Gore Vidal, Matters Of Fact and Fiction (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 138.

A. RATT. Cruising?

THE BARON. No, just--walking!

A. RATT. That's all you need to do.

THE BARON. I sometimes find it suffices. You have a vacancy, do you?

A. RATT. For you?

THE BARON. And a possible guest. You know the requirements. An iron bed with no mattress and a considerable length of stout knotted rope. No! Chains this evening, metal chains, I've been very bad, I have a lot to atone for . . .[1]

Dr. Touchet explains that, "the Baron goes off to seek a man to inflict his penance," in his analysis of Williams' gay masochist. "Almost immediately we hear a 'strangulated outcry.' The homophobic statement of the play is complete when the Baron, dead, is pushed across the stage and out of the play."[2]

Rather than turning to a sadistic street hustler to expiate his "sinful" attraction to others of his gender, another guilt-ridden gay character, created by George F. Kaufman and his wife Leueen MacGrath for The Small Hours, turns to a psychiatrist. While not as dramatic as the Baron's behavior in Camino Real, judges of the period in America often did order lesbians and gay men to seek psychiatric help. In The Small Hours such help is provided during a stay in prison.

---

[1]Tennessee Williams, Three Plays by Tennessee Williams (New York: A New Directions Book, 1959), p. 202.

[2]Gene R. Touchet, "American Drama and The Emergence of Social Homophilia, 1952-72," (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Florida, 1974), p. 7.

The Kaufmans' The Small Hours, which lasted only twenty performances at the National Theatre after it opened on 15 February 1951,[1] concerns the not-too-bright wife of a successful publisher whose life is full of domestic traumas including her son's imprisonment on a narcotics charge for smoking marijuana. After his release, he explains to his mother what it was that drove him to it:

> PETER. . . . You know what's the matter with me, don't you? You know why I've been such a stinker, and why I took dope, and why I can't get on with anybody.
> (LAURA just waits)
> I don't know how else to say this. No matter how I say it, it's going to upset and shock you. I wish I could have shielded you from this, but my own need for help is too great. I'm a latent homosexual, that's what's wrong with me.
> (LAURA still does not speak, there is the merest tightening of her hand)
> In my defense I have to tell you that I fought against it in every way I knew how. It was a difficult fight and it was a lonely fight because it wasn't anything I could discuss, especially not with you and father. But these past months I've been having some talks--a man that I think can help me. He's a doctor I met in prison, and we've been going ahead with it since I came out. Right now I'm going through a tough phase, and when it gets tough I'm tempted to drop the whole thing. I'm really not telling you this to distress you, but because I need your help.
>
> LAURA. You know you have it, don't you, my darling?
>
> (HE bends over and kisses her, SHE gives a little half cry, holds him tight for a moment. HE goes.)[2]

---

[1]John Chapman, ed., The Burns Mantle Best Plays of 1950-51 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1951), p. 236.

[2]George S. Kaufman and Leueen MacGrath, The Small Hours (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, p. 2-31.

Another mother of another unhappy young man suspected, at least, of socially unacceptable sexual inclinations, did not listen as sympathetically to her son as Laura in The Small Hours. This young man had been accused of being a pederast. He denies the charges, but goes to the park to watch boys at play, and applies for employment as a teacher at a private school for boys. This character, the first suspect pederast stage portrait ever seen on the American stage, appears in Ladies Of The Corridor, written by Dorothy Parker in collaboration with Arnaud d'Usseau. The playwrights, as Richard Watts, Jr. of the Post reported, "have looked with pity and terror into the lives of quiet desperation led by some lonely and aging widows in a gloomy New York hotel."[1] Watt's colleagues on the New York dailies had mixed reactions. They praised the performers directed by Harold Clurman, but were less than enthusiastic about the authors' efforts. Ladies Of The Corridor began a disappointingly brief 45 day engagement at the Longacre Theatre on 21 October 1953.[2]

One of the ladies living in the residential hotel, Grace Nichols, a genteel widow confined to a wheelchair, is cared for by her subservient son, Charles. "Look carefully at him and he

---

[1]Richard Watts, Jr., "Two On The Aisle," New York Post 22 October 1953.

[2]Louis Kronenberger, ed., The Best Plays of 1953-54 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1954), p. 311.

is beautiful,"[1] the authors write in describing the role played by handsome Shepperd Strudwick. Charles has announced to his mother that he wants to go back to teaching and plans to find a professional attendant to look after her. He has not worked since being fired as a teacher in a small town after the parents of one of his students accused him of seducing their son. "I paid that preposterous sum and we left town,"[2] Grace recalls. The school has been closed for years and there are no records that might spoil Charles' chances of being hired by a Mr. Whittaker, who has interviewed him for a position at a private school for boys in New York City. Mrs. Nichols objects to Charles' leaving her to the care of someone else citing "the obligations of a human being."[3]

CHARLES (goes to her). Grace, what are you talking about?

MRS. NICHOLS. I'm talking about the most important thing of all--duty. Mr. Whittaker has a tremendous duty to those children. Those little boys are in his charge, He dare not expose them to--

. . .

CHARLES (sitting in chair). To what?

MRS. NICHOLS. Need we go into that?

CHARLES. Are you telling me that you feel you have a duty?

---

[1]Dorothy Parker and Arnaud d'Usseau, Ladies Of The Corridor (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, p. 1-1-3.

[2]Dorothy Parker and Arnaud d'Usseau, Ladies Of The Corridor (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1945), p. 82.

[3]Ibid., p. 83.

MRS. NICHOLS. Yes, Charles, I am.

CHARLES. To whom?

MRS. NICHOLS. To those little children, Charles. As I get nearer the grave I realize that I must do what is right. Painful though it may be to me, and mine. If you're not going to tell Dr. Whittaker the truth, then I must!

CHARLES. But it wasn't the truth! It was a vicious lie!

MRS. NICHOLS. Appearances, Charles, appearances.

CHARLES (jumps up). And what were the appearances?

MRS. NICHOLS. You kept the boy after school.

CHARLES. I wanted to help him with his composition. (Pacing L. and back to C.)

MRS. NICHOLS. But it was appearances. They were damaging. He was such a pretty little boy.[1]

With his mother threatening to write to any prospective employer if he ever considers leaving her, Charles is trapped. The fact that the only employment he will consider is teaching at a school of young boys calls to question his professed innocence. Mrs. Nichols, while seemingly self-righteous, vindictive and selfish, may actually be protecting both Charles and herself from a second financially devastating and personally humiliating scandal.

Before the appearance in 1954 of "the first American play to present an avowed homophile,"[2] as Dr. Touchet character-

---

[1]Dorothy Parker and Arnaud d'Ussear, Ladies Of The Corridor (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1954), p. 84.

[2]Gene R. Touchet, "American Drama and the Emergence of Social Homophobia, 1952-1972," (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Florida, 1974), p. 16.

izes the Arab apologist for his lifestyle in The Immoralist, the six other new plays with gay characters produced in the first half of the 1950s offered theatregoers a sorry, unsavory lot of stage portraits. Broadway audiences saw a couple of flitty Fire Island effeminates, a persecuting homophobe, a slandering closeted villian, one masochist, one suspect sadist, a convicted drug-user and a suspected child molester. Because the majority of these roles were minor ones, however, the reviewers made little or no mention of these characters as gays. In addition, none of the plays in which these seven characters appeared were primarily concerned with a gay's social or personal conflicts.

In Tea and Sympathy suspicions of gay inclinations figured most prominently in the drama's plot, but the sensitive young man being persecuted was heterosexual. His problems reflected those experienced by some among heterosexuals, a dramatic predicament not unfamiliar to Continental playgoers in the first half of the twentieth century. "In the theatre homosexuality is always a false accusation," André Gide observed in 1950, "never a fact of life."[1] Four years later, when Ruth and Augustus Goetz's dramatization of Gide's internationally acclaimed and denounced novel, The Immoralist was produced on Broadway, American theatregoers saw a play with a protagonist whose gay predilliction becomes the most important

---

[1]Ruth and Augustus Goetz, "Genesis Of A Play From An Andre Gide Novel," New York Times, 31 January 1954.

fact of his life. The man from Variety recognized that the authors of The Immoralist took a giant step in the development of gay characterizations on the American stage.

> A generation ago Mae West crudely exploited homosexuality in "The Pleasure Men." [sic] Other plays dealing with the subject have been "The Captive," "The Green Bay Tree," and "Trio." More recently there has been "Tea and Sympathy," . . . compared to the Gide Story, the story of "Tea and Sympathy" is a pretty, valentine which leaves most people feeling a sentimental glow that courageous clean-mindedness has triumphed over nasty rumor. Gide is not dealing with rumor, this hero is guilty as charged.[1]

The protagonist, if not the hero, of the Goetz's The Immoralist is a fine-looking young French bachelor, son of a well-known, affluent archeologist whose own work in that field has already gained him a reputation even more illustrious than that of his father's. Act One begins in 1900 in their country home in Normandy when, after the father's funeral, the bachelor, a mature man in his late twenties or early thirties, learns that Bocage, the manager of their estate, has been appointed his legal guardian. Michel's father left a will that stipulates that, "The propriety of my son's behavior shall be the sole condition of his enjoying his inheritance."[2] Michel is insulted, enraged and deeply hurt by this demeaning stipulation.

Both Michel and Bocage know why the old man died suspicious of his only child. Even though the son has spent his whole life devoted to proving through his exemplary behavior

---

[1]"Play on Broadway," Variety, 10 February 1954.

[2]Ruth and Augustus Goetz, The Immoralist (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1954), p. 31.

working at his father's side, that he is not gay, the old man never forgot an experience, humiliating and traumatic to them both, when Michel was expelled from a boarding school for boys.

> MICHEL (in torment). I was eleven years old! I had a problem . . . and when you are eleven years old you are not very good at problems. And I solved mine vilely--I know that!
>
> BOCAGE. If it had been anything else--like stealing or lying--the school would not have expelled you. But this was a sin of the flesh, an offense against yourself and the other boy--it frightened your father! He never forgot it.
>
> MICHEL. He never forgot it! Do you think I did? That morning as the teachers packed my boxes, they threw my clothing in as if it were infected. Then they walked me through the courtyard at the recess so that everybody could watch me leave. I was alone on the earth. At that moment they cut me away from other human beings. I was never able to make my way back . . . not even to my father. . . .[1]

Michel decides to leave his Normandy country home immediately, feeling himself a failure since he had been unable to allay his father's fears about him. Marcelline, a pretty young neighbor who has been in love with Michel since they were children, wants to go with him. Despite her brother's suspicions about Michel and his annoyance at his sister's unconventional aggressiveness, Marcelline asks Michel to marry her. The first scene ends as Michel, driven into the arms of the adoring young woman whom he calls, "My only friend,"[2] by his father's

---

[1]Ruth and Augustus Goetz, The Immoralist (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1954), p. 32.

[2]Ibid., p. 36.

suspicions of him, accepts Marcelline's proposal. They plan to be married immediately and leave France so that Michel can continue his archeological research.

In the second scene of Act One, it is clear that the marriage has only hurt and confused the rejected bride. They are living in Biskra in the Sahara Desert of Algeria and Michel is ailing with undiagnosed tuberculosis. During the two months that they have been married he has never once made love to his wife. While Marcelline is tormented by this unnatural situation, Michel, satisfied with their platonic relationship, professes his love for her. Attempting to prove himself, he takes his virgin-bride in his arms, but the physical exertion brings on another of his coughing spells. When Michel begins to hemmorage, terrified Marcelline screams for help as the curtain descends.

In the first scene of Act Two Michel returns from a week's stay in the hospital to find that Marcelline has hired an Arab houseboy named Bachir to help her during his recovery. The audacious boy, a blackmailing petty thief who prostitutes himself for gay tourists, immediately recognizes Michel's proclivity. The first chance he gets he mentions to his master an orchard outside of the city in which a man named Moktir "lives without women--only boys and men are out there. Beautiful men."[1] Michel is annoyed at Bachir's presumptuousness

---

[1]Ruth and Augustus Goetz, The Immoralist (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1945), p. 61.

and will hear no more.

Bachir will not be put off. "Then maybe I amuse you, sir." he tells Michel, "I dance for you--."[1] The boy does so, picking up Marcelline's sewing scissors to click them as dancers use castanets. When she comes into the room interrupting the boy's seductive dance, Bachir leaves with Marcelline's scissors. Michel has seen the handsome young thief steal them, but says nothing when his wife notices that they are missing from her sewing basket.

Two weeks later, Michel is sitting one evening on the terrace of his house in Biskra, when an Arab comes to seek him out and show him a small piece of stone sculpture that was unearthed in the plowing of a field. Michel invites the man to join him for coffee and learns, much to his amazement, that the Arab has not only read his books but has taught at the University of Fez.

MICHEL (astonished). It is a great University! Why did you leave?

ARAB. One must choose, sir. Of the thousand forms of life each of us can know but one. I came here because I chose to live without shame.

MICHEL. Shame of what?

ARAB. I am Moktir, the shepherd.

MICHEL. From the orchards?

ARAB. Yes.

---

[1]Ruth and Augustus Goetz, The Immoralist (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1954), p. 64.

MICHEL. I have heard of you. I want nothing from you.

(Michel rises, to down right of terrace)

ARAB. You didn't begin by insulting me. I am no different now than when I entered here.

MICHEL. You are to me! I didn't know why you were!

ARAB. You don't know now. I have given up more freedom than you will ever have in order not to lie to you, or to anyone, and above all not to myself.

MICHEL. Everything I have been taught tells me that what you are is wrong.

ARAB. Wrong! How can a man of science use such a word! My instincts are a part of nature.

MICHEL. That is not true!

ARAB. How can you judge what is true for me? I must do that for myself, and I have only a short time on this earth in which to be myself. For me only the present exists.[1]

Michel asks Moktir to leave before Marcelline returns. Offended that he should be insulted and rejected by a scholar from whom he had hoped to borrow a book and engage in a civil conversation, the Arab starts to exit. Suddenly disturbed at his impulsive, rude behavior, Michel stops him and apologizes. The two men shake hands and Michel promises to come and visit the orchards. He gives Moktir a book written by Aristippus, the Greek philospher of Cyrene, an ancient district of North Africa, who taught that pleasure is the only rational aim of life.

MOKTIR. (looks at it) Aristippus! Thank you. (He goes out the gate then turns) There is a line here I have

---

[1]Ruth and Augustus Goetz, The Immoralist (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1954), pp. 72-73.

never forgotten. (He quotes) The art of life lies in taking pleasures as they pass, and the keenest pleasures are not intellectual--nor are they always moral. . . .[1]

Michel watches his guest depart as the curtain falls.

Bored with life in the Sahara and frustrated in her relationship with Michel, Marcelline has begun to drink. He, on the other hand, finds himself, for the first time in his life, at ease. He is recovering from his consumption and, together with his wife, has been going for daily visits to the orchards. The young French woman finds no satisfaction in their outings. "When I sit with you and Moktir," she tells her husband, "I feel completely unnecessary."[2] Before racing off to throw herself on her bed, the virgin-wife says, "I could live with you anywhere, without comfort, without children--but I cannot live with your denial of me. It makes me feel half-dead!"[3]

Bachir enters to find Michel in a bad humor. Within minutes the audacious houseboy is fired because he has so annoyed Michel with his insinuations that his employer is interested in more than just finding a place to work in the orchards. Bachir is astonished and vindictive.

BACHIR. . . . The first time I saw you with Madame--the day you took this house--I knew you were--(Michel reaches out for Bachir's throat. Bachir grabs his hands)

---

[1]Ruth and Augustus Goetz, The Immoralist (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1954), p. 76.

[2]Ibid., p. 78.

[3]Ibid., p. 81.

MICHEL. How dare you? (He grabs him)

BACHIR. Don't! I will not tell her! I promise you! (Michel flings him to the ground)

MICHEL. Get out!

BACHIR. It is no secret--(He stands up) Maybe not even to her--(He exits quickly away from the house. His laughter can be heard in the distance) It is no secret! . . .[1]

Offended and enraged by the houseboy's mockery, Michel goes to his wife's bed to prove his heterosexual capabilities as the curtain descends.

In the next scene, some months later, Marcelline comes home from the wine shop drunk. Michel is so wrapped up in his writing and his friendship with Moktir that he has not been aware of his wife's alcoholism. The Arab is visiting Michel when the housekeeper has to help the hysterical, incoherent young woman to bed.

MOKTIR. (Comes onto the terrace) You have not deceived her! You have deceived yourself!

MICHEL. I have to help her! (Moktir starts out) Don't go! Help me, Moktir!

MOKTIR. It is dishonor to live two lives! I return to my own life. I deceive no one. I corrupt no one. Do you think that because I am what I am I have no morality? Do you think that because you have come to our life, you will be able to live without any?

MICHEL. I must help her!

MOKTIR. Your power to help is not great. You hide behind her. The only way you could help her is to spare her what is coming--you should bear that alone!

---

[1]Ruth and Augustus Goetz, The Immoralist (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1954), pp. 83-84.

MICHEL. No! No! I will not be alone! I cannot lose her! I cannot live as you do!

MOKTIR (Gravely) You harm us all. . . .[1]

Michel goes to his drunken wife to resolve the matter.

MICHEL. I have to tell you the truth. I have to tell you everything. You will not understand it, just as I cannot. But if you know about me, you will not destroy yourself anymore.

MARCELLINE (Puts her feet on the ground to rise) I am drunk. Thank God, I am drunk.

MICHEL (Comes to her and takes her by the arms) I am everything you fear I am.

MARCELLINE (Almost screams) How dare you tell me the truth? How dare you?[2]

Michel wants Marcelline to save herself by leaving him and going back home to Normandy. He will go on living in Biskra without her.

MARCELLINE. What will I say? What will I tell people?

MICHEL. Don't spare me! Tell the truth. See that no one ever makes our mistake again!

MARCELLINE (Pleading) I don't care about others. I just care about you and me.

MICHEL. Listen to me, Marcie! You must go home hating me! For your own sake you must see me as I am.

MARCELLINE (Pulls away from him) Don't . . . don't . . . don't . . . (She pulls away from him--exits to terrace)

MICHEL (Following her) You must understand me! (Marcelline is trying to escape the words, but he follows her--she sits down and covers her ears) I will say it everywhere! I will write it! I will speak it!

---

[1]Ruth and Augustus Goetz, The Immoralist (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1954), pp. 90-91

[2]Ibid., pp. 91-92.

MARCELLINE. Don't, Michel . . . don't!

MICHEL (Against her loud protests takes her hands from her ears so that she can hear him) I will never be silent again! Whoever hears of me, will hear that before anything! If there is an ounce of energy within me, I will say what I am like! This one thing I can do! I can speak out! (He raises his head in defiance as the curtain comes down)[1]

As Marcelline is preparing to leave Biskra the next morning, she learns that she is pregnant. She will not allow the doctor to tell her husband, and departs for Tunis and a boat to take her back to France. In a final conversation with Bachir, minutes before Michel comes to take her to Tunis, Marcelline learns that the corrupt, ex-houseboy plans to blackmail her husband if he remains in Algeria.

MARCELLINE. Poor Michel.

BACHIR. He will have it everywhere, Madame. It might as well be Bachir who profits-- . . .[2]

Six weeks later, Michel appears at the house in Normandy. He tells Bocage, his guardian, that he has been so miserable that he had to come home.

MICHEL. I have scavenged through the back streets of every town I passed through--There is no loneliness like that! I have been exploited by those who are like me, and shunned by those who are not.

BOCAGE (Not wanting to hear) My God, Michel--

MICHEL. And for that freedom I left Marcelline . . .[3]

---

[1]Ruth and Augustus Goetz, The Immoralist (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1954), pp. 92-93.

[2]Ibid., p. 104.

[3]Ibid., p. 116.

Robert, his brother-in-law, threatens to post a letter Michel wrote him admitting that he was gay on the church door if he ever comes back after Marcelline's baby is born. This is the first Michel hears of his wife's pregnancy. Aware that she is lonely too, he wants to stay with her.

> MARCELLINE. How could we be together? Think of the things we can never say to one another, the questions we can never ask . . . What kind of a life would that be?
>
> MICHEL. There is no assurance I can give you. I will no more lie to you than you to me. Our life together might destroy us both . . . but it might not. There are many kinds of marriages, Marcie, and people sacrifice many things to hold on to them.[1]

Bocage pleads with Marcelline to allow Michel to stay.

> BOCAGE. . . . Oh, Miss, let him stay. Let him stay and face these people down. In time they will listen to him. And if not to him, then to his books.
>
> MARCELLINE. No one will listen! That is a solution for those who come after we are gone--It won't solve our lives.[2]

Bocage warns Marcelline, "If you send him away now, there is only one life he can go back to--."[3]

> MARCELLINE. Is Bocage right? Is that the only life you face?
>
> MICHEL. I wish it were not--but there is no place on earth where those who are like me will not seek me out. Only here in this house where I was raised, can I shut them out.[4]

---

[1]Ruth and Augustus Goetz, The Immoralist (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1954), p. 120.

[2]Ibid., p. 120.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid., p. 121.

After Marcelline agrees to live again with her gay husband, who apparently plans to live continently, Michel makes her a promise before the final curtain falls on The Immoralist.

> MICHEL. I promise one thing: whatever life we may have here we will live it in dignity.[1]

Since only little more than a third of Andre Gide's novel is set in Algeria, the Goetzes freely devised almost all of the plot and most of the characterizations. The novel's protagonist does not openly consort with gay Arabs, nor does he reveal his sexual prediliction to anyone. He neither separates from, nor reconciles with his wife after impregnating her. In the novel, Marcelline's death conveniently resolves Michel's dilemma.

Additional elements, suggested by Gide's own biography were woven into the dramatization of the novel. Only in the denouement, in which Michel elects celibacy, after the loneliness, rejection and oppression of the gay lifestyle he had known, do the Goetzes depart from the facts of Gide's unconsummated marriage of convenience to his pious maiden cousin.

Klaus Mann noted that Madeleine Gide, "did not mind his erratic habits, or at any rate did not prevent him from indulging in them. Gide, the husband, roved throughout the world--no less unbound than did Gide, the bachelor."[2]

---

[1]Ruth and Augustus Goetz, The Immoralist (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1954), p. 121.

[2]Klaus Mann, Andre Gide (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc., 1943), p. 101.

Eric Bentley faulted the Goetzes for the way in which they resolved Michel's preference for his own gender while enjoying the emotional comfort and social convenience of marriage to a woman.

> The question has been: what can a homosexual husband do--assuming that his wife loves him and that he needs her affection? The answer proffered in the last scene of the play is that he can do without homosexuality! Or can he? This is modern drama. We can end, if we like, with a question mark. What the Goetzes don't seem to have realized is that this is not to ask a question but to beg one--and that, the main question of their play . . . The goal the Goetzes were making for was the open presentation of homosexuality and the open advocacy of a humane attitude to it. Up to now, as Gide told them in an interview, homosexuality in the theatre has been an accusation . . . Its standard form at present is, in fact, the unjust accusation, for our public has reached the point where it will allow the subject of homosexuality to come up, provided that the stigma is removed before the end of the evening. Our public's motto is: tolerance--provided there is nothing to tolerate . . . In short, the Goetzes stuck on a final scene [that] is last minute conformism.[1]

The goal that the Goetzes had set for themselves in adapting The Immoralist for the stage, was, indeed, "the open presentation of homosexuality," in Bentley's words, "and the open advocacy of a humane attitude to it."[2] A quarter of a century after The Immoralist played on Broadway Ruth Goodman Goetz revealed that she and her late husband had written the play as a gesture of outrage. A well-known English actor-director whom they admired, both professionally and personally,

---

[1]Eric Bentley, The Dramatic Event (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954), pp. 206-7.

[2]Ibid.

had been forced to live an uncomfortable, covert lifestyle, considered so depraved and revolting, that even any reference to it was unthinkable in his company, and in polite society. "We decided, for the sake of this fine, superior human being and others like him," Mrs. Goetz recalled, "we were going to drag the subject out into the open, out on the stage to which we had access since we were writing for the theatre."[1]

Ruth Goodman Goetz recalled that she could trace the genesis of The Immoralist back to the day when as a very young woman she had noticed a slender volume on a shelf at the Alfred A. Knopf Publishing Company in New York City where she was working after returning from a sojourn studying in France.

> It was Gide's classic novel, written, would you believe it before the turn of the century, and translated into English by Dorothy Bussy. I had read some of Gide's notebooks in France, but had never heard of The Immoralist. I was very impressed, returned it to the shelf, and then remembered it years later during a conversation with Gus, my husband, when we were in England in 1950 for the London production of our Broadway hit, The Heiress. During the rehearsals we became painfully aware that the English director was simply incompetent. We went to our producer, the late Binky Beaumont--a darling person--and told him that the director didn't know what he was doing. He said he'd get in touch immediately with his friend, who was starring in a show, about coming in as a replacement. The next day he took over. I can't tell you how impressed Gus and I were watching that man work. He was so sensitive, so considerate, so intelligent--the way he handled the actors. And he had such insight into our script. He could recognize what we, the writers, had had in the back of our minds when we were in the process of putting something down on paper. Of course, he made the play work beautifully and it went on to be a sensational hit in London.

---

[1]Ruth Goodman Goetz, Interview, New York City, 12 January 1980.

> We were so appreciative, Gus and I. After the first try-out performance in Brighton, we were walking back to our hotel on the promenade along the beach. "What a shame," I said, "that this man, this talented, intelligent, kind human being has to live as he does--half-hidden from the rest of us and always on the defensive, careful and guarded about a whole part of his life." Of course, we knew he was homosexual, and Binky, too. "Nobody even dares to talk about the subject openly;" Gus replied, "I don't think anyone has even written about what they have to go through, have they?" "Yes," I said. "Andre Gide has."
>
> My husband had never heard of The Immoralist. I went out the next day and bought a copy for him. As soon as he finished reading it, we both knew that it was going to be our next project. We had to do it, for him, our director who we respected so and admired. We wanted to get the subject out, where it belonged, so that he and people like him wouldn't have to go on living half-hidden from the rest of the world.
>
> Eighteen months later when we finally finished the play, we sent it to him before anyone else had read it. He wrote to say that he hated it. That it was awful and dirty, the whole subject matter. Poor Gus was devastated, I remember, at that reaction from the man for whom we had written it. Now, in 1980, I can better understand, looking back, why this stage star reacted as he did. He must have felt very threatened, of course, that the play might very well bring the subject out of the closet.[1]

The Goetzes went from London to Paris to see André Gide before returning to New York to start work on the play. The elderly author told the American couple:

> "Take my play and do for it what you did for 'Washington Square' [on which 'The Heiress' was based]. I will abide by any form you give me in the theatre. And when your play comes to be done in France, I ask only that I may be permitted to translate it."[2]

The Goetzes worked two years on their adaption of Gide's novel. He died before they had finished their first rough draft.

---

[1]Ruth Goodman Goetz, Interview, New York City, 12 January 1980.

[2]Ruth and Augustus Goetz, "Genesis of A Play From An Andre Gide Novel," New York Times, 31 January 1954.

"Why did we feel that we could dare handle a subject, and do justice to it, that even in the 1950s most people felt uncomfortable about if the subject ever came up in conversation?" Ruth Goetz asked rhetorically:

> To begin with I had known homosexuals all my life. My father was a theatrical producer and I was raised and educated in Manhattan. I worked with them when I grew up. They never offended me and I never felt hostile to them. Lesbians never seemed threatening to me, a bit perplexing perhaps, because I could never never figure out what they could possibly do. Somehow it was easier to understand what the men might be up to. It never occurred to me to pass judgment on them.
>
> As a happily married couple, and well known as such, Gus and I were hardly suspect of a subject matter that might have seemed personally or professionally threatening to some other playwrights. Then, too, we were understandably more sensitive to the plight of minorities. I was Jewish and Gus was raised as a Catholic. While neither of us were really touched by any prejudice, because of our fortunate families' circumstances, we were aware of Catholics and Jews who had been.[1]

After spending two years writing The Immoralist, the Goetzes spent ten more tortuous months searching for a producer. The play had been turned down by almost every major producer in the theatre. "As a last resort, we sent it to Billy Rose," Mrs. Goetz recalled:

> Billy Rose wanted to be cultured. I honestly think that was the real reason that he decided to do our play so he'd be identified with something that to his way of thinking was cultured or intellectual.
>
> We asked Herman Shumlin to direct--which, it turned out was almost our undoing! Herman had been one of the producers to turn the play down, but in rejecting it, he wrote that it was a beautiful script. He didn't dare do it, take a chance on such a daring show, if I remember

---

[1]Ruth Goodman Goetz, Interview, New York City, 12 January 1980.

correctly, because at that time he had money problems of some sort--as a producer.

After Louis Jourdan and Geraldine Page were set as our stars, Herman brought us this blond, unknown kid, James Dean, that he insisted should play the Arab houseboy despite our misgivings about his Nordic physical appearance. Herman was right, it turned out, as we began to realize during rehearsals; Jimmy was sensational in the role.

We also found out during rehearsals that Herman was distorting the theme of our play. He decided to sentimentalize the wife's situation so that the husband seemed the villian. We had written The Immoralist with compassion for the homosexual's predicament in such a situation. "But audiences will sympathize with the wife," Herman insisted. "They can't relate to a homosexual husband!" We concluded that Herman couldn't. Then he gave us trouble with a scene in our original script in which Michel goes to see Moktir in the orchard. Herman was so uncomfortable with it he wanted it cut. He didn't know how to handle the two boys tossing a ball in the background. We were afraid he was going to have them play it swishy or with limp wrists. To make matters worse, Herman okayed a God-awful set that made the orchard look like one of those post-cards of an oasis tinted in harsh colors. The set was junked and the scene cut. Moktir came to see Michael at his home in the rewriting we had to do.

When Herman persisted in spoiling everything we had worked for with his sentimental staging, we went to Billy. He took in a rehearsal, fired Herman and replaced him with Daniel Mann. We felt badly because we were fond of Herman, but he was simply too far out of his element to deal fairly with homosexual characters.

It was too late to put the orchard scene back into the play during our try-out engagement in Philadelphia where we got rave reviews even though we shocked them even without the boys in the orchard. We went onto Broadway still minus the scene Herman had been unable to deal with. So the New York critics and audiences never had to.[1]

When Billy Rose's production of Ruth and Augustus Goetz's The Immoralist opened at the Royale Theatre on 8 February 1954, critic Louis Kronenberger called it "perhaps the most serious

---

[1]Ruth Goodman Goetz, Interview, New York City, 12 January 1980.

and outspoken treatment of homosexuality that Broadway had seen."[1] Except for John Chapman of the Daily News none of the critics from the New York dailies appeared discomforted by the subject matter. In a brief critique, Chapman wrote of the performers in the show, "I was embarrassed for them last evening. And for me, too."[2] Brooks Atkinson of the New York Times, who hailed The Immoralist as "an admirable piece of work. The tragedy is austere, crushing and genuine," did refer to the eleven-year-old schoolboy's sexual activity with another student as "abominable crime," and to Andre Gide's gay orientation as "his misfortune."[3] On the other hand, Robert Coleman, of the Daily Mirror, was compassionate in his treatment of the Goetzes' work:

> "The Immoralist" has to do with the plight of the homosexual, often scorned and shunned by the moral and usually blackmailed and exploited by the corrupt. Gide wrote at a time when the law had not taken cognizance of the fact that such unfortunates are victims of errant genes.
>
> Though most of us now take a more understanding view, the statutes still do not provide sufficient protection for them. They have no status in our civilization. They doubtless have to pay a terrible price for nature's quirks. If "The Immoralist" does nothing else, it may awaken us to a sober consideration of the subject.[4]

---

[1]Louis Kronenberger, ed., The Best Plays of 1953-54 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1954), p. 10.

[2]John Chapman, "'The Immoralist' Sure Enough Is," New York Daily News, 9 February 1954.

[3]Brooks Atkinson, "'The Immoralist' by Ruth and Augustus Goetz, Made From Andre Gide's Novel," New York Times, 9 February 1954.

[4]Robert Coleman, "The Immoralist," New York Daily Mirror, 9 February 1954.

Thomas R. Dash of Women's Wear Daily posed a number of questions after seeing The Immoralist.

> Here we behold an ill-starred sex deviationist, who does not want to be considered a social pariah, who wants to pursue his chosen task with dignity and honor. What should our attitude be? Should society be intolerant, should we treat these cases as clinical specimens, or as ordinary human beings, should we treat them as social lepers and punish them, or should be treat them with sympathy as we would treat a person with some physical malady?[1]

The man from Variety commented:

> Gide does not explain, nobody could, how it is that certain men become fixated upon their own sex and cannot love women. He does make piteously clear the suffering which being "different" inflicts upon the individual. The sneers of the holier-than-thous, the black-mailings of tramp-nances are only passing sidelights. The terrible hurt laid bare in this play is deeper than mere social ostracism.[2]

The Goetzes' drama failed, however, to move Noel Coward. "The Immoralist, a gloomy little number whipped up from Andre' Gide's turgid preoccupation with the same theme, bored me to death when it wasn't giving me the giggles."[3] Coward also dismissed Tea and Sympathy, as "a mixture of naivete' and dishonesty . . . treated untruly and lasciviously."[4]

The mixed reviews blunted somewhat the boxoffice impact of costarring French-born Louis Jourdan, a strikingly

---

[1]Thomas R. Dash, "The Immoralist," New York Women's Wear Daily, 9 February 1954.

[2]"Play On Broadway," Variety, 10 February 1954.

[3]Cole Lesley, Remembered Laughter, The Life of Noel Coward (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), p. 325.

[4]Ibid.

handsome and popular Hollywood movie star, and Geraldine Page who had been hailed by the critics as a new Broadway star the previous season. Herman Shumlin's prediction that audiences would not relate to a sympathetic gay protagonist may also have been a factor in The Immoralist's disappointing three-month engagement. Still, according to Dr. W. David Sievers, "its respectable run of ninety-six performances indicates the psychological maturity of the Broadway Theatre by the mid-fifties."[1]

John McLain of the Journal American felt that the Goetzes lack of complete candor hurt their work. "The writig seems to skirt the fringes of the issue, rather than facing up to the facts that have become fairly pedestrian in our present world."[2] The word "homosexual" is not heard in The Immoralist, and Michel's confessional scene, in which he tells his wife, "I am everything you fear I am," and "Whoever knows me will know that about me first!" is no more explicit than that. Reginald Cockburn, a veteran theatregoer, recalls, "The night I saw the show, as we were leaving the theatre, a man walking ahead with his wife turned to her and said, 'What was his problem? He have cancer?'"[3]

---

[1]W. David Sievers, Freud On Broadway (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1970), p. 413.

[2]John McLain, "Fails To Stir Emotional Reaction," New York Journal American, 9 February 1954.

[3]Reginald Cockburn, Interview by telephone, New York City, 11 January 1980.

The consensus of those newspaper critics who were disappointed with The Immoralist was that it lacked an emotional wallop. This may be attributable to the plot's structural defect. The Immoralist moves to its denouement before the couple's marital conflict ever really climaxes. "It is like sitting on a dynamite charge that never explodes,"[1] Robert Coleman complained. "A grave drama about abnormality seemed to me pretty dull theatregoing,"[2] concurred Richard Watts, Jr. in the Post. Walter Kerr wrote in the Herald Tribune, "Ruth and Augustus Goetz have brought a quiet, patient candor to the subject of homosexuality. But a quiet, patient candor is not precisely an exhilarating theatrical vein."[3] John McLain reported, "Here is a girl who insists upon marrying a guy who is not really a guy, and what happened thereafter failed to capture me."[4]

Despite its financial failure and mixed critical reception, The Immoralist was selected by Louis Kronenberger as one of the best plays of the 1953-54 theatrical season.

> The Goetzes combined understanding with detachment; they equally eschewed prissiness and sensationalism, and the result is an honest and clear-sighted study, a soberly

---

[1]Robert Coleman, "'Immoralist' Treats Hard Subject With Sympathy," New York Daily Mirror, 9 February 1954.

[2]Richard Watts, Jr., "A Grave Drama About Abnormality," New York Post, 9 February 1954.

[3]Walter Kerr, "The Immoralist," New York Herald Tribune, 9 February 1954.

[4]John McLain, "Fails To Stir Serious Emotional Reaction," 9 February 1954.

> effective formulation. If there is a vital weakness, it is too thorough-going a "study" to come altogether to life on the stage. If it is as accurate, it is also at times as inexpressive as a blueprint. Everyone seems a little too articulate, everything a little too explicit; there is a certain sense of figures carefully placed in the moral landscape. In terms of story, we should be kept guessing more at the beginning, while in terms of theme we should be left guessing less at the end. But what, all in all, seems noteworthy is how much the play achieved rather than fell short of.[1]

Dr. Gene Touchet observed, "The Immoralist had the potential to be a strong homophilic play. But it is not. In spite of some advocated homophilia, the protagonist finally denounces his homosexuality and takes steps to live his life as a homophobe."[2] He concluded in appraising the drama, "In spite of these faults, The Immoralist is a landmark work, for it is one of the first dramas to pit homophilia against homophobia."[3] Moktir, the Arab shepherd who left his post as a professor at the University of Fez to escape conventional society, is "the first homophilic homosexual in American drama in the 1950s. He is the first character to refute homophobic motives and to present a valid homosexual identity."[4]

Since Mr. Touchet's doctoral study was limited to the decades between 1952 and 1972, he did not deal with the first homophilic characters in American drama. Those landmark

---

[1]Louis Kronenberger, The Best Plays of 1953-54 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, Inc., 1954), p. 10.

[2]Gene R. Touchet, "American Drama and the Emergence of Social Homophilia, 1952-1972," (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Florida, 1974), pp. 17-18.

[3]Ibid., p. 28.

[4]Ibid., p. 19.

characters, the first unmistakenly gay male characters seen in a public performance on the Broadway stage, were the teen-age high school student and his lover, a young choirmaster, in Chester Erskin's 1938 failure The Good. Howard refused to deny his gay sexual orientation and Mr. Duncan refused to speak of their relationship as "wrong," but only "different,"[1] before they ran off to live together as lovers. The following theatrical season Oscar Wilde's defense from the records of his trial of "the love that dare not speak its name,"[2] was heard in the British-imported Broadway hit of the notorious and tragic author.

Both The Good and Oscar Wilde were illegal, but the New York State law prohibiting gay characters on stage was being blatantly ignored by the end of the 1930s. However, after the closing in 1945 of Trio, producers and playwrights were reminded that the Wales Padlock Law was still on the books. In 1954 when Billy Rose produced The Immoralist, the Goetzes' play could have been closed. Aware of that possibility after a ten-month search for someone to produce The Immoralist, the Goetzes told an interviewer when the show was finally in rehearsal, "What Gide wrote in a great burst of bravery 50 years

---

[1]Chester Erskin, The Good (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, p. 42.

[2]Sewell and Leslie Stokes, Oscar Wilde (Typewritten copy), Lincoln Center, pp. 2-2-25 & 26.

ago, takes a great amount of bravery, it seems, to produce in 1954."[1]

In 1980, Ruth Goetz wondered aloud:

> When was Jean Paul Sartre's No Exit produced? Yes, the year after LaGuardia had Trio closed. I think that was the end to the whole censorship threat, but we really didn't know that for sure until our play was produced. No Exit just had that lesbian in it; The Immoralist was, as we intended it to be, the first sympathetic dramatic consideration of the homosexual's predicament. We got it out in the open, out of the closet and onto the stage.[2]

The Immoralist and No Exit differed significantly. The Goetzes' work, "An Outstanding Example of Theatrical Courage,"[3] according to critic Whitney Bolton, presented two gay lifestyles: one unashamedly open and active; the other, continent but intellectually, professionally, and personally open and active. Jean Paul Sartre's piece is an existential, dramatic, three character dialogue, one of whom happens to be a lesbian. Sartre damned Inez to hell, so it is hardly surprising that no voices of protest were raised, but the Goetzes' compassionate treatment of Michel and Moktir did not result in protest either.

Ruth Goetz remembered that censorship had not been on her or her husband's mind when they decided to work on the play.

> We had been working on it for some time when the subject first came up. Gus mentioned to a friend that we

---

[1]Vernon Scott, "Curtain Cues," New York Post, 29 January 1954.

[2]Ruth Goodman Goetz, Interview, New York City, 12 January 1980.

[3]Whitney Bolton, "An Outstanding Example of Theatrical Courage," New York Morning Telegraph, 10 February 1954.

> were adapting Gide's novel. "It's against the law," he reminded us. Of course, I knew about the Padlock Law. My father had taken me to see The Captive when I was in my teens. He felt sorry for the producer, Gilbert Miller, when the show was closed by the police. I remembered the Trio closing, too; still Gus and I never gave it a second thought as we continued working on The Immoralist.
>
> Whatever qualms any producers may have had expected with the law or censorship of some kind had they put it on, Billy Rose had absolutely none. I never heard that possibility mentioned even once all during rehearsals or during the run of the play. Not a single word! Stage censorship was a dead issue by the mid-50s. Had it not been, The Immoralist would certainly have provoked considerable activity and hostility.[1]

In 1963 when The Immoralist, starring newcomer Frank Langello, was revived with great success in an Off-Broadway playhouse some critics mentioned scenes in the revival that had been cut from the Broadway original because of problems with censors. Judith Crist of the Herald Tribune covered the revival at Bouwerie Lane Theatre where it was seen in 210 performances[2] after receiving unanimous rave reviews from the critics. "With the changed moral climate," Crist reported, "at least of our theatre in the past nine years, Mr. and Mrs. Goetz have reportedly made their play more frank and more pointed in dealing with homosexuality."[3] Augustus Goetz had died in 1957 and his widow had, in fact, made only very minor

---

[1]Ruth Goodman Goetz, Interview, New York City, 12 January 1980.

[2]Henry Hewes, ed., The Best Plays of 1963-64 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, Inc., 1964), p. 351.

[3]Judith Crist, "'The Immoralist' Antiquely Good," New York Herald Tribune, 8 November 1963.

changes in some of the dialogue. The orchard scene with the two Arab boys tossing a ball in the background in the original playscript, was seen for the first time by New York audiences in Bruce Becker's Off-Broadway revival. Ironically enough, the scene had been cut from the original production not by any censor and not because of any fear of censorship, but by Herman Shumlin, the single most active opponent of stage censorship in the history of American theatre.

CHAPTER XIV

CONCLUSIONS AND OTHER THOUGHTS

The missing story covering a thirty-two year interval (1922-1954) in the history of the American Theatre during which lesbians and gay men emerged as characters in plays produced on the American stage may be found in the history of the nearly three dozen productions covered in this study. The public's initial reaction at the sight of stage representations of such despised personalities changed to a degree of tolerance, if nothing more, by mid-century for these legally prohibited dramatizations. The four American and one French doctoral dissertations that dealt with gay characterizations on stage did not include consideration of the legal oppression and critical hostility to such roles as they emerged in American drama during the time span between the post World War periods.

Even before the New York State Criminal Code was amended in 1927 to include a specific prohibition against presenting stage productions "depicting or dealing with, the subject of sex degeneracy, or sex perversion,"[1] the general statutory

---

[1]Jonathan Katz, Gay American History (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1976), p. 90.

prohibition against obscene, indecent, immoral and impure public performances served well enough to close down the first shows with gay characters ever seen on the American stage. The feeling of some of New York's religious leaders and of such self-appointed watchdogs of public morality as John S. Sumner, head of The Society For The Prevention of Vice, removed Broadway theatregoers' first view of a lesbian seduction scene in Sholom Asch's The God Of Vengeance, a play which came to America in 1923 from Berlin via the Yiddish Theatre. The same voices joined by some politicans, newspaper editors, and drama critics, were raised against Edouard Bourdet's The Captive, a 1926 Parisian import, in which a lesbian infatuation disrupts a marriage. Both plays were closed by the police, The Captive, part of a sensational raid on three Broadway shows during which actors were herded into taxis and booked in court along with the playwrights and producers for having participated in immoral performances.

The Broadway show raid of 1927 was, to some degree, carried out to intimidate Mae West, who was attempting to bring her play, The Drag, the first American drama with gay male roles, to Broadway after its highly publicized, commercially successful out-of-town try-out. West was unable to find a New York City theatre owner willing to lease her a playhouse in the face of police threats provoked by the public's hysteria at the prospect of seeing a gay male characterization on the stage of a legitimate theatre. To insure that Broadway

theatre owners would continue to refuse to house such tenants, the Wales Padlock Law, at the instigation of William Randolph Hearst, became part of New York State's Penal Code. By means of the Padlock amendment the operating license on a theatre might be revoked for a year if an immoral play was presented.

Mae West was the first producer and playwright who attempted to defy the legal ban against gay characters in a drama. Her effort, Pleasure Man, which contained transvestites among the guests in a party scene, was closed by the police in 1928; she was arrested, along with her cast. A "hung" jury at her trial saved the playwright from serving another term in jail, as she had for starring in Sex, one of the three Broadway shows raided.

Despite the continuing legal prohibition, two successful Broadway plays with gay characterizations and of more dramatic worth than West's attempts, were produced during the first half of the 1930s along with half a dozen other shows that failed. Jed Harris's production of Mordaunt Shairp's insinuating, but only suspiciously gay The Green Bay Tree and Herman Shumlin's sensitive handling of Lillian Hellman's "devastating lesbian accusation" in The Children's Hour succeeded possibly because America's attitude toward sexual candor was undergoing change by the mid-1930s.

In an attempt to reverse such sexual liberalism, at least on the stages of the country's largest, most sophisticated city, the Roman Catholic Church spearheaded a campaign in support of a statute to make New York City's Commissioner of Licenses,

a political appointee, a one-man censor of Broadway's theatres. Passed by the Assembly in Albany, the Dunnigan Censorship Bill was vetoed by Governor Herbert Lehman after Herman Shumlin rallied thousands of theatre people in a campaign during which many more thousands of theatregoers signed petitions protesting the threatened loss of freedom of expression on the American stage. Another half-dozen unsuccessful plays with gay, or suspiciously gay, characters appeared in the aftermath of the Dunnigan Bill veto, and one great hit, Oscar Wilde. In 1939 this play seemed to mark the end of the legal prohibition on gay characterizations and themes on the Broadway stage despite the inhibiting statute which remained on the books. But in 1945, America's playwrights, producers and performers were all reminded of the extant Wales Padlock Law, when Trio, a drama about a troubled lesbian relationship, was evicted from a Broadway theatre by the Commissioner of Licenses before completing its scheduled engagement. Civil libertarians joined forces with theatre workers in a highly publicized confrontation with Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia who had instigated this theatrical cause célèbre. The mayor and his License Commissioner were roundly criticized, and mocked in the press, and never again did any politician or law enforcement official attempt to close a drama with a lesbian or gay character on Broadway, even though the Penal Code Statute remained in effect for several more decades.

A year after Trio was closed, Jean Paul Sartre's Parisian-import, No Exit, saw still another lesbian character, played on Broadway without protest. A more conclusive test of New York's tolerance of gay dramatic representations came in 1954 at the height of the red and gay witch hunt hysteria spawned by Senator Joseph McCarthy.

Just two months before the Army-McCarthy hearings, Billy Rose produced Ruth and Augustus Goetz's very free adaptation of Andre Gide's classic novel, The Immoralist. Jean Paul Sartre's No Exit had a single unsympathetic lesbian character with less than a single page of dialogue describing her lifestyle. The Immoralist, on the other hand, was the first compassionate treatment of two gay males' personal and sexual predicaments. The Goetz's drama did not provoke a single recorded threat of censorship, and lesbian and gay male theatrical characterizations, after three hundred and fifty years, were finally "out of the closets" and on the English-language stage.

By the mid-1950s, protestors such as publisher William Randolph Hearst and Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia were dead, and The Society For The Prevention of Vice, after the retirement of John S. Sumner, was defunct. Religious groups that had espoused legal prohibitions against gay dramatic representations were largely quiescent.

An additional study should be undertaken about emerging lesbian and gay characterizations in plays produced on the

American stage; it is "an ugly chapter,"[1] according to Richard Hall who identified it in an article in the 11 January 1979 issue of the Advocate: "The history of homophobia among the critics."[2] Only a single, briefly annotated magazine article in the June 1978 issue of Christopher Street touches upon that largely unexplored and undocumented material.

Allan Pierce, head of the English department at Rutgers Preparatory School and a Ph. D. candidate in the New York University Drama Department, wrote in his article entitled, "Homophobia and The Critics:"

> Reading the criticism of gay plays, one wonders what value it serves, since the vast majority of the reviews reveal more about the critics' homophobia than about the productions themselves. When, in years to come, scholars try to understand the foundations of our gay theatrical performances, they will unfortunately gain hardly a clue from the work of the mainstream New York drama critics.[3]

Although restricting examination in his magazine article to drama reviews written only during the past two decades, Pierce posits that:

> an examination of fifty years of reviews of plays with gay themes or characters, or that reviewers considered to be gay allegories, reveals that the critics have generally been abrasive to the healthy homosexual sensibility. Rather than fostering mass enlightenment, theatre critics have by and large acted as narrow-minded, prejudiced fag haters and baiters.[4]

---

[1]Richard Hall, "Richard Rehse, All About 'Out and About,'" Advocate, 11 January 1979.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Allan Pierce, "Homophobia and The Critics," Christopher Street, June 1978, p. 44.

[4]Ibid., p. 39.

In the tradition of Brooks Atkinson, George Jean Nathan and Burns Mantle, the most prominent and influential of the critics of New New York dailies, Howard Taubman of the New York Times became, according to gay theatre historian William H. Hoffman, "a pioneer homophobe"[1] when he attempted to instigate an anti-gay exposé in 1961 to rid the Broadway, off- and off-off Broadway stages of influences he attributed to gays working in the American theatre. In a 1961 Sunday New York Times feature article, Taubman announced:

> It is time to speak openly and candidly of the increasing influence and incidence of homosexuality on the New York stage--and, indeed, in the other arts as well.
>
> The subject is too important to be left forever to the sly whispers and malicious gossips. . . .
>
> The infiltration of homosexual attitudes occurs in the theatre at many levels. . . .
>
> The insidious results of the unspoken taboo is that sincere, searching writers feel they must state a homosexual theme in heterosexual situations. They convince themselves that what they wish to say will get through anyhow. But dissembling is unhealthy. The audience senses rot at the drama's core.
>
> The taboos are not what they used to be. Homosexuality is not a forbidden topic.[2]

"What seemed to worry Taubman especially," according to Allan Pierce, "was that homosexual playwrights, in submission to the public's preference for 'normality,' were writing plays about heterosexuals, but in a homosexual way."[3]

---

[1] William M. Hoffman, Intro. to Gay Plays, The First Collection (New York: Avon Books, 1979), p. xxv.

[2] Howard Taubman, "Not What It Seems: Homosexual Motif Gets Heterosexual Gise," New York Times, 5 November 1961.

[3] Allan Pierce, "Homophobia and The Critics," Christopher Street, June 1978, p. 41.

The "rot at the drama's core" mentioned by Taubman was, of course, a gay sensibility. The New York Times drama critic concluded his article by suggesting that "The work of some talented writers seems tainted. . . . [with] furtive, leering insinuations that have contaminated some of our arts."[1]

Two years after his original warning about such contamination of American drama, Taubman wrote a second article for the Sunday Times, elaborating upon his hypothesis. Entitled, "Modern Primer: Helpful Hints To Tell Appearances Vs. Truth,"[2] Taubman informed readers that, "since this column is a public service of sorts, . . . possibly we can come up with helpful hints on how to scan the intimations and symbols of homosexuality in our theatre."[3] The critic drew up a list of unpleasant or frustrating dramatic situations relating to conflicts between the sexes which, if found in a play, might indicate that the author was gay.

As a result of the clues provided by Taubman, a gay witch-hunt in the New York theatre may have been under way in the 1960s. Allan Pierce observed:

> Fear that an unidentified gay playwright would lure the public into 'renouncing heterosexuality' and participating in 'disgusting, sinful acts' became widespread, coinciding with the straight man on the street's dread of being 'seduced.' . . .

---

[1]Howard Taubman, "Not What It Seems: Homosexual Motif Gets Homosexual Guise," New York Times, 5 November 1961.

[2]Idem, "Modern Primer: Helpful Hints To Tell Appearances Vs. Truth," New York Times, 28 April 1963.

[3]Ibid.

> Playwrights who were suspected of being gay were watched, major authors whose work was especially misrepresented critically included Edward Albee, Tennessee Williams, and William Inge.[1]

Following Taubman's lead, Martin Gottfried of Women's Wear Daily called Edward Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf? "perhaps the most successful homosexual play ever produced on Broadway, if its sexual core had been evident to more people it probably never would have run--even though it is perfect theatre (although basically dishonest)."[2]

In 1966, another drama critic for the Times, Stanley Kauffmann, declared that "three of the most successful American playwrights of the last twenty years are (reputed) homosexuals."[3] The drama critic insisted on the unmasking of gay playwrights so that they could then write about their own kind rather than transfer their experiences into heterosexual ones which, as Taubman had originally posited, results in distortion. "Only this one neurosis," Kauffmann wrote in 1966, "homosexuality, is taboo in the main traffic of our stage."[4] The Times reviewer pleaded, "I do not argue for increased homosexual influences in our theatre. It is precisely because I like many others, am weary of disguised homosexual influences that I raise the matter."[5]

---

[1]Allan Pierce, "Homophobia And The Critics," Christopher Street, June 1978, p. 41.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Stanley Kauffmann, "Homosexual Drama and Its Disguises," New York Times, 21 January 1966.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid.

Kauffmann's article in which he claimed that the "vindictiveness" of gay playwrights who "hate those who make them hate themselves" caused them to "distort marriage and femininity,"[1] pleased some readers who wrote letters to the editor. Many such letters complimented Kauffmann on his suggestions. However, one reader protested, "Are Jews only to write about Jews?"[2] In a follow-up article Kauffmann wrote in his own defense:

> I mean simply (to repeat) that homosexual dramatists need the same liberty that heterosexuals now have. If this is too much for us to contemplate, then at least let us drop all the cant about homosexual "influences" and distortion; because we are only complaining of the results of our own attitudes.[3]

In an article in 1968, two years later, for the New York Times, Rosalyn Regelson reported:

> Some drama critics have been accusing certain major playwrights of an arrogant homosexual imperialism toward the normal world. Plays like "A Streetcar Names Desire," and "Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf?" which have moved large audiences over the world, have been treated as esoteric missiles in guerrilla attacks by the "homosexual underground." Among the critics waging a counterattack have been Howard Taubman, Stanley Kauffmann, John Simon, Philip Roth and also Elizabeth Hardwick, who calls for a return to "a masculine theatre."[4]

---

[1]Stanley Kauffmann, "Homosexual Drama and Its Disguises," New York Times, 21 January 1966.

[2]"Drama Mailbag: 'Arguing About Homosexuality,'" New York Times, 6 February 1966.

[3]Stanley Kauffmann, "On The Acceptability of the Homosexual," New York Times, 6 February 1966.

[4]Rosalyn Regelson, "Up The Camp Staircase," New York Times, 3 March 1968.

Along with those critics cited in the Times article, Allan Pierce included Brooks Atkinson, Clive Barnes and Mel Gussow, all of the Times, along with John Chapman and Douglas Watt of the Daily News, George Oppenheimer of Newsday, and Leo Miskin of the Morning Telegraph.[1] "Chapman walked out in the middle of one gay play in 1967," Pierce reported, "and reviewed no more plays the whole season that smacked of homosexuality."[2] Watts described one gay character as "a somewhat queer (even for a queer),"[3] in a review written as late as 1976.

The witch hunt for gay playwrights that lasted throughout the 1960s concluded with a defense of at least one major American playwright by William Goldman in his book, The Season: A Candid Look At Broadway. Goldman confided to readers that, "Arthur Miller is the only major American playwright since World War II who has not been associated with homosexuality. He is also the only Jew."[4]

"Whether it's changing for the better these days is open to question," wrote gay theatre historian Richard Hall in 1979 in an appraisal of the homophobic bias of some of the New York drama critics. "John Simon, Douglas Watt and Mel Gussow," Hall

---

[1]Allan Pierce, "Homophobia and The Critics," Christopher Street, June 1978, p. 40.

[2]Ibid., p. 41.

[3]Douglas Watt, "Kate In Loonie Land," New York Daily News, 4 February 1976.

[4]William Goldman, The Season: A Candid Look At Broadway (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969), p. 238.

reminded, "continue their vitriolic ways unchecked."[1] In 1975 Simon disparaged gays in the audience of a play he was reviewing,[2] just as police spies had made similar reports on audiences viewing The Captive, The Drag and Pleasure Man back in the 1920s. In January of 1979 Richard Eder of the New York Times, reviewing Tennessee Williams's new play, A Lovely Sunday For Creve Coeur, with an all female cast, suggested that "perhaps these characters are not women, but men transformed into women."[3]

Douglas Watt identified gay men as "queer" in the last month of 1979 in his review of Martin Sherman's Bent, the dramatic exposé of the Nazi imprisonment and annihilation of German gays. The Daily News critic put "queer" and "queers" in quotation marks, remarking that in some of the dialogue in Bent this was the way they "refer to themselves."[4] Walter Kerr of the New York Times, also used quotation marks when he, too, made reference to "queers"[5] in the two critiques he made of Bent.

---

[1]Richard Hall, "Richard Rehse: All About 'Out and About,'" Advocate, 11 January 1979.

[2]Allan Pierce, "Homophobia and The Critics," Christopher Street, June 1978, p. 44.

[3]Richard Eder, "'Creve Coeur,' New Drama by Tennessee Williams," New York Times, 22 January 1979.

[4]Douglas Watt, "Entertainment: 'Bent' Is Shocking But Not Moving," New York Daily News, 3 December 1979.

[5]Walter Kerr, "'Bent,' Starring Richard Gere," New York Times, 3 December 1979, and "For The Serious Theatregoer," New York Times, 16 December 1979.

Like all writers employed by the Times, Kerr continues to use "homosexuals" to identify gay males since it is the policy of that publication to continue to call both lesbians and gay men "homosexuals."[1] "After ten years of struggle to educate the media, you'd think they'd say it right!," television critic Cindy Stein wrote in Boston's Gay Community News. "You'd think that the words we have chosen to call ourselves, lesbians and gay men, could have been adopted instead."[2]

Even when one recalls that George Jean Nathan's triades in 1927 were cited in justifying the police closing of The Captive, it is not believed that any similar sentiments uttered by John Simon, Douglas Watt or Mel Gussow would, in future, incite police or legal action against a Broadway play with gay characters. On 19 March 1975, the United States Supreme Court "extended to theatrical productions today," reported the New York Times, "the same kind of constitutional protection against advance censorship and prohibition that newspapers, books and motion pictures have."[3]

Burns Mantle had written in 1933 in his review of The Green Bay Tree, "There is a curious fascination about the drama dealing with abnormal characters. It is an adventure combining

---

[1]"Good Gray Lady Loosens Up," Gay Community News, 29 November 1980.

[2]Cindy Stein, "Television: Queers in America's Living Room," Boston Gay Community News, 5 January 1980.

[3]Warren Weaver, "High Court Restricts Censorship Of Plays," New York Times, 19 March 1975.

the pleasures of the theatre with the inspection of a kind of human zoo."[1] Thirty-five years later actor Cliff Gorman observed that plays about lesbians and gay men continue to fascinate theatregoers. "They think that just because it's about homosexuals," Gorman said of the public interest in the 1968 success, the Off-Broadway production of Boys In The Band, in which he appeared, "it's a freak show."[2] Expecting attitudes to change, actor Gorman predicted that "homosexual drama will be old hat in five years."[3]

While sixty-six plays with gay characters were produced on the New York stage during the seven-year period,[4] 1969 to 1974, only about two dozen were seen on Broadway, and Off, and Off-Off Broadway during the following four years.[5] In the last year of the 1970s only one play with gay characters premiered on Broadway: the already mentioned Martin Sherman's Bent. The success of that drama may be attributed more to the shock impact of this exposé of the Nazis' unrecorded and savage per-

---

[1]Burns Mantle, "'Green Bay Tree' Highly Emotional," New York Daily News, 21 October 1933.

[2]Judy Klemesrud, "You Don't Have To Be One To Play One," New York Times, 29 September 1968.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Donald Lee Loeffler, An Analysis of the Treatment of the Homosexual Character in Dramas Produced in the New York Theatre from 1950 to 1968 (New York: Arno Press, 1975), pp. 47A-47D.

[5]My count.

secution of German gays than to the public's continued "curious fascination," as Burns Mantle described it, "with abnormal characters."

Mantle's description of the experience in his time of seeing a play with gay characters as "an adventure combining the pleasures of the theatre with the inspection of a kind of human zoo,"[1] may no longer apply to modern theatregoers, but it makes it easier to understand retrospectively, the consternation felt at the initial sight of such dramatic representations. For many in the audience apparently it was like watching some dangerous, unsightly animal-freaks turned loose from their closet-cages to strut and speak for the first time on the American public stage. "Next we may have to look at 'The Captive's' pale brethen," a newspaperman warned readers in 1927 when Mae West wanted to produce The Drag on Broadway, "and then it will be all over."[2]

Contrary to the drama critic's dire prediction, the emergence of gay male characterizations, following that of lesbian characterizations, in legitimate plays presented on Broadway did not mark the end, but the continuation of a chapter, unrecorded until now, in the history of the American theatre.

---

[1]Burns Mantle, "'Green Bay Tree' Highly Emotional," New York Daily News, 21 October 1933.

[2]Fragment of an untitled, undated newspaper article in file folder MWEZ n.c. 6901, Lincoln Center.

SOURCES CONSULTED

BOOKS

Ackerley, J. R.. The Ackerley Letters. Edited by Neville Braybrook. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975.

_____. The Prisoners of War. London: Chatto and Windus, 1925.

Allen, Frederick Lewis. Only Yesterday. New York: Harper and Row, 1931.

Atkinson, Brooks. Broadway. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1970.

Baker, Dorothy. Trio. New York: Houghton Miffin Company, 1943.

Barker, Felix. The Oliviers. New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1953.

Bentley, Eric. The Dramatic Event. Boston: Beacon Press, 1954.

Boback, A. A.. The Story of Yiddish Literature. New York: Yiddish Scientific Institute, American Branch, 1940.

Boswell, John. Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Brill, A. A.. Freud's Contribution to Psychiatry. New York: W. W. Norton, 1944.

Castle, Charles. Noel. Garden City, New Jersey: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1973.

Carr, Virginia Spencer. The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975.

Conolly, L. W.. The Censorship of English Drama 1737-1824. San Marino, Calif.: The Huntington Library, 1976.

Corey, Donald Webster, (pseud.). The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach. New York: Greenberg: Publisher, 1951.

Cottrell, John. Laurence Olivier. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975.

Coward, Noel. Future Indefinite. London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1954.

Cubeta, Paul M., ed.. Twentieth Century Interpretations of Richard II. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1971.

Deutsch, Helen and Hanau, Stella. The Provincetown. New York: Russell & Russell, 1931.

Erlich, Avi.. Hamlet's Absent Father. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1977.

Falk, Doris V., Lillian Hellman. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1978.

Franken, Rose. When All Is Said And Done. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1963.

Goldman, William. The Season: A Candid Look At Broadway. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969.

Green, Martin. Children of the Sun. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1976.

Griffin, Constance M.. Henry Blake Fuller: A Critical Biography. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1939.

Hellman, Lillian. Pentimento. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973.

Holland, Norman N.. Psychoanalysis and Shakespeare. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1964.

Hotson, Leslie. Mr. W. H.. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964.

Katz, Jonathan. Gay American History. New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell Company, 1976.

Kocher, Paul. Christopher Marlowe. New York: Russell & Russell, 1962.

Laufe, Abe. The Wicked Stage: A History of Theatre Censorship and Harassment in the United States. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1978.

Lesley, Cole. Remembered Laughter. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976.

Lifson, David S.. The Yiddish Theatre in America. New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1965.

Liptzin, Sol. The Flowering of Yiddish Literature. New York; Thomas Yoseloff, 1930.

McCarthy, Mary. Mary McCarthy's Theatre Chronicles. New York: Farrar, Straus & Company, 1963.

McKinney's Consolidated Laws of New York. Book 39, Penal Code. Brooklyn, N. Y.: Edward Thompson Company, 1967.

Mantle, Burns, ed.; Chapman, John, ed.; Kronenberger Louis, ed.. The Best Plays of 1922-23, and yearly through The Best Plays of 1953-54. Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1923; New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1954.

Marx, Samuel and Clayton, Jan. Rogers and Hart, Bewitched, Bothered and Bedevilled. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1976.

Massey, Raymond. A Hundred Different Lives. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976.

Maugham, Robin. Conversations with Willie. New York: Simon and Shuster, 1978.

_____. Somerset and All the Maughams. New York: The New American Library, 1966.

Moody, Richard. Lillian Hellman, Playwright. New York: Pegasus, 1972.

Morley, Sheridan. A Talent To Amuse. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1969.

Mosel, Tad. Leading Lady, The World and Theatre of Katherine Cornell. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978.

Pinciss, Gerald. Christopher Marlowe. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, Co., 1975.

Rosenberg, Marvin. The Masks of Othello, The Search For the Identity of Othello, Iago, and Desdemona, By Three Centuries of Actors and Critics. Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961.

The Third Sex. Edited by I. Rubin. New York: New Books, 1961.

Sappho. Sappho. Translated by Mary Barnar. Berkley, California: University of California Press, 1958.

Sarotte, Georges-Michel. Like A Brother: Like A Lover. Translated by Richard Miller. Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978.

Schildkraut, Joseph. My Father and I. As Told To Leo Lania. New York: The Viking Press, 1959.

Scott, W. I. D.. Shakespeare's Melancholics. London: Mills and Boon, Ltd., 1962.

Shaeffer, Louis. O'Neill, Son and Artist. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973.

Shirer, William. The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich. New York: Simon and Shuster, 1960.

Sievers, W. David. Freud on Broadway. New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1970.

Stagg, Jerry. The Brothers Shubert. New York: Random House, 1968.

Taubman, Howard. The Making of the American Drama. New York: Coward: McCann, Inc., 1966.

Tributes To Henry B. Fuller In Whose Minds and Hearts He Will Always Live. Edited by Anna Morgan. n. p., Ralph Fetcher Seymour Publisher, 1920.

Tripp, C. A.. The Homosexual Matrix. New York: The New American Library, 1976.

Tuska, John. The Films of Mae West. Secaucus, N. J.: The Citadel Press, 1973.

Vidal, Gore. Matters of Fact and Fiction. New York: A New Directions Books, 1959.

Vincenza, Una, Lady Troubridge. The Life of Radclyff Hall. New York: Scribners, 1963.

West, Mae. Pleasure Man. Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1975.

Williams, Tennessee. Memoirs. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975.

DISSERTATIONS

Blake, Gary. "Herman Shumlin: The Development of a Director." Ph. D. dissertation. The City University of New York, 1973.

Johnson, Annette Bergman. "A Study of Recurrent Character Types in the Plays of Lillian Hellman." Ph. D. dissertation. University of Massachusetts, 1970

Loeffler, Donald Lee. An Analysis of the Treatment of the Homosexual Character in Dramas Produced in the New York Theatre from 1950 to 1968. New New: Arno Press, 1975.

Shapiro, Stephen R.. "The Theme of Homosexuality in Selected Theatrical Events Produced in the United States Between 1969 and 1974." Ph. D. dissertation. University of California, Santa Barbara, 1976.

Touchet, Gene. "American Drama and the Emgerence of Social Homophilia, 1952-1972." Ph. D. dissertation. University of Florida, 1974.

INTERVIEWS

Carnovsky, Morris. Telephone interview. Connecticut, 15 August 1977.

Cockburn, Reginald. Telephone interview. New York City, 10 October 1978.

Elsom, Isobel. Interview. Motion Picture Country Hospital, Woodland Hills, California. 16 March 1978.

Franken, Rose. Telephone interview. New York City, 15 January 1980.

Goetz, Ruth Goodman. Interview. New York City, 12 January 1980.

Le Gallienne, Eva. Telephone interview. Weston, Connecticut, 30 September 1978.

MacMahon, Aline. Telephone interview. New York City, November 1977.

Revere, Anne. Telephone interview. Locust Valley, New York, 28 May 1979.

Shumlin, Herman. Interview. New York City, 4 March 1979.

MISCELLANEOUS

Baker, Dorothy and Howard. "'Trio' Clarified by Authors." Press release by Samuel J. Friedman, New York, 8 November 1944. In "Trio" file, New York Public Library, Lincoln Center.

Daly, Blyth. Conversation. Studio City, California, 1948.

Encyclopedia Britanica. 14th Edition, XXII, Vol. I.

Giantvalley, Scott. Private correspondence. Dept. of English, University of Southern California, 5 July 1977.

God of Vengeance program. Broadway production. Apollo Theatre, 1923. On File, New York Public Library, Lincoln Center.

Harris, Jed. Television interview. "The Dick Cavett Show." WNET-TV, Channel 13, 25 March 1980.

The Oxford Companion To The Theatre. Edited by Phyllis Hartnoll. London: Oxford University Press, 1967.

The Rats Of Norway playbill. The Playhouse, Charing Cross, London, 6 April 1933.

Tynan, Kenneth. Television interview. "The Dick Cavett Show." WNET-TV, Channel 13, 13 August 1980.

U. S. Theatre Censorship files. 1920s through 1950s. Newspaper fragments concerning The Drag, Pleasure Man and Oscar Wilde productions. New York Public Library, Lincoln Center.

Weinberger, Harry. "Provincetown and the Law." Typewritten article with notations. "Censorship: U. S. Stage. 1920s" file. New York Public Library, Lincoln Center.

NEWSPAPERS

"Actors Arrested With Producers In 3 'Sex' Plays." New York World, 16 February 1927.

"An Admirable Veto." Editorial. New York Times, 20 May 1937.

Allen, Kelcey. "Amusements." New York Graphic, 30 September 1926.

"Amusements." New York Morning Telegraph, 12 March 1933.

"Amusement Notes." Chicago Daily News, 1 November 1926.

Anderson, John. "Author's Responsibility To His Brain Child, TONY IN 'WINTER BOUND' PLAY SUFFERS FROM NEGLECT." New York Journal, 18 November 1929.

_____. "'The Good' Presented at Windsor Theatre." New York Journal American, 6 October 1938.

_____. "How Children's Lie Brought Ruin To 2 Teachers' Lives Told In Play." New York Evening Journal, 21 November 1934.

_____. "Kenwood War Play At Morosco." New York Journal American, 26 December 1942.

_____. "'Love Of Women,' Debuts At John Golden Theatre." New York Sun, 14 December 1937.

_____. "New Drama Strikes Old Sour Note." New York Journal American, 16 October 1937.

_____. "The Play." New York Evening Post, 30 September 1926.

_____. "Reprise." New York Evening Journal, 2 May 1935.

_____. "Waltz In Goose Step." New York Journal American, 2 November 1938.

Anderson, Scott P.. "Kinsey Study Declares Gays 'Indistinguishable.'" Los Angeles Advocate, 23 August 1978.

"Arrest Sex Play Audiences, Urges Bloom." New York Morning Telegraph, 14 February 1927.

"Arts Theatre." London Times, 26 October 1938.

"At Hoyt's Theatre A Comedy In 4 Acts By Archibald Clavering Gunter." New York Dramatic Mirror, 17 October 1896.

Atkinson, Brooks. "Boiled-Shirt Comedy." New York Times, 29 January 1933.

_____. "8,752 Children's Hour." New York Times, 22 November 1935.

_____. "'The Immoralist,' By Ruth and Augustus Goetz, Made From Andre Gide's Novel." New York Times, 9 February 1954.

_____. "Language's Lord." New York Times, 16 October 1938.

_____. "The Play In Review." New York Times, 27 November 1946.

_____. "The Play." New York Times, 21 October 1933.

_____. "The Play." New York Times, 21 November 1934.

_____. "The Play." New York Times, 29 January 1935.

_____. "The Play." New York Times, 2 May 1935.

_____. "The Play." New York Times, 16 October 1937.

_____. "The Play." New York Times, 14 December 1937.

_____. "The Play." New York Times, 6 October 1938.

_____. "The Play." New York Times, 11 October 1938.

_____. "The Play." New York Times, 16 April 1948.

_____. "The Seal Of Good Producing." New York Times, 29 October 1933.

Atkinson, J. Brooks. "The Play." New York Times, 30 September 1926.

_____. "The Play." New York Times, 18 December 1928.

"At The Play." Town Topic, 2 October 1926.

"As Good As The Day They Were Written Fifteen Weeks Ago." Advertisement. New York Times, 31 December 1932.

"Augustus Thomas In Paris Assails Banton Play Raid." New York Morning Telegraph 12 February 1927.

Banks, Paul. "The Green Bay Tree." London New English Weekly, 16 March 1933.

"Banton Abandons Play Jury System." New York Evening

Post, 4 February 1927.

"Banton Defends Play Jury System." New York Times, 30 December 1926.

"Banton To Sift Stage Charges To Foil Hearst." New York Tribune, 1 February 1927.

"Banton Will Make Cops Play Critics." New York Morning Telegraph, 8 February 1927.

Barnes, Clive. "Theatre: Another Look At 'Merchant.'" New York Times, 10 June 1970.

Barnes, Eleanor. "'The Captive' Good Play For Medical Student." Unidentified Los Angeles newspaper, 1928.

Barnes, Howard. "Ballet Plus Murder." New York Herald Tribune, 6 June 1946.

_____. "The Theaters." New York Herald Tribune, 4 November 1943.

_____. "The Theaters." New York Herald Tribune, 30 December 1944.

_____. "The Theaters." New York Herald Tribune, 16 April 1948.

"Barring Of 'Trio' Arouses Players." New York Times, 11 November 1944.

"Bayonne Bars 'The Drag.'" New York Times, 10 February 1927.

Beebe, Lucius. "Stage Asides: If We Recall 'Such A Little Queen." New York Herald Tribune, 31 October 1943.

_____. "Stage Asides." New York Herald Tribune, 25 September 1938.

"Bell Divorces Actress Eva Le Galliene's [sic] Shadow." New York Daily News, 8 July 1930.

"Better Than Censorship." Editorial. New York Times, 25 May 1923.

Blalock, W. J., Jr.. "The Night They Raided Three Broadway Shows." New York Sunday News, 22 April 1956.

"A Blushing Raider Re-Enacts Scene Of 'Pleasure Man.'" New York Herald Tribune, 22 March 1930.

"Boasting Of Sex, 'The Drag' Goes On." New York Sun, 1 February 1927.

Boehnel, William. "'The Green Bay Tree' Exciting Adult Drama." New York World-Telegram, 21 October 1933.

_____. "Three Foreign Films First In Ten Best Exhibited In 1932." New York World-Telegram, 31 December 1932.

Bolton, Whitney. 'Design For Living' Sleekest and Most Persuasive Play In Town." New York Morning Telegraph, 26 January 1933.

_____. "'The Green Bay Tree' Revived With Character Alternations." New York Morning Telegraph, 3 February 1951.

_____. "Moralists Make Jackasses Of Themselves With 'Design For Living.'" New York Morning Telegraph, 26 January 1933.

_____. "'Season In The Sun' Nice Piece Of Funny Writing." New York Morning Telegraph, 30 September 1950.

_____. "Stage: 'Children's Hour' Still Taut, Powerful Drama." New York Morning Telegraph, 20 December 1952.

_____. "Stage Review: 'The Immoralist' Outstanding Example Of Theatrical Courage." New York Morning Telegraph, 10 February 1954.

_____. "'Strange Interlude,' Wears Well, Acting Honors To Page, Prince." New York Morning Telegraph, 13 March 1963.

"Broadway Report." New York Newspaper PM, 6 November 1944.

"Broadway: Trio Is Play On Sordid Theme." Boston Christian Science Monitor, 30 December 1944.

Bronski, Michael. "Northwest Corner Of Your Mouth." Boston Gay Community News, 10 November 1979.

Broun, Heywood. "It Seems To Me." New York World, 25 May 1923.

_____. "It Seems To Me." New York World, 4 February 1927.

_____. "The New Play." New York World, 20 December 1922.

Brown, John Mason. "The Play: By John Mason Brown." New York Evening Post, 21 October 1933.

_____. "The Play." New York Evening Post, 13 November 1929.

_____. "The Play." New York Evening Post, 2 May 1935.

Brown, Sterling. "Winter Bound." Wall Street Journal, 16 November 1929.

Cambridge, John. "'The Good' At The Windsor Saved By Competent Acting." Daily Worker, 7 October 1938.

"The Captive At Empire." Brooklyn Standard, 30 September 1926.

"'Captive' Breaks Berlin Record." New York Morning Telegraph, 16 January 1927.

"'The Captive' Flees The Wrath Of Law." New York Daily Mirror, 17 February 1927.

"'Captive' Immoral Mahoney Decides." New York Times, 9 March 1927.

"'The Captive' Is Withdrawn; Cast Of Play To Escape Trial." New York Sun, 16 February 1926.

"'The Captive' Presented At The Empire Theatre." New York Graphic, 30 September 1926.

"'The Captive' Quits But New Producer Will Defy Police." New York Times, 17 February 1927.

"The Captive." Variety, 6 October 1926.

_____. Variety, 8 October 1926.

_____. Variety, 18 July 1951.

"'Captive' Will Be Offered Broadway." New York American, 28 August 1926.

"Cardinal Backing The Dunnigan Bill." New York Times, 18 May 1937.

Carroll, Harrison. "The Captive In Mayan Bow." Unidentified Los Angeles Newspaper, 1928.

Castellum, Maida. "The Stage." New York Call, 21 December 1922.

"Censorship As John Drew Sees It." New York Morning Telegraph, 20 February 1927.

Chapman, John. "'The Immoralist' Sure Enough Is." New York Daily News, 39 December 1944.

_____. "Moss Keeps Things Humming In Theatre By Making Mistakes." New York Daily News, 27 February 1945.

Chapman, John. "The Right People." New York Daily News. 23 December 1934.

_____. "'Season In The Sun' Is Humor At Its Best, And Beautifully Acted." New York Daily News, 29 September 1950.

_____. "'Tea and Sympathy' A Beautiful Play, Deborah Kerr Magnificent." New York Daily News, 1 October 1953.

_____. "There Are More Broken Backs Than Chilled Spines In 'The Dancer.'" New York Daily News, 6 June 1946.

_____. "'Trio' Finally Arrives and Proves Talky But Strangely Fascinating." New York Daily News, 30 December 1944.

_____. "'Trio' Marks Time As Shubert Stands On Landlord Rights." New York Daily News, 8 November 1944.

Charash, Jack. "Circling Times Square." New York Today, 21 November 1929.

"Cheers Greeted Robert Morley As 'Oscar Wilde." New York Post, 23 November 1938.

"The Children's Hour." Variety, 22 November 1934.

"Clean Plays By Force." Editorial. Billboard, 23 April 1927.

"Clean-Stage Drive Halts For Courts." New York Herald Tribune, 12 February 1927.

"Clean-up Of Stage, Dance Halls and Poolrooms Ordered By Moss." New York Times, 21 January 1934.

"Clean-up Or Be Cleaned-up, Mayor Walker Warns Stage," New York American, 26 December 1930.

"Clergyman Flays Police For Raid On Captive." New York Morning Telegraph, 11 February 1927.

Clurman, Harold. "What Was Broadway's All-Time Best Season?" New York Times, 16 March 1980.

"Confidential Performance Of The 'Drag' For Endorsement." Variety, 9 February 1927.

Coleman, Robert. "'The Captive' Dazes." New York Mirror, 30 September 1926.

_____. "'The Captive' Theme Restated By 'Trio.'"

New York Daily Mirror, 30 December 1944.

Coleman, Robert. "'Immoralist' Treats Hard Subject With Sympathy." New York Daily Mirror, 9 February 1954.

_____. "Love Of Women." New York Daily Mirror, 14 December 1937.

_____. "Powys Play At Biltmore." New York Daily Mirror, 16 October 1937.

_____. "Rats Of Norway." New York Daily Mirror, 16 April 1948.

"Comedy By Coward Daring and Witty, Too." New York World-Telegram, 25 January 1933.

"Confirms Award On 'Oscar Wilde' Life." Variety, 18 November 1942.

Conway, Jack. "Pleasure Man." Variety, 19 September 1928.

Cooke, Richard P.. "The Theatre." Wall Street Journal, 4 November 1943.

Cookman, A. V.. "Note On Mordaunt Shairp." New York Times, 12 November 1933.

Corbin, John. "The Play." New York Times, 20 December 1922.

Crist, Judith. "'The Immoralist' Antiquely Good." New York Herald Tribune, 8 November 1963.

"Critical and Amusements." New York Newspaper PM, 2 March 1945.

"Critical and Amusements. PM Visits: The Two Who Wrote 'Trio.'" New York Newspaper PM, 24 September 1944.

"Crowds Fight To See 'The Drag.'" New York Herald Tribune, 4 February 1927.

Dale, Alan. "Depressing Play New Offering At Apollo." New York American, 24 February 1923.

_____. "One Tragic Phase Of Human Nature Frankly Staged." New York American, 30 September 1926.

Darlington, W. A.. "A Well Acted Play." London Daily Telegraph, 18 February 1937

Dash, Thomas R.. "The Immoralist." New York Women's Wear Daily, 9 February 1954.

Davis, Burton. "Much Talked Of 'Captive' Opens." New York Morning Telegraph, 30 September 1926.

"District Attorney and 'The Captive.'" New York World, 23 November 1926.

Donaghey, Frederick. "This Thing And That Thing." Chicago Sunday Tribune, 14 November 1926.

"Don't Relax Mayor! Wipe Out Those Evil Plays Now Menacing Future Of The Theatre." New York American, 26 January 1927.

"Doom Of Stage Censorship Bill Seen After Albany Hearing." Billboard, 5 March 1927.

Douglas, Lord Alfred. "Lord Alfred Douglas Praises Play As Truthful To His Friend." New York Herald Tribune, 9 April 1939.

_____. "A Preface To Oscar Wilde." New York Post, 10 October 1938.

"'The Drag' And 'Sex' Not The Half Of It." New York Evening Post, 2 February 1927.

"'The Drag' Blamed For Bringing The Play Censorship To A Focus, Stopped In Jersey." Variety, 16 February 1927.

"'Drag' Censored At Bridegeport; Battle On Here." New York Herald Tribune, 1 February 1927.

"'The Drag' Dragged Off The Boards In Bayonne." New York Daily Mirror, 13 February 1927.

"'The Drag' Ends Hectic Career; Morganstern Out." New York Morning Telegraph, 13 February 1927.

"'The Drag' Mae West's New Play Has 'Poppa Love Poppa' Theme." Zit's Theatrical Newspaper, 5 February 1927.

"'The Drag' Quits As 3 Sex Plays Reap Harvest." New York World, 13 February 1927.

"'The Drag's' Rehearsing With 60 Villagers." Variety, 14 January 1927.

"'Drag' Staged At Bridgeport." New York American, 1 February 1927.

"'The Drag' Stopped." New York American, 11 February 1927.

"Drama Mailbag: Arguing About Homosexuality." New York Times, 6 February 1966.

D., P. J.. "'The Green Bay Tree,' Now At The Broad Street Theatre." Newark Evening News, 24 April 1934.

Dudley, Bide. "The Stage." New York World, 18 November 1929.

Eder, Richard. "'Creve Coeur,' New Drama By Tennessee Williams." New York Times, 22 January 1979.

"An Editorial; 'The Mayor and Trio.'" New York Newspaper PM, 2 March 1945.

"Editorial." New York Post, 17 February 1927.

"The Elder Schildkraut In Devastating Play." New York Evening Telegram, 20 December 1922.

Faber, Charles. "On Stage and Screen: Anne Baxter Is Back From Outback." Los Angeles Advocate, 6 March 1980.

_____. "The Interview Ticket." Los Angeles Advocate, 19 April 1979.

Feigenbaum, William M. "Does The Stage Need A Censor?" New York Evening Journal, 31 December 1926.

"Fight To Save 'Captive' Like 'Scopes Case.'" New York Herald Tribune, 19 February 1927.

"Films Heads Make A New Concession." New York Times, 12 July 1934.

"Film Personalities." New York Herald Tribune, 22 January 1933.

"Footlights--The Stage." Light, 16 December 1929.

"14 Indictments Follow Probe Of New Play." New York Times, 7 March 1923.

Francis, Robert. "The Theater." Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 16 October 1937.

_____. "The Theater." Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 14 December 1937.

Freedley, George. "On Stage--And Off." New York Morning

Telegraph, 26 December 1952.

Freedley, George. "Stage Today: New Franken Play Is Confused Piece." New York Morning Telegraph, 5 November 1943.

_____. "The Stage Today." New York Morning Telegraph, 29 May 1945.

_____. "The Stage Today." New York Morning Telegraph, 28 November 1946.

Gabriel, Gilbert W.. "'The Captive' From Paris." New York Sun, 30 September 1926.

_____. "Design For Living." New York American, 25 January 1933.

_____. "Last Night's First Night." New York Sun, 2 October 1928.

Gaghan, Jerry. "'Trio' In Locust Debut, Sabinson Play Scores." Philadelphia Daily News, 26 October 1944.

Gaines, William Pendleton. Fragment of an untitled, undated interview with George Jean Nathan in an unidentified New York newspaper. File MNEZ n. c. 6901, New York Public Library, Lincoln Center.

Garland, Robert. "Arthur Hopkins Presents 'These Days' At Cort." New York Morning Telegram, 13 November 1938.

_____. "'Children's Hour' A Moving Tragedy." New York World-Telegram, 21 November 1934.

_____. "Fine Fusion Of Arts Is The Play At The Cort." New York World-Telegram, 29 October 1933.

_____. "'The Green Bay Tree' By Off-Broadeqy Group." New York Journal American, 17 July 1947.

_____. "'Green Bay Tree' Impressively Staged At Mews Playhouse." New York Journal American, 17 July 1942.

_____. "'Reprise' New Play At The Vanderbilt." New York World Telegram, 2 May 1935.

_____. "Rose Franken Play Bows On Broadway." New York Journal, 4 November 1943.

Garrick. "The New Play." New York Journal, 30 September 1926.

"Gate Theatre." London Times, 30 September 1936.

Gelder, Larry Van. "Interlude Still Tops." New York Mirror, 12 March 1963.

Gilbert, Douglas. "Jed Harris Flourishes Anew." New York Times, 31 October 1933.

"Gilbert Miller Preparing To Defy Mrs. Loomis By Producing 'The Prisoner.'" New York World, 20 August 1926.

"'Girls In Uniform,' As A Play Is A Moving and Distinguished Production." New York Morning Telegraph, 1 January 1933.

"'Girls In Uniform' Stages Well." New York World-Telegram, 31 December 1932.

"Girls' School Upheld 'Captive,' Says Shotac." New York Herald Tribune, 21 February 1927.

"'God Of Vengeance' Cast Is Indicted." New York Times, 7 March 1923.

"'God Of Vengeance' An Obscene Play; 13 Found Guilty." New York Morning Telegraph, 24 May 1923.

"'God Of Vengeance' Immoral; 11 Actors In Play Convicted." New York World, 24 May 1923.

"'God Of Vengeance' Players Convicted." New York Times, 24 May 1923.

Goetz, Ruth and Augustus. "Genesis Of A Play From An Andre Gide Novel." New York Times, 31 January 1954.

"Gossip Of The Rialto." New York Times, 22 January 1933.

"The Green Bay Tree." Variety, 7 February 1951.

Guernsey, Otis L., Jr.. "The Playbill: A Gentleman By The Name Of Moss." New York Herald Tribune, 4 March 1945.

Gussow, Mel. "Tennessee Williams On Art And Sex." New York Times, 3 November 1975.

Hall, Richard. "Conversations With Eric Bentley." Los Angeles Advocate, 23 March 1977.

Hammond, Percy. "The Theaters." New York Tribune, 20 December 1922.

Hammond, Percy. "The Theaters." New York Herald Tribune, 17 September 1926.

_____. "The Theaters." New York Herald Tribune, 30 September 1926.

_____. "The Theaters." New York Herald Tribune, 10 October 1926.

_____. "The Theaters." New York Herald Tribune, 16 January 1927.

_____. "The Theaters." New York Herald Tribune, 4 February 1927.

_____. "The Theaters." New York Herald Tribune, 13 February 1927.

_____. "The Theaters." New York Herald Tribune, 25 January 1933.

_____. "The Theaters." New York Herald Tribune, 5 February 1933.

_____. "The Theaters." New York Herald Tribune, 21 October 1933.

_____. "The Theaters." New York Herald Tribune, 5 November 1933.

_____. "The Theaters." New York Herald Tribune, 21 November 1934.

_____. "The Theaters." New York Herald Tribune, 29 January 1935.

_____. "The Theaters." New York Herald Tribune, 2 May 1935.

Harper, Ray W.. "Footlight Reflections." Brooklyn Citizen, 3 October 1926.

Hawkins, William. "'The Rats Of Norway' Limns The Lemings." New York World Telegram, 16 April 1948.

Hearst, William Randolph. "The Best Treatment For Unclean Spoken Plays Is To Apply The Methods Which Protected Motion Pictures." New York American, 30 December 1926.

"Helen Menken Recalls 'Captive' And Her Arrest." New York Herald Tribune, 9 June 1935.

Higley, Philo. "No-Man's Land, Sappho In Overalls." New York Morning World, 14 December 1929.

Hipp, Edward Southern. "King-Size In Spades." Newark Evening News, 12 March 1963.

"Horace Liveright Clatters Down B'Way On Rostinante." New York Post, 17 February 1927.

Howe, Frederick. "An Exploration Of The History Of Female Impersonators." Los Angeles Advocate, 5 October 1977.

_____. "Homosexuality In English Drama." Los Angeles Advocate, 23 February 1977.

"'Hymn To Venus' Has Some Hymn; Second Lesbian Play Opened By A. H. Wood At Atlantic City." Zit's Weekly, 6 November 1926.

Ibee.. "Outrageous Fortune." Variety, 10 November 1943.

_____. "Plays On Broadway." Variety, 21 April 1948.

_____. "Whiteoaks." Variety, 30 March 1938.

"Inside Stuff-Legit." Variety, 24 October 1933.

Joseph, John. "'Sin Of Sins' Brings Strange Fish Into Adelphia Aquarium, Joseph Reports." Chicago Herald and Examiner, 9 November 1926.

"Judge Breaks Gravel Over 'Pleasure Man.'" New York Daily News, 27 March 1930.

Kauffmann, Stanley. "On The Acceptability Of The Homosexual." New York Times, 6 February 1966.

_____. "Homosexual Drama And Its Disguises." New York Times, 21 January 1966.

Kerr, Walter. "'Bent' Starring Richard Gere." New York Times, 3 December 1979.

_____. "The Immoralist." New York Herald Tribune, 9 February 1954.

_____. "The Theatres: 'The Children's Hour.'" New York Herald Tribune, 19 December 1952.

Klemesrud, Judy. "You Don't Have To Be One To Play One." New York Times, 29 September 1968.

Kronenberger, Louis. "Critical And Amusements." New York Newspaper PM, 30 December 1944.

Kronenberger, Louis. "'Outrageous Fortune' Very Famous BUT VERY FOOLISH." New York Newspaper PM, 4 November 1943.

"'La Prisonniere' To Be Put On By Frohman Here September 29, New York Telegraph, 28 August 1926.

"Legislature Gets Play 'Padlock Bill.'" New York Times, 19 March 1927.

Len, Mathilde. "'Sin Of Sins' Fails To Impress Critic." Chicago Daily News, 9 November 1926.

Leviero, Anthony. "Menjou Testifies Communists Taint Film Industry." New York Times, 22 October 1947.

Licata, Sal J.. "The Emerging Gay Presence." Los Angeles Advocate, 26 July 1978.

Littell, Robert. "The New Play." New York Evening Post, 2 October 1928.

"Liveright Appeal To Reopen 'Captive.'" New York Times, 20 February 1927.

"Liveright Sues City To Reopen 'The Captive.'" New York Herald Tribune, 20 February 1927.

Lockeridge, Richard. "The New Play." New York Sun, 31 December 1932.

_____. "The New Play." New York Sun, 21 November 1934.

_____. "The New Play." New York Sun, 15 October 1937.

_____. "The New Play." New York Sun, 14 December 1937.

_____. "The New Play." New York Sun, 11 October 1938.

"London's 'Wilde' Drama Stars Robert Morely." New York Journal American, 9 October 1938.

MacGowan, Kenneth. "The New Play." New York Globe, 20 December 1922.

Mackaye, Milton. "Mae West Asks To Block Raid Tonight." New York Evening Post, 2 October 1928.

McClain, John. "Fails To Stir Emotional Reaction." New York Journal American, 9 February 1954.

_____. "'Season In The Sun': Full Of Wonderful and Painful Laughs." New York Journal American, 29 September 1950.

_____. "A Strong Though Rather Soiled Play." New York Journal American, 2 February 1951.

"Mae West Again, "Pleasure Man,' Jewel From Her Pen Proves Tame." Brooklyn Eagle, 2 October 1928.

"Mae West And Cast Of 55 Players Plead In Court." New York Sun, 2 October 1928.

"Mae West And 61 Of 'Pleasure Man' Cast Arrested." New York World, 2 October 1928.

"Mae West Case Given To Jury." New York Daily News, 27 March 1930.

"Mae West Defies Police, Continues To Present Play." New York World, 3 October 1928.

Manely, Richard. "These Brothers Pull As A Team Even When Yoke Spans Oceans." New York Herald Tribune, 4 December 1938.

Mantle, Burns. "Burns Mantle Tags LaG. As Real Censor, Warns Of Dangers." New York Daily News, 5 March 1945.

_____. "'The Captive' As Ugly And Devastating As Sin, And As Common." New York Daily News, 30 September 1926.

_____. "Enter The Lord High Censor." New York Sunday News, 6 February 1927.

_____. "Father In Double Role Gets Ovation." New York Daily News, 21 December 1922.

_____. "'Green Bay Tree' Highly Emotional." New York Daily News, 21 October 1933.

_____. "It's A Tough Year For Failures." New York Daily News, 21 October 1933.

_____. "'Love Of Women,' Interesting Discussion Of A Sex Problem." New York Daily News, 14 December 1937.

_____. "'Oscar Wilde' A Sympathetic Retelling Of An Old Scandal." New York Daily News, 11 October 1938.

Mantle, Burns. "'Prisoner Of War,' Aimless Drama." New York Daily News, 29 January 1935.

_____. "'Proof Thro' The Night Is A Vivid Drama Of Women In War." New York Daily News, 26 December 1942.

_____. "'Waltz In Goose Step,' Leaves Nazi Problem Where It Was." New York Daily News, 2 November 1938.

_____. "'Winter Bound' Agitates Suspicious." New York Daily News, 23 November 1929.

_____. "'Wise Tomorrow' Is A Drama About A Couple Of Harpies." New York Daily News, 16 October 1937.

Marcus, Steven. "A Second Look At Sodom." New York Herald Tribune, 20 June 1965.

Martin, Linton. "'Trio' Makes Its Debut On Locust Stage." Philadelphia Inquirer, 26 October 1944.

Maves, Karl. "Samuel M. Steward." Los Angeles Advocate, 24 August 1977.

"Mayor Approves Plan To Curb Moss." New York Times, 8 March 1945.

"Mayor Backs Moss In Closing 'Trio.'" New York Times, 2 March 1945.

"Mayor's Filth War Raids West Play." New York Daily Mirror, 4 October 1928.

Metcalfe. "The Theatre." Wall Street Journal, 2 October 1926.

Monroe, Eleanor. "Belasco." Women's Wear Daily, 2 January 1945.

"Morals Critic No Court, Says M'Adoo." New York American, 13 March 1923.

Moran, Charles. "Police Seize Cast As New Play Opens." New York Daily News, 2 October 1928.

Morehouse, Ward. "The New Play." New York Post, 4 November 1943.

_____. "The New Play." New York Sun, 30 December 1944.

_____. "The New Play." New York Sun, 16 April 1948.

"Moss Insists He Has Right To Censor Plays." New York Herald Tribune, 23 March 1945.

"Moss Shuts 'Trio' And Warns Others." New York Times, 25 February 1945.

"Moss 'Trio' Closing To Get Court Case Test," New York Times, 4 March 1945.

"Mr. Banton Goes To The Play." New York Evening Post, 12 February 1927.

"Mr. Banton's Raids." New York Morning World, 11 February 1927.

"Mr. Moss And Trio." New York Times, 22 February 1945.

"Name Morley As Season's Best Actor." New York Daily News, 19 January 1939.

Nathan, George Jean. "George Jean Nathan's Theatre Week." New York Journal American, 8 January 1945.

_____. "George Jean Nathan's Theatre Week." New York Journal American, 12 March 1945.

_____. "George Jean Nathan's Theatre Week." New York Herald Tribune, 11 January 1953.

_____. "The Week In The Theatre." New York Morning Telegraph, 10 October 1926.

"News And Gossip Of The Rialto." New York Times, 25 February 1923.

"News Of The Stage." New York Times, 22 May 1937.

"New Plays." Bronx Home News, I October 1926.

_____. Bronx Home News, 14 November 1929.

"The New Play." Brooklyn Times, 30 September 1926.

"New York Modesty Tardy Says 'Captive' Originator." New York Herald Tribune, 11 February 1927.

"New York Stage Indecent, Says Cardinal Hayes." New York Herald Tribune, 10 October 1930.

Nichols, Lewis. "The Case Of Trio." New York Times, 19 November 1944.

_____. "Melodrama Of The Abnormal." New York Times, 6 June 1946.

Nichols, Lewis. "On Censorship." New York Times, 4 March 1945.

_____. "The Play." New York Times, 4 November 1943.

_____. "Trio." New York Times, 30 December 1944.

"Now Our Idea Is This." Editorial. New York Morning Telegraph, 18 January 1927.

"Now Our Idea Is This." Editorial. New York Morning Telegraph, 3 October 1928.

O'Brien, Jack. "The Theatre." AP News Features, 11 November 1944.

Ogden, Clare. "Captive Is Moral Lesson, Helen Menken, Star, Asserts." New York Morning Telegraph, 16 January 1926.

"Oh, For Sense For Censors!" Editorial. New York American, 26 March 1923.

"Only A Major Operation Can Save The Stage." Editorial. New York American, 2 February 1927.

Oppenheimer, George. "On Stage." Newsday, 20 March 1963.

Ormsbee, Helen. "Rose Franken Says Playwrighting Like Piecrust Needs Light Hand." New York Herald Tribune, 28 November 1943.

Osborn, E. W.. "The New Plays." New York Evening World, 30 September 1926.

"'Oscar Wilde' At Gate Theatre." London Daily Telegraph, 30 September 1936.

"Other New Plays." New York Morning World, 13 November 1929.

Pace, Eric. "Herman Shumlin, 80, Dies; Leading Producer-Director." New York Times, 15 June 1979.

"Padlock For Stage Voted By Senate." New York Times, 24 March 1927.

"Parisian Plays Are Naughtier Than New York's." New York Herald Tribune, 20 February 1927.

Parmer, Charles. "Bourdet Releases Himself From His 'Captive Myth.'" New York Morning Telegram. 28 November 1926.

"Paterson Sees 'The Drag' Billed As 'Medical Play.'" New York World, 4 February 1927.

"Perplexing Drama." New York Campus, 4 December 1929.

"Perverts Called Government Peril." New York Times, 19 April 1950.

"Play Frankie And Johnnie Raided By Police As Indecent. Fifteen Arrests Are Made." New York Times, 11 September 1930.

"The Playhouse." London Times, 1 September 1925.

"The Play." New York Evening Post, 20 December 1922.

"The Play." New York Times, 17 September 1926.

"Play On Broadway." Variety, 10 February 1954.

"Plays Out Of Town." Variety, 24 November 1926.

"Plays Out Of Town." Variety, 2 February 1927.

"Plays That Cross The Line." Editorial. New York Herald, 8 March 1923.

"Pleasure Man, Mae West Play, Given Premiere." New York American, 2 October 1928.

"Police Planning More Raids To Halt Production." New York Daily News, 3 October 1928.

"Police Raid Three Shows, Sex, Captive and Virgin Man; Hold Actors And Managers." New York Times, 10 February 1927.

"Police Ready To Raid Theatres With 'Dirt' Plays." Variety, 9 February 1927.

"Police Won't Let 'Drag' Play Here." New York Evening Post, 9 February 1927.

Pollock, Arthur. "Theater." Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 14 November 1928.

_____. "Theater." Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 25 February 1933.

_____. "Theater." Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 21 October 1933.

_____. "Theater." Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 21 November 1934.

Pollock, Arthur. "The Theater." Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 29 January 1935.

_____. "The Theater." Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 2 May 1935.

_____. "The Theater." Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 24 March 1938.

_____. "The Theater." Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 2 November 1938.

_____. "Theater." Brooklyn Eagle, 13 November 1944.

_____. "Theater." Brooklyn Eagle, 30 December 1944.

_____. "'Trio' A Moral Play With An Odd Triangle Plot Opens At Belasco." Brooklyn Eagle, 30 December 1945.

"Powys Play In Baltimore." New York Times, 5 October 1937.

"The Premiere." Brooklyn Citizen, 30 September 1926.

"Press Old Charges Against Liveright, Backer Of 'Captive.'" New York Times, 18 February 1927.

"Prisoners Of War." New York Journal American, 29 January 1935.

"Prisoners Of War." Variety, 5 February 1935.

"Producer Of Show Is Sent To Jail." New York Times, 18 December 1942.

"A Question Of Morality." Editorial. New York Journal American, 16 March 1945.

"Quip Out." New York World Telegram, 19 November 1938.

"Raid Mae West Play, Seize 56 At Opening." New York Times, 2 October 1928.

"Raided Shows More Definant." New York Sun, 11 February 1927.

Rantillo, Thelma. "'No Exit' From France." Boston Christian Science Monitor, 27 November 1946.

Rascoe, Burton. "The Theater." New York World-Telegram, 26 December 1942.

_____. "The Theater." New York World-Telegram,

4 November 1943.

Rascoe, Burton. "'Trio' Is Good But Fails Buildup As Sensation." New York World-Telegram, 30 December 1944.

Rathbun, Stephen. "In And About The Theatre." New York Sun, 28 August 1926.

Regelson, Rosalyn. "Up The Camp Staircase." New York Times, 3 March 1968.

"Rehearsals Today For 'Gibson Girls.'" New York Times, 26 October 1937.

R., G.. "Girls In Uniform Stages Well." New York World-Telegram, 31 December 1932.

"Rudolph Schildkraut Stars In God Of Vengeance." New York Sun, 20 December 1922.

"Rumor Zukor-Lasky Split." New York Telegraph, Weekly Motion Picture Section, 13 February 1926.

Schildkraut, Joseph. "A New Conception Of 'The Green Bay Tree.'" New York Post, 31 January 1951.

Schloss, Edwin H.. "'Trio' Bows At Locust St. Theater." Philadelphia Record, 26 October 1944.

Scott, Vernon. "Curtain Cues." New York Post, 29 January 1954.

Seldes, Gilbert. "Second Sights." New York Graphic, 16 November 1929.

"'Sex' A Crude Drama." New York Times, 1 April 1926.

"Sex." Billboard, 8 May 1926.

"Sex Plays Are Raided." New York Daily Mirror, 10 February 1927.

"The She-Devil In The Boarding School." New York Times, 12 January 1969.

Shipley, Joseph T.. "On Stage." New Leader, 14 October 1950.

"Shumlin Gets Wilder Play, WPA Rushes Sillar Drama." New York Daily News, 16 October 1938.

Skolsky, Sidney. "Behind The News." New York Daily News, 7 July 1930.

Sloper, L. A.. "Outrageous Fortune." Boston Christian Science Monitor, 19 October 1943.

Smith, Alison. "Other New Plays." New York Morning World, 13 November 1929.

"Smith Against Censor." New York Times, 4 February 1927.

"Smith Approves Theatre Padlocks; Vetoes Gas Cut-Off." New York Times, 8 April 1927.

Sobel, Bernard. "School Play Proves Impressive." New York Daily Mirror, 1 January 1933.

Soos, Wilma. "Helen Menken Star Of Exotic Play Talks In A Taxi." Brooklyn Daily Times, n. d., 1926.

"Stage Wants Police Power For Play Jury." New York Herald Tribune, 3 February 1927.

Stein, Cindy. "Television: Queers In America's Living Room." Boston Gay Community News, 5 January 1980.

Stokes, Sewell. "Writing of 'Wilde.'" New York Times, 20 November 1938.

Stoller, Maurice. "Stage Today." New York Morning Telegraph, 1 January 1945.

Stone, Percy N. "Bourdet Didn't Try To Shock When He Wrote 'The Captive.'" New York Herald Tribune, 12 December 1926.

"Sues For $1,000,000 In Closing Of 'Trio.'" New York Times, 3 March 1945.

"Sumner Forms Group For A Stage Clean-Up." New York Times, 6 December 1930.

Taubman, Howard. "Actors Studio Presents O'Neill Revival." New York Times, 13 March 1963.

_____. "Modern Primer: Helpful Hints To Tell Appearance Vs. Truth." New York Times, 28 April 1963.

_____. "Not What It Seems: Homosexual Motif Gets Heterosexual Guise." New York Times, 5 November 1961.

Taylor, Clarke. "Contemporary Elegance At 74: Sir John Gielgud." Los Angeles Advocate, 1 June 1977.

"A Terrible Man, This Dunnigan." Editorial. New York Daily News, 17 November 1933.

"Theatre." Chicago Daily Tribune, 9 November 1926.

"Theatres." Wall Street Journal, 30 September 1926.

"Therer's No Place On Stage For Money-Mad Exploiters Of Filth." Editorial. New York American, 3 October 1928.

"This Week's Openings." New York Times, 22 January 1933.

"Three Hundred Club." London Sunday Times, 12 July 1925.

"'Trio' To Close Tonight." New York Times, 24 February 1945.

"Truth." New York Morning Telegraph, 21 December 1922.

"Uncertain Sex In New Play Starts Row." New York Evening Journal, 1 February 1927.

Vreeland, Frank. "The Marble Bride." New York Evening Telegram, 30 September 1926.

Waldorf, Wilella. "Edith Barrett To Play A Role In "Wise Tomorrow." New York Post, 12 September 1937.

_____. "Forecasts And Postscripts." New York Post, 15 September 1933.

_____. "Two On The Aisle." New York Post, 4 November 1943.

_____. "Two On The Aisle." New York Post, 30 December 1944.

_____. "Two On The Aisle." New York Post, 10 March 1945.

"Walker At Palm Beach, Smiles Over Theatre Raids." New York Herald Tribune, 18 February 1927.

"Walker Backs McKee." New York Times, 15 February 1927.

"Walker Play Crusade Laid To Pre-Election Promise." New York Evening Post, 16 February 1927.

"Waltz In Goose Step." Variety, 9 November 1938.

"The Warning To The Stage." New York Evening World, 19 February 1927.

Watt, Douglas. "Entertainment: 'Bent' Is Shocking, But Not Moving." New York Daily News, 3 December 1979.

Watts, Richard, Jr.. "Cavalcade." New York Herald Tribune, 22 January 1933.

Watts, Richard, Jr.. "Decline Of 'The Green Bay Tree.'" New York Post, 2 February 1951.

_____. "A Grave Drama About Abnormality." New York Post, 9 February 1954.

_____. "O'Neill's 'Strange Interlude' Still Retains Its Dramatic Power." New York Post, 12 March 1963.

_____. "The Theatre: Applause And Cheers." New York Herald Tribune, 23 October 1938.

_____. "The Theaters." New York Herald Tribune, 14 December 1937.

_____. "The Theaters." New York Herald Tribune, 24 March 1938.

_____. "The Theaters." New York Herald Tribune, 11 October 1938.

_____. "The Theaters." New York Herald Tribune, 2 November 1938.

_____. "Theater." New York Post, 16 April 1948.

_____. "Two On The Aisle." New York Post, 27 November 1946.

_____. "Two On The Aisle." New York Post, 22 October 1953.

_____. "Two On The Aisle." New York Post, 17 January 1970.

_____. "'Winter Bound' Is Provincetown Players' Offering." New York Herald Tribune, 13 November 1929.

Weaver, Warren. "High Court Restricts Censorship Of Plays." New York Times, 19 March 1975.

Weintraub, George R.. "The Play." Atlantic City Union, 2 November 1926.

"Went To Be Shocked, Found 'The Drag' Clean." New York Graphic, 1 February 1927.

"West Play A Hodge-Podge." New York Times, 2 October 1928.

Whipple, Sidney B.. "Ethel Barrymore Triumphs In Matriarch Role At Hudson." New York World-Telegram, 24 March 1938.

Whipple, Sidney B.. "Love Of Women At The John Golden." New York World-Telegram, 16 October 1937.

_____. "Miss Starr, Jarvis Rice Play Difficult Roles." New York World-Telegram, 6 October 1938.

_____. "Play On Oscar Wilde Sparkles With Wit." New York World-Telegram, 11 October 1938.

_____. "Powys Brings A Play." New York World-Telegram, 16 October 1937.

"Wilde Finally Discovered." New York Herald Tribune, 28 April 1940.

Wiley, Don. "Relentless And Absorbing Tragedy In 'The Captive.'" San Francisco News, 9 June 1935.

"Will Raid 'The Drag' If It Opens." New York Sun, 9 Febraury 1927.

Winchell, Walter. "Robert Morley Star." New York Daily Mirror, 11 October 1938.

_____. "Tense Drama At Elliott, A New Hit." New York Daily Mirror, 21 November 1934.

_____. "Waltz In Goose Step." New York Daily Mirror, 2 November 1938.

"'Winter Bound' Actress Had To Pick Part." New York American, 13 November 1929.

"'Winter Bound' And The Mind Bound." New York Sun, 25 November 1929.

"'Winter Bound' Is An Unusual Study Of A Peculiar Woman." Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 13 November 1929.

"'Winter Bound' Is Presented By Provincetown Players." New York Evening Journal, 13 November 1929.

"'Winter Bound' Moves Along Devious Paths." New York Times, 13 November 1929.

"'Wise Tomorrow.'" London Times, 21 February 1937.

"Wise Tomorrow." Variety, 10 March 1937.

"Wise Tomorrow." Variety, 18 October 1937.

Woolcott, Alexander. "The Reviewing Stand." New York Herald Tribune, 21 December 1922.

_____. "The Stage." New York World, 30 September 1926.

Zolotow, Sam. "Shubert Refuses Theatre To Trio." New York Times, 6 November 1944.

_____. "Violet To Close Saturday Night." New York Times, 8 November 1944.

Zorres, H. Z.. "'The Captive' Is Seen At Empire." New York Commercial, 30 September 1930.

PERIODICALS

Auden, W. H.. "The Alienated City: Reflections on 'Othello'." Encounter, August 1961, p. 11.

Bates, Ernest Sutherland. "Comstock Stalks." Scribner's Magazine, April 1930, p. 362.

Benchley, Robert. "Goings On About Town." New Yorker, February 1933, p. 4.

_____. "The Theatre." New Yorker, 1 December 1934, p. 34.

Brackett, Charles. "The Theatre." New Yorker, 9 October 1926, p. 33.

"Broadway in Review." Theatre Arts Monthly, January 1933, p. 186.

Brown, John Mason. "Diadems of Paste." Theatre Arts Monthly, December 1926, p. 816.

_____. "Intermission: Broadway In Review." Theatre Arts Monthly, April 1929, p. 238.

C., H. S.. "The New Books." Saturday Review of Literature, 2 March 1934, p. 523.

De Cassers, Benjamine. "Smash the Panders and Smut-Hounds!" Theatre Magazine, July 1928, p. 12.

"The Editor Goes To The Play." Theatre Magazine, April 1929, p. 40.

Freeman, Donald. "La Prisonnière." Vanity Fair, December 1926, n. p..

Gibbs, Wolcott. "The Green Bay Tree." New Yorker, 28 October 1933, p. 26.

_____. "The Theatre. 'Passion in Dotheboys'." New Yorker, 24 April 1948, p. 50.

_____. "The Theatre." New Yorker, 13 November 1943, pp. 36-40.

Harriman, Margaret Case. "Profiles, Miss Lilly of New Orleans." New Yorker, 8 November 1941, p. 25.

Helbing, Terry. "'Rogues' Gallery." Christopher Street, June 1978, p. 18.

"Helen Hayes Helps Save The American Theatre From Censorship." Life, 31 May 1937, p. 17.

Hornblow, Arthur. "Mr. Hornblow Goes To The Play." Theatre Magazine, April 1923, p. 68.

_____. "Mr. Hornblow Goes To The Play." Theatre Magazine, December 1926, p. 16.

Hutchens, John. "Mid-Season Show Shop." Theatre Arts Monthly, January 1930, p. 11.

Jackson, Graham. "The Theatre of Implication." Canadian Theatre Review. (Fall 1976): 34-35.

Krapf, E. E.. "Shylock and Antonio: A Psychoanalytic Study of Shakespeare and Antisemitism." Psychoanalytic Review XLIII (1955): 113-130.

Levin, Jim. "Butterflies, Pansies, Twilight Men and Strange Brothers: The American Male Homosexual Novel Between the Wars." Gai Saber. New York: Gay Academic Union (1978): 244.

Leyendecker, Frank S., "Theatre." About Town, 19 January 1945, p. 12.

McK., K., "Shapes of the Soul." The Stage, December 1933, p. 21.

Meryman, Richard. "Mae West, A Cherished, Bemusing Masterpiece of Self-Preservation." Life, 18 April 1969, p. 72.

Midgley, Graham. "The Merchant of Venice: A Reconsideration." Essays in Criticism X (1960): n. p..

Mothersill, Hiram. "Sense and Censorship." Theatre Guild Magazine, November 1928, p. 11.

Nathan, George Jean. "Theatre." American Mercury, March 1927, pp. 373-75.

Paterson, Ada. "Miss Menken Defends 'The Captive'." Theatre Arts Magazine, February 1927, p. 22.

Pierce, Allan. "Homophobia and the Critics." Christopher Street, June 1978, pp. 40-44.

Plant, Richard. "The Man With The Pink Triangles." Christopher Street, February 1977, p. 6.

"Playboy Interview With Mae West." Playboy, January 1971, pp. 76-78.

Roberts, Katherine. "Least Effort." Colliers, 17 December 1938, p. 11.

Ross, Thomas Arthur. "A Note On The Merchant Of Venice." British Journal of Medical Psychology XIV (1934): 303-311.

Summer. John S.. "For The Ultimate Good Of Society There Must Be A Cessation Of Dirty Plays--Hence The Theatre Closings." Theatre Magazine, May 1928, pp. 111-12.

"The Talk Of The Town." New Yorker, 5 March 1927, p. 19.

"Theatre." London News Review. 12 November 1936, p. 28.

"Trio." Stage Today, 1 January 1945, n. p..

Wangh, Martin. "Othello: The Tragedy of Iago." Psychoanalytic Quarterly XIX (1950): 202-212.

West, Mae. "Sex In The Theatre." Parade, September 1929, n. p..

Young, Stark. "Cort Laurels." New Republic, 15 November 1933, p. 17.

Zunser, Jesse. "Trio." Cue. 6 January 1945, p. 21.

_____. "New Plays: Furor Over 'Trio.'" Cue, 18 November 1944, p. 21.

PLAYS

Anderson, Robert. Tea and Sympathy. New York: Random House, 1953.

Asch, Sholom. "The God of Vengeance." The Great Jewish Plays. New York: Horizon Press, 1966.

Arlen, Michael. The Green Hat. Typewritten copy. New York Public Library, Lincoln Center.

Bourdet, Edouard. The Captive. Translated by Arthur Hornblow, Jr.. Introduction by J. Brooks Atkinson. New York: Brentano's, 1926.

Brecht, Bertolt and Feuchtwanger, Lion. Edward II, A Chronicle Play. Translated by Eric Bentley. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1966.

Coward, Noel. Play Parade I. London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1950.

De La Roache, Mazo. White Oaks. London: MacMillian and Co., Limited, 1936.

Dickinson, Thomas H.. Winter Bound. Typewritten copy. New York Public Library, Lincoln Center.

Erskin, Chester. The Good. Typewritten copy. New York Public Library, Lincoln Center.

Famous Plays of 1932-33. London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1934.

Ford, John. The Broken Heart. Edited by Brian Morris. New York: Hill and Wang, 1966.

Franken, Rose. Outrageous Fortune. New York: Samuel French, 1944.

Fuller, Henry B.. The Puppet-Booth: Twelve Plays. New York: The Century Co., 1896.

Garrett, Oliver H. P., Waltz In Goose Step. Typewritten copy. New York Public Library, Lincoln Center.

Gibbs, Wolcott. Season In The Sun. New York: Random House, 1950.

Goetz, Ruth and Augustus. The Immoralist. New York: Dramatist Play Service, Inc., 1954.

Hellman, Lillian. Four Plays By Lillian Hellman. New York; Random House, 1942.

Hoffman, William M., ed.. Gay Plays: The First Collection. New York: Avon Books, 1979.

Kaufman, George S. and MacGrath, Leueen. The Small Hours. Typewritten copy. New York Public Library, Lincoln Center.

Kenwood, Allan R.. Proof Through The Night. Typewritten copy. New York Public Library, Lincoln Center.

Mast, Jane. Pseudonym for Mae West. The Drag. Manuscript Division, Thomas Jefferson Building, Library of Congress.

Marlowe, Christopher. Edward the Second. Edited by W. Moelyn Merchant. New York: Hill and Wang, 1970.

_____. Edward II. Introduction by H. B. Charlton and R. D. Waller. New York: Gordian Press, Inc., 1930.

O'Neill, Eugene. Nine Plays By Eugene O'Neill. New York: The Modern Library, 1959.

O'Neil, George. American Dream, Epic of an American Family. Typewritten copy. New York Public Library, Lincoln Center.

Parker, Dorothy and d'Usseau, Arnaud. Ladies of the Corridor. Typewritten copy. New York Public Library, Lincoln Center.

Sartre, Jean Paul. No Exit. Translated by Paul Bowles. New York: Samuel French Inc., 1945.

_____. No Exit. Translated by Stuart Gilbert. Introduction by Ruby Cohn. New York: Random House, Inc., 1967.

Shairp, Mordaunt. The Green Bay Tree. Typewritten Copy. New York Public Library, Lincoln Center.

Shakespeare, William. The Merchant of Venice.

_____. Troilus and Cressida.

Sixteen Famous British Plays. Compiled by Bennett A. Cerf and Van H. Cartmell. Garden City, New York: Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., 1942.

Stokes, Sewell and Stokes, Leslie. Oscar Wilde. New York: Random House, 1938.

_____. Oscar Wilde. Typewritten copy. New York Public Library, Lincoln Center.

West, Mae. Pleasure Man. Typewritten copy. Manuscript Division, Thomas Jefferson Building, Library of Congress.

Williams, Tennessee. The Theatre of Tennessee Williams. New York: A New Directions Book, 1971.

_____. Three Plays By Tennessee Willams. New York: A New Directions Book, 1959.

Willingham, Calder. End As A Man. New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1953.

Winter, Keith. The Rats Of Norway. London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1933.