THE EVOLUTION OF A STAR:

THE CAREER OF VIOLA ALLEN, 1882-1918

by

RITA M. PLOTNICKI

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.

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Abstract

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The years 1880 to 1918 were a time of transition in the American theatre. In evaluating this period, many scholars concentrate on the personalities and productions which were significant in the evolution of the modern American theatre. Prominent turn-of-the-century artists, who belonged to the mainstream rather than to the vanguard of the new era, are often examined inadequately or ignored entirely. While many forgotten stars of the late nineteenth century American theatre are worthy of study, this paper examines the career of Viola Allen. Her thirty-six years on stage--from 1882 to 1918--span the transitional period of American theatre. As a young actress, Miss Allen worked with many stars of the older school of acting: John McCullough, Lawrence Barrett, Joseph Jefferson III, and Tomasso Salvini in the classic tragedies and comedies. She was also known for her performances in a variety of contemporary dramas: Esmeralda, Held by the Enemy, Saints and Sinners, Hoodman Blind, and Shenandoah. Twice, in different phases of her career, Viola Allen was leading lady of a resident stock company, an important nineteenth century institution. During the season of 1888-89, she performed with the Boston

Museum Stock Company. In 1893, Charles Frohman, a significant producer, founded the Empire Theatre Company, and Miss Allen soon became the leading lady. She left the company in 1898 and, under the management of George C. Tyler of Liebler and Company, Miss Allen became a star in the dramatization of Hall Caine's novel, The Christian. As a star, Viola Allen greatly affected the plays in which she appeared. She worked with the authors of several of her dramatic vehicles. Often, her influence can be seen in the casting, stage management or design of a production. She had the greatest influence on the three Shakespearean revivals that were her starring vehicles after 1903, when she left Liebler and Company. When she returned to the management of Liebler and Company in 1908, her career entered a new, somewhat uncertain phase. While The White Sister was highly successful, some of her vehicles--such as The Daughter of Heaven--were failures, reflecting the changing theatrical taste and the increased popularity of the movies. Miss Allen also acted for a brief period in film, completing the first version of The White Sister in 1915. When she made her last appearance on the New York stage in 1918, Viola Allen closed a career that spanned over three decades in the American theatre, and in which she played over eighty roles in such diverse dramas as Esmeralda and Macbeth, and worked with the leading actors and managers of the era. How she attained her enormous popularity, what characteristics she possessed as an actress, and what contributions she made to the theatre in her era--and in the development of the American theatre--are the focus of this study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The popular image of a scholar is that of a person locked away in a lonely garrett to pursue his studies in isolation. My own experiences in preparing this dissertation contradict this notion. My study would have been impossible without the aid of many people whose efforts I wish to acknowledge.

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This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my father, Adam Leo Plotnicki. He would have been so proud.

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INTRODUCTION

The years 1880 to 1918 were a time of transition in the American theatre. In evaluating this period, many scholars concentrate on the personalities and productions which were significant in the evolution of the modern American theatre. Prominent turn-of-the-century artists, who belonged to the mainstream rather than to the vanguard of the new era, are often examined inadequately or ignored entirely. The lack of sufficient studies on important late nineteenth century figures gives a narrow and sometimes biased view of a varied theatrical epoch.

One way to increase our knowledge of turn-of-the-century American theatre is by tracing the career of one of the many stars who exemplified the traditions of the nineteenth century. Such a study could be valuable for the information it provided on a performer who, through talent, perseverence and luck, reached the top of his profession. Though each actor's career is unique, there are some elements common to any successful performer in a certain era. By studying a single performer, one can learn of an era's preferences and see how changes in taste affected the theatrical establishment. Such a study could also reveal some of the theatrical practices of the time, especially in acting, directing, and management.

While many forgotten stars of the late nineteenth century American theatre are worthy of study, this paper will examine the career of Viola Allen. Her thirty-six years on stage, from 1882 to 1918, span the transitional period of American theatre. As a young actress, Miss

Allen worked with many stars of the older school of acting: John McCullough, Lawrence Barrett, Joseph Jefferson III, and Tomasso Salvini in the classic tragedies and comedies. She also was known for her performances in a variety of contemporary dramas: Esmeralda, Held by the Enemy, Saints and Sinners, Hoodman Blind, and Shenandoah.

Twice, in different phases of her career, Viola Allen was leading lady of a resident stock company, an important nineteenth century theatrical institution. During the season of 1888-1889, she performed with the Boston Museum Stock Company, one of the oldest in the country. In 1893, Charles Frohman, a significant producer, founded the Empire Theatre Company and Miss Allen soon became the leading lady. By 1898, when she left the company, resident troupes were disappearing from the American theatrical scene.

What replaced the resident stock company was the star system and the long run. Since this study is examining standard theatrical practices from 1880 to 1918, it must consider the concept of a "star." Though the term was never precisely defined by the theatre of that period, Kenneth Harris has provided a modern explanation of the term:

> That is, starhood in the American commercial theatre at the turn of the century was as much the result of a semantic process as the logical outcome of artistic competence or audience popularity. The actor became a star when the naming entitled him, sometimes overnight, to one or more of the following prerequisites of stardom: featured billing; an opportunity for an effective voice in the selection, casting, interpretation and stage management of the play; a high salary; a percentage of gross receipts, special travel and living arrangements while on the road; and other benefits fitting his longevity and status as a star.[1]

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[1] Kenneth Harris, "George C. Tyler and the Liebler Company: A Study of the American Theatrical Producer at Work" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa, 1974), pp. 173-174.

Under the management of George C. Tyler of Liebler and Company, Miss Allen became a star in 1898 in the dramatization of Hall Caine's novel, The Christian.

As a star, Viola Allen greatly affected the plays in which she appeared. She worked with the authors of several of her dramatic vehicles. Often her influence can be seen in the casting, stage management or design of a production. She had the greatest influence on the three Shakespearean revivals that were her starring vehicles after 1903, when she left Liebler and Company. Though under the nominal aegis of Nixon and Zimmerman from 1904 to 1907, Miss Allen was responsible for Twelfth Night, The Winter's Tale, and Cymbeline.

When she returned to the management of Liebler and Company in 1908, her career entered a new, somewhat uncertain phase. While The White Sister was highly successful, some of her vehicles, such as The Daughter of Heaven, were failures, reflecting the changing theatrical taste and the increased popularity of the movies. Miss Allen also acting for a brief period in film, completing the first version of The White Sister in 1915.

When she made her last appearance on the New York stage in 1918, Viola Allen closed a career that spanned over three decades in the American theatre in which she played over eighty roles in such diverse dramas as Esmeralda and Macbeth and worked with the leading actors and managers of the era. "At the height of her career her popularity probably exceeded that of any other figure in the American theatre,"[2]

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[2] "Viola Allen" New York Times, 11 May 1948.

noted the New York Times in its eulogy. How she attained her enormous popularity, what characteristics she possessed as an actress, and what contributions she made to the theatre in her era and in the development of the American theatre will be the focus of this study.

Since most of Miss Allen's career was prior to the invention of film, recordings and television, this study relies on reviews of productions to provide both descriptions and opinions of her acting. To select material from the thousands of reviews of her performances, it was necessary to develop a standard for evaluating the validity of the criticism. The primary consideration for the inclusion of a review was whether the writer seemed to provide a detailed description of the production, and opinions that were supported by well-reasoned conclusions drawn from the facts presented. Since many reviewers of the period had strong prejudices, pieces that were obviously slanted were eliminated, unless the critic provided a detailed description of some stage business that would show how Miss Allen played a role. "Puff" criticism, which was a reworking of press releases and reviews and provided no concrete detail, was also eliminated. In discussing some of Miss Allen's early performances, however, it became necessary to modify this standard. Sometimes only one review of a particular production was available. Often the reviewer was cursory in his comments, labeling the actress with adjectives without providing support for his opinion. Also, since Miss Allen toured extensively throughout her career, the reviews included reflect the opinions of a large number of critics from many parts of the country, rather than just the New York critics.
The reviews that formed the basis of the study were carefully selected and evaluated so they might picture Viola Allen as accurately as possible after so many years.

CHAPTER I

APPRENTICESHIP

"My going upon the stage was regarded in the light of a family joke. It also partook of the nature of an accident," wrote Viola Allen on the origin of her theatrical career.[3] This haphazard beginning opened a thirty-six year career in which Miss Allen became one of the most popular performers during the early 1900s. Following her adult debut in Esmeralda in 1882, Viola Allen performed for sixteen years before she attained the prized status of a star.[4] Eleven of these years, from Esmeralda to her engagement as leading lady of Charles Frohman's Empire Theatre Company for the season 1893-1894, can be considered a period of apprenticeship in the theatre.

During the first five years of Viola Allen's career, she played both classical roles and parts in contemporary plays. Many of these roles were in support of leading actors of the day: John McCullough, Mrs. D. P. Bowers, Lawrence Barrett, W.E. Sheridan, Mrs, John Drew, Tomasso Salvini, and C. W. Couldrock. Such notable figures certainly influenced the acting of a novice in the profession. Viola Allen was also associated with other prominent theatre personages in her early career, including the Frohmans, David Belasco, Steele MacKaye and William Gillette. The association with the Frohmans was to continue,

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[3] Viola Allen, "My Beginnings," The Theatre, April 1902, p. 93.

[4] For a definition of the term "star," see above, p. 2.

intermittently, throughout her entire career.

Besides working with many significant figures, Viola Allen also learned the current theatrical practices and the hazards that could affect a performer. She acquired the stamina needed by a player to tour the country. The young performer also faced the uncertainty of the actor's life, never knowing when or where a production might close, leaving one out of work. In 1886, Viola Allen made her first attempt at stardom in a drama called Talked About, only to have the tour fail in a short time.

During the second half of Viola Allen's apprenticeship, she was usually associated with only one play or company for an entire season. Her longest engagement was with the Jefferson-Florence company in The Rivals and The Heir-in-Law for the seasons 1889 to 1892. Prior to her association with the Jefferson-Florence company, she was leading lady of the Boston Museum Stock Company for the 1888-1889 season. She also appeared in extended runs of Hoodman Blind in 1887, Shenandoah in 1889, and Aristocracy in 1892. With these long engagements, Miss Allen was given the time and the environment needed by an actress to refine her skills. During both phases of her apprenticeship, she worked within the frame of the established theatre.

Though Miss Allen's stage career might have begun accidentally, she was not unfamiliar with the theatre. Her early theatrical knowledge came from her family, since both her father, C. Leslie Allen, and her mother, Sara Lyon Allen, were actors.[5] C. Leslie Allen, who came from

[5]The account of the careers of C. Leslie Allen and his wife were compiled from the following sources: Albert Diehl Albert, Jr., "The Real Viola Allen," San Francisco Chronicle, 9 June 1907; John B. Clapp

a prominent Boston family, began his career early in 1852 at the Harvard Athenaeum in Boston as a member of the Aurora Club, an amateur theatrical group. By the fall of that year, he was engaged for the season by George C. Howard of Troy, New York. Allen began to specialize in character roles, especially old men, and played with many companies and stars in the next ten years. In 1862 he married Sara Lyon, an English born actress who came to America at an early age. Mrs. Allen played supporting roles, chiefly old women. Viola Emily Allen was born in Huntsville, Alabama, 27 October 1867, while her parents were on tour.[6] Both Allens appeared with the Boston Theatre Stock Company between 1869 and 1881, although only Leslie Allen played every season. In the fall of 1881, Allen created the role of Old Rogers in Esmeralda at the Madison Square Theatre in New York and the family moved to that city.

Recalling her childhood, Miss Allen wrote:

> At that time [1882] I had not been to the theatre ten times in my life. Born in Huntsville, Alabama and educated in a school in a suburb of Boston, a church school in Toronto, and finally "finished" in a boarding school in New York, I knew almost nothing about the drama. . . . My mother was English and she brought my brothers and sister and myself up more simply than most children in American homes. In

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and Edwin F. Edgett, Players of the Present, Part I (New York: The Dunlap Society, 1899), pp. 15-20; "Boston Actors and Actresses: Charles Leslie Allen," After Dinner, 31 January 1874; Lewis Strang, Famous Actresses of the Day in America, 1st ed. (Boston: L.C.Page and Co., 1899), pp. 134-146.

[6]Though the year 1869 is often given as the year of Viola Allen's birth, her death certificate, completed with information given by her sister, lists the year as 1867. (Certificate of Death #11138, City of New York, Department of Health, 9 May 1948) For the season of 1869-70, her father was a member of the Boston Theatre company, and it seems unlikely that his pregnant wife would be in Huntsville, Alabama while he was in Boston. In light of Miss Allen's subsequent career, the earlier date is more plausible.

> I seldom heard the theatre mentioned in the household. Father and I read a great deal of Shakespeare, as part of my training in rhetoric and English literature.[7]

In another account, she stated that she never appeared on the stage as a child, an occasional visit to a matinee performance being her only youthful theatrical experience.[8] Since both of her parents acted during much of her childhood, Miss Allen's accounts of her youth may be read with skepticism. The accuracy of both of these accounts is directly challenged by evidence of Viola Allen's career as a child performer. A program from the Olympic Theatre in Halifax, Nova Scotia, for Dora, or Divided Hearts and Divided Homes on 19 July 1869, lists "Little Viola," in the role of "Willie, William Allan's child, 4 years of age." The same bill shows C. Leslie Allen as "Farmer Allan" in Dora and stage manager of the company.[9] Writing of the production, an unidentified reviewer stated:

> We must not forget to mention Little Viola (we believe to be a daughter of C. Leslie Allan [sic] who personated Wm. Allan's child, Willie, and who did her part almost as well as her elders did theirs. The fairy little lady brought down the house frequently with her winsome ways and brought many a tear to the eye of many a parent who heard her innocent words and witnessed her childlike, natural actions.[10]

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[7] Allen, "My Beginnings," p. 93.

[8] "Music and Drama" clipping, 4 December 1897, Viola Allen folder, Harvard Theatre Collection. Hereafter the Harvard Theatre Collection will be abbreviated as HTC.

[9] Playbill, Olympic Theatre, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 19 July 1869, C. Leslie Allen Scrapbook, Theatre Collection of the Performing Arts Research Center, the New York Public Library at Lincoln Center, hereafter referred to as Lincoln Center.

[10] "Howard's Olympic Theatre" clipping, n.d., C. Leslie Allen Scrapbook, Lincoln Center. Punctuation of play titles and of characters' names varied widely during this time period. Occasionally the spellings of titles and characters also varied. In all direct quotations, the original spellings and punctuation are preserved.

Little Viola is mentioned again in reviews of the following year's summer season at the Olympic. In Rosa Leigh!, starring Clara Morris, little Viola Allen plays Lord Arthur May, and both Mr. and Mrs. Allen are in the cast of the production.[11] It was reported that "it would be injustice indeed to pass over little Viola Allen, who played 'Lord Arthur May' with a care and accuracy which astonished the audience."[12] Other accounts from that same season list Little Viola as appearing in the afterpiece of Romeo and Juliet and in her father's benefit.[13] Though such sketchy evidence cannot prove that Viola Allen made her stage debut as a very young child, the probability does exist. Children of actors have long been used to fill juvenile roles in a production, and a bright child on the same stage with a parent could handle a small role. There is also the possibility that Viola Allen was born earlier than 1867.

That Viola Allen's first adult appearance took place on 4 July 1882, cannot be disputed. Though there is some variation in details, all accounts agree on the broad outline.[14] In March of 1882, the management of the Madison Square Theatre was searching for an understudy for Annie Russell, who played the title character in Esmeralda by Frances

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[11] Playbill, Olympic Theatre, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 21 June 1870, C. Leslie Allen Scrapbook, Lincoln Center.

[12] "Olympic Theatre" clipping, n.d., C. Leslie Allen Scrapbook, Lincoln Center.

[13] Clippings, n.d., C. Leslie Allen Scrapbook, Lincoln Center.

[14] The account of Viola Allen's debut in Esmeralda is drawn from Allen, "My Beginnings," p. 93; William E. Sage, "Viola Allen Supported all the Great American Stars before She became One Herself, but Her Great Glory is Her Association with Salvini, Italy's Greatest Tragedian," Cleveland Leader, 2 February 1913; and "Viola Allen Started Playing While Yet in Tender Years," Atlanta Journal, 21 March 1912.

Hodson Burnett and William Gillette. Leslie Allen, who played Old Rogers in the production, showed a picture of his schoolgirl daughter to a member of the company who suggested that Allen's daughter audition for the part. Though Allen was amused by the suggestion, his wife thought it was a good idea and the next day he took his daughter to the theatre for an audition. Viola read the part for William Seymour, the stage manager, and was engaged in the role as the understudy. When Miss Russell wanted a summer vacation from the long-running production, Viola took over the role. Her father, who had left the play some time earlier, returned to the company, and Mrs. Allen also joined the cast.[15] Recalling her adult stage debut, Miss Allen wrote:

> At rehearsals, of course, the auditorium had been dark and empty. Now it was a glow of light and a sea of faces. This is what I should have expected, but somehow I had failed to do so, and now, being confronted with the thing, my wits seemed to fail me.
>
> My lines went from my memory, but luckily I did not have to speak them until I was close to my father. He, realizing that I must have stage fright, whispered the words to me, and as soon as I heard them I was alright again. I plunged back into my absorption in the story that I was helping to depict, and went through to the end without any further trouble.[16]

One may wonder how a schoolgirl, not quite fifteen, could play the title character in a popular production at a prominent New York theatre. From the outline of the play, however, one can see the limited demands that the role placed upon an actress's ability. Esmeralda is a simple country girl of eighteen, living with a domineering mother and a

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[15] New York Dramatic Mirror, 8 July 1882. Hereafter the paper will be referred to as NYDM.

[16] "Miss Allen Began at Top," The Scrapbook, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

gentle, henpecked father, Old Rogers, on a farm in the North Carolina hills. She becomes engaged to her childhood sweetheart at the beginning of the story. When the family acquires sudden wealth, her overbearing mother forces Esmeralda to break the engagement and takes her daughter to Paris, over her husband's protests, to secure a nobel husband for Esmeralda. Much of the play is devoted to the sufferings of Old Rogers and to the efforts of Nora and Kate Desmond and Mr. Estabrook to reunite the parted lovers. Esmeralda appears in part of the first act, intermittently in the third act, at the end of the fourth act, and not at all in the second act. While Esmeralda's broken romance is the motivation for the play, her character is really a secondary one. Only in the third act, where she finally defies her mother by refusing to marry the Marquis De Montessin, does the part demand anything more than sweetness and simplicity.[17] Except in this confrontation scene, the role of Esmeralda required of an actress only that she be sweet and simple. These attributes are not beyond the abilities of most beginning actresses, and young Viola evidently was acceptable as Esmeralda. A review stated:

> Mr. John E. Owens and Miss Russell will take up their parts again at the Madison Square Theatre during this week. The character of Esmeralda has been played lately--and with good taste--by Miss Viola Allen. Mr. Leslie Allen and Miss Allen will act the play throughout the country next season.[18]

The Madison Square touring companies had a reputation for quality and it is a measure of her ability that the fledgling actress was engaged for the tour. Gustave Frohman was director of the traveling

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[17] Frances Hodgson Burnett and William H. Gilette, Esmeralda (New York: 1881), in English and American Drama of the Nineteenth Century (New York: Readex Microprint, 1966).

[18] New York Times, 30 July 1882.

companies of the Madison Square Theatre. Daniel Frohman selected the casts and rehearsed the touring companies while Charles Frohman arranged and booked the tours for Madison Square Theatre. Miss Allen's association with the three Frohman brothers dates from the beginning of her career.[19]

Although Esmeralda was still playing at the Madison Square Theatre, the management organized three Esmeralda companies for the fall of 1882.[20] The Allens--father, mother and daughter--were members of the Esmeralda (East and West) troupe. From its schedule, the East and West Company was not the most important of the three for it played mostly one night stands in smaller cities while the General Company, headed by John Owens and Annie Russell, toured the larger cities with engagements as long as two weeks. Though it did not play the smallest towns, the East and West Company had a more rigorous schedule than would be given to a prime company. The demands of its schedule, especially for a novice performer, can be surmised from the first month's bookings. Opening in Morristown, New Jersey on 28 September 1882, the East and West Company played twenty-five different towns in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana with three days off for travel and a simple, two-night engagement.[21] Writing many years later, Miss Allen described conditions on a tour:

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19 John Scott McElhaney, "The Professional Theatre in San Francisco, 1880-1889" (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1972), p. 137.

20 NYDM, 19 August 1882.

21 A complete listing of the tour routes of the three Esmeralda companies, as given by their managers, can be traced by following "Dates Ahead" in the NYDM from 16 September to 23 June 1883.

> Travel becomes the bane of an actress' life. At first the girl who has never been a hundred miles from home will enjoy the new cities and new sights. But after a season or two living in a couple of trunks grows decidedly monotonous, and she hails with delight the "stand" of a couple of weeks. In the smaller and less pretentious companies the travel is constant and hard, destroying all regularity in meals and rest.[22]

With the rigors of touring placing an additional burden on the young actress, Miss Allen had to quickly acquire skill and stamina to repeat Esmeralda nightly in a different town.

The Allens continued to play one night stands, but changing managerial plans were to alter the pattern. In November of 1882, Gustave Frohman leased the Baldwin Theatre in San Francisco and, with David Belasco as his stage manager, planned to form a first-class stock company for the theatre.[23] Both Viola and Leslie Allen became part of the company and opened the new venture with Esmeralda on 25 January 1883.[24] The San Francisco Chronicle appraised the fledgling actress in her West Coast debut:

> Her [Viola Allen's] appearance was enough to draw the audience to her, and in the first act, she was neat, graceful, and particularly attractive. The strong scene in the third act was a little too much for her, but it did not attenuate the interest or attraction.[25]

In the restaging of Esmeralda for San Francisco, it was the scenic arrangement of David Belasco that provided the chief attraction

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[22] Viola Allen, "What it Means to be an Actress," The Ladies Home Journal, May, 1899.

[23] McElhaney, p. 141.

[24] NYDM, 3 February 1883.

[25] San Francisco Chronicle, 26 January 1883.

of the piece. The Chronicle noted that "the sensation, however, of the performance, was produced by Belasco, who changed the stage from a log cabin fully furnished to an artist's studio with three thousand articles in it, in 75 seconds."[26] Later reports show that the time required for the scene change had been reduced to forty, and then to twenty-two seconds.[27]

Even with the allure of Belasco's staging of Esmeralda and of Young Mrs. Winthrop, the next piece, Gustave Frohman's West Coast venture was terminated 17 March 1883 with Esmeralda playing three weeks to "fair business."[28] It is impossible to determine where Viola and Leslie Allen next played,[29] but it is possible that they toured with Esmeralda in Oregon.[30] One must assume that both Allens had rejoined the East and West Company by 23 April 1883, for it was while performing Esmeralda

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[26] Ibid.

[27] San Francisco Chronicle, 28 January 1883, and 4 February, 1883.

[28] NYDM, 17 March 1883, p. 4.

[29] The Allens left the East and West Company for a time and it is impossible to determine when they rejoined it. Newspapers of the time provided dramatic coverage of major stars and important touring companies, but secondary companies were often ignored entirely or mentioned only briefly. The personnel of the secondary companies was often not given. The following review is typical: "Not withstanding a persistent drizzling rain and almost bottomless mud, the Opera House contained a splendid audience last evening to see Esmeralda by one of the Madison Square companies, under the direction of manager Haslim. It was admirably cast, in fact every character was so capitally handled that to make special mention would be to discriminate unjustly." Bloomington (Illinois) Daily Pantagraph, 16 November 1882.

[30] The San Francisco Chronicle of 4 February 1883 mentioned a proposed tour of Esmeralda in Oregon, but subsequent issues of that paper provide no confirmation that the tour ever took place.

at the Mt. Morris theatre in Harlem that Viola Allen was to be given the second opportunity of her career.[31]

> It was March [April] of the following season, while I was playing Esmeralda in the Harlem Opera House, that Mr. John B. McCullough and his manager happened to stumble upon the performance. Mr. McCullough thought he saw in me a possible Virginia for his Virginius. He came behind the scenes. I have no recollection of my deportment but I was in a state of tremendous excitement at meeting this, the first great actor I had ever seen. That he considered me for his Virginia seemed to me as remarkable as the proposition to put me on the stage had seemed to my father. But to the tragedian and his manager, the matter presented itself in a serious light, and as a result of the interview, I was engaged.[32]

Miss Allen's astonishment is understandable since John McCullough, in early 1883, was at the peak of his dramatic powers. A pupil of Edwin Forrest, McCullough was the leading exponent of the heroic school of American acting. Though the heroic tradition stressed vigorous, realistic acting, McCullough thoroughly studied his characters in a continuous effort to improve his abilities. This desire for betterment led him to study the Delsarte method of acting, with Steele MacKaye, which gave to McCullough's acting a new subtlety and repose. While lacking the versatility and poetic fire of Forrest or Booth, McCullough, with his natural

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[31] George C. D. Odell in Annals of the New York Stage, Vol. 12 (1927, rpt., New York: AMS Press, 1970), p. 59, lists Annie Russell and John Owens as heading the company at the Mount Morris Theatre on 23 April 1883, but the NYDM of 5 May 1883 lists Owens as appearing at McVicker's Theatre in Chicago on 23 April. The whereabouts of Miss Russell are unknown. Of the three Esmeralda companies only the East and West Company played in Harlem at any time near March, the time Miss Allen mentions in her account of her meeting with McCullough. Moreover, McCullough himself was not in New York in March but in April, playing Niblo's Garden from 9 April to 21 April 1883, and the Grand Opera House, Brooklyn during the week of 23 April (Odell, Annals, Vol. 12, pp. 49, 168). Newspaper accounts of Esmeralda at the Mount Morris do not mention members of the company, but Miss Allen must have been part of it.

[32] Allen, "My Beginnings," p. 93.

gifts and his hard work, achieved greatness in roles like Virginius, Brutus, and Julius Caesar. By the fall of 1883, however, McCullough's health had begun to fail and a decline in his acting skills gradually became noticeable.[33]

A tour with one of the leading tragedians of the era provided a challenge to Viola Allen's acting abilities. Even though she now had been on the stage for a year, acquiring some skill and polish, her roles with McCullough would require more than the simple sweetness of an Esmeralda. She admitted the inadequacy of her early performances:

> In my first appearance as Virginia I appreciated the responsibility of the role and was frightened. I knew that I had not done well. I read the truth in the too significant kind silence of Mr. McCullough. Not even my mother, who traveled with me, could comfort me much. I was driven in upon myself as we always are in times of grief and disappointment. I said to myself: "You must not fail. Tomorrow night you will have another chance. You must redeem yourself." The next night I played the part better. I received a few words of praise, a little applause, and I took heart. Fortunately for me, we were traveling and for two weeks it would have been impossible to get another Virginia. By the end of the fortnight I was giving a satisfying performance.[34]

Reviews of McCullough's tour confirm Miss Allen's assessment of her early efforts. The Cincinnati correspondent for the New York Dramatic Mirror noted that "The support was good, though Viola Allen in Kate Forsythe's roles suffered in contrast with her predecessor."[35]

Originally, Viola Allen had been engaged for Virginia and other juvenile roles in McCullough's repertory, but a third turn of fate made her the leading lady of the company:

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[33] Garff B. Wilson, A History of American Acting (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1966), pp. 30-37.

[34] Allen, "My Beginnings," pp. 93-94.

[35] NYDM, 10 November 1883.

> On a Thursday night at four o'clock his leading lady was summoned to New York, I think by illness in the family. At any rate, it was necessary for her to go and I was notified that I must play her parts. That night we were playing Virginius, so of course I was prepared, but after the performance, by drinking much black coffee, sitting up all night, and with my mother's help, I learned my role for the next night. The leading lady did not return and I remained with Mr. McCullough, in that capacity, to the end of the season.[36]

By the time the company reached New York in March of 1884, Miss Allen's roles included Julia in The Gladiator, Tarquina in Brutus, Desdemona in Othello, and Lady Anne in Richard III.[37] Much of the critical reaction to the young performer in such demanding roles was encouraging. One report stated that "Miss Viola Allen, as Julia, gave a companion picture to her Virginia--a beautiful performance. This young lady is on the high road to dramatic fame, and there need be no limit to the goal of her aspirations."[38] The New York Morning Journal was even more laudatory:

> Her Desdemona is a charming performance throughout. It is seldom that one so young as Miss Allen achieves the prominence she has. With her natural and quick intelligence, her mind will adapt itself to the highest order of stage art so that by the time she has matured a little the best of the stage will be in her grasp. Two or three years schooling such as she is having with McCullough will do her immense good, and pave the way for her as a successor to Mary Anderson, now our representative tragedian.[39]

The New York Dramatic Mirror, however, admonished the young actress:

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[36] Allen, "My Beginnings," pp. 93-94.

[37] Ward Morehouse, "Broadway After Dark," New York Sun, 22 February 1935.

[38] Amusements; Star Theatre, The Gladiator," New York Daily News, n.d., Viola Allen Scrapbook, Museum of the City of New York.

[39] New York Morning Journal, 7 March 1884.

> But too much praise is spoiling the young lady [Viola Allen] and she has fallen into the errors of artificiality and extravagance. She has not apparently been informed that Virginia is not the leading part in the play. She looks sweet and innocent, however, and she has, moreover, the ingenuous self-confidence of extreme girlhood.[40]

At the end of her tour with McCullough, Viola Allen played two brief engagements in melodramas. As Ilka in Alpine Roses she toured with the Madison Square Company from 14 April to 5 May 1884.[41] On 10 May 1884, she played Lucy Golden in The Pulse of New York at the Star Theatre in New York for its two-week run.[42] Both of these characters were sweet and simple like Esmeralda. In her performance, the effects on Miss Allen's acting from her year with McCullough was noted by the critics. The Philadelphia Press comments that "Miss Viola Allen as Ilka is still struggling under the gloom of tragedy and was very heavy and explosive,"[43] while the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin called her performance of Ilka "crude and boisterous."[44] As Lucy Golden in The Pulse of New York, "Miss Viola Allen was unpleasantly artificial."[45] A more thoughtful appraisal of her performance in the same role was given by the critic of the New York Dramatic Mirror:

> Viola Allen was quite effective in a pretty and simple character, Lucy Golden. She is becoming affected, however, and should put an end to mimicking the tricks of bygone emotional actresses. Simplicity was formerly this young

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[40] NYDM, 8 March 1884.

[41] "Dates Ahead," NYDM, 5 April to 26 April 1884.

[42] Odell, Vol. 12, pp. 84-85.

[43] "Alpine Roses, at the Opera House," Philadelphia Press, 15 April 1884.

[44] Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, 15 April 1884.

[45] "The Pulse of New York," New York Times, 11 May 1884.

> lady's charm. Possibly she lost it through her connection with the McCullough company where she was given roles beyond her years.[46]

While her year in tragedy may have hurt the naturalness of her acting in melodrama, Viola Allen returned to the McCullough company for the following season--a season that was to be unexpectedly short. McCullough's illness had sapped his body and mind to a point where he was becoming increasingly muddled in his performances. The season came to an abrupt close at the end of September, during the second week of his Chicago engagement. Miss Allen describes McCullough's final performance:

> I had just left the stage, but from the whispers and the pale faces of those in the company who stood in the wings I knew that the tragedy had fallen. I saw Mr. McCullough being led from the stage, heard him whisper vaguely that he would go before the curtain and explain, saw them close the door of his dressing room while he mumbled strange words, and heard the curtain rung down upon the scene. My mother came to me and we went to our rooms to talk of it in awed whispers, as one speaks in a room of death.[47]

With the McCullough tour so suddenly ended, the young actress faced a problem common to many players, that of securing employment in the middle of a season when most companies were completely cast and booked. The extraordinary luck that had propelled a schoolgirl onto the stage and into leading roles with one of the country's top tragedians had to be supplanted by a more ordinary method of advancement--publicity. Her advertisement placed in the New York Dramatic Mirror of 18 October 1884 read: "Viola Allen, late leading lady with John McCullough, at liberty--Address: Simmonds and Brown."[48] It did seem to be an effective

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[46] NYDM, 17 May 1884.

[47] Allen, "My Beginnings," p. 94.

[48] NYDM, 18 October to 15 November 1884.

aid in gaining employment since the original announcement was replaced by one in the 22 November issue of the paper, listing Viola Allen as "Pompon in La Charbonniere."[49]

Miss Allen had been playing Pompon in the production for three weeks prior to the new notice in the Dramatic Mirror. La Charbonniere opened in Philadelphia on 20 October 1884, with Laura Don in the role of Pompon, but Miss Don's engagement was limited and Viola Allen replaced her in Albany on 3 November 1884.[50] Mrs. D. P. Bowers, a highly respected and experienced leading lady who had played with Forrest, Booth and Salvini, was the star of the production.[51] Again, the young actress had an opportunity to learn from one of the leading members of her profession, an opportunity that she was advised to use:

> Miss Viola Allen takes the part of Pompon, and her modest and pleasing personality make the character more lamb-like than the author intended. She has feeling, this young actress, and by studying Mrs. Bowers she will learn to speak colloquially and to lose that sobbing quality of voice when no pathos is required.[52]

Chance intervened to end the young actress' tour with an established player for a second time. Brooks and Dickson, the managers of La Charbonniere, were in financial difficulties, and the play had to be withdrawn. It was noted that "Salaries are not much in arrears."[53]

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[49] NYDM, 22 November 1884.

[50] "Dates Ahead," NYDM, 11 October 1884, and "Brooks and Dickson's Season," NYDM, 1 November 1884.

[51] Alan Dale, "Familiar Chats with Queens of the Stage" (New York: C.W. Billingham, Publishers, 1890), pp. 287-299.

[52] Chicago Tribune, 23 December 1884.

[53] "Brooks and Dickson's Affairs," NYDM, 3 January 1885.

Viola Allen again found herself in the middle of a season without an engagement, this time because of the financial failure of the management. She did not advertise her plight in the Dramatic Mirror, perhaps because two "at liberty" notices in such a short period of time--even though she was not at fault--would create an unfavorable impression.

Her second cancelled engagement of the season was to give Miss Allen yet another opportunity to work with one of the leading actors of the day. On 9 February 1885, she played Mildred in Lawrence Barrett's production of A Blot on the 'Scutcheon by Robert Browning. Barrett was unique among the stars of his time because he continually produced plays that he felt had literary merit, like Browning's tragedy, regardless of their suitability as vehicles for his acting or as money-making attractions. According to the critic of the New York Times, Tresham in A Blot on the 'Schutcheon did not fit Barrett's talents, but the character of Mildred was most congenial to Miss Allen." He wrote that "some charming points in Miss Viola Allen's Mildred and some happy bits in Miss Marie Wainwright's Gwendolyn were more praiseworthy than Mr. Barrett's whole delineation."[54]

Though she appeared with Barrett for only one week in one of his less successful productions, Viola Allen's association with the tragedian is rarely omitted from later accounts of her career.[55] Either Lawrence Barrett's acting and personality had made a very strong

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[54] New York Times, 10 February 1885.

[55] A playbill for Barrett's production of Julius Caesar at the Star Theatre, New York, on 26 January 1885 does not list Miss Allen as part of the company. A program of A Blot on the 'Scutcheon at the Park Theatre, Brooklyn on 16 February 1885 lists Miss Kate Maloney as Mildred. Lawrence Barrett Portfolio, Players Collection, Lincoln Center.

impression on the young actress, or she and her publicists recognized the value of an association with Barrett, however brief. In fairness to Miss Allen, it must be noted that she had already been engaged as leading lady of the Lyceum Theatre and could not have toured with him.[56] It is probable that she accepted the brief engagement with Barrett to have an opportunity to work with that respected actor.

Viola Allen's association with Steele MacKaye and the opening of the Lyceum Theatre with Dakolar also was rarely omitted from later accounts of her career, but these accounts do not give the entire story, again, perhaps, to create a more favorable impression.[57] MacKaye was one of the few figures in the American theatre to be gifted (as actor, playwright, director, theorist and inventor) with vision beyond the conventional theatre beliefs of his era. Yet, the ideas of this eccentric genius did not always translate into practical stage terms. The Lyceum Theatre and the acting school associated with it were to be a showcase for MacKaye's theories and inventions. Gustave Frohman and David Belasco were associated with MacKaye in this venture. With such a combination of able and strong-willed individuals who had divergent viewpoints of the theatre's function, it is no wonder that the enterprise ended in dissension and failure. Apparently the production was troubled from the beginning. Cost overruns on the Lyceum Theatre mounted as the renovation took longer than expected, and money became short. MacKaye spent much time rehearsing the students who were to play the chorus of fisher folk,

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[56] "Professional Doings," NYDM, 7 February 1885.

[57] Typical of later career accounts are Strang, Famous Actresses, pp. 134-146 and Clapp and Edgett, Players of the Present, pp. 17-21.

His friends often attended the rehearsals, laughing and jeering while actors performed and applauding when MacKaye stopped the rehearsal. Several members of the company refused to play until the spectators were silenced.[58]

After several postponements, Dakolar opened the Lyceum Theatre on 6 April 1885. Critics admired the new theatre and its innovations, but were less pleased by the production. Edward Dithmar's review in the New York Times was representative:

> Mr. Steele MacKaye has given New York a comfortable and attractive little playhouse. . . . Mr. MacKaye has posed during the past winter as a trainer of actors and a Professor of the art of acting, and he has thus led people to expect more from him than was forthcoming last evening. . . . Pruned of at least one-third of its dialogue, Dakolar might be an effective piece . . . The play is certainly of too little merit for a stage so pretentious as that of the Lyceum: and what is even more astonishing, its performance last evening developed some shockingly bad acting . . . Miss Viola Allen is a handsome young lady, whose acting is as yet too mannered to be wholly pleasing. She gives abundant promise, though, and is likely to improve with proper study.[59]

The New York Dramatic Mirror offers a more detailed analysis of Miss Allen's deficiencies as Madeline:

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[58] Wade Chester Curry, "Steele MacKaye: Producer and Director" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana, 1958), pp. 82-96. Curry claims on page 94 that Miss Allen was a pupil of MacKaye's school. However, this statement seems erroneous. Curry himself notes on page 89 that the major roles were filled by professional actors. The announcement of her signing on 7 February 1885 implies that she was not a pupil of MacKaye's school. Miss Allen was touring when MacKaye's school was in operation. As noted above, p. 14, McCullough was a pupil of MacKaye's and Miss Allen might have learned something of MacKaye's methods from the tragedian.

[59] Edward Dithmar, "The Amusement Season," New York Times, 7 April 1885.

> There are good and bad points in the acting of Viola Allen. She has been forced into a position which is above her abilities and experience. Miss Allen is a sweet and pretty young girl qualified to play light, sentimental roles, but by no means fitted for intense emotional work . . . Miss Allen may in time arrive at the point, for she gives abundant promise; but at present she is little more than a child. Her acting, therefore, in the more exciting situations of Dakolar, is affectedly serious--the species of dramatic feeling that has no depth and awakens no response in the observer's breast.[60]

With a consensus by the critics as to the deficiencies in both the play and the acting, the management sought to improve the production by eliminating one of the weaknesses--the acting of Miss Allen. On 15 April she was requested to surrender her manuscript so that it might be given to an understudy. When the young actress arrived at the theatre that evening, she learned that the script had been given to Kate Forsythe, who was to supplant Miss Allen as soon as she learned the lines and business. Miss Allen, when she learned this, refused to play that evening until she was given written assurance that she would not be replaced until her six-week contract expired. When her request was denied, she declined to perform that evening. Mr. Sesion, the stage manager, went before the curtain and dismissed the audience, saying that Miss Allen was "indisposed, not physically, but mentally."[61] When Kate Forsythe played Madeline the following evening, she had to borrow gowns since Miss Allen withheld the gowns that the Lyceum management had provided. Sesion stated that "Miss Allen had to complain of nothing, but that we did not think her capable of filling the part."[62]

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[60] "Easter Week at the Theatres," NYDM, 11 April 1885.

[61] "The Lyceum Closed," NYDM, 18 April 1885.

[62] "The Lyceum Theatre Troubles," clipping, 17 April 1885, HTC.

Miss Allen answered the charge: "I explained that he [MacKaye] knew my capabilities before he engaged me, and asked simply that he would fulfill his contract with me."[63] It cannot be disputed that Miss Allen was inadequate as Madeline but MacKaye did have over six weeks to replace her before the play opened. The replacement of Viola Allen did not improve the faltering houses at the Lyceum, and Dakolar closed on 23 May 1885. (Belasco had left the management on 2 May, after quarreling with MacKaye.) Miss Allen's career was not damaged since, by the date of Dakolar's close, she was playing leading roles with W.E. Sheridan, a noted tragedian, at the People's Theatre.[64]

In her brief engagement with W.E. Sheridan, one of the most versatile actors of the time, Viola Allen played in King Lear, Ingomar, and Louis IX, the latter being Sheridan's finest characterization.[65] Reviews of these plays are limited, but The New York Herald did note that "Miss Viola Allen was a sweet and gracious Cordelia. She looked her part well, acted it well, and occasionally threw into it a genuine intensity which moved her audience."[66] With the unhappiness of the Lyceum experience behind her, the young actress returned to tragedy, and showed that she could give a capable performance.

It would be logical to expect Miss Allen to take a summer vacation after a season filled with so many unexpected happenings and so much turmoil. Few theatres were open in the heat of summer and most

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[63] Ibid.

[64] Odell, Vol. 12, pp. 430-431.

[65] Ibid., p. 466.

[66] New York Herald, 20 May 1885.

actors wished to rest from the rigors of playing a nine or ten month tour. The young actress was already engaged as leading lady with the noted tragedian, Tomasso Salvini, for the following season, giving her some security.[67] Yet, instead of resting, Viola Allen pursued another career opportunity.

J.H.Vicker, one of the leading theatrical producers, was opening his new Chicago theatre with a special company that included Robert Mantell, Louis James, Herbert Kelsey, Caroline Hill, Madame Ponisi and Ida Vernon. Miss Allen became a part of that organization.[68] McVicker's stock companies had been famous in past years, featuring such players as James O'Neill, but economic conditions had forced McVicker to disband his permanent company in favor of engagements of stars and touring companies. However, he still organized special companies to play standard dramatic pieces. For the summer season of 1885, the repertoire included True Nobility, London Assurance, The Marble Heart, School for Scandal and She Stoops to Conquer.[69]

McVicker's new theatre building lived up to his reputation, but one reviewer noted that:

> True Nobility must be held to be a dull and conventional work, essentially incapable, in its lack of dramatic vitality, of being molded into acceptable form. . . . There is much potential good, it is a pleasure to acknowledge, in the company that is now gathering at McVicker's, and it is to be hoped that the varied talents of Mr.

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[67] NYDM, 20 June 1885.

[68] Ibid., 27 June 1885.

[69] Jay Ferris Ludwig, "McVicker's Theatre, 1857-1896" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1958), pp. 89-97.

> Mantell, Mr. Hawson, Mr. Varrey, Miss Vernon, and Miss Allen may crystallize into a worthy organization before several of the players are called away by their autumn engagements.[70]

In McVicker's company, Viola Allen had her first opportunity to play a comedy, London Assurance. Later in her career, for several seasons the young actress was to play classic comedies, but her first venture into this field drew unfavorable comments: "Viola Allen was a positive failure as Grace Harkaway. She made the part a giggling, insipid girl who says smart things as though looked out of a book, and then laughs at herself in a simpering way that made one think of a Vassar girl at a picnic."[71] These remarks were amplified by the Chicago Tribune:

> That little dash of human ice-cream, Viola Allen, was out of place in the comedy [London Assurance]. She seems to be without any keen sense of humor, and although in a minor part, her artificiality might be overlooked for the sake of a pretty presence, her affection in a prominent role painfully strains what is in itself sufficiently unnatural.[72]

After playing Marie in The Marble Heart, Miss Allen apparently left the company. There is no mention of her in the casts of The School for Scandal and She Stoops to Conquer.[73]

Despite her poor notices in London Assurance, the young actress' next engagement was as Lydia Languish in another classic comedy, The Rivals, with Mrs. John Drew at her Arch Street Theatre in Philadelphia, where Mrs. Drew's characterization of Mrs. Malaprop was the definitive one of her era. Miss Allen's second appearance in comedy

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[70] "Amusements," Chicago Tribune, 5 July 1885.

[71] NYDM, 25 July 1885.

[72] "Amusements," Chicago Tribune, 14 July 1885.

[73] NYDM, 18 July, 15 August 1885.

received much more critical acclaim than her first. The reviewer of the Philadelphia Public Ledger wrote:

> The support was quite good, and much better than might have been expected when it is remembered that such "star" actors as Jefferson have played Bob Acres. . . . Viola Allen as Lydia Languish appeared to the greatest advantage in the spirited scenes where she renounced Beverly, but gave an intelligent performance throughout, and her youth and beauty fitted the part to a nicety.[74]

The Philadelphia Press notes that "Miss Viola Allen, as Lydia Languish, is pretty, graceful, and altogether commendable; her acting gives abundant evidence of keen dramatic power."[75]

Viola Allen's next engagement would test her developing abilities in drama fully since she had been engaged as leading lady for the internationally famous Tomasso Salvini in the 1885-86 season. Salvini's style of acting was even more physical and rigorous than the heroic style of Forrest and McCullough. Henry James described Salvini as Othello, his most famous character:

> No more complete picture of passion can be given to the stage in our day--passion beginning in noble repose and spending itself in black insanity. . . . It has from the first the quality that thrills and excites, and this quality deepens with great strides to the magnificent climax. The last two acts constitute the finest piece of tragic acting that I know.[76]

Salvini's passion was awesome to behold but it did present certain problems to the actress playing Desdemona, as Miss Allen recalled:

> When I played in Othello with Salvini I was always

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[74] Philadelphia Public Ledger, 8 September 1885.

[75] Philadelphia Press, 8 September 1885.

[76] Henry James, "Salvini's Othello," Atlantic Monthly 51 (March 1883), p. 380.

> nervous during the smothering scene because he used to get so excited, I turned my face sideways and held a small space under the further side of the pillow so that I could breathe, but even the breathing hole would get closed up under the forceful energy of Salvini. Then, when he found that he had killed Desdemona without cause, in his remorse he threw himself wildly upon the body. I used to wait for this piece of business with fear and trembling, Salvini's fall was always so awfully realistic.[77]

Another difficulty was the fact that Salvini played in Italian while the rest of the company, including his son Alexander, spoke English. Tomasso Salvini played only five times a week and the remaining performances featured his son and Miss Allen in The Duke's Motto, or in Romeo and Juliet.[78] Besides Othello, the elder Salvini's repertory included King Lear, The Gladiator, Ingomar, The Outlaw, and Coriolanus.[79]

Salvini's tour opened in New York to great acclaim for his performance but negative reaction to his company, an opinion that was to be repeated throughout the tour. Edward Dithmar, in the New York Times, wrote: "It is to be regretted that the company supporting the tragedian does not in some measure fill out the performance of which he is so majestic and central a figure."[80] The Washington Post reported that "The supporting company did not appear to good advantage,"[81] a sentiment echoed in the San Francisco Chronicle: "The support was not good."[82]

Although the general impression of Salvini's company was not

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[77] "A Sketch of Viola Allen's Career," Toledo Blade, 15 December 1901.

[78] Sage, "Viola Allen Supported."

[79] Morehouse, "Broadway after Dark."

[80] Edward Dithmar, "Salvini," New York Times, 27 October 1885.

[81] Washington Post, 6 January 1886.

[82] San Francisco Chronicle, 3 February 1886.

favorable, individual members of the company, especially Miss Allen, were singled out for special notice. Dithmar remarked in the New York Times that "Miss Viola Allen's Desdemona was a timid and uncertain performance, but in the final scene of the tragedy the actress displayed a strength which her previous efforts had not shown and which gave promise of better things in the future."[83] As Neodamia in The Gladiator, "Miss Allen presented a beautiful picture as the Christian martyr and her elocution was marked with simplicity and grace."[84] In Ingomar, "Miss Allen in the flowing robes of Parthenia presented many a pretty picture . . . and her rendition was pleasing even if it was without genuine sensibility. It was a very creditable piece of work for so young an actress, who may gain warmth as she grows older."[85]

The young actress played Juliet to the Romeo of Alexander Salvini and William Sage found that "Miss Allen, though she could not compass the tragedy of the character, was delightful in the earlier scenes and on the balcony."[86] A reviewer in the San Francisco Chronicle, after seeing her with Salvini's company, provided an evaluation of the young actress' development: "Viola Allen, remembered as a pretty Esmeralda not very long ago, has developed into a clever, sincere, and expressive emotional actress, never rising to any great heights but never falling below an agreeable and effective standard."[87]

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[83] Dithmar, "Salvini."

[84] Philadelphia Public Ledger, 17 November 1885.

[85] Ibid, 20 November 1885.

[86] Sage, "Viola Allen Supported."

[87] "The Italian Artist," San Francisco Chronicle, 2 February 1886.

While praise for the young actress may have been moderate, Viola Allen's tour with Salvini brought her to the attention of theatre audiences across the country. Perhaps this exposure prompted her decision to join the production of W.C. Cowper's play, Florell. Cowper had originally given the play to the Madison Square Theatre Company but the agreement was broken. He then engaged Viola Allen for the title character and her father for the role of Rev. Silas Baldwin. A four-act comedy-drama of New England life, Florell contained one emotional role--that of Miss Allen's character. Silas Baldwin, the absent-minded parson, was an old man's part, Leslie Allen's specialty.[88] Florell was first performed on 31 May 1886 at the Academy of Music in Fall River, Massachusetts. A correspondent for the New York Dramatic Mirror attended the opening performance and wrote:

> It [Florell] may be put down as a mild success, but I doubt if there is any money in it in its present form. The name does not add to the drawing power. Such a name is only fit when a star actress is the attraction. The text is too talky and the climaxes are weak. The last act is the best. . . . Viola Allen as Florell, the waif, gives a fair interpretation, and as a whole is pleasing. Leslie Allen is good in any old man part and as the clergyman gets all there is out of the role. . . . Business was small, owing in part to but two days' billing.[89]

The Mirror correspondent also notes that the company was to tour New England for two weeks and then go to the Lyceum in New York.[90]

No record can be found of Florell in the summer of 1886, but the play, with the new title of Talked About opened in Philadelphia on 6

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[88] "Story of Florell," NYDM, 22 May 1886.

[89] "Fall River," NYDM, 12 May 1886.

[90] Ibid.

September 1886.[91] Viola Allen was now billed as star of the production.[92] In the opinion of the Philadelphia correspondent of the Dramatic Mirror:

> Viola Allen, as Florell, the waif, made a very favorable impression. She looked remarkably pretty and her acting was marked by intelligence, refinement, and quiet, well-governed force. Although she was handicapped by a part that was never written for a star, which in fact is made to feed almost every other part in the play, she proved her ability to shine in modern drama, and need have no fears for the future.[93]

From Philadelphia, the production went to Washington, D.C., opening on 13 September 1886, at the National Theatre, where "there was a large attendance of excellent quality, a good play and a competent company of actors."[94]

Talked About continued its tour, opening at the Criterion Theatre in Brooklyn on 20 September 1886. In the Brooklyn Eagle the critic wrote;

> The first appearance of Miss Viola Allen at this theatre will be remembered as one of the most successful first nights of a young artiste in the brief history of the Criterion. She made a most favorable impression not only for her artistic personation of the heroine and her intelligent conception of the character, but also by her personal attraction, her elocution and her musical voice.[95]

He also mentioned that Viola's father, C. Leslie Allen and her mother, playing under the name of Mrs. Brunton, were members of the company.[96]

From the notices, it would seem that Talked About was a

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[91] Morehouse, "Broadway after Dark."

[92] Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, 7 September 1886.

[93] "Philadelphia," NYDM, 18 September 1886.

[94] "Amusements," Washington Post, 14 September 1886.

[95] Brooklyn Eagle, 21 September 1886.

[96] Ibid.

resounding success and Miss Allen was a new star, but that assumption is misleading. The Washington correspondent for the New York Dramatic Mirror noted that "the attendance at the National was not as much as Viola Allen, her capable company, and pretty play deserved."[97] Odell called the Criterion "a more hazardous venture for manager and audience,"[98] indicating that the Criterion was not the best house in which to open a new play. Talked About continued to tour, playing New Haven and Boston, but the struggling drama ended its run in Worcester, Massachusetts on 9 October 1886 after playing four nights to nearly empty houses.[99] Viola Allen's first venture as a star ended in failure.

Reviewing Miss Allen's first attempt at stardom, one sees two factors that contributed to the failure of the production: a weak script and a lack of audience recognition. The deficiencies of the play have already been noted.[100] While the script might have served as a vehicle for a well-known actress--Lotta Crabtree, for example--Talked About was not strong enough for Miss Allen, whose national reputation was based mainly on her tour with Salvini. She had received recognition for the tour, but it was as a subordinate player to an actor of international renown, and audiences seemed not to remember anyone but the famous star. The failure of Talked About taught Viola Allen that an actor must have either a play to excite the public, or broad recognition as a star.

The demise of Talked About left all the Allens out of work, and

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[97] NYDM, 25 September 1886.

[98] Odell, Vol. 12, p. 362.

[99] NYDM, 2 October to 16 October 1886.

[100] See above, pp. 31, 32.

also in debt for the closed tour,[101] It was not until late November that the Allens secured another engagement, with Atkins Lawrence, who had purchased the rights to A Wall Street Bandit, a success in New York and also on the road. Lawrence opened with his new supporting players at the National Theatre, Washington, D.C. on 29 November 1886.[102] The Washington correspondent of the Dramatic Mirror commented: "I don't admire the piece, but hope it will succeed on account of the Allens."[103] By January of 1887, however, the Allens had left the company.[104]

During the next year and a half, Viola Allen was associated with four different companies. She toured in Saints and Sinners by Henry A. Jones in the spring of 1887, performing with the character actor, C.W. Couldrock. Couldrock, though he could play the classics, was noted for his roles in romantic melodrama, especially Dunstan Kirke in Hazel Kirke.[105] In the summer of 1887, Miss Allen played in a company at the Baldwin Theatre, San Francisco, headed by William Gillette. Gillette, like Couldrock, was noted for his roles in melodramas, particularly in suspense melodramas of his own creation. As an actor, Gillette believed in choosing roles suited to one's personality and in a more subdued, natural acting style which would give the impression of spontaneity.[106] Two of Gillette's plays were produced at the Baldwin that summer:

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101 NYDM, 9 October 1886.

102 Ibid., 4 December 1886.

103 Ibid., 11 December 1886.

104 Ibid., 15 January 1887.

105 Wilson, American Acting, p. 97.

106 Ibid., pp. 222-223.

Held by the Enemy and Esmeralda. Viola Allen was to play again with Gillette in Held by the Enemy in a brief engagement at the end of the 1887-88 season. During most of that season of 1887-88, Miss Allen appeared in Hoodman Blind by Henry A. Jones and Wilson Barrett, with Frederic de Belleville, a promising young actor.

Rather than providing a detailed account of Miss Allen's performance in these dramas, it might be well at this point in her career to examine the kind of characters she was playing on the stage. Letty Fletcher in Saints and Sinners is the erring heroine who, after succumbing to the lure of temptation and losing her virtue in the second act, is permitted to suffer for three more acts until she dies, repentent and forgiven in the final scene.[108] The character of Esmeralda has been discussed previously.[109] Though no script of it is available, Humanity, the third play of the Baldwin summer season, was described as "an old fashioned Surrey drama, as the blood-and-thunder style is called in London."[110] Miss Allen played Eleanor Goodheart. In Hoodman Blind she appeared in the dual role of Nance and Jess, two sharply contrasting portrayals of womanhood. Nance is the innocent, virtuous wife, while Jess is the fallen woman, redeemed at death by one good deed.[111]

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[107] Exact production dates and casts are found in the NYDM from 22 January 1886 to 6 May 1887.

[108] Henry A. Jones, Saints and Sinners (London: MacMillan and Co., 1891).

[109] See above, pp. 9-10.

[110] "At the Theatres," San Francisco Chronicle, 12 July 1887.

[111] Henry A. Jones and Wilson Barnett, Hoodman Blind, t.s., n.d., (Microcard, New York Public Library: The Research Libraries, Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street).

It is difficult to separate the character from the story in Held By the Enemy because the play is so tightly constructed, but Rachel McCreery, the Confederate lass, shows spirit, ingenuity, and loyalty in her quest to reconcile her duty to her country and her love for the Yankee captain.[112]

One designation fits all of these characters: "melodramatic." The virtuous, long suffering wife; the repentant fallen woman; the unhappy young girl, parted from her love by circumstance, are all staples of that genre. Each part, however, offers a different challenge to an to an actress. Letty Fletcher tested an actress' ability to convincingly portray the anguish of a tormented soul for an extended period. Esmeralda was a character of sweetness and naivete that could become saccharine and leaden in the hands of an unskilled actress. Unfortunately, no description of the character of Eleanor Goodheart is to be found, but the blood-and-thunder melodrama implied characters with strong, clearly defined traits, and her name indicates extreme kindness and virtue. As Nance and Jess, an actress' versatility was tested by the rapid changes from virtue to vice required of the performer. Though Rachel McCreery is essentially melodramatic, the character comes closest to being a three-dimensional one, and the subtleties of the role must not be lost in the fast-paced story. Though these roles may not offer the challenge of a Desdemona or a Cordelia, each one provides the opportunity to develop a trait that can be used in playing more demanding roles. A representative evaluation of Viola Allen's acting during this year and a half in melodrama assesses her success in one of these parts:

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[112] William Gillette, Held by the Enemy, English and American Drama of the Nineteenth Century (New York: Readex Microprint, 1967).

> Miss Viola Allen was warmly welcomed, and won a great triumph as Nance and Jess. The sweetness, tenderness, simplicity and purity of Nance were strongly and finely contrasted with the recklessness, sauciness and misery of Jess, and each character was firmly and boldly outlined, notwithstanding the fact that the actress kept the resemblance between the two before the audience with sufficient clearness to justify the mistakes which are so essential to the plot and its development. Her acting as the poor, misguided Jess was so realistic and so true to nature as to make one shudder, although it never was so strongly emphasized as to make the character repulsive.[113]

With her full season tour in Hoodman Blind came the second phase of Miss Allen's apprenticeship. Though she had appeared a full season in Esmeralda and worked with several noted actors, recognition and the better scripts and engagements that came with it had often eluded her. An advertisement in the New York Dramatic Mirror illustrates her growing prominence. Announcing the "Second Annual Triumphal Tour of the Intense, Vigorous and Impressive Melodrama, Hoodman Blind," it described the production: "Mr. Frederic De Belleville and Miss Viola Allen, supported by a Distinguished Cast of Excellent Power."[114] The notice indicates that the name of Viola Allen might have some value in promoting a production, and thus implies that the capabilities of Miss Allen would be known to the reader.

A further indication of Viola Allen's growing recognition was her engagement by the Boston Museum as leading lady of their stock company for the 1888-89 season. Though the resident company was rapidly being eliminated by touring productions, the Boston Museum still maintained its famous troupe. Founded in 1843, the Museum Company was known for the production of light dramas and comedies.[115] As leading lady of the

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[113] Boston Herald, 6 March 1888.

[114] NYDM, 30 April 1887.

[115] Edward Mammen, "The Old Stock Company: The Boston Museum and Other 19th Century Theatres," in More Books, January, 1944, pp. 3-18.

Museum's stock company, Miss Allen would be given significant roles in contemporary dramas. Moreover, she would be subject to the close scrutiny of the knowledgeable Boston audiences and critics. Indicative of her new position and its demands is the following:

> A large and especially enthusiastic audience gathered at the Museum last night to inaugurate the opening of the regular season and greet the new stock company in a reproduction of The Bells of Haslemere. . . .
>
> Miss Viola Allen, the graceful young actress who has taken the place of Miss Evesson and who is familiar here in tragedy parts, was cast as Evelyn Brookfield. . . . It is impossible not to compare, somewhat, her acting with that of Miss Evesson, who took the same part here so recently. Where the latter was undoubtedly weak in some of the most trying moments, Miss Allen seemed to be at her best, and was unusually free from the nervousness accompanying a first appearance.[116]

The Boston Museum could offer to its new leading lady a chance to work with a company of experienced actors. For the season of 1888-89, the group included John B. Mason, Edgar L. Davenport, George Wilson, Falkland Buchanan, C.S. Able, Annie Clarke, Miriam O'Leary, Helene Dayne, Maida Craigen, and Grace Atwell. New to the company, in addition to Miss Allen, were H.M. Pitt, Willis Granger, T.L. Coleman and C. Leslie Allen.[117]

A closer look at two of these actors gives some notion of the calibre of the company. Edgar Loomis Davenport was the son of the noted tragedian, Edward Davenport, and the brother of the popular actress, Fanny Davenport. He had appeared frequently on the stage as a child, was a member of the company at the Walnut Street Theatre in

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[116] "Miss Allen at the Museum," clipping, n.d., Viola Allen folder, HTC.

[117] Unidentified clipping, n.d., Viola Allen folder, HTC.

Philadelphia, and played several seasons with his sister's companies in both Shakespearean drama and the works of Sardou. Davenport had joined the Museum company in 1887 as leading juvenile, and had already won acclaim with his portrayal of Frank Beresford in The Bells of Haslemere.[118] John B. Mason, who had just risen to leading man for the season 1888, first joined the Museum Company as a young utility player in 1879, when the great comedian William Warren was still performing. Mason played romantic juveniles and light comedy roles during his early years with the company and gained considerable experience in classic comedies, such as The School for Scandal, before graduating to leading man.[119] Davenport represented the actor who joined the Museum Company after much experience in many places and Mason represented the actor who learned his craft through long association with one troupe. This combination of varied experience brought together for a season was typical of the stock company. In a company, freed from the problems of touring and the worry of broken engagements, actors could share their experience while concentrating on their craft.

If the Boston Museum gave Viola Allen an experienced and talented company in a stable atmosphere, she also brought certain assets to the troupe. It was noted that "the young artist is the fortunate possessor of pleasing features, a lithe, pliable, well-proportioned if somewhat diminutive figure, an innate gracefulness, a pleasing voice, natural enthusiasm and rare dramatic instincts, to all of which she has added the result of thorough and intelligent training."[120]

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[118] Clapp and Edgett, pp. 81-82.

[119] Wilson, American Acting, p. 221

[120] Boston Courier, clipping, n.d. HTC.

In the play The Bells of Haslemere, "the artist [Viola Allen] made a quick and most favorable impression, and gave every evidence of great fitness for the position she had been chosen to fill."[121]

After the revival of The Bells of Haslemere, the Museum presented the first American production of Little Lord Fauntleroy, an adaptation of the popular novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett, on 10 September 1888. In this highly successful production, Miss Allen played Mrs. Erroll, the mother of Fauntleroy. With the focus of the story on the boy, much of the critic's attention was given to Elsie Leslie, the child actress who portrayed the title character. Miss Allen, however, was not overlooked:

> At first the Mrs. Erroll of Miss Viola Allen was unmistakably untrue to the character. Her actions belied her words. She was singularly lacking in simple, gentle naturalness when talking with anyone other than her boy. He seemed to affect her work as he did the feelings of others: charm it into naturalness. But in her dealings with him, and in the latter part of the scene with Mr. Havisham, Miss Allen forgot to accent every other word as is unfortunately sometimes her custom, and was true, direct and real. Her chaste and simple style of beauty readily lent itself to the character, and heightened much its effect.[122]

More notice was to be given to the new leading lady in the next production, a new play, Shenandoah, written by Bronson Howard especially for the Museum Company.[123] In this Civil War drama, which opened on 19 November 1888, Miss Allen played Gertrude Ellingham, a spirited Southerner in love with a Union officer--a character similar to Rachel McCreery in Held by the Enemy. One critic commented that:

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[121] Boston Herald, 28 August 1888.

[122] "The Theatre," clipping, n.d., HTC.

[123] NYDM, 24 November 1888.

> Miss Allen. . . caught, as if by inspiration, the true atmosphere and flavor of the southern character she had to portray. She was . . . spirited, tender, earnest and charming, running the gamut of a girl's passion easily, steadily, and without any serious slips. It was only once or twice in the whole performance, and then only a little, that she lapsed into the hard, dry style which was her heritage from her experience in the legitimate.[124]

The management of the Museum had hoped to repeat the success of Little Lord Fauntleroy with Shenandoah, but although "few plays have been better played all around, yet is almost as bad a failure as Met by Chance. It is upon its own merits that the play has failed."[125]

With the early demise of Shenandoah, the Museum quickly prepared a production of Sweet Lavender by Arthur Wing Pinero, who was later to establish a reputation as a writer of problem dramas. Opening on 31 December 1888, the comedy-drama ran until March. Although the production showed signs of its hasty preparation, "the acting of the Museum company deserves various degrees of praise . . . Miss Viola Allen . . . hardly fulfilled expectations, although her performance had not a few brilliant moments."[126]

Joseph's Sweetheart, which succeeded Sweet Lavender on 25 March 1889, was another adaptation of a novel, Fielding's Joseph Andrews, adapted by Robert Buchanan. In this drama of eighteenth century life, it was noted that:

> Miss Allen was genuine as Fanny. Her intention was often much better than her result. She appreciated the innocence and the rusticity of the girl and showed her knowledge of those

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[124] Russell Metcalf, "The Theatre," clipping, n.d., HTC.

[125] "Harlequin," Boston Home Journal, 22 December 1888.

[126] Boston Post, 1 January 1889.

> qualities in countless gestures and motions as well as in her voice and face. If one regretted some lack of personality that would have added a charm which the character needed, one must at the same time do full credit to the artistic comprehension of the young actress. The abandon of her love and its outspoken expression were absolutely charming at times, so much so that it seems a pity to say that owing to an exuberance of style she was seldom or never so good as she meant to be.[127]

After presenting revivals of Our Boys and The Ticket-of Leave Man at the beginning of May, the Museum closed its season on 11 May 1889, with a third revival, Hazel Kirke, in which Miss Allen was given a benefit.[128] An account of the performance appears in the Boston Times:

> Although Miss Allen has been at the Museum but a single year, yet it is evident, judging by the packed and enthusiastic house . . . that she has won a host of admirers among the Museum patrons. . . . The title role [Hazel Kirke] is a part peculiarly suited to the talents of Miss Allen. She fairly outdid herself last evening and in several of the strong scenes of the play . she carried the audience to the enthusiastic point.[129]

Viola Allen gained much popularity in her year at the Boston Museum, but how did that year with the stock company affect her acting? One Boston critic evaluated Miss Allen's acting in great detail:

> One would like to cajole one's self into believing that Miss Allen has made a great hit this season, but it is impossible. A sweeter little actress has never trodden the boards, here; and further reason which makes one wish for her success is the fact that she strives so conscientiously for it. I never saw, in all my life, a performance where the desire to please was so visible, or so appealing as it is in her Minnie Gilfillian. [Miss Allen's role in Sweet Lavender] This very endeavor does much to mar a performance which is excellent in intention, but misses its aim by the very over effort that relieves it of any close blood relation to girlhood.
>
> Miss Allen, however, has probably a better fate before her if she remains here, than befalls the actress who makes

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[127] "Drama," clipping, n.d., HTC.

[128] NYDM, 4 May, 11 May 1889

[129] Boston Times, 12 May 1889.

> an instantaneous hit and has to hold herself up to it. She is capable of doing really strong work. I still remember her Desdemona as one of the best I ever saw, and in her success in such work lies some reason for her failure in other lines. It bred in her a certain exaggeration of style which is unavoidable in classic roles, and which does not dovetail well with society girls. She is at present in her transition state between the two. She should, however, be warned against the explosive style, into which she is falling. It is ruining one of the sweetest voices I ever heard...
>
> Miss Allen is pretty, refined, and has a truly fine and often emotional nature. She should learn repose; she should give her audience some credit for imagination, and be patient. She has had a good start, and a popularity that grows, as hers will do, by familiarity, is worth a dozen of the sudden hits that spring up like mushrooms in one night with one effort and, having no root, are pulled up by the first counter whim.
>
> In the meantime, she must treasure her voice and cut away from its use and unnaturalness that is growing upon her, and which, if she is not careful, will get beyond her control. A peculiarity of vocalism will be admired, but an unpleasantness of the voice is the most depressing fault an actress can have.
>
> A great many of the young people are attracted by Miss Allen and it rests entirely with herself to deepen the impression. It is certain that if she has something heavier to do, she will do it much better; but since, in a company as the Museum, that is too much to expect, it will be her task to make much of little by studying how best she can give uniqueness of character to the women she chances to create. An imaginative actress may do much for a part beside put herself in its shoes.[130]

Miss Allen later wrote an evaluation of how the year with the Boston Museum stock company aided her acting: "There I had the opportunity to play many parts, I worked hard in that fine old stock company and gained the all-round experience I felt was nearly indispensible."[131]

Before Viola Allen began the 1889-90 tour with the Jefferson-Florence Company, she renewed a valuable old association and recreated one of her most praised characterizations of the Boston Museum season. Charles Frohman, whom Miss Allen knew from her Madison Square experience,

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[130] Unidentified clippings, Viola Allen folder, n.d., HTC.

[131] Allen, "My Beginnings," p. 94.

had seen merit in the failed Shenandoah and had acquired the rights to the play. After persuading Bronson Howard to make a few changes in the piece, he engaged Miss Allen to recreate the role of Gertrude Ellingham in a new cast that included Henry Miller, Wilton Lackaye, Nanette Comstock, and Effie Shannon, all players who were eventually to be stars. The new production of Shenandoah opened on 9 September 1889, and provided Frohman with the first New York success in his long producing career.[132] In assessing Viola Allen's New York presentation of Gertrude Ellingham, Edward Dithmar notes that "Miss Viola Allen plays the . . . heroine in a sympathetic manner. Her performance is notably free from the affection that used to mar her work."[133] Since she was already contracted to the Jefferson-Florence company Miss Allen played in Shenandoah only for the first six weeks of its long run.[134]

With her performance of Lydia Languish in The Rivals at the Star Theatre, New York on 14 October 1889, Miss Allen began a three year association with one of the most renowned companies of the late nineteenth century.[135] Although Joseph Jefferson was most famous as Rip Van Winkle, his Bob Acres in The Rivals and Dr. Pangloss in The Heir-At-Law were also notable. In assessing Jefferson's unique position in the American theatre, William Winter writes:

> Fifty years from now the historian of the American stage, if he should be asked to name the actor of this period who

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[132] Daniel Frohman and Isaac F. Marcossen, Charles Frohman: Man and Manager (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1916), pp. 117-124.

[133] Edward Dithmar, New York Times, 10 September 1889.

[134] Frohman and Marcossen, pp. 117-124.

[135] Morehouse, "Broadway After Dark."

> was most beloved by the people of this generation, will answer that it was Joseph Jefferson. Other actors of our time are famous, and they possess in varying degrees the affection of the public. Jefferson is not only renowned but universally beloved. To state the cause of this effect is at once to explain his acting and to do it the honour to which it is entitled. . . . Jefferson is at once a poetic and a human actor, and he is thus able to charm all minds and to win all hearts.[136]

William Florence, who played Sir Lucius O'Trigger and Zekiel Homespun to Jefferson's famous roles, was a prominent character actor often seen in Irish parts.

> To the tours with Jefferson he brought a strength that was deeply valued and appreciated equally by the famous actor and the public . . . The power of Florence was that of impersonation. He was imaginative and sympathetic, his style was flexible; and he had an unerring instinct of effect. The result of his success lay in his profound feeling, guided by perfect taste and perfect self-control.[137]

The third star of the company was Mrs. John Drew, the renowned actress-manager who was noted for her Mrs. Malaprop which, to one reviewer, " . . . is no surprise. It has often been seen here [Boston] before and it is the same elegant, finished piece of acting as ever. In the worst even of her mental tumblings over the big words, Mrs. Drew never forgets that Mrs. Malaprop is a lady."[138]

In her years with the Jefferson-Florence company Miss Allen's characterizations of Lydia Languish and Cecily Homespun received much critical notice. As Lydia, "Miss Allen is entitled to the distinction of having made Miss Languish a personage of life and some real interest. She is certainly to be credited with a remarkably clever personation."[139]

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[136] William Winter, Shadows of the Stage (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1892), p. 151.

[137] Ibid., p. 174.

[138] O.B. Stebbins, "The Rivals: A Critical History of the Play," The Opera Glass, July 1895, p. 102.

[139] "Stars in 'The Rivals,'" Boston Globe, 12 November 1889.

Further, she "gives to the part of Lydia some of the old-time quality. Hers is a piece of acting well thought out, if not noticeably brilliant."[140] Still, "she did not catch the comedy spirit of the role as some of her predecessors."[141] When the company played The Heir-at-Law:

> The Cecily Homespun of Miss Allen was a delightful picture of the graceful awkwardness . . . of a country girl possessing native refinement and modesty and lacking only the conventional veneerings of society--a type of awkwardness quite as real and much more attractive than the coarser model more often seen on the stage. Very noticeable was the . . . country dialect consistently maintained throughout by the Homespuns . . .[142]

Her three seasons with the Jefferson-Florence company gave Viola Allen much experience in the playing of comedy, a valuable addition to her experience in tragedy and modern dramas. Since the company generally played a six-month season, she also had free time in which to take other engagements of interest to her.[143] After playing only two roles for a season, in the shadow of such noted performers, it is possible that Miss Allen accepted other engagements to keep her skills from becoming stale and to gain recognition on her own.

Her first engagement away from the Jefferson-Florence Company was a return to an old part. Miss Allen again played Gertrude Ellingham in Shenandoah for a highly successful summer season at McVicker's theatre in Chicago. When that theatre was destroyed by fire on 26 August 1890,

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[140] Unidentified clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[141] "At the Theatres," NYDM, 14 October 1889.

[142] Boston Daily Globe, 18 November 1890.

[143] In 1889-90, the Jefferson-Florence company played from 14 October 1889 to 3 May 1890. The following year the season ran from 13 October 1890 to 18 April 1891 and the third season ran from 6 October 1891 to 26 March 1892. "Dates Ahead," NYDM, October-April 1889, 1890, 1891, 1892.

the production was transferred to another house to finish the engagement.[144]

The following summer, Miss Allen added two new characters to her repertory. From 5 May to 27 June 1890, she played Myrtle Vanderstyle in The Merchant, a drama by Martha Morton. The drama had received a prize as the best new American play from the New York World and had previously been produced at a special matinee on 26 June 1890.[145] As a piece of dramatic literature, The Merchant was not highly regarded. There "are passages . . . that show evidence of skillful dramatic treatment and decided literary ability, but those passages are few and far between."[146] Odell records the length of The Merchant run with a note of astonishment. One explanation for the success of the drama might have been the cast, which blended both seasoned players and promising young performers, including Henry Miller.[147] Certainly Viola Allen contributed to the success of the play, as one reviewer noted:

> One personation interested me specially--that of Myrtle Vanderstyle by Viola Allen. I doubt whether we have another actress that could make as much of the part; certainly we have no one that could make more of it. Both in utterance and action Miss Allen is admirable. Her action seems to me quite faultless, and her utterance is excellent, though she does now and then misplace an emphasis.[148]

With the second new character Miss Allen played in the summer of 1891, she gained her first experience in Shakespearean comedy.

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[144] Playbill, McVicker's Theatre, 21 July 1890, Lincoln Center, and NYDM, 12 July, 23 August, 6 September 1890.

[145] Odell, Vol. 14, p. 510.

[146] NYDM, 5 July 1890.

[147] Odell, Vol. 14, p. 510.

[148] "The Rudiments," NYDM, 4 July 1891.

As Celia, she joined a group of distinguished performers in an outdoor performance of As You Like It on 16 June 1891, at the Stevens Estate, Castle Point, Hoboken, New Jersey. The cast included Rose Coughlan as Rosalind, Maurice Barrymore as Orlando, Frank Mayo as Jacques, C.W. Couldrock as Adam, Sidney Drew as Le Beau, Agnes Booth as Audrey, and Maida Craigen as Phebe.[149] In this assemblage of talent:

> It was upon Miss Viola Allen the honors fell unexpectedly. Her charming personality and the picturesqueness of her costume. . . won for her the attention, and gave importance to the thin and colorless role of Celia. . . . She was as pretty as the daintiest water-color painting--as graceful and picturesque as a bit of choice Sèvres ware. She had a part that required little of her in the dialogue but she filled the scene with a sweet and gentle girlish beauty, and Celia got an importance Shakespeare never dreamed she would achieve.[150]

In the fall of 1891, while appearing with the Jefferson-Florence company, Viola Allen played again in a one-performance production, a special matinee of Letterblair, by Marguerite Merrington, an English professor at Hunter College, at the Lyceum theatre on 22 October. E. H. Sothern, who played the title character, would use a revised version of the drama as his vehicle for the 1892-93 season.[151] In the initial productions, however, it was Viola Allen who:

> . . . early took the first place among the actors. She played the heroine with finesse and force, giving excellent effort to her share of the text. This is not a complex character. . . . But Miss Allen gave her a strong individuality, and depicted all her moods with unvarying skill. Nothing could be better in its way than her simulation of surprise, amusement, vexation, and finally tearful remonstrance in the scene at the door.[152]

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[149] Odell, vol. 14, p. 714.

[150] "As You Like It: The Pastoral Play," The Illustrated American, 4 July 1891, pp. 293, 299.

[151] Odell, vol. 15, pp. 16, 292.

[152] New York Times, 23 October 1891.

After concluding her third and final season in comedy, Viola Allen performed briefly with Kate Claxton, playing Henriette to Miss Claxton's famous character of Louise in The Two Orphans at the Grand Opera House, Brooklyn, on 30 May 1892.[153] The New York Times reported that ". . . many folks will be attracted to this week's performance at the Grand Opera House by Viola Allen, one of the best of our actresses now . . .,"[154] a statement supported by an account of the production in the New York Dramatic Mirror:

> The ever popular Two Orphans, with Kate Claxton, Viola Allen, Helen Tracy, Mark Lynch, and Charles A. Stevenson in the prominent parts attracted large audiences to the Grand Opera House, Monday. The performance was possibly the best given of the piece in this city in several years. Miss Allen was an excellent Henriette.[155]

These notices from The Two Orphans confirm that Viola Allen was rapidly becoming a well-known and popular performer. Certainly she gained much recognition merely by touring with the Jefferson-Florence company, but her ability to win acclaim as Lydia Languish and Cecily Homespun shows the excellence of her acting during the time, an excellence by the praise she received in other roles performed during this period.

Viola Allen's next engagement not only reflected her new prestige, but also would prove to be pivotal in her career for it would lead to her engagement with the Empire Theatre Company. Charles Frohman, who became successful with a production of Bronson Howard's Shenandoah, produced that dramatist's new play, Aristocracy, at Palmer's Theatre on

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[153] Odell, vol. 15, p. 70.

[154] "The Theatrical Week," New York Times, 29 May 1892.

[155] "At the Theatres," NYDM, 4 June 1892.

14 November 1892. Besides Miss Allen, the cast featured Wilton Lackaye and Henry Miller from the earlier Shenandoah production and a promising new actor, William Faversham. Howard later stated that Frohman had allowed him to select his cast, and the dramatist noted that he had let the actors, to a large degree, develop the characterizations of their roles.[157] Given the reputations of Howard and Frohman, and the excellence of the cast, the production of Aristocracy naturally aroused much interest in New York theatrical circles. In its two-and-one-half column review, the New York Times gave both the play and the production the careful attention such an event deserved. The reviewer found Howard's drama to be inferior to many of his earlier plays, clumsily constructed in many places and offering no new insights. In assessing the acting he noted:

> Viola Allen has little chance in the really unimportant role of Virginia to use her best gifts. Her adroitness and delicacy in the treatment of scenes of badinage, and dainty sentimental passages is hardly called into the play. Hers is always a welcome face on the stage, but an inferior actress could make as much of her part as she does.[158]

After two and one-half months at Palmer's, the company toured with the production for the reminder of the season.[159]

For Frohman and Howard, Aristocracy could be considered a failure because it was less than an overwhelming success. As a measure of Viola Allen's career, however, it shows the extent of her reputation

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[157] "Four Theatrical Novelties," clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[158] "The Theatrical Week," New York Times, 20 November 1892.

[159] Lloyd Anton Frerrer, Jr., "Bronson Howard: Dean of American Dramatists" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa, 1971), p. 318.

as an actress. With the approval of one of the country's top producers, she had been selected for the production by a leading author and was trusted to work out her own characterization. The principal critic of the piece noted that her acting ability was much greater than the demands of the role. In the ten years since her debut in Esmeralda, Miss Allen had reached a point where she could be considered one of the top young performers in the country. Her period of apprenticeship was over.

In her early career, Viola Allen had been given many opportunities to develop her abilities as an actress. She had been lucky as Esmeralda to play a character that did not require any deep dramatic skills, but many of her other roles, particularly the classic tragedy and comedy parts, tested her acting skills and offered her opportunities to grow in her craft. She was also fortunate to have had many chances to learn from the most respected actors of the late nineteenth century. Writing of these opportunities, Miss Allen discussed some of her early influences:

> From Mr. McCullough I learned, or should have learned, the great lesson of strength in repose. From Lawrence Barrett one must have caught something of the necessity of a mental alertness. Tomasso Salvini impressed upon one by his example the carrying power of tremendous force. And . . . from Mr. Jefferson gleaned something of the beautiful optimism that was evident even in his work.[160]

What characteristics Viola Allen's acting did acquire may be discerned from the discussions of her performances. Most frequently she is described as "sweet," "pretty," and "charming"--adjectives that are more indicative of her overall demeanor than of her histrionic ability.

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[160] Allen, "My Beginnings," p. viii.

Often, however, this personal appeal which infused many of her personations blended easily with the part and enriched the character she portrayed. Miss Allen's careful preparation of her roles was frequently mentioned. Her training in tragedy was also noted and sometimes it was considered a handicap because it made her acting artificial in less serious material. As a developing actress, Viola Allen was frequently described as "showing much promise of future ability." The validity of this observation would be tested in the next phase of her career.

CHAPTER II

THE EMPIRE THEATRE COMPANY

"When Charles Frohman formed his Empire Stock Company in 1893, he engaged me for it," Viola Allen later recalled. "I stayed five years at the Empire . . . It was his [Frohman's] dream to make it the best group of actors he could get together--like his brother's Lyceum company."[1] The Empire Theatre Company was important to both the actress and the producer for each were at critical phases of their careers. Viola Allen, after eleven seasons of playing a mixed collection of roles, had gained solid theatrical experience but still needed to hone her acting skills and to keep her name in the public view. Frohman, with a successful producing career since Shenandoah, needed to solidify his status as a major producer. The Empire theatre and its stock company would provide the necessary key for both individuals.

Frohman, as owner of the theatre and guiding force of the stock company, had the most visible stake in the new enterprise. He had begun his theatrical career in the early 1880s as road manager of Haverly's Mastodon Minstrels, and later booked touring companies for the Madison Square theatre. After several of his producing ventures ended in failure, he achieved his first success with Bronson Howard's Shenandoah in 1889. In 1890, he organized his first stock company at Proctor's Theatre. John Drew became his first star when he lured the actor away from Augustin

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[1] Helen Ormsbee, "Miss Viola Allen, Past and Present," New York Tribune, 19 January 1941.

Daly's company. Though his booking interests were extensive, Frohman, in 1893, was managing only three companies: John Drew's company, a company of comedians, and the Empire Theatre Company.[2]

The Empire Theatre opened on 25 January 1893 with The Girl I Left Behind Me, by David Belasco and Franklin Fyles. Frohman moved the offices of his burgeoning theatrical interests to the new theatre, and the Empire remained his favorite theatre until his death. In 1893, the Empire, on Broadway and Fortieth Streets, was north of the theatrical district, then located in Herald Squre. But the new playhouse began the movement of the theatrical district to Times Squre.[3] Famed for its elegance, the Empire ". . . had the finest auditorium of any theatre of its time, the largest and most hospitable lobby, and all the comforts of a cultivated institution. The ticket taker wore full dress and a silk hat."[4] A fuller assessment of the Empire was written by George Odell:

> A seating capacity of about eleven hundred persons, a handsome interior in red and gold . . . and an almost invariably honest and attractive stage performance soon elevated the Empire into a leading center of amusement in our town. That proud position it never lost and today (1947), . . . Frohman's cherished scene of activities still stands, the leading playhouse of New York, the only theatre in the city with a settled policy of good plays well presented, a theatre to which now, as fifty years ago, when it began its fine career, one can go with a fixed certainty of finding entertainment worthy of attention. . . . I spent many a delightful evening in the Empire Theatre in the first half-century of its existence.[5]

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[2] Harry Stiver, "Charles Frohman and the Empire Theatre Stock Company," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1958), pp. 8-20.

[3] Frohman and Marcosson, pp. 148-151.

[4] Brooks Atkinson, Broadway (London: Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1971), p. 43.

[5] Odell, vol. 15, pp. 295-296.

During the summer of 1893, Frohman made extensive changes in the company that had opened the Empire Theatre. Only Cyril Scott remained from the previous season.[6] One can only speculate as to why the producer reorganized the company. Though Belasco's play had been a success, it is possible that Frohman thought the acting to be below the standard he wished to establish at his new theatre. Since the Empire had opened in mid-season, it is also possible that the actors he might have wanted for the new company were already engaged for that season. Heading the newly reorganized Empire Theatre Stock Company for its first full season were Henry Miller and Miss Allen.

Viola Allen's association with Charles Frohman went back to the beginnings of both of their careers. While booking tours for the Madison Square companies in 1882, Frohman must have been familiar with the young actress of the Esmeralda (East and West) company.[7] When he produced The Pulse of New York in May 1884, "in the cast was a handsome, "painstakingly young woman named Viola Allen, whom Charles had singled out because of her admirable work in a play that he had seen . . . The youthful manager did much to aid her progress."[8] In 1889, she was the only lead from the original Boston production of Shenandoah to recreate her characterization for Frohman's new production. She was also selected for his production of Aristocracy in 1892.[9] By his continual re-employment of the actress, and by his selection of her for leading lady of

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[6] Stiver, p. 57

[7] See above, p. 11

[8] Frohman and Marcosson, p. 85.

[9] See above, pp. 43-44, 49-50.

his Empire Company, Charles Frohman showed his opinion of Viola Allen's abilities as an actress.

Frohman had the same kind of faith in his new leading man, Henry Miller. In 1886, when both were unknowns working in San Francisco, Frohman told the actor that "Some day, I am going to be a big producer of plays on Broadway. When that time comes you shall be my leading man."[10] Prior to that San Francisco meeting, Miller had acted in classical drama with Helen Modjeska and Adelaide Neilson and had been a member of Augustin Daly's company in New York.[11] In the summer of 1887 both he and Miss Allen had appeared in San Francisco with William Gillette at the Baldwin Theatre.[12] Miller worked with the Lyceum Theatre company for a time and rejoined Frohman, and Miss Allen, in the New York production of Shenandoah. These three were also associated in Aristocracy.[13]

Another actor from the cast of Aristocracy, William Faversham, became part of the new Empire Theatre Company and later took over as leading man when Miller left in 1896. Faversham was an English actor who had played in provincial stock companies before coming to the United States in 1887. Upon his arrival, he joined Daniel Frohman's Lyceum Company and stayed for most of the next five seasons, playing occasional engagements with E.H. Sothern and Minnie Maddern before his role in Aristocracy.[14]

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[10] Frank P. Morse, Backstage with Henry Miller (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1937), p. 172.

[11] Lewis Strang, Famous Actors of the Day in America (Boston: L.C. Page and Co., 1906), pp. 190-192.

[12] San Francisco Chronicle, 29 May 1887.

[13] Morse, pp. 172-180.

[14] Strange, Famous Actors, pp. 94-108.

The success of the Empire Theatre Stock Company, with its newly reorganized troupe, would depend to a great degree on the theatrical beliefs of Charles Frohman and his implementation of these convictions in the policies of the theatre. Two examples give some notion of his attitude toward the theatre. Though a founder of the powerful Theatrical Syndicate in 1896, a group that was to control the American theatre for the next decade, Frohman never bothered to attend meetings. He was the only active theatrical producer in the group and saw the Syndicate as a way to make more money to produce more plays.[15] When he went down with the Lusitania in 1915, he left a total estate of four hundred and fifty-one dollars. As a businessman he had made huge profits on his productions, but as a lover of theatre he had re-invested them in new ventures. Though the theatre to him was essentially a form of show business (not of culture or art), Frohman truly loved the theatre and he did what he thought best to produce plays successfully.[16]

Frohman's policies at the Empire reflected the care with which he translated his ideas into productions. Besides selecting his leading players, he personally chose each member of the reorganized troupe. Actors were assigned parts according to the traditional method of lines of business. Though the innovative producer, Augustin Daly, had abandoned lines of business in his New York company, Frohman preferred to follow the old method of casting roles with the Empire Company. A leading man would normally get the largest male role, for example. Sometimes this practice resulted in a player being given an inappropriate role. A high

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[15] Stiver, p. 20.

[16] Atkinson, pp. 42-45.

rate of personnel turnover, especially in smaller parts, weakened the ensemble. Occasionally students from the Empire Dramatic School, another part of Frohman's enterprises, would play morning or matinee performances with the Stock Company.[17]

The Empire Theatre Company began the season with a late summer or early fall tour, playing the main cities from New York to San Francisco. Each of the previous season's successes were played in rotation, one week for each play. Returning to the Empire in late December or early January, they played there until late May or early June. A typical season consisted of six months at the Empire and four months on tour. Plays ran as long as they drew audiences, except if a contract guaranteed a certain production date for a new play that was to be performed by the company. If a production failed, the company revived an old success while a new play was readied.[18] Viola Allen wrote a description of her life as leading lady of the Empire Theatre Company that provides detail on the daily routine of the company:

> Our life is monotonous. . . . The actress' day is a brief one, so far as freedom for personal enjoyment of life goes. The popular idea is that she is at the theatre at half-past seven, leaves just after the audience does, and has nothing to occupy herself until the next evening at half-past seven again. There is a good deal overlooked in this calculation. The performance is over, say, at eleven. She is tired out; it is half-past eleven or a quarter to twelve before she is ready to go home. . . . In the morning, I must rise early if I want to have much time to myself.
>
> Perhaps Mr. Frohman wants to see us at the theatre; we may have rehearsals for some new piece, or for some new people who are to be tried in a part. We often rehearse

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[17] Stiver, pp. 60-67.

[18] Ibid., pp. 83-87.

> and fully prepare a play that is never acted after all, the current play keeping it off. Then along comes another manuscript and we study it and rehearse it, thinking that if the current piece drops down in attendance this will be a better successor than the one we first rehearsed, and which had gone elsewhere with another company.
>
> There is always something to do even when we are running a piece successfully.[19]

Actors of the Empire Company were well-paid for their work, however. For the season of 1894-95, the total weekly salaries for twenty actors and one extra was one thousand, six hundred twenty-seven dollars and fifty cents ($1,627.50). In comparison, the salaries of William Gillette's Secret Service company for the same season, twenty-three actors and eight extras, totaled only one thousand two hundred sixty-five dollars ($1,265.00). Miller, as leading man, received two hundred dollars a week, while Miss Allen made one hundred and fifty dollars a week. Faversham's salary was one hundred and twenty-five dollars; J. E. Dodson's, one hundred and fifty dollars; and W.H. Thompson's one hundred dollars. Both Kitty Cheatham and May Robson received seventy-five dollars a week.[20]

In addition to compensating his actors generously, Frohman did not spare expenses on a production. Elaborate, realistic box sets with carefully selected properties were the norm. They were lit by a gas-electric combination. Unlike most producers, he did not require the performers to furnish their own costumes, but provided expensive, attractive dress for all of the players. Like the scenery, the costumes were elaborate and sometimes they were too ornate to be entirely

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19 Viola Allen, "Life is Tedious," New York Herald, 31 January 1897.

20 Charles Frohman Company account book, 1894-95, Museum of the City of New York, and Stiver, p. 42.

appropriate.[21]

Although very interested in the progress of each production at the Empire, Frohman rarely staged a play from beginning to end. Instead, he relied on stage managers to work out most of the details. Frohman attended only the final rehearsals.[22] Discussing Frohman's contributions at these rehearsals, John Williams noted:

> Not once is his manner aggressive nor his insistance upon a point tyrannical. His method is as simple as his manner. It is merely that of allowing the people on the stage to act out their parts as they think and feel them without interference, as long as they are going in the right direction. Then, when they have shown all they have to contribute to the scene or to the character, he stops them for what he reassuringly calls "just a few points"--which more often than not are the making of the scene or the character.[23]

Stiver, in his study of the Empire Theatre Company, summarizes Frohman's relations with his actors:

> Although Frohman was dictatorial at times, he was quite considerate of his actors. They were usually the first to be allowed to play for the Actor's Fund, ladies' aid societies or other worthy benefits . . . He always tried to help his actors with their personal problems and his concern extended even to former members of his company. . . . Relations between manager and company were excellent and Frohman constantly praised the quality of acting of his stock company.[24]

Frohman's interest in drama was equal to his interest in his actors; he personally selected each play that he produced. Using the motto "Nothing but successes at the Empire,"[25] as guide, his choices

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[21] Stiver, pp. 89 and 101.

[22] Atkinson, p. 44.

[23] John D. Williams, "When Actors Play to an Audience of One," Ladies Home Journal, February 1910, p. 9.

[24] Stiver, p. 58.

[25] Unidentified clipping, n.d., Frohman folder, Museum of the City of New York.

fell into a well-defined pattern. He believed that a play successful in London would succeed anywhere and consequently relied heavily on English imports for the Empire Theatre. Frohman preferred a strong love interest in serious plays, coupled with a story that made the spectator think positively about the good in life. Though he claimed not to tolerate indecency or serious discussion in drama, a few of the plays produced at the Empire--Sowing the Wind, John-a-Dreams and The Conquerors--belie this assertion.[26] Of the many playwrights associated with him, J. M. Barrie, author of Peter Pan, best complemented his taste in drama. In assessing Frohman's choice of plays, Brooks Atkinson noted that ". . . his taste in plays was indifferent. He had no intellectual curiousity; there was always a fundamental core of show business in his attitude toward the theatre. He detested Ibsen and most European plays. He was prudish and chauvinistic."[27] A different view of his dramatic taste was given by his brother:

> Where other men found diversion and recreation in golfing, motoring or walking, Charles sought entertainment in reading manuscripts. He was never without a play; when he traveled he carried dozens. . . . Back in Charles' mind was a definite and well-ordered policy about plays. His first production on any stage was a melodrama and, though in later years he ran the whole range from grave to gay, he was always true to his first love.[28]

Within the limits of his theatrical vision, Frohman produced at the Empire plays by some of the most noted dramatists of the day. These included playwrights such as Henry Arthur Jones, Hadden Chambers, Sydney Grundy, Louis M. Parker, Clyde Fitch, David Belasco, Jerome K.

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[26] Stiver, pp. 78-80.

[27] Atkinson, p. 43.

[28] Frohman and Marcosson, p. 304.

Jerome, Arthur Wing Pinero and Oscar Wilde. The importance of an Empire Theatre production to playwrights was stated by Daniel Frohman:

> The Empire Stock Company became an accredited institution, a new play by it was a distinct event, its annual tour to the larger cities an occasion that was eagerly awaited. To have a play produced by it was the goal of the ambitious playwright, both here and abroad.[29]

Since Frohman took so much interest in the Empire Theatre, Viola Allen and the other members of the company were directly affected by his production policies, especially in the area of play selection. A performer could only be judged on how well he presented his character in a drama. In her five seasons as leading lady of the Empire Theatre Company, Miss Allen appeared in twenty plays. Since the opening of a new play at the Empire was considered important by the playwrights of the period, it is desirable to consider the merits of the play as well as Miss Allen's character and her presentation of that character in evaluating her acting during these seasons.

Liberty Hall, by R.C. Carton, opened the "preliminary season" at the Empire Theatre on 21 August 1893. A four-act comedy that had had a long London run the previous season, the play was suited for Frohman's purposes.[30] Its plot was not original but a variation of the tale of the suitor who disguises himself to win the woman he loves. Two sisters left penniless by the death of their father refuse to accept their cousin's offer to stay in his home. Blanche, the older sister--played by Miss Allen--is a high-minded young woman ignorant of the realities of the world. The sisters go to live with an uncle, a bookshop

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[29] Ibid., p. 150.

[30] "Liberty Hall and Pierrot," New York Times, 22 August 1893.

proprietor in London. Disguised as a lodger in the uncle's apartment, the cousin tempers Blanche's pride while winning her love.[31] Frohman explained his choice of the drama by saying that "it is sweet, simple, and quaint, and will be a good example to illustrate the policy which I intend to pursue at the Empire, which is, above all else, to produce clean, wholesome plays. There is nothing startling in it, no great dramatic climaxes. It is a delightful picture . . ."[32]

"The performance was rewarded with smiles for its gentle, pervasive humor if not always for its wit . . . and tears, for its pathos, which is never deep but is oftener than usual true and uniform," wrote the critic of the New York Times. He continued his assessment of the production by describing the acting:

> There was a particularly warm welcome for Viola Allen, an uncommonly tasteful and sympathetic actress in comedy. . . . In "Liberty Hall" Miss Allen is right in her element, as, indeed, she would be in many plays of many different sorts, for her powers are not narrowly restricted, and where the author's idea is sensible and true she gives it graceful and telling expression.[33]

Another reviewer found Miss Allen to be ". . . uncommonly tactful and womanly, carrying into her impersonation a sweetness and tact that completely captivated her audience. . . ."[34] Although the critic of the Dramatic Mirror noted that Miss Allen has a most engaging presence," he found flaws in her performance; "She is too solicitous in delivering her monosyllables and there is in her movements a suggestion of the

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[31] NYDM, 26 August 1893.

[32] New York Times, 25 June 1893.

[33] "'Liberty Hall' and Pierrot," New York Times, 22 August 1893.

[34] Unidentified clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

melodramatic quite foreign to this atmosphere."[35]

Liberty Hall played at the Empire until The Younger Son opened the regular season on 24 October 1895. David Belasco, who co-authored the Empire's first success, The Girl I Left Behind Me, adapted his new drama from a recent German play, Schlimme Saat by O. Vischer. Both Belasco and Frohman hoped to repeat the success of their first venture, but the new play proved to be a disappointing failure.[36] To summarize the convoluted story of The Younger Son is difficult since the condensed version of the plot filled two columns of the Dramatic Mirror. The play concerned a doting mother, Mrs. Kirkland, with two sons. John, the eldest, is a drunken idler and Paul, the younger, is an aspiring but inept artist. Nell Armitage, an orphan whom Paul loves, and Uncle Peter share the Kirkland's house. John's long-suffering, abused wife and Clarkson McVeigh, a villainous suitor who plots to send Paul to Rome so that Nell could be his, also figure in the plot.[37]

"There is good, dramatic material in all this, but it cannot be said that Mr. Belasco has made the best possible use of it. His play is far too fussy to be forceful," wrote the Times critic in evaluating the drama. He continued:

> But far more important than the play is the return of the well-equipped company, capable of performing almost any good play well. The acting was generally good last night. Miss Allen, it is true, might as well have worn roller skates in her first scene, and thus introduced a novelty in comedy instead of giving us a reminiscence of the circus in her effort to seem light-hearted. But she is a good

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[35] NYDM, 26 August 1893.

[36] Odell, vol. 15, pp. 565-566.

[37] NYDM, 4 November 1893.

> actress, with a remarkably sweet personality, and she bore a long and trying part with becoming dignity. . . . The stage management was careful in Mr. Belasco's fashion, and too much praise cannot be given to the manner in which the various actors removed their overshoes when they came in from out of doors.[38]

With the failure of the play The Younger Son, Frohman revived Liberty Hall until a new production was ready. Returning to London successes, he chose The Councillor's Wife by Jerome K. Jerome and Eden Philpots, which opened at the Empire on 4 November 1893.[39] The plot of the play was similar to that of Liberty Hall:

> A brother and sister defrauded of their fortune are living in a garrett. The sister is about to marry a benevolent old man in order to bring comfort to herself and to her brother. Of course, there is a poor lover who is jilted. . . . Then a rich relation appears, money becomes abundant, the benevolent old man finds out his mistake and the careless artist gets the fine girl.[40]

The Councillor's Wife had been produced by Frohman at a special matinee during the preceding season and had been played in several other cities so its audience potential was known. It was ". . . a light sentimental piece, delicate in fancy and showing persons dominated by circumstances the authors have contrived for them . . . The play is bright, brisk and fresh. Much of the dialogue is naive, and the situations are genuinely pathetic and humorous by turns."[41] The piece "was most admirably played . . . As each actor had his or her great scene--there was one for everybody--the beholder decided that particular he

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[38] "The Empire Theatre Company," New York Times, 25 October 1893.

[39] Odell, vol. 15, p. 566.

[40] NYDM, 19 November 1892.

[41] NYDM, 11 November 1893.

or she to be superior to any one of the other."[42]

Sydney Grundy's Sowing the Wind followed The Councillor's Wife at the Empire, opening on 2 January 1894. The new play was to provide Frohman with a solid hit for his favorite theatre's second season and it was to give Viola Allen a role and a scene that became one of the high points of her Empire years.[43] As Rosamund, Miss Allen played an actress in love with young Ned Annesley, the ward of the wealthy, aristocratic Mr. Brabazon. Horrified by their proposed marriage, Brabazon and his friend Watkins seek to dissolve the engagement by blackening Rosamund's character to Ned. Watkins, many years earlier, had helped save Brabazon from a woman of whom the aristocrat's father had not approved, a woman who subsequently became a notorious courtesan. Unknown to Brabazon, his former fiancée had had his child, Rosamund.

At the end of the third act, father and daughter, unaware of their relationship, confront each other over her mother's renunciation of her child and subsequent descent into a life of sin. Rosamund argues for her mother:

> What wrong did she do anyone but herself? Why should a woman be virtuous? Is vice to be a man's monopoly? What use to struggle--to be brave and true? What is the upshot? What is our reward? Hers desolation! Mine contempt! . . . She was forsaken. My father left her. As you know, men do leave women sometimes. Perhaps he was right to leave her--perhaps he did his duty--by his father. . . . If he had stayed my mother's life would have been different; and if a day of judgment ever comes, . . . he will be held accountable for some part of her sins. . . . I grew up in an atmosphere of evil. But she was kind to me. Too kind to tell me that she was my mother. . . . What trials awaited me, what

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[42] New York Times, 7 November 1893.

[43] Odell, vol. 15, pp. 566-567.

> difficulties beset me, I leave you to imagine. But I perservered, and after I built a humble but honourable home, I met Mr. Annesley--and loved him. That was not my fault, for you love him also, and he loved me. . . . And now, when just in sight of happiness, first one and then another of you come and says such happiness is not for such as you and tears it from my grasp. Why is such happiness not for such as me? Because I have been tempted and I have not fallen--because I have suffered and I have not sinned? Do not defame my mother. She was at least a woman. So am I. Let the women stand by the women, and the men by the men. Let it be fought out to the end. Sex against sex! I am my mother's child. She never deserted me and if her sins be scarlet, she was my mother and I owe her reverence.[44]

Brabazon, in the fourth act, discovers that Rosamund is his daughter, and gives his blessing to the match with Ned.

Some notion of the impact of the third act, with its "sex against sex" speech, can be seen in the comparison drawn by the critic of the New York Times:

> This play treats of just the same theme as Mr. Wilde's "A Woman & c," and quite as frankly, but although Mr. Grundy, unlike his shallow, pretentious cockney contemporary, lets his discarded woman go off to the bad quickly, his play is honest, wholesome, and elevating, while the other is false and morally depressing. That is because Grundy is a sincere man and Wilde is not.[45]

Interestingly, Sowing the Wind violates one and possibly both of Frohman's taboos about dramas. It is full of serious discussion, and some people in 1894 would have considered it obscene.

Though Rosamund was to be one of Viola Allen's most famous roles with the Empire company, her performance was not finished on opening night:

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[44] Sydney Grundy, Sowing the Wind, in English and American Drama of the Nineteenth Century (New York: Readex Microprint, 1968).

[45] "At the Theatre," New York Times, 3 January 1894.

> Mr. Henry Miller and Miss Viola Allen, as the father and daughter respectively, were evidently in earnest. But they did not get inside the characters which they represented. Mr. Miller, who was evidently extremely nervous, was hard and constrained when he should have been gentle and full of feeling. The same fault marred Miss Allen's performance. She was admirable in the lighter scenes, but she had no hold upon the heavier and pathetic ones. She acted with vigor enough, but she spoke her lines mechanically and as though the effort was against her own conviction. . . . Mr. Miller and Miss Allen worked hard and with an earnestness which is delightful to witness in these slipshod days. They were overweighted on the first night. . . However, familiarity will doubtless give them confidence and instill into them a little sympathy.[46]

Another reviewer noted the effects of Sowing the Wind on Allen's acting by stating "Miss Viola Allen had seemed lately not to be fulfilling her promises, but her portrayal of Rosamund is sympathetic, unaffected, and surprisingly forceful."[47] Peter Robertson, however, has a different view of the relationship between the play and the actors:

> What makes Viola Allen draw tears in "Sowing the Wind"? Is it her hapless situation? Not a bit of it. . . . Viola Allen is a very attractive woman with a very strong personal magnetism. We are crying only because she is in distress. We all hate to see a pretty woman suffer, and especially a woman who makes us like her for herself. I honestly believe that Viola Allen could make us cry if only she pretended to have a pain in the back of her neck.[48]

During the long run of Sowing the Wind at the Empire, Viola Allen appeared in two special matinees, both benefit performances. John Thurgood,Farmer, by Henry Byatt, was performed on 16 January 1894, for the benefit of the Virginia Day Nursery. Thomas Frost's Chums was

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[46] "Sowing the Wind," Illustrated American, 20 January 1894.

[47] "The Week at the Theatre," New York Times, 7 January 1894.

[48] Peter Robertson, "Memoranda about the Play by a Man on the Back Row," clipping, n.d., HTC.

performed for the benefit of the Normal College Alumni on 27 March 1894.[49] It is possible that Frohman wished to test these dramas on a New York audience. John Thurgood, Farmer was an English play which had been produced in London the previous season.[50] Chums had received honorable mention in a play contest sponsored by the New York Herald and and had been given one earlier performance.[51]

Thornton Clark and Louis N. Parker's Gudgeons, which followed Sowing the Wind, opening on 14 May 1894 as part of a double bill with The Luck of Roaring Camp, was the seventh different drama in which Miss Allen appeared that season.[52] As a play, "'Gudgeons' is refreshingly free from problems. . . . The woman with a past, the outcast of society, and the question of sex against sex are all out of it. It is simply a brisk, bantering, clean comedy. . . ."[53] In the play, James Ffolliatt Treherne, a gentlemanly rogue, attempts to fleece an American millionnaire and his daughter out of their fortune by marrying the girl to his nephew. The young people fall in love on their own, however, and the story ends happily.[54] Henry Miller, as Treherne, played the rogue for comedy and was a great success.[55]

Miss Allen, as Miller's wife in the piece, was not as fortunate,

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[49] Odell, vol. 15, p. 568.

[50] Programme, John Thurgood, Farmer, London, Globe Theatre, 1893, Lincoln Center.

[51] NYDM, 12 April 1892.

[52] Odell, vol. 15, p. 569.

[53] NYDM, 19 May 1894.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Morse, p. 182.

for she was ". . . completely lost beneath the thin, colorless material thrown over her and labelled Mrs. Treherne. Several times she is permitted to exclaim 'You are a wonderful man!' and this was about scope of her opportunity."[56] This opinion was echoed by the critic of the New York Times: "Miss Allen is out of her sphere as the patient, loving wife, who acquieses in all her husband's schemes, and greets each new manifestation of his ingenuity with 'James, you are wonderful,' but she plays with humor and grace."[57] The double bill ran for two weeks and the second season of the Empire Theatre Company closed on 29 May 1894.[58]

While Charley's Aunt and John Drew's company played at the Empire Theatre in the fall of 1894, the Stock Company toured the country, returning to the Empire on 4 December 1894, with The Masqueraders, a drama by Henry Arthur Jones that had been a huge London success the previous spring.[59] Jones's play told the story of Dulcie Larondie, an impoverished gentlewoman who prefers to work in a tavern than be a governess. She is courted by two men, Sir Bruce Skene, a rich, titled gentleman but also a gambler and a drunkard, and David Remon, a poor astronomer. After outbidding Remon in an auction for Dulcie's kiss, Skene proposes, and Dulcie, eager to return to society, accepts. Skene loses his money through his dissipation and sends Dulcie to beg money from Remon, who has inherited a fortune. The astronomer still loves

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[56] "Players and Players," Illustrated American, 2 June 1894.

[57] "New Bills at the Theatre," New York Times, 15 May 1894.

[58] Odell, vol. 15, p. 569.

[59] Morse, p. 183.

Dulcie and she gradually realizes that she loves him. Tired of all the subterfuge, Skene and Remon cut cards for Dulcie and her daughter, and Remon wins. Dulcie, strengthened by the arguments of her sister, refuses to break her marriage vows and to go away with the man she loves. Remon finally accepts her choice and the lovers pledge their eternal devotion. The ending is left open as Remon goes off to Africa on an expedition, from which there is little likelihood that he will return.[60]

Viola Allen, as leading lady of the company, played Dulcie Laronde. In an interview, she offered her analysis of the character:

> The character of Dulcie is so rich, so full of growth from act to act. . . . In the first act she is a thoughtless, happy-hearted girl, thinking only of her own pleasure. The next shows her in possession of the joy she had craved, but with a new anxiety to bear along with it. In the third act, it seems as if the end of all things has come to her, and still another phase of the character is shown. In the fourth, the real strength and nobility of spirit the woman possesses comes to the front.[61]

The critic of the New York Times also analyzed Miss Allen's role in his discussion of the play and its acting:

> The burden of the acting falls on the shoulders of Mr. Miller and Miss Viola Allen . . . Neither equaled the expectations of the spectators early in the performance--both exceeded them before the play was finished.
>
> In Miss Allen's role a famous London actress, Mrs. Campbell, disappointed her public . The truth probably is that the role is often false to nature, and cannot be made wholly effective. . . . The hysterical rhapsody and scenes of coquetry in Act I were not convincing, but in the quieter passages Miss Allen was strong and she is always charming.[62]

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60 Henry Arthur Jones, The Masqueraders, in J.O. Bailey, ed., British Plays of the Nineteenth Century (New York: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1966), pp. 463-492.

61 Munsey Magazine, January 1898.

62 "David Remon's Lucky Cut," New York Times, 4 December 1894.

Two Boston critics provide comments which complement each other. Henry Clapp notes that Miss Allen:

> . . . showed far more flexibility than might have been thought possible, and touched the heroine's many kinds of emotion with a fairly skillful hand. . . . Over and over again the curious artificiality which is ever latent in Miss Allen's style, made itself felt as a taint or clog.
>
> On the other hand at her best moments she was brilliantly effective and sometimes deeply natural.[63]

The reviewer of the Boston Courier provides an extended analysis of her acting:

> Miss Viola Allen's Dulcie is a proof of her growth in her profession, for it is fitted with fine details which leave no instant of it blank or without significance, the apparently aimless bits in the early scenes having a real relationship to the character as Dulcie confesses herself later. At times you can't help feeling that a scene or a speech is governed by the actress' mentality alone, and that is studied and superficial. But Miss Allen cannot remake her temperament and these curiously insincere moments are few in proportion to the many in which her grace, gentleness, and sweetness predominate.[64]

The Masqueraders repeated the success it had in London, playing until the middle of March. One member of the audience was Herbert Beerbohm-Tree, its London producer. When "Beerbohm-Tree witnessed the Empire's presentation of 'The Masqueraders,' he said that it was infinitely superior to the London production . . . and added that Viola Allen was the best leading woman he had ever seen."[65]

Beerbohm-Tree provided the Empire Theatre with its next play, John-a-Dreams, by C. Haddon Chambers, which opened on 18 March 1895. He had planned to produce the play himself in New York, but the critic

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[63] Henry A. Clapp, "Masqueraders," Boston Advertiser, 8 October 1895.

[64] Boston Courier, 13 October 1895.

[65] "Viola Allen's Preferences," n.d., Viola Allen collection, Lincoln Center.

of the New York Times acidly noted, "Why he sold it instead of producing it was made manifest last evening when the play was performed . . . It is simply a dull play. . ."[66] John-a-Dreams is a love triangle in which Harold Wynn and Sir Hubert Garlinge, friends and college roommates, become rivals for Kate Cloud, a singer. Harold, a poet and dreamer, has also been an opium eater, while unknown to both men, Kate's early life had been spent on the streets. During the drama, Sir Hubert's base nature is exposed, and Kate and Harold, after many trials, are finally united.[67]

Though the play was not strong, John-a-Dreams remained at the Empire for five weeks. Besides the shock value of having both a drug addict and a fallen woman in one play, the critic of the New York Times notes another reason for its run:

> Mr. Miller, Miss Allen, Mr. Faversham, Mr. Dodson, Miss DeWolfe and Mr. Edeson all worked with a will: Their acting was as tactful and forcible as possible. Miss Allen has done nothing better, in a technical sense, than the confession of love in Act I, the recital of the story of her "past" in Act II, and her vehement rebuke to the treacherous lover in the last act.[68]

The Dramatic Mirror also commented favorably on her performance but noted that "In some respects she is not suited to the character for it is difficult to conceive how a fallen woman of Kate Cloud's experience could be as refined and charming as Miss Allen."[69] She later said that John-a-Dreams was a play that she disliked,[70] and perhaps

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[66]"Simply a Stupid Thing," New York Times, 19 March 1895.

[67]"At the Theatres," NYDM, 23 March 1895, p. 10.

[68]"Simply a Stupid Thing," New York Times, 19 March 1895.

[69]"At the Theatres," NYDM, 23 March 1895, p. 10.

[70]"Viola Allen's Preferences," n.d., Viola Allen collection, Lincoln Center.

that feeling influenced her performance.

Frohman seemed wedded to British drama, for another English import replaced John-a-Dreams at the Empire, ". . . a play from the pen of a man whose name the producer was afraid to display and newspapers refused to print."[71] The Importance of Being Earnest, by the then notorious Oscar Wilde, was produced on 22 April 1895.[72]

Critical reaction to the play was biased. Though they generally praised the acting, the reviewers distorted accounts of the play to produce an unfavorable reaction.[73] A representative piece appeared in the New York Times:

> That "The Importance of Being Earnest" would not long survive transplantation was an assumed fact on the night of its first performance at the Empire Theatre. It is a burlesque comedy of the kind for which the mass of players care not a jot. Most people do not enjoy a play, no matter how smart it may be, that does not touch the emotions. Homely humor please more than fanciful wit; and they want pure sentiment and simple pathos. This thing of Wild's is smart; nothing more.[74]

In the opinion of the Mirror's critic, it ". . . should merely be looked upon as a humorous trifle at the fag end of the season. . . ." and he noted that "Viola Allen as Gwendolyn Fairfax, caught the comedy spirit of the part and interpreted her lines with characteristic cleverness."[75] Of all the plays in which Miss Allen appeared at the Empire Theatre, The Importance of Being Earnest was the only drama to remain viable to the present day; yet, critical and audience reaction

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[71] Morse, p. 183.

[72] "New Theatrical Bills," New York Times, 23 April 1895.

[73] Morse, p. 184.

[74] "The Theatrical Week," New York Times, 28 April 1895.

[75] "At the Theatres," NYDM, 27 April 1895.

forced Frohman to withdraw the play after a week. Several old successes, such as Liberty Hall, Gudgeons, and Sowing the Wind, were revived to finish the season.[76]

Besides her regular roles with the Empire Company, Viola Allen appeared in two special performances that season. Frederic le Maitre, a one act play by Clyde Fitch, was presented at the Empire on 2 May 1895. Miss Allen was featured as Madeline.[77] At the benefit for C.W. Couldrock on 31 May at the Fifth Avenue Theatre, she recreated one of her roles in classic comedy, Lydia Languish in The Rivals. The cast of the benefit was engaged for one special performance at the Boston Theatre on 13 June 1895.[78] A review of that production assessed her performance:

> Miss Allen enacted Lydia in a painstaking, intelligent and agreeable manner. A little of the romantic gush of the character was missed at times, but this was partly due to the character being cut . . . Yet it was not wholly lost, as Miss Allen's very amusing description of her lover's kneeling in the snow of cold winter's night and coughing and sneezing so pathetically, abundantly proved.[79]

After three years of playing only in modern dramas, she still had not lost the ability to handle a classic role.

Viola Allen rejoined her colleagues from the Empire Theatre, after her brief return to the classics, and toured with the group in the 1895-96 fall season. For the New York opening of his company,

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[76] Morse, pp. 184-185.

[77] Morehouse, "Broadway After Dark."

[78] Eugene Tompkins and Quincy Kilby, The History of the Boston Theatre, 1854-1901 (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1908), pp. 427-428.

[79] Stebbins, p. 103.

Frohman, recalling his success of the previous year, selected Henry Arthur Jones's new drama, Michael and His Lost Angel. The play was to open simultaneously in London and New York on 15 January 1896.[80]

In his new drama, Jones told the story of Michael Faversham, a pious, self-righteous, ascetic clergyman in a remote English parish. Audrie Lisden, a wealthy, charming, worldly "widow" has settled in the parish after reading one of the clergyman's books. She is fascinated by him and is determined to assert her power over him. He resists her advances, including an offer to restore the local church--his life's dream. By a combination of planning and circumstances, the two are stranded on a remote island for a time and the minister falls. Audrie's husband, presumed dead, returns and ruins the lovers' plans for marriage. At the dedication of the restored church, Faversham confesses his sin and retires to a monastery in Italy. Audrie, now truly in love with Michael, is also in Italy, dying. The two confess their mutual love and she dies in Michael's arms.[81]

Audrie Lisden was a role that Miss Allen enjoyed. She commented:

> The part grew on me. . . . She [Audrie] was not an easy part. The sympathy of the audience sets in strongly against her at the very start. Audrie Lisden . . . startled and worried them [the audience]. She said queer things and did queer things. Her nature was so complex that the audience had to use their head in studying her motives.[82]

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[80] Morse, p. 185.

[81] Henry Arthur Jones, Michael and His Lost Angel, in Clayton Hamilton, ed., Representative Plays, vol. 3 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1925), pp. 5-85.

[82] "A Popular Leading Actress," NYDM, 8 February 1896,

Her ability to portray this complex character was assessed by the reviewer of the New York Times:

> Probably neither Mr. Miller nor Miss Allen ever has done more satisfactory work. Miss Allen, however, has by far the more difficult task. . . . The variety of power Miss Allen bestowed upon her portrayal of this fascinating personage was remarkable. It is not too much to say that in certain scenes, notably in the admirably devised second act of this five-act play, she completely realized every phase of her character.[83]

The play itself was not appreciated as much as the acting. In the Dramatic Mirror one learns the reaction of the opening night audience to the drama:

> There have been few theatrical failures in New York more pronounced than that of Michael and his Lost Angel at the Empire Theatre last Wednesday night. . . . The first night audience sat amazed through much of the play and apparently with repressed resentment during the elaborate church scene. This, which was supposed to be the vital part of the drama, was cut out at subsequent performances at the Empire. The applause throughout the play that was not perfunctory was personally directed.[84]

Michael and His Lost Angel played only thirteen performances at the Empire and the play also failed in London,[85] a fact which must have disappointed both Frohman and Jones. Though the play failed, Viola Allen retained her liking for the drama. In an interview, she "stoutly maintained that the play taught a splendid lesson if it had only been looked at in the right light."[86]

Since failures were not compatible to the Empire's image, the

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[83] "A Ritualistic Dimmesdale," New York Times, 16 January 1896.

[84] "At the Theatres," NYDM, 25 January 1896.

[85] Ibid.

[86] "The Empire's Leading Woman," n.d., Viola Allen collection, Lincoln Center.

Company opened in a new play on 27 January 1896. Discussing A Woman's Reason, by Charles Brookfield and F.C. Philips, the critic of the Times commented:

> In the remarkably short time that had elapsed since Mr. Charles Frohman decided to throw aside Arthur Jones's lost angel play, the actors at the Empire Theatre had prepared themselves to give a spirited if somewhat rough performance of another new play, "A Woman's Reason," which received plenty of applause last night, and may survive the somewhat cynical indifference of sophisticated persons to purely sentimental views of life and old fashioned stagecraft.[87]

A brief description of the plot clarifies the reviewer's comment about sentimentality. Lord and Lady Benchley, haughty but spendthrift nobility, are deeply in debt to Stephen D'Acosta, a Jewish moneylender. To erase their debt, they force their daughter, the Honorable Nina Keith, to marry D'Acosta. She has been prejudiced by her parents' views, and leaves the long-suffering D'Acosta and their child to elope with Captain Crozier. After a few months with her lover, Nina realizes that she really loves her husband. She leaves Crozier and devotes her time to repentance and good works. All ends happily as the saintly D'Acosta forgives his wife and their family is reunited.[88]

Noting a lack of subtlety in the characters of A Woman's Reason, the Times reviewer also saw that flaw in the acting because "the performance was necessarily cruder than we generally see at the Empire, but there was no lack of vigor. Miss Allen, Mr. Miller, Mr. Davenport and Miss DeWolfe treated their roles with a good understanding of their theatrical value."[89] The reviewer of the Dramatic Mirror did not

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[87] "New Theatrical Bills," New York Times, 28 January 1896.

[88] Charles Brookfield and F. C. Philips, A Woman's Reason, t.s., Lincoln Center.

[89] "New Theatrical Bills," New York Times, 28 January 1896.

agre with this assessment for he felt that:

> . . . Viola Allen as Nina Keith proved as charming and captivating as ever. Indeed, her enticing personality made it difficult to convince the audience that anything Nina says or does could be otherwise than the right thing to do under the circumstances. It is evidently within the bounds of deserved tribute to declare that in Viola Allen the manager of the Empire Theatre company has a veritable treasure.[90]

"The big reconciliation scene went over with a bang in 1896," commented Frank Morse, Henry Miller's biographer. "In spite of this plot, the play ran five or six weeks."[91]

Marriage, by Brandon Thomas and Henry Keeling, the next production at the Empire, continued the examination of the wedded state. "Separation would have been a more suitable title, for the principal couple of the comedy have had a falling out at the opening of the first act and are not reunited until just before the final curtain."[92] Like the preceding piece, the play features a heroine, Lady Belton, who marries for a not so noble reason--to keep her husband out of the clutches of Mrs. Chumbleigh, a presumed widow. Lady Belton's conscience prompts her to leave her husband and Mrs. Chumbleigh, of course, uses the opportunity. The widow's "dead" husband returns: Lady Belton realizes that she loves her husband, and all is righted in the end. In the drama:

> Miss Allen has the most difficult and least reasonable role. Eve Belton is a personage with a character rather too unusual and complex for a light comic play. . . .
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> If Miss Allen could scarcely make Eve reasonable, she certainly made her charming, in depicting her whimsical

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[90] "At the Theatres," NYDM, 1 February 1896.

[91] Morse, p. 186.

[92] "At the Theatres," NYDM, 22 February 1896.

moods, her innocence, and her genuine affection.[93]

In the comedy, which opened 17 February 1896, she played opposite William Faversham, instead of the Empire's leading man, Henry Miller.[94] This change in casting was perhaps a trial run for the following year, since Miller was planning to leave the company at the end of the current season.

For the Empire's next production, Clyde Fitch's Bohemia, opening on 9 March 1896, the actors returned to their usual line of business, but this play was to be Miller's last as leading man of the company.[95] The play, which closed after forty-eight performances, had the longest run of any Empire production that season.[96] Although based on La Vie de Boheme by Henri Murger, in "departing from the spirit of this work, the play lost that kind of interest which the book inspired."[97] A further comparison of the book and the play was given by Edward A. Dithmar:

> As a rendering of the Paris Bohemian life glorified by Murger, which, in the practical American view, is the life of libidinous vagabonds, it fails utterly. But, as a rather agreeable entertainment, "Bohemia" will probably serve better than some of the other recent plays at the Empire. It has drawn well thus far . . . It has prettiness, oddity and fun. . . . It has Miss Allen as a very pretty American Mimi, whose craving for a big fur muff when all is lost save honor is not the less piquantly pathetic because she looks like a New England schoolteacher who has lost her school.[98]

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93 "New Theatrical Bills," New York Times, 18 February 1896.

94 Ibid.

95 Morse, p. 186.

96 John Chapman and Garrison P. Sherwood, eds., The Best Plays of 1894-1899 (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1955), p. 167.

97 "Bohemia at the Empire," New York Times, 15 March 1896.

98 Edward A. Dithmar, New York Times, 15 March 1896.

Writing of her role in Bohemia, Miss Allen commented, "It requires conscientious work to do your best in a play that you do not like, so far as your own part is concerned, and to do your utmost to help it to a long run, such as 'Bohemia' had when you know that it means long continued appearance in an uncongenial role."[99] Her lack of feeling for the part is reflected in different ways in some of her notices. One read: "Mimi was sweetly and discreetly played by Viola Allen, although it was difficult to imagine her anything else than the leading lady of the Empire Theatre."[100] Another critic wrote: "Miss Viola Allen's "Mimi" was strong in its way, but not of 'Bohemia.' She could not be otherwise than artistic and effective."[101] And a third reviewer commented: "Miss Allen, as the virtuous Mimi, did fairly well, and the general representation was smooth and competent, although never inspired."[102]

During its 1896-97 fall tour, the Empire Theatre Company presented two plays that had not been part of its New York repertory the previous season: The Benefit of the Doubt, by Arthur Wing Pinero, and Lady Betty's Highwayman, by Justin Huntley McCarthy.[103] Lady Betty's Highwayman, which was to have a New York matinee on 10 December 1896,[104]

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[99] "Life is Tedious," New York Herald, 31 January 1897.

[100] "At the Theatres," NYDM, 14 March 1896.

[101] "Bohemia," n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center

[102] New York Post, 16 March 1896.

[103] Playbills, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center, and Morehouse, "Broadway After Dark."

[104] Morehouse, "Broadway After Dark."

was ". . . a pretty story of the eighteenth century in a good imitation of the language of the period and was admirably played by Viola Allen and Mr. Finney. Miss Allen presented a captivating figure in eighteenth century costume, and played her part with excellent judgment."[105]

Pinero's play, a more serious venture than the McCarthy piece, was similar to The Masqueraders. The Benefit of the Doubt was another look at the problem of infidelity in marriage, apparently a popular subject for drama at the turn of the century. While the critic of the Boston Transcript saw great merit in the play, he felt that:

> The acting, unfortunately, was not worthy of the play. The company lacks the cohesion and the power to weld together the characters into something approaching unity. Both Miss Allen and Miss DeWolfe were unconvincing, and while acting up to the utmost limit, failed to create any illusion. Miss Allen's facial mannerisms seemed more obtrusive than ever, the only scene in which she was thoroughly praiseworthy being that at the end of the second act.[106]

When the company returned to the Empire, it opened the new season with Under the Red Robe on 29 December 1896, a dramatization by Edward Rose of Stanley Weyman's novel.[107] The red robe of the title refers to the robe of Cardinal Richelieu, the drama's manipulator. Gil de Berault, however, is the chief character of the play. A gambler and soldier of fortune, he violates the law against dueling and kills a man. Richelieu modifies the usual death penalty for the crime by sentencing de Berault to either capture the traitor, Henri de Cochefôret,

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[105] Philadelphia Public Ledger, 24 November 1896.

[106] "Hollis Street Theatre: 'The Benefit of the Doubt,'" Boston Transcript, 27 October 1896.

[107] New York Times, 3 October 1896.

within a month or to be killed. Using an assumed name, de Berault becomes part of the de Cocheforet household and he wins the trust and then the love of the rebel's sister, Renée. The conflicts between his love for Renée, his honor as a gentleman, and the sentence of the Cardinal are resolved favorably and the lovers are united at the end of the play.[108]

With its seventeenth century French setting, Under the Red Robe was different from the plays that had been seen at the Empire previously and would require some adjustments by the actors. George T. Richardson, a critic, felt that:

> Were there nothing save the presence and personal accomplishment of Miss Viola Allen to commend it, "The Red Robe" could well be popular. Nothing that this lady has ever done here approaches her art as manifested in Renee De Cocheforet. There are scenes of strong emotion and they are vividly, deeply played as if the actress felt with the character. There is another scene in which, in the midst of danger to a loved one, Renee banters with a foppish officer, and the playing of it is fairly delicious.[109]

While another critic echoes Richardson's opinion of Miss Allen's acting, he questions the depth of the role:

> For my own part, though, I find her realization of Weyman's fascinating heroine completely satisfying. . . . I think Miss Allen has secured better triumphs in stronger roles. Renee, in the play, is largely a pictorial figure. Miss Allen denotes all her traits that are brought in use deftly, and is convincing in the stirring rebuke to Berault, and the contemptuous manner in which she receives the honest Lieutenant's denunciation of the spy . . . But the piece, after all, is a swiftly moving, picturesque, romantic drama with no great depth of passion.[110]

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[108] Edwin Rose, adaptor, Under the Red Robe, t.s., n.d., Lincoln Center.

[109] George T. Richardson, "Under the Red Robe," clipping, 9 November 1897, HTC.

[110] Unidentified clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

The Boston critics were again very specific in their evaluation of her acting. "Miss Viola Allen . . . played the heroine, Renee, with characteristic unevenness," wrote Henry Clapp. He continued:

> [She was] pleasing greatly when her fine personality was uttering itself most freely, and irritating not a little when her professional self-consciousness was fully operative and expressed itself in those jerky staccato artificialities and varied vocal runs and cadences, which never stop or cease to surprise. Miss Allen, as ever, had beautiful moments and made fine touches . . .[111]

Another critic felt that the play was miscast: "Miss Conquest should play Renee de Cocheforet; Miss Allen should play the wife. As the parts are cast now, Miss Conquest does her little with her usual intensity, grace and charm, but Miss Allen is so painfully out of her element that it is but charity to refrain from criticising her."[112]

While the critical reaction was divided over the merits of Miss Allen's acting in Under the Red Robe, the popular opinion of the audience kept the play running for the stock company's entire season. One production, a special matinée of A Man and His Wife on 6 April 1897, briefly interrupted the run of Red Robe. A Man and His Wife returned to the problem of infidelity with the story of a weak woman, Eleanor Ainslie, who is tempted to leave her husband by the persuasion of Sir Noel Drage, a director of her husband's gold mine. By the end of the play, however, Eleanor realizes that she loves her husband and the two are reconciled. "Viola Allen, as the vacillating Mrs. Ainslie, was earnest and effective," in the judgment of the Dramatic Mirror, "endowing the

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111 Henry A. Clapp, "Great Audience Sees the First Boston Presentation of 'Under the Red Robe,'" clipping, n.d., HTC.

112 Boston Transcript, 12 November 1897.

very unattractive role with an individuality that drew forth pity rather than contempt."[113]

A Man and His Wife did not become a part of the repertory of the Empire Theatre company. Following the usual fall tour, the stock company opened the new season at the Empire on 4 January with the play, The Conquerors, by Paul Potter,[114] a play that provoked great controversy. The cause of the contention was a scene in the second act when Eric von Rodeck, a German officer in French territory, has been insulted by Yvonne de Grandpre, a French girl, who throws a glass of wine in his face. He is given his opportunity for revenge when, after saving her from an attempted ravishment by the French innkeeper, Eric threatens her with the same fate. Yvonne's pleas move him to change his mind. Though she faints, he does not press his advantage. The innkeeper again attempts to ravish her, and Eric kills him. It is not until the end of the play that Yvonne learns of her rescue, and the play ends with her and Eric in each other's arms.[115]

Charles Frohman, who had said that he favored decency and morality in drama,[116] commented that "Aside from the fact that an audience likes to see the rescue of a man, and likes to follow a story of hatred turned to love, I claim that the redemption of Eric makes 'The Conquerors' a morally strong work and that we are issuing a splended sermon."[117]

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[113] "At the Theatres," NYDM, 17 April 1897.

[114] Morehouse, "Broadway After Dark."

[115] New York Herald, 9 January 1897. In every available description of the play, the word "rape" is not mentioned.

[116] See above, p. 61.

[117] "The Drama," clipping, n.d., clipping, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

The Dramatic Mirror, which was then at war with Frohman and the Syndicate, seemed to answer his statement with its headline: "Decency Outraged by Frohman. A Deliberate and Brazen Attempt to Debauch the Theatre, The Conquerors, Produced at the Empire, the Nastiest Play Ever Seen on a Reputable Stage--New York Newspapers Forced to Condemn It. . ."[118] Charles Nirdlinger provided a dispassionate view of the play:

> For the basilar act on which Mr. Potter constituted his exposition of lust and vulgarity is so prepostrous in conception, so unconsciously funny in its details, that I marvel how its intended nastiness prevailed over ridicule to the extent of attracting swarming audiences. . . .
>
> If the average spectators of "The Conquerors" could only have been trusted to see the side-splitting fun of all this, the really ludicrous element in Mr. Potter's strain to be hot i' the blood of his story and obscene in its texture, then, perhaps, it would not have been worthwhile to consider the subject seriously.
>
> In point of fact, the only "problem" that the play presents to reason and decency is whether the suppression of such drama comes within the province of the police or of the board of health.[119]

With the controversy surrounding the drama itself, some reviewers neglected the acting of The Conquerors; however, in the Dramatic Mirror, it was noted that:

> William Faversham and Viola Allen labored conscientiously to make tolerable the leading roles, and their impersonations were highly credible. Neither has ever acted with more sincerity or force. One must pause to consider the horror that would have befallen had these parts been attempted by players of less skill and refinement.[120]

Another reviewer expressed a similar opinion, noting that:

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118 NYDM, 9 January 1898.

119 Charles F. Nirdlinger, "The Conquerors," Illustrated American, 22 January 1898.

120 "At the Theatres," NYDM, 15 January 1898.

> In the hand of the Empire Stock Company, headed by Viola Allen and William Faversham, this play has achieved considerable success, but the making of the play has been so awkwardly accomplished that with a less able set of players it would be relegated to the sphere of melodrama on the Bowery. . . . Viola Allen invests her part of Yvonne de Grandpre with a grace and a charm that dissipates all sense of indelicacy.[121]

The critic of the Times, however, thought that the play affected Miss Allen's performance:

> Of the acting of the principals, Viola Allen's was hardly open to criticism last Tuesday night until the good imitation of nature in the drama gave way to rank artificiality. Her expression of just anger, pride, patience, and finally horror was convincing. All through she acted with zeal and tact.[122]

Yvonne de Grandpre was Viola Allen's last role with the Empire Theatre Stock Company for:

> . . . she is to be exploited as a star next season by Messres T.A. Liebler and Co. . . . Miss Allen is to remain under the management of the Liebler company during a period of five years and it is stipulated in her contract that she shall be provided with new plays, the merits of which will be carefully considered, and that she shall be surrounded by a high class company.[123]

After her last performance at the Empire, the cast and crew presented her with a jeweled gold chain purse and an inscribed scroll to wish her luck in her new venture.[124]

Commenting on the end of her years with the Empire Company, Miss Allen later wrote, "My beginnings might then, I suppose, be considered

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[121] Unidentified clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[122] "The Drama," New York Times Illustrated Magazine, 9 January 1898, p. 4.

[123] "Miss Allen Signs Contract," clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[124] New York Herald, 24 April 1898.

over."[125]

Two questions remain about the second phase of Viola Allen's career, her years with the Empire Theatre Company: why did she leave the company, and what did those five seasons do for her acting? Several factors might have caused her to break with Charles Frohman, a producer who had been very influential in her career to that point. While still at the Empire, she spoke of her dislike for two dramas in which she appeared, John-a-Dreams and Bohemia.[126] Another article said that her aversion to The Conquerors was so great that she had asked to have a clause inserted in her contract allowing her to decline parts under certain conditions. Frohman refused to insert such a clause.[127]

Viola Allen's decision to leave the Empire might have been influenced by the variety and quality of her roles. Frohman's dramatic taste was limited; most of the Empire's plays were sophisticated melodramas. Only three plays--Liberty Hall, The Importance of Being Earnest, and Marriage--were comedies. The majority of her roles at the Empire could be placed in one of two categories: the virtuous woman or the fallen, repentant woman. A few parts, such as Mrs. Treherne in Gudgeons, were weak or not particularly suitable to her acting talents. Except for the special engagement in The Rivals, she did not have an opportunity to play classical roles. When asked "What would you rather act most?", she replied:

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125 Allen, "My Beginnings," p. viii.

126 "Viola Allen's Preferences," clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

127 Unidentified clipping, 1 December 1901, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

> If I were put in possession of the magic wand of Merlin, I should wave in a grand revival of Shakespeare. I should like nothing better than to play Juliet. Any actress who has once had the privilege can never be content with anything less.[128]

If she remained with the Empire Company, it would be unlikely that her dream would be realized.

Though her roles at the Empire were not varied, many of these parts gave Miss Allen a chance to test her acting abilities. As Rosamund in Sowing the Wind, with the "sex against sex" speech, she received critical praise for her playing of a difficult scene. In The Masqueraders, as Dulcie, she again won acclaim, in this instance for her portrayal of a complex character. Though Michael and His Lost Angel was a failure, Miss Allen won a personal triumph with her ability to make the character of Audrie believable. As Yvonne in The Conquerors, she was able to mitigate the unsavory aspects of the play through her acting. These performances showed that Miss Allen, in some roles, fulfilled some of her early promise as an actress.

All of her characterizations were not successful, however, but the critics frequently noted that her acting was always competent, and her performances were intelligent, if not always inspiring. The sweet and womanly quality noticed in her early years was still present in Miss Allen's performances with the Empire Company, and many reviewers cited her personal charm as a contribution to her portrayal of characters.

Miss Allen's years with the Empire did not help to erase some of the faults in her acting that were noticed during her early career.

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128 "A Popular Leading Actress," NYDM, 8 February 1896.

Critics still remarked upon her vocal and facial mannerisms and some felt that these flaws were more pronounced now than they had been earlier. She was often criticized for being artificial, and for being unable to draw any deep emotional response from an audience through her acting. During the years with the Empire, some critics saw a lack of consistency in her acting. She could be either very natural or extremely artificial, sometimes in different parts of the same play. This trait would seem to indicate that Miss Allen was not always flexible enough to portray different moods of the same character.

While she was with the Empire Company, Miss Allen watched Charles Frohman create many new stars. Henry Miller, the company's leading man, had left the Empire to become a star in 1896. Maude Adams, who had been with John Drew's company, became a Frohman star in 1897. After five years as leading lady of the Empire Theatre Company, Miss Allen felt it was her turn to be elevated to that select group. Since Frohman would not give her the opportunity she felt she had earned, the actress went elsewhere.[129] Norman Hapgood observed that "the surest way for an American actor to become a star is to serve faithfully in the Frohman ranks until he is widely enough known to lead a company."[130] Miss Allen, whose earlier starring venture had failed in part due to lack of recognition, apparently realized the value of the exposure she had gained in her years at the Empire, and was now ready to exploit it.

After Viola Allen had announced her plans to become a star,

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[129] "Daly as Star Maker," clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[130] Norman Hapgood, The Stage in America, 1897-1900 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901), p. 32.

a commentator for the Dramatic Mirror looked back on her career at the Empire and offered his appraisal of her talents:

> Viola Allen, like Georgia Cayvan, has always seemed a part of the company in which she has played. Her associates have made a background against which her delineation of characters has shown out splendidly.
>
> But it seems to me that unless she be put at the head of an equally strong organization, her gracious, sympathetic style will be lost.[131]

Though the commentator felt that the Empire Theatre Company was an important factor in Viola Allen's success as an actress, she obviously did not agree, for she had left the group to pursue the more desirable position of a star.

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131 NDYM, 9 April 1898.

CHAPTER III

THE NEW STAR

"To this day I am grateful to George Tyler," Viola Allen stated in 1941. "He offered me my first starring contract. It lasted for five years and I owed a great deal to his imagination and foresight. He had such vision; he always looked ahead and always wanted the next thing to be greater and bigger than what we had already done. Now, as then, I think of him as a genius among producers."[1] Just as Charles Frohman figured prominently in the early years of her career, George C. Tyler was to be influential during Miss Allen's years as a star. During the first five years of their association (1898-1903) they worked together on four productions: The Christian, In the Palace of the King, The Hunchback, and The Eternal City. As a result of these successes, both the actress and the producer reached the heights of their profession in popularity and prestige.

In 1898, when she left Charles Frohman's Empire Theatre Company, Viola Allen took a big gamble. Her first venture as star, Talked About in 1886, had been a quick failure.[2] A reason for her leaving one of the country's top producers was that Frohman had not made her a star after five years of working for him. Miss Allen had no guarantee of her box office appeal, for it was the Empire Theatre Company, not the individual

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[1] Ormsbee, "Miss Viola Allen, Past and Present."

[2] See above, pp. 31-33.

players, that received the most prominent billing.[3] Nor could she be certain of the quality of the roles available to her. Frohman had been able to select his plays from the works of the most noted of contemporary dramatists,[4] but would these authors offer their work to an untried star? When she left the Empire Company, she could have become a leading lady for a male star, or played the lead in a traveling company of an established and popular drama. Instead, she chose to venture into the unknown, as a new star in an untried play.

George C. Tyler also believed in taking risks. Born in Centerville, Ohio in 1867, Tyler grew up in Chillicothe, where his father owned a newspaper. At the age of twelve, he persuaded his father to let him leave school and become an apprentice at the newspaper. Besides learning the printer's trade, the boy also was assigned to be the theatrical correspondent for the paper. Chillicothe grew too tame for the restless teenager, however, and Tyler left hom at seventeen to travel across the country, working as a printer. His father lured him back by offering him a chance to manage Clough's Opera House in Chillicothe. This short season of 1888 was an artistic success, but a financial failure. Later Tyler worked in New York as a reporter for the Dramatic News and, in 1890, the Dramatic Mirror. He spent five years in the 1890s on the road as an advance man for several companies, including one of James O'Neill's tours of The Count of Monte Cristo. His attempts at producing were unsuccessful until he starred Charles Coghlan

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[3] Playbill, n.d., Player's Collection, Viola Allen folder, Lincoln Center.

[4] See above, p. 61-62.

in The Royal Box in 1897. In order to raise the necessary capital for the centure, he formed a partnership with a printing acquaintance named Theodore A. Liebler, who had the necessary cash. The firm of Liebler and Company was born.[5]

From the beginning of the partnership, Liebler and Tyler maintained a division of responsibilities in the firm. Liebler served as treasurer, lending his name and financial backing to the enterprise, keeping a watch over the business affairs, but letting Tyler be responsible for all of the decisions concerning the plays and the productions. Tyler, for his part, had an enthusiasm for the theatre and the practical knowledge needed to mount a successful production. Together they formed an ideal partnership.[6] It was Tyler's views that determined the plays the new firm would produce. Harris, in his evaluation, noted that:

> Tyler was a fourth or fifth generation, middle-class American, secure in his belief that decency, self-confidence, hard work, ingenuity and luck would enable a man to rise to the top, his integrity unsullied and his destiny firmly on the side of the angels. Like many of his contemporaries, he would have been confident that America's hopes (and his) lay in the affirmation of the positive values represented by simple virtues, morality, patriotism, religious faith, and respectability and obedience to the Commandments (particularly the fifth and seventh). "He believed," said his friend Booth Tarkington, in "art, beauty, and heaven." He was, in short, a Victorian.[7]

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[5] The account of George C. Tyler's career is taken from George C. Tyler and J.C. Furnas, Whatever Goes Up: The Hazardous Fortunes of a Natural Born Gambler (Indianapolis, Indiana: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1934), pp. 1-40, and Harris, pp. 62-70.

[6] Harris, pp. 56-63.

[7] Ibid., pp. 27-28.

Tyler's beliefs might have been conservative and conventional, but they were ideals with which Viola Allen could feel very comfortable.

Though in later years Viola Allen was grateful to Tyler for offering her a starring contract, at the time of their first association, it was Tyler who was appreciative. He subsequently wrote a detailed account of their initial meeting:

> So I played the same system again when the chance came along, betting the few dollars we had left on another of my private admirations--nothing intelligent about it--sheer hunch. It was Viola Allen this time. I'd been an ardent admirer of her performances ever since I'd first seen her, when she was a child of sixteen, playing Esmeralda. . . . When I read . . . that she was planning to leave the Empire Company and strike out on her own as a star . . . I walked round my chair three times for luck and wrote her a note of the same presumptuous tenor as the one I'd written to Coghlan [Charles Coghlan, the star of Tyler's first successful production].
>
> It's a hundred to one she'd never heard of me at all, but she was a polite lady, so she asked me to come and talk to her, if I liked, about the possibility of our doing business. On my way up to her house, I was careful to invest a nickel in a shoe-shine. . . . Long afterward, Miss Allen told me that all the time she was listening to my glowing account of what we would do for her, she was unable to take her eyes off the brilliant high-lights on my newly shined shoes . . . She asked me: "How much money are you prepared to lose on this venture, Mr. Tyler?" All the other managers who were after her, you see, had been telling her they'd be willing to lose thousands of dollars just to get her established. And, in all honesty, I could but answer nothing but: "Why, I don't expect to lose any. I count on winning from the jump."
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> This was no salesman's line either. Liebler and Company had to win from the jump or go down for the last time. So we signed a contract on the strength of my inordinate optimism and commenced looking round for a play to star her in.[8]

Finding an appropriate drama for Miss Allen was not an easy task, for as Tyler noted ". . . satisfactory vehicles for great

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8 Tyler and Furnas, pp. 140-141.

emotional actresses don't grow on every bush."[9] A newspaper account of her signing with Liebler and Company reported that her likely vehicle would be The Courtship of Miles Standish, a dramatization of the Longfellow poem by Stanislaus Stange. Miss Allen would play Priscilla. The article also noted that her management was planning to present her in a dramatization of a famous novel by an English author.[10]

It was the second possibility that provided Viola Allen with her first starring role. Charles Frohman gave her the dramatization of Hall Caine's best-selling novel, The Christian. Frohman owned the rights to the piece but decided against producing it because it reminded him of Michael and His Lost Angel, one of his failures.[11] As Tyler later recalled:

> When Miss Allen decided that she thought it [The Christian] might have possibilities, I looked wise and agreed. When she said she thought it would need a lot of rewriting, I agreed again. Then we--principally she--figured out the necessary changes and it was determined that she go to England and put them up to the author in person. That suited me in every way. She was a very famous and highly intelligent and uncommonly beautiful lady and I was nobody in particular . . . and besides, she had the price of a trip and I distinctly hadn't.[12]

At the time of her visit, Hall Caine was one of the most popular authors of the day, The Christian being the sixth of his successful novels dealing with the Isle of Man. The son of a Manx blacksmith, Caine received a sketchy education before becoming a clerk to a Liverpool

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[9] Ibid., p. 141.

[10] "Miss Allen Signs Contracts," New York Telegram, 8 April 1898.

[11] Leander Richardson, clipping, 31 May 1903, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[12] Tyler and Furnas, pp. 141-142.

architect at age fourteen. For about a year he assisted a schoolteacher uncle and he later ran a school by himself on the Isle of Man. When he returned to his job with the architect, he began contributing articles to professional journals. The turning point in his career came in 1879 when he began his correspondence with Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Caine became the poet's secretary in 1881, and stayed with Rosetti until his death in 1882. Caine's own writing career expanded, but it was not until 1887 that he achieved popular success with his first Manx novel, The Deemster. By 1898, he had written several best-selling novels, and from the profits purchased an estate on the Isle of Man, Greeba Castle, where he lived for most of the year.[13] A moody person, Caine was subject to attacks of nervous depression for much of his life.

The Christian was published in 1897 and the novelist himself prepared the dramatization of the book. In the play, John Storm, a young aristocrat, and Glory Quayle, a working-class girl, are sweethearts from the Isle of Man. Both go off to London to pursue careers, he to become a minister and she to become a nurse. Storm, deeply religious and somber by nature, is appalled by the vanity and frivolity of London, and shocked by the worldliness of its clergy. After six months, he abandons London and enters a monastery. Glory, too, is upset by her new life in London, particularly the hollowness and cruelty of the hospital authorities. She, however, is a beautiful, vivacious girl with a love of life. Moving in quite the opposite direction from Storm, she accepts an opportunity to go on the stage. Storm, meanwhile, becomes

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[13] Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycroft, eds., Twentieth Century Authors (New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 1942), pp. 235-237.

increasingly tormented by his love for Glory, a love which is at war with his religious convictions. He leaves the monastery in disgrace and returns to London to found a shelter for unfortunate and homeless girls. Glory, after many tribulations, is now a famous music hall singer. The two lovers meet again and separate, are reunited, and make plans for marriage. Glory then writes Storm that she cannot live the life they had planned. Besides the pronounced differences between the natures of the two lovers, each has contrary strains in his own character that makes their eventual union highly unlikely.

After Glory breaks their engagement, Storm comes to her room, bent on murdering her in order to save her soul from the life she has been leading. By repeatedly reminding him of their youthful love, Glory dissuades him from his purpose. At the end of the confrontation, they are in each other's arms. These scenes of renunciation and reunion might have gone on forever had Storm not stirred up much enmity with his work in the London slums. His enemies instigate a mob which starts a brawl. Here the novel and the play diverge. In the book, Storm is mortally wounded and he and Glory are married on his death bed. In the play, he is not as seriously wounded. Glory, realizing her love for him, vows to forsake her frivolous life and together they plan to work among the poor.[14]

Persuading Caine to make changes in the manuscript was not easy; he had a reputation for being difficult.[15] With Miss Allen's prompting,

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[14] Hall Caine, The Christian, t.s., n.d., Lincoln Center. Differences between the play and the book are described in "The Christian in Book and Play," clipping, 15 October 1899, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[15] "Glory Quayle and The Christian," The Coming Age, July 1899, p. 22.

he moved the location of the first act to the Isle of Man to allow Glory to appear earlier in the play.[16] Other alterations, made with the star's suggestions, were necessary to change the five hundred page novel into a play. In the final dramatization:

> The effect of the changes in the Liebler dramatization . . . was to bring more attention on Glory Quayle, to eliminate the social and political aspects of the story, to halt the narrative at the moment of happiness for the hero and the heroine, and generally to convert the tone of the original novel into a sentimental hymn to love and redemption. A significant change is wrought in the moral character of the girl. Glory is changed from what the Victorians would call a fallen woman into a young innocent, desperately fighting to preserve her virtue in the face of overwhelming odds against her.[17]

During the long run of The Christian, Miss Allen gave many interviews in which she discussed her feelings about the story and her conception of Glory. Speaking of The Christian, she said:

> When I first read the book, it impressed me as most powerfully written, most wonderfully original in its conception, construction and characterization, and possessed of many unusual dramatic possibilities. . . . Many people undoubtedly regard the views expressed by the author as extreme, but no one will deny the great underlying power of the story. The contrasting character drawing is most forceful and graphic, especially that of Glory Quayle and John Storm.[18]

Continuing, she discussed Glory: "While Glory Quayle is not an ordinary girl, the character appeals to me as most thoroughly human."[19] In another interview, she expanded her ideas of Glory:

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[16] Philip McKay, "Miss Viola Allen Discusses Glory Quayle and "The Christian," Illustrated American, 28 October 1898.

[17] Harris, pp. 344-345.

[18] McKay, "Viola Allen Discusses Glory Quayle."

[19] Ibid.

> [One] of the strong features of Glory, and, indeed, of the play, is the emphasizing of the fact that Glory has her dream no less than John Storm . . . As I see and feel her nature, it is not the restless desire to enjoy the new, untried life which leads her to leave her home, so much as the double desire to be no longer a burden on her dear ones and the hope, born of the enthusiasm of youth and self-conscious power, which makes her feel that she can and will rise. . . . Glory sacrifices all these for the hunted and calumniated lover of her girlhood. This is the impulse of true womanhood.[20]

With a dramatization of The Christian written and the leading lady preparing her role, Liebler and Company began to put together the production. Edward J. Morgan, on loan from Daniel Frohman, was the original John Storm. At the time, ". . . he was the most promising young leading man in the country . . . "[21] An Englishman, Morgan began his acting career in America, playing a soldier in Shenandoah. After several seasons of touring, he became a member of Daniel Frohman's Lyceum Stock Company where he soon attained prominence. At the request of Charles Frohman, Daniel lent Morgan to Viola Allen's company for the initial weeks of The Christian, though the actor had to leave the play for the scheduled run of Trelawny of the Wells with the Lyceum troupe in November 1898.[22]

Two actors who had previously worked with Miss Allen had prominent roles in the new production. John Mason, who had played leading roles with the actress in the Boston Museum Stock company, was cast as Horatio Drake.[23] Jamison Lee Finney, a former member of the Empire

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[20] "Glory Quayle," The Coming Age, p. 22.

[21] George C. Tyler, "I Remember, I REMEMBER," New York Daily News, 25 September 1934.

[22] Washington Post, 2 October 1898.

[23] See above, pp. 58-59.

Theatre Company, portrayed Lord Robert Ure.[24] Other members of the original New York company included: C.G. Craig, George Woodward, R.J. Dillon, Guy Nichols, Myron Calice, Edgar Norton, Frank J. Keenan, Mrs. Georgia Dickson, Ethel Marlowe, Carrie Merrilees, Perdita Hudspeth, Bessie Dunn and Ethel Merrilees. William Furst of the Empire Theatre wrote an original score for the production and Louis Young painted the scenery. The production was under the supervision of the author of the drama, with Frank J. Keenan acting as stage manager and staging the mob scenes.[25] Miss Allen was responsible for persuading Caine to come to America and supervise the production.[26]

Things seemed to be progressing satisfactorily for the company, but the producer, however, encountered one of the usual problems of his vocation, a lack of money. Tyler relates the story:

> Not a jarring note came up until rehearsals were already well under way. Then, however, there appeared that faint troubled look in the star's and author's eyes every time the subject of money came up or was mentioned. . . . Not that they said anything--their manners were too good for that . . . [At] length they got around to inquiring, ever so gently, just when we were going to open in New York and at what theatre? . . . I carefully evaded the issue. I didn't know anyone who'd be damn fool enough to let us have a New York theatre to play . . . The only dodge I could think of was to go round to Mr. Erlanger [Abraham Erlanger, a member of the Syndicate] . . . and ask if he wouldn't like to see one of the rehearsals. I figured that his

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[24] Finney is listed as a member of the Empire Theatre Company on a playbill for Lady Betty's Highwayman, Hollis Street Theatre, 2 November 1896, Lincoln Center.

[25] Playbill, The Christian, Knickerbocker Theatre, n.d., Collection of the author.

[26] Tyler and Furnas, p. 142.

> mere presence would buck the whole outfit up. . . . He came and watched, he approved, he bought a third interest in the production--and, from then on, things began to roll.[27]

With the necessary financing secured, The Christian opened in Albany, New York, on 23 September 1898. Newspaper accounts of the first performance give additional details of the production. Four different settings were required for the play: the tilting ground and the ruins of Peel Castle, Isle of Man; the saloon of the Coliseum Music Hall, London; the club room of St. Mary's Church, Soho; and Glory's apartment in the Garden House, Clement's Inn. It was promised that the sets would ". . . be remarkable for their massive magnificence."[28] Electric lighting and mechanical effects completed the scenery. Besides the sixteen principals of the cast, there were twenty-eight experienced performers for the great mob scene in the church. Furst's music, written especially for the piece, wove several Manx airs into the continuity.[29] In The Christian, as in most of its productions, Liebler and Company followed the standard scenic practices of the period, with the emphasis on elaborate realism through painted rather than three-dimensional scenery. The costuming was also ornately realistic. The firm, however, always took great care to insure the technical quality of its productions.[30]

Albany had nothing but praise for the debut of The Christian. It was "One of the most notable 'first nights' in the theatrical history of Albany. . . "[31]

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[27] Ibid., pp. 142-143.

[28] "The Christian," Albany Argus, 24 September 1898.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Harris, pp. 191-206.

[31] "The Christian's Debut," unidentified Albany paper, 24 September 1898, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

From Albany, the play went to Washington for a week's run and there it was also greeted enthusiastically:

> It is not enough to state that the theatre was crowded, for in judging audiences . . . quality counts even more than numbers. And it is safe to say that in no city of the land could a more representative American audience than that of last night have gathered. . . . [It] was composed of cultured critical people who are cognizant of literary and theatrical affairs and capable of reflecting the best sentiment of their widely scattered sections of the country.[32]

From the Washington audience, the cast received fourteen curtain calls on the opening night's performance. Receipts for the week's performances were over ten thousand dollars.[33]

After a week in Washington, The Christian opened in New York City on 10 October 1898, at the Knickerbocker Theatre.[34] Something of what might have been in Miss Allen's mind at that time may be discerned from an interview she gave:

> No matter . . . how many years of experience one may have had on the stage, the first night of a new production cannot be looked forward to but with considerable nervous anxiety. A raw character, to be portrayed amid new scenic surroundings, with perhaps artists whose stage methods are known only from contact with them at rehearsals, involves special responsibilities which the experienced artist feels most keenly.
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> I do not think I ever made an entrance on the stage at the first night's performance of a new production that I was not intensely nervous and apprehensive for my fellow players and myself. . . . First night audiences in New York are apt to be extremely critical and not as responsive

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[32] "At the Play-Houses," unidentified Washington paper, 27 September 1898, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[33] Unidentified clipping, n.d., Washington, D.C., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[34] T.P. James, "The Christian," New York Criterion, 11 October 1898.

> to the efforts of the player as other audiences which gather to see the new play at a later time.[35]

Her apprehension, however, was unwarranted in this case because The Christian proved to be as big a success in New York as it had been in Albany and Washington. Tyler wrote of that opening night:

> Between the second and third acts on the New York opening night, I tore myself away from the cheering audience long enough to drop in the box office--I wanted to find some hard-boiled professional who would congratulate me and tell me it was all true. There in the box office I found the whole theatrical syndicate, the lords of the stage creation, sitting there in sort of a shocked silence . . . Nobody was saying a word--There wasn't a sound but the roar of applause from inside.[36]

For the season of 1898-1899, the play proved to be one of the most successful dramas on the New York stage. In a time when a long run was the exception rather than the rule, its one hundred sixty performances were surpassed by only three plays: The Runaway Girl, a musical comedy; The Turtle, and The Man in the Moon, a spectacular fantasy. In comparison, Henry Arthur Jones's The Liars ran for one hundred twelve performances, William Gillette's Because She Loved Him So, for one hundred and forty-four, and Richard Mansfield in Rostand's Cyrano de Bergerac for only forty-eight performances.[37]

One might argue that certain productions would play New York for a limited run before going on the road, making a comparison of the length of runs an unreliable indication of success, but an examination of financial figures also shows the tremendous popularity of The Christian. In

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[35] "They Make Miss Allen Nervous," clipping, 16 October 1898, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[36] Tyler and Furnas, p. 143.

[37] Chapman and Sherwood, Best Plays 1894-1899, pp. 233-260.

the third week of the production, it had the largest receipts of any play in New York, running against such attractions as Richard Mansfield in Cyrano, John Drew in The Liars and Joseph Jefferson in The Rivals.[38] Another week, the receipts for The Christian were fifteen thousand dollars while Drew grossed thirteen thousand and Mansfield only twelve thousand dollars.[39] Tyler later wrote of his feelings about this great financial success:

> In the first burst of delirium I bet Hayman a Jim Bell overcoat that we'd play to fifteen thousand dollars a week as long as we stayed at the Knickerbocker--a fool bet to make, but I won it anyway . . . I really think the only thing that saved my sanity was the newspaper reviews the next morning--every paper except The Herald damned The Christian up and down dale--Willie Winter on the Tribune called it The Christian Pill. That alone made sense--it was the only recognizable touch in a world gone crazy.[40]

Tyler's comments point to the one aspect of the production that was subject to almost universal disapproval, the drama itself. The dean of New York critics, William Winter, did not change his opinion of the play after time for reflection. He later wrote:

> The public, however, derived no material benefit from Mr. Caine's drama, for it proved to be only a loose, inadequate, ineffective synopsis of his novel. It revealed an essayist insisting that, being an essayist, he was also a dramatist, and a moralist declaring that doctrines and precepts are the synonyms of situations and action. . . . Those authors who write novels and make plays for the purpose of teaching lessons, inculcating truths, revolutionizing society, and reforming mankind, become tedious

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[38] Flyer of comparative receipts, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[39] "List of Receipts for a Week," clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[40] Tyler and Furnas, p. 144.

and therein they measurably defeat their purpose.[41]

Norman Hapgood, another influential New York critic, was equally disdainful of the play. He wrote:

> Oh, it was a bad play. The trade of novel writing has been learned by Mr. Caine up to his limit, while in drama he is a beginner. In the art of being stupid, as in other things, I personally prefer the expert to the novice, And so--if I had to do either--I would rather read The Christian again, with such reasonable skipping as necessary to preserve my sanity, than to sit through it at the theatre.[42]

Similar reactions to the drama were expressed by critics across the country, but perhaps the most perceptive comment on the play was made by Henry Jewett, an actor who played John Storm. He said "There's lots of buncombe in it, lots of buncombe."[43]

Though the dramatization of The Christian may not have made a good play, the faults of the piece were overcome by strong acting. Viola Allen, in her first starring role, was the focus of much commentary for her portrayal of Glory. A sampling of the critical opinions from around the country gives some notion of the variety of the reviews. "I remain of the opinion that Eleanora Duse is an actress of about the calibre of Viola Allen," wrote the critic of the Philadelphia Press, "and I am convinced she could not play 'Glory Quayle' any better than this American girl does, for Miss Allen makes 'Glory' intensely human in the midst of most artificial surroundings."[44] The reviewer

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[41] William Winter, The Wallet of Time, vol. 1 (New York: Moffat and Co., 1913), p. 436.

[42] Hapgood, p. 350.

[43] Lewis C. Strang, Famous Actresses of the Day in America, second series (Boston: L.C. Page and Co., 1902), p. 134.

[44] "The Lounger in the Lobby," Philadelphia Press, 19 November 1899.

of the Indianapolis Daily Journal, however, had some reservations about the star's performance:

> Concerning the Miss Allen portrayal of the character of Gloria [sic] Quayle, it is easy to see that there might be many and conflicting opinions. She is undeniably a beautiful woman and possesses a great magnetism and a commanding stage presence. It must be admitted, however, that her work was wanting in the element of art which conceals art; in other words, while she demonstrated herself to be an actress of consummate power, Miss Allen was never able to make her audience forget that she was acting.[45]

An unknown Chicago critic noted how Miss Allen played one scene:

> Her maidenly modesty forbids her revealing her real feelings, and when Father Storm . . . bids her be gone she tries to laugh him out of his ascetic sternness. But the tears are really in her eyes while she laughs and chatters on. . . . Miss Allen, half-laughing, half-crying, was as moving a spectacle as the stage ever affords. She dropped her mannerisms, she forgot to square her words and stances with a hard rule as she is too prone to do, and the very heart of her seemed to speak.[46]

In the Louisville Courier-Journal, the reviewer thought that Miss Allen was not physically right for the role:

> Miss Allen fails physically to meet the ideal that one has formed of the impetuous "Glory Quayle." Aside from eyes of remarkable magnetism, power and expression, she can lay no claim to physical beauty. She is slight and rather below than above average height; assuredly she is not the type of magnificent womanhood represented by the "Glory Quayle" of one's imagination. And yet there is not one who witnessed last night's presentation that can deny . . . the charm and force of the actress.[47]

In the opinion of the critic of the St. Louis Star, her success as Glory is:

> . . . simply the expression of public devotion for past endeavors. Intelligent and thoroughly equipped as she is, the admitted leader among romantic stage heroines, she

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[45] Indianapolis Daily Journal, 17 March 1900.

[46] Unidentified clipping, Chicago, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[47] Louisville Courier-Journal, 8 March 1900.

> knows that there is no genuine romance of love or of ambition in the part she has assumed nightly these many months. Hence, her entire portrayal from beginning to end is unreal, unnatural, overstrained. . . . The play is so badly adjusted to Miss Allen's capabilities that one sometimes wonders where her art that has placed her on so high a pedestal in former days may be in there.[48]

Neither the negative comments on the play nor the mixed notices for Miss Allen's acting performance kept audiences from attending The Christian. Over one hundred and eighty thousand people saw the play in New York alone.[49] For the seasons of 1898 and 1899, the Liebler Company realized a profit of five hundred thousand dollars on the play, ranking it third among the firm's top grossing plays.[50] Part of the explanation of the play's appeal was the fact that The Christian is counted a very moral play with great influence for good among the public.[51] One could therefore see the drama, confident that one was not wasting time on mere entertainment but was being inspired by the experience. Discussing the audience for The Christian, Lewis Strang noted that:

> It chiefly appeals to persons on whom the theatre-going habit is not permanently fixed, and who, therefore, are not analysers, consciously or unconsciously, of dramatic effects. The sentiments in the speeches of John Storm that are uttered by the actor with all the solemnity of complete conviction, strike the unsophisticated with peculiar force.[52]

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[48] St. Louis Star, 24 October 1899.

[49] Unidentified clipping, Boston, March 1899, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[50] Harris, p. 93.

[51] Frank J. Martin, "The Christian," Cleveland Plain Dealer, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[52] Strang, Famous Actresses, p. 135.

Part of the success of all Liebler and Company productions can be attributed to its press department which managed public relations for the firm. Perhaps Tyler's background in the newspaper business helped him to establish an effective public relations department for Liebler and Company, capable of generating the needed publicity for a production. One example of the Liebler and Company method was the special matinee of The Christian performed for over two thousand ministers in New York City on 15 November 1898.[53] Not only did the matinee give the clerical stamp of approval to both the play and the production, but it also provided an item that would be picked up by other papers to publicize the play. As the production toured the country, the matinee would be recalled in the local paper, generating more notice for the play.[54]

The press department of Liebler and Company had a variety of methods that it used to promote a play or a star. It regularly distributed press releases to newspapers,[55] interviews and photographs of the stars were also handed out. Performers' biographies and pictures were placed in popular monthly magazines, such as Munsey's and The Ladies Home Journal.[56] Sometimes the article would be attributed to the star, as in "What It Means to be an Actress," which carries Miss

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[53] Unidentified clipping, n.d., Viola Allen collection, Lincoln Center.

[54] For an example, see Arthur D. Brandeis, "Viola Allen as Glory Quayle," Chicago Dramatic Magazine, October 1899.

[55] The Viola Allen Collection at Lincoln Center has several articles marked "Compliments of Liebler and Company, not duplicated in your city."

[56] Harris, pp. 221-230.

Allen's name as author.[57] In his study of Liebler and Company, Harris states that it is impossible to determine whether such articles were ghostwritten or not.[58] While it cannot be proven that all articles by the stars of Liebler and Company were ghost written, strong evidence shows that in the case of Viola Allen, the articles were a collaboration between the star and her press agent. To Frank J. Wilstach, her press agent, she wrote:

> It was indeed nice of you to not feel that the little alterations I made in the first story were horrible . . . or unnecessary.
>
> In the first place, I don't want to pose as a writer--that is . . . under false colors.
>
> Do keep the story "Are Curtain Calls Inartistic" for use later . . . I made a very clumsy addition after the . . . paragraphs near the end. Please use the Historical Novel and Play article.[59]

Though she might not have been the sole author of the articles attributed to her, Miss Allen evidently read, approved and occassionally made additions to the pieces.

With the advantage of good publicity and favorable audiences, Miss Allen and The Christian toured the country for two years. The first season was spent mostly in New York and Boston, and the following year she played further South and West, with long engagements in Philadelphia and Chicago.[60] When Edward Morgan returned to Daniel Frohman, Henry Jewett and then Joseph Haworth played John Storm in

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[57] Allen, "To Be an Actress."

[58] Harris, p. 230.

[59] Viola Allen, letter to Frank J. Wilstach, 8 August 1900, Frank J. Wilstach Collection, Manuscript Division, New York Public Library. Miss Allen's handwriting has a particularly strong right slant. She used a broad nibbed pen and heavy black ink. These factors made her writing difficult to read and occasionally a word could not be deciphered by the researcher.

[60] Brandeis, "Viola Allen as Glory Quayle"

New York.[61] On tour, Jewett and Robert Drouet appeared in the role. Also in the touring company were Edgar L. Davenport, another acquaintance from the Boston Museum, and C. Leslie Allen.[62]

Though The Christian was still touring in 1899, plans for Viola Allen's future were already being made by Liebler and Company. According to a contract dated 4 July 1899, between F. Marion Crawford and the management firm, the novelist agreed to write a novel that could be dramatized by Lorimar Stoddard and "to use every means in his power and talent to produce a story suited . . . to the talents of Miss Viola Allen."[63] When the signing of the contract was reported in The Dramatic Magazine, Arthur Brandeis noted:

> This will be one of the first instances on record in which the personality of the artist who will present the dramatized version of a book has been introduced into the original pages of the novel. Taking this fact in view, it can be readily understood how congenial the role should be to Miss Allen, and how well it should suit itself to her individuality.[64]

Why Miss Allen would choose to abandon a successful play for a new drama was explained by a press release which noted the limits that appearing in one role places on an actor's artistic growth, and how an actor could be locked into one part for the rest of his career.[65] The star was not as courageous as the article made her appear, however,

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61 Chapman and Sherwood, Best Plays 1894-1899, p. 242.

62 FJD, "Monday Night Bills, Philadelphia Item, 14 November 1899. For information on Davenport, see above pp.

63 Contract between Liebler and Company and F. Marion Crawford, 4 July 1899, Liebler and Company Collection, Lincoln Center.

64 Brandeis, "Viola Allen as Glory Quayle."

65 "Every Success Has Its Sting," Press release, t.s., n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

for many stars--Maude Adams, Julia Marlowe, Minnie Maddern Fiske, for example--changed plays after one or two seasons. The actress' desire to try new roles was probably sincere, though even while working at the Empire Theatre, Miss Allen wrote of the monotony of a long run.[66] It would certainly be better to change plays while her popularity was at a high point than to wait until The Christian had run its course and then try a new play.

Again, Tyler chose a dramatization of a novel for Miss Allen. He later confessed to a fondness for dramatized novels ever since the success of The Christian.[67] He also described the manner in which In the Palace of the King came to be written:

> The way we put In the Palace of the King together can stand as a sample of our methods in this period of doing things lavishly. . . . eventually we'd need something sure-fire for Miss Allen to follow it [The Christian], with something so spectacular and expensive, of course, that it couldn't miss. . . . A little hasty research developed, for sheer lavishness of background, the period of the Field of the Cloth of Gold was about the world's record . . . a little more thought . . suggested that the only man who could really do that background justice was F. Marion Crawford, the great romancer. So I wrote to Crawford, whom, of course, I'd never seen in my life, coolly suggesting that he might like to write us a novel along those lines that we could dramatize. To take the edge off my presumptions, I carefully enclosed a few figures about the receipts of The Christian for credentials. . . . Did it work? Certainly.[68]

Francis Marion Crawford, though an American citizen, was born and spent most of his life in Italy. His father, Thomas, was a sculptor and his mother was a sister of Julia Ward Howe. While attending several universities, he developed a gift for languages and eventually traveled

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[66] See above, pp.

[67] Tyler and Furnas, p. 149.

[68] Ibid., pp. 151-152.

to India to study Sanskirt. Crawford edited a newspaper and wrote reviews before publishing his first novel in 1883, Mr. Isaacs. A prolific writer, he published twenty-six works between his first book and In the Palace of the King in 1900. Many of the works were romances, several were set in Italy, and all featured complicated plots, vivid characterizations, and richly detailed settings.[69]

Crawford's style can be seen in the play, In the Palace of the King. Set in Spain's Golden Age during the reign of Philip II, it is the story of the love between Don John of Austria, the King's brother, and Dolores de Mendoza, the daughter of a soldier. Their union is opposed by Philip, who wants Dolores for his mistress, and also by her father, who fears that because his daughter is not high born, such a marriage would disgrace both his daughter and Spain. The Princess Eboli also wishes to prevent the marriage since she is in love with Don John. Captain Mendoza tries to stop his daughter from seeing her sweetheart by locking her in her room, but she escapes and goes to Don John's apartment. Here she overhears a quarrel between the King and his brother. Cardinal Torres tries to mediate the disagreement but is stabbed and apparently killed by the King. Philip then forces his brother to take the blame for the murder. At a victory celebration, both the Cardinal's death and Don John's arrest are announced. Dolores puts the life of her fiancé above her honor, and tells the court of her visit to Don John's rooms and what she saw there. Though the King had sentenced his brother to death, he is compelled to rescind his

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[69] Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, American Authors 1600-1900 (New York: The H.W. Wilson Co., 1938), pp. 190-191.

decree when Dolores's tale turns the entire court against him. The final blow to the King is delivered by the Cardinal who returns alive, to corroborate Dolores's story and to rescue her honor. Philip is now forced to consent to the marriage of Dolores and Don John; the villains are punished and all ends happily.[70]

Following the pattern of The Christian, Viola Allen again played a role in the development of the play; and, in this case, the novel on which it was based. She, her mother, and Tyler traveled to Italy to consult with Crawford on his work. Lorimar Stoddard, who dramatized Tess of the d'Ubervilles, one of Minnie Maddern Fiske's greatest successes, was engaged to adapt the novel to the stage.[71] There were, however, some flaws in Stoddard's work, for Tyler wrote to William Seymour, a noted play doctor and the director of Palace, telling him:

> Stoddard has delivered us his play which is in bulk satisfactory, but it will need many serious alterations which he will have to make, and at the earliest possible moment. Miss Allen has been simply living in the manuscript for the last three or four days and now she wants you to come up and go over the thing carefully with her. After you and she have satisfied yourselves as well as possible, then I will send for Stoddard and have him do the finishing up. Unless she has the benefit of the advice and assistance of a practical man like yourself, we are going to lose a lot of time in making the necessary alterations.[72]

Even Crawford, who was in poor health, came to the United States and toured with the company for six weeks in order to get the drama in shape. In spite of the flaws, "due to Miss Allen's great personal

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[70]Lorimar Stoddard, In the Palace of the King, t.s., n.d., Lincoln Center.

[71]"The Making of a Play," Washington Post, 30 September 1900.

[72]George C. Tyler, Letter to William Seymour, 21 June 1900, Tyler papers, Firestone Library, Princeton University, hereafter referred to as Princeton.

draw, the receipts were enormous long before we'd got the dramatization worked out into what we considered decent shape."[73]

The effects of all the cooks on the stew of In the Palace of the King may be seen in the criticism of the play: "[With] so much plot, so many intrigues and so many characters trying to dodge one another through the palace of the King, one is rather bewildered to keep track of the main thread."[74] While mentioning the deficiencies of the piece, Ernest Freiberger also stated its strong points:

> Its action, altho [sic] occasionally halting, is more often quick and tempered to the times that gave elegance even to passion; and its language, while occasionally spirited and terse, is more often constructed in sentences too involved . . . [Some] of the scenes might be reduced in length, containing much that is awkwardly explanatory . . . The love interest is well sustained, and holds the attention of the audience because the lover's plans are so continuously disturbed by kingly strategy, parental objection and jealous rivalry. The play is plentiful in surprises, and what is greatly to its credit, it commands attention to the very end.[75]

"Commanding in the material arrangement of its scenes, sumptuous and most alluring in matter and richness of environment, and marvelously well acted, it is, when faults and merits have been well weighted and carefully balanced, to be set down as one of the season's undisputed successes," wrote Montgomery Phister. He continues:

> Miss Allen . . . is a most fascinating, if not at all times a thoroughly convincing actress. No one has ever denied her possession of talent. . . . "In the Palace of the King" owes much of its present popularity to the excellence of the company engaged with Miss Allen in its acting.[76]

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[73] Tyler and Furnas, pp. 152, 155.

[74] "At the Theatres," Washington Post, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[75] Edward Freiberger, Chicago Saturday Evening Herald, 27 October 1900.

[76] Montgomery Phister, "Montgomery Phister Talks of Viola Allen and Her New Play," Cincinnati Tribune, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

In the supporting company were Eban Plympton as Philip, Edgar L. Davenport as the Cardinal, Marcia Van Dresser as the Princess Eboli, Gertrude Norman as Inez, Clarence Handyside as Captain de Mendoza, Robert T. Haines as Don John, C. Leslie Allen as Antonio Perez, and William Norris as Miguel. Norris, in particular, was singled out for much praise. William Seymour staged the play.[77]

Viola Allen's performance again drew a range of critical reaction that covered the entire spectrum of possibilities. A sampling of reviews from five of the major theatrical centers in the country is representative of the criticism. In Chicago, one critic wondered how the play might affect her future acting:

> Her personality, too, helps the play from beginning to end, even when her acting is marred by the false note of the play. And it is this marring one means when making the statement that her reputation will not gain from her association with the play. The latter will secure much of its popularity from her, but she will be paying the cost of what comes from lowering her talents to its level. The next piece she attempts will show the measure of her loss, in the same way the present play discloses what effect her long appearance as Glory Quayle in "The Christian" had upon her. . . . Miss Allen herself will wish some day that she could forget Dona Dolores de Mendoza, the machine-made heroine of a machine-made play.[78]

"From the moment Miss Viola Allen came upon the stage until the final curtain, it was apparent that she was the magnet of attraction," commented a Philadelphia reviewer. He continued:

> As played by Miss Allen, Dolores is a light-hearted girl of many a merry mood, yet one of strong purpose and steadfast will. . . . Miss Allen's comedy was certain and sure.

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[77] The cast is taken from Freiberger's review. Both he and Phister, to give two instances, devote much space to Norris's portrayal of the dwarf court jester.

[78] Chicago Tribune, 28 October 1900.

> She displayed all the varying moods of joyous expectancy to joyous realization with an ingenuous fidelity that was charming, artless and graceful. . . . [The] actress placed herself in sympathy with her audience and they were ready to respond to the stronger and more emotional scenes that followed. Here too, Miss Allen was authoritative as a rule, though in the address to the nobles . . . there was lacking the fiery oratory and fierce abandon of a passionate, desperate woman . . . In the quieter but strongly dramatic scene where she wins a confession of guilt from the King . . . Miss Allen acted with an intensity that was thoroughly convincing.[79]

Alan Dale, a New York critic, wrote that:

> Miss Viola Allen was seen at her best and her worst. When she was quiet, imperious, and "dignified" she invested the role of Dolores with much grace and a good deal of conviction. When she gave way to her artificial gaspings and gutteral incoherencies she was merely a tragedy queen. But as a whole, the role of Dolores fitted her infinitely better than did that of Glory Quayle. This actress has no sentiment at all, but she knows her business. She cannot move you, but she can make you hear what she has to say.[80]

Dale's comments on the duality of her acting were echoed in a Boston review:

> The acting of Miss Allen is at times wonderfully effective, at other times it comes woefully short of perfect work. Miss Allen has an engaging presence . . . in the light passages of the play, especially in her deliciously demure love-making, she is almost perfect. It is, however, because she attempts to make use of the same vocal gymnastics in the strong emotional scenes . . . that she disappoints us greatly. She prattles (that is the word which seems to fit her style) when she rages and when she is most intensely excited, the same as when she is cooing and coquettish . . . Twice in the course of the last evening she came very near being grand. . . ., first in the denunciation scene; and secondly, in the closing act where she compels the king to sign Don John's pardon. In each of these scenes she did nobly, so nobly in fact, as to make one almost overlook the insincerity, the artificiality,

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[79] Philadelphia Evening Telegraph, 29 October 1901.

[80] Alan Dale, New York Journal, 3 January 1900.

> or whatever it is that will show itself even in her best moments.[81]

In the West, A San Francisco critic felt that:

> The star is an actress with many ideas--too many almost for the straight course of emotionality which lies before Dolores. Every little scene which in the hands of a feebler actress would pass for its face value becomes with her a diamond of many facets. She arrests one's attention by the complexity and firmness of her part, as much as by her magnetism. To the (perhaps Provincial) Western mind, some of Miss Allen's love making has too much the air of conscious charm. . . . The scenes of actual thrill and passion reveal Miss Allen a master in her art.[82]

Although it was not an extraordinary success like The Christian, In the Palace of the King was a popular production. Its New York run, commencing 2 January 1900, totalled one hundred and thirty-eight performances, a very respectable figure, but in no way approaching the five hundred and five performances that Florodora, a musical, was to play.[83] For the season of 1901-1902, Miss Allen grossed an average of ten thousand dollars per week, making the total receipts three hundred and fifty thousand dollars.[84] The phenomenon of The Christian could not be equalled, but In the Palace of the King showed that Miss Allen's success was capable of drawing an audience in other pieces. Profits from the play totalled two hundred thousand dollars, a one hundred and fifty percent drop from The Christian, but still a very

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[81] "Hollis Street: In the Palace of the King," unidentified Boston paper, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[82] San Francisco Bulletin, 4 February 1902.

[83] Burns Mantle and Garrison P. Sherwood, eds., The Best Plays of 1899-1909 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1944), pp. 367-392.

[84] "Viola Allen Closes Successful Season," clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

good figure.[85]

One might be tempted to attribute the lowered profit figure for In the Palace of the King to the fact that it did not play two full seasons. For the last month of the season of 1901-02, Miss Allen and her company revived James Sheridan Knowles's drama, The Hunchback, for a spring tour which began in Chicago on 28 April 1902. Figures released by Liebler and Company gave the receipts for The Hunchback as between fifteen and eighteen thousand dollars a week for the period of its run.[86] Part of the reason for the increased revenues was the fact that Liebler and Company increased the prices for the spring tour in some cities,[87] a move probably designed to offset the cost of mounting a new production at the end of the season.

It would not seem to be a financially astute move to open a new play at the end of the season, unless a company was trying to recoup losses from an unsuccessful tour which, according to Harris's study of Liebler and Company, was not true in this instance.[88] One may speculate, however, that Palace might not have been drawing audiences as well in the last part of its long tour as it did in the beginning, and that The Hunchback was produced to inject new life, both artistically and financially, into the tour. An acknowledged reason for the revival was to try out the play for possible use at matinees during the next season when Miss Allen was to play in The Eternal City.[89]

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[85] Harris, p. 93.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Unidentified clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[88] Harris, p. 176.

[89] Unidentified clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

Another explanation is that Miss Allen wished to appear in a classical role again and had persuaded her management to mount the production. Her love of Shakespeare was an often reported fact, and it is possible that she wished her acting abilities to be judged in something other than contemporary drama. The role was a challenge to any actress since:

> It is a connecting link between the theatre of the present and that of the past. . . . [It] has been played by every English and American actress of prominence up to the present time . . . [It] is quite as much of a test part as Juliet, combining, as has been said, "an Imogen in sweet sincerity and unswerving loyalty, a Katherine in wrath and indignation, and a Rosalind in yielding."[90]

Some notion of how successful Viola Allen was in meeting the challenge of Julia in The Hunchback can be gained from contemporary accounts of her performance. The critic for The Theatre found the entire production to be an exercise in futility. He wrote:

> The essay was hardly needed to prove that she could play the part acceptably or that it could be useful to her in the emergencies of the future. It would be profitless to measure the actress by the possiblities of the character or to make comparison with distinguished achievement in it. . . . Could not these people, under the direction of the author of the play and of the form, by some chance have established the right expression, the most effective business, the proper modulation of the voice and the true delivery of the words? Is Julia to recite how she will "shine when she gets to London" as she would recite "Mary Had a Little Lamb?"[91]

In the Philadelphia Times, the reviewer noted Miss Allen's familiarity with the style of role.

> [It was] not a new vehicle for an actress who had gained some

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[90] "The Hunchback," Philadelphia Press, 29 May 1902.

[91] "Plays and Players," The Theatre, July 1902.

> of her schooling under McCullough . . . [Her] entire exhibition was interesting as an example of histrionism of a kind that is rapidly passing. Miss Allen knows exactly how this sort of thing should be done, although the syncopation of utterance she has been developing so viciously since she came forward in "The Christian" . . . often seriously interfered with the distinctness and clarity of last evening's delivery.[92]

The "Looker-On" had little praise for the star:

> Miss Viola Allen added no whit to her fame by her ambitious essay to impersonate James Sheridan Knowles's country lass, Julia. . . . Admirably supported, she was quite overshadowed by the rest of the cast, and especially Miss Adelaide Prince, whose Helen was as deliciously natural as Miss Allen's Julia was painfully artificial. In her affected coyness in the earlier scenes of the play, Miss Allen was at her worst, handicapped by an unpleasantly raucous voice and an enunciation that is so faulty as to make her utterances at times almost unintelligible, many of her best lines entirely lost their proper effect.[93]

Disagreeing with the remarks about Miss Allen's voice, the critic of the New York Sun noted that:

> Miss Allen is our pleasantest elocutionary actress. She imbues her speech with sufficient emotional feeling to place it midway between strenuous declamation and easy conversation. . . . All these qualities were abundant in her Julia. . . . She brought forward an almost obsolete role and quite legitimately compelled respectful new attention to it.[94]

Though Miss Allen may not have received much praise from the critics for her performance as Julia in The Hunchback, she did gain personal satisfaction in playing a classical role again.

Even before the spring season of The Hunchback, while In the

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[92] "Viola Allen as Julia in 'The Hunchback,'" Philadelphia Times, 29 May 1902.

[93] The Looker-On, "'The Hunchback' at the Garrick," clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[94] "Viola Allen Leads a Company in 'The Hunchback,'" New York Sun, 3 June 1902.

Palace of the King was still touring, Viola Allen and George Tyler were beginning their collaboration with Hall Caine on the star's vehicle for the following season, a dramatization of the author's latest novel, The Eternal City. In November of 1901, Caine sent Tyler a preliminary outline of the scenes that he felt the public would want to see in the play.[95] The novelist sent the first full draft of the scenario to Miss Allen for her consideration. In the accompanying letter, he noted that the scenario, as then written, called for only two large sets: Roma's studio and the Castle of St. Angelo. The rest of the scenery could be hung, making the production easier to tour than The Christian. Caine, however, preferred a different scenario that would result in a much grander production. Although the tour would be limited to larger theatres, he felt that the second scenario would not only make more sense dramatically, but also make as much money by touring only a few large cities.[96] Apparently, Caine changed his mind about the larger production, for he wrote the actress a few days later that he had eliminated four scenes and simplified the entire scenario. He concluded that "I am waiting anxiously to hear from you both on the business and artistic aspects of the affair."[97]

Further discussion took place by letter in the spring of 1902. Caine and Tyler explored the possibility of starring Miss Allen in the London production of The Eternal City, but there was no suitable theatre

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[95] Hall Caine, Letter to George Tyler, 9 November 1901, Tyler papers, Princeton.

[96] Hall Caine, Letter to Viola Allen, 4 January 1901, Tyler papers, Princeton.

[97] Hall Caine, Letter to Viola Allen, 8 January 1901, Tyler papers, Princeton.

available for the play. In addition, Caine also feared that Miss Allen would be taking a great risk by appearing in London. He felt that the English audiences were too variable to guarantee a successful venture and that their preference for extremely youthful heroines would work against Miss Allen.[98]

The three collaborators discussed the casting of the new production. Edward Morgan, who had been the original John Storm in The Christian, was being considered for the leading role of David Rossi, provided that his acting ability was still of the same calibre and that his health was still sound. Morgan's withdrawal from the touring company of The Christian and the probability of its success without him were also taken into consideration.[99] In discussing the rest of the cast, Caine wrote: "I could wish you to get the best possible actor for the Pope. What of Mason? [John Mason, who had also been in The Christian] He has reserve, passion and great tenderness. In the fifth act, the Pope has great work to do. You will give your best possible attention to this point."[100]

When Miss Allen arrived in Europe in the spring of 1902, she and Caine worked out the details of the production. In May, Caine wrote to Tyler that the star, needing rest, was not able to help him arrange the

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[98] Hall Caine, Letters to George Tyler, 9 April, 22 April, 12 May 1902, Tyler papers, Princeton.

[99] Hall Caine, Letter to Viola Allen, 18 April 1902, Tyler papers.

[100] Hall Caine, Letter to George Tyler, 22 April 1902, Tyler papers, Princeton.

framework for staging the play.[101] By August, however, after she had been in Europe a while, the actress and the author were discussing the play. Miss Allen wrote back to her producer tha. Caine had cut the manuscript and that in order to improve the flow, he had also made one or two important changes in the piece. She cautioned Tyler, ". . . I will ask you not to show the manuscript to any member of the Company till I return."[102]

While in Europe, the star also visited Rome in order to take care of other details of the production. She helped supervise the collection of photographs and drawings of the Roman scenes to be reproduced in the staging. She could not see Pietro Mascagni, the composer of the music for the piece, since he was away from home at the time. Neither did she see the Pope, although she did tour the locations in the Vatican which figured in the drama. Discussing her visit, she stated her purpose: " . . . I visited all the places myself and tried to drink in all the inspiration possible, to be able to do my part in creating that much desired . . . atmosphere," and she gave a specific example: "I went there [the Coliseum] to picture to myself the riot which has much strong bearing upon our play--that time of turmoil which shaped the turbulent future of Roma and David Rossi."[103]

In the dramatization of The Eternal City, the Coliseum riot is the climax of the third act. The drama itself takes place in a newly

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[101] Hall Caine, Letter to George Tyler, 12 May 1902, Tyler papers, Princeton.

[102] Viola Allen, Letter to George Tyler, n.d., Tyler papers, Princeton.

[103] S. Weller, "Miss Viola Allen's Quest for Atmosphere," New York Telegram, 14 September 1902.

created republic of Italy sometime in the near future where the Pope again has some measure of political power. In the opening scene, Prime Minister Bonnelli and his party are waiting on the balcony of the politician's home to watch the papal procession pass. David Rossi, a political firebrand, disrupts the procession, and denouncing the current government, Rossi points to Donna Roma Volonna, Bonnelli's supposed mistress, as an example of the corruption of the present system. Stung by this accusation, Roma vows to have Rossi in her power within a month. Before their meeting in Roma's sculpture studio, Rossi learns that Roma is his childhood sweetheart, Roma's father having adopted the orphaned Rossi and raised him. When the two finally meet again in the third act, they rediscover their old ties, but are quickly swept into the political turmoil brought about by the Coliseum riot. The Pope, meanwhile, has discovered that Rossi is his son, born of an early and tragic marriage that caused the Pope to abandon his military career to enter the priesthood. Tensions reach their highest point with the murder of Bonnelli by Rossi. To save her fiancé, Roma confesses to the murder of the prime minister. All the confusion--political, familial and legal--is cleared up in the last act, which ends with Rossi being made prime minister. Roma is freed from prison and the lovers are reunited.[104] In the American version of the play, two important deviations from the original novel were made in the dramatization. Roma's good name was preserved, for in the book she was actually Rossi's mistress, and she did not die at the end of the play as she does in the novel.[105]

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[104] Hall Caine, The Eternal City, t.s., n.d., Lincoln Center.

[105] Harris, p. 346.

With the script prepared and the production details arranged, The Eternal City opened in Washington, D.C. on 6 October 1902. Edward J. Morgan was David Rossi, a casting favored by the playwright. Bonnelli was played by Frederic de Belleville, an early associate of Miss Allen's.[106] C. Leslie Allen was also a member of the company. Eugene Presbrey was responsible for stage management.[107] Portraying Pope Pius X was E. M. Holland who " . . . looks as much like a distinguished ecclesiastic as a layman can be expected to do. It is said that Mr. Holland's private life is very quiet, refined and exemplary, which is particularly desirable in this case."[108]

The Eternal City, featuring a fictional Pope as a leading character and Miss Allen as the star, naturally attracted the attention of theatre critics. "The drama, in spite of its efficient cast and ponderous sceneries does not carry the slightest conviction," wrote one reviewer. He continued:

> No such beautiful and luxurious stage pictures have been presented on Broadway during the year and they grew in elaboration during all five acts. . . . Miss Allen received ample tribute of applause from her admirers . . . In the love scenes of her meeting with Rossi, and in the tragic climax of the fourth act . . . she acted with much technical ability but with little magnetism. Her strident utterances also marred the tenderness of the scenes which were conjured up on the stage.[109]

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[106] See above, p. 35.

[107] "Viola Allen Scores in 'The Eternal City,'" clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[108] Unidentified clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center. Though there was a Pope Pius X, he did not become Pope until 1903. In 1902, the reigning Pontiff was Leo XIII.

[109] "'Eternal City,' a Heavy Drama," clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

In the New York Tribune, the critic praised Miss Allen, the star. He wrote that:

> Miss Viola Allen . . . is always the herald of innocent pleasure and the guarantee of earnest artistic effort . . . Her embodiment of the wayward but faithful heroine . . . is an image of tender, enticing and spirited womanhood and a professional achievement of ample variety and admirable skill. . . . [In] Roma's colloquies with Rossi and with Bonnelli up to the destruction of the bust, Miss Allen puts forth a splendid dramatic power and struck a true note of passion.[110]

A more negative appraisal of her acting is given by the reviewer of the Philadelphia Evening Sun, who felt that:

> There are great possibilities in the character of Roma, and Miss Allen at her best brings them out only in part. The one deep and beautiful note in her voice she overworks until it becomes monotonous, and in the portrayal of Roma's lighter moods she is stagey and unconvincing. She rises to the climaxes with some power, however, and she looks very handsome in the studio scene.[111]

In finding flaws in the star's performance, Jeannette L. Gilde noted that:

> In the old days, when Miss Allen played in the Empire Theatre stock, she had a certain repose and a certain charm. The repose has gone, and the voice, which used to be more or less agreeable, is now hard and penetrating. . . . Miss Allen's audiences are recruited from among those people who object to everything objectionable. As Miss Allen is one of the same mind, this makes her a safe actress for them to patronize. They are not the regular theatre-going class. . . . Mr. Morgan has mannerisms, particularly mannerisms of speech, but I have gotten used to them and don't mind them. At least he pronounces correctly and does not say "spectarkle" when he means spectacle as does Miss Allen.[112]

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[110] "Miss Allen at the Victoria," New York Tribune, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[111] "'The Eternal City' as Presented Last Week in Philadelphia," Philadelphia Evening Sun, 20 October 1902.

[112] Jeannette L. Gilde, clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

Anna S. Richardson, in her review, seems to summarize the points made by other critics:

> It [The Eternal City] is a vehicle first and a play afterward. . . . [The] production appears as having been written for Miss Allen, and around Miss Allen, and with Miss Allen's undoubted assistance. And it is going to be the greatest money winner this hardworking star has ever had . . . . [The] role fits her admirably--much better, in fact, than her one gray gown in the trial scene. She was noticeably nervous Monday night . . . When she made her first entrance her voice was harsh from sheer fright, and her puffed sleeves shook so that one could see it in the center of the orchestra. But with the progress of the play, she warmed up to her work and brought much strength to bear on the successive climaxes.
>
> But after all, it was a relief to see her in that quiet scene in the last act. It was a pleasure to have the curtain descend decently, quietly, softly on a wordless finish. . . . And when it was all over, we went away hungry in mind and soul. Our eyes had been feasted, our ears had been tickled--and there it stopped.
>
> But take my word for it, "The Eternal City" will make for Miss Allen and her managers an independent fortune. I don't know why, but it will. . . . The end of the season will find Miss Allen richer in purse, but, I fear me, much given to the melodrama of the stripe that might be termed "yellow."[113]

Ms. Richardson's prophecy of financial prosperity for The Eternal City proved to be true. In Washington, it broke the previous attendance record at the National Theatre that had been held by DuBarry, with Mrs. Leslie Carter.[114] After its New York opening on 17 November 1902, at the Victoria Theatre, the play ran for ninety-two performances. Again, the total number of performances was down from the earlier production, but it was still a respectable figure. Mary of Magdala, another play that touched on religion, with Minnie Maddern Fiske, ran for one hundred and five performances. Only seven non-musical dramas played

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[113] Anna S. Richardson, "Hall Caine's Roma Deodorized," New York Sunday Telegraph, 23 November 1902.

[114] "Society at 'Eternal City,'" clipping, 8 October 1902, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

over a hundred performances in New York that season, with the longest run being that of the original dramatization of The Wizard of Oz.[115] The Eternal City was reported to have set new house records in Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Brooklyn, Newark and Buffalo.[116] For the season of 1902-1903, the drama netted a profit of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars.[117]

Since the reviews of the production give little praise to the drama and mixed notices to the star, it is difficult to account for the appeal of The Eternal City. Certainly the novelty of having the Pope as a leading character would be one factor, and Miss Allen would be another. In London, however, the play--with Herbert Beerbohm-Tree as the star--failed. Roma, in the London version, remained Bonnelli's mistress, as in the book.[118] An article offers a possible explanation for the success of the American version of the play:

> Miss Allen did not like the Tree version and insisted that it be changed and adapted for her American audiences. . . . The willingness of the author to improve the character of the heroine and make the climax take on a form more suitable to audiences who desire a happy mood at the end of their evening's entertainment is greatly praised by theatre-goers.[119]

From the prosperous first season for The Eternal City and the pattern of Miss Allen's career with Liebler and Company it would be logical to expect her to play in the drama for another season.

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[115] Mantle and Sherwood, pp. 413-434.

[116] "Hollis Street Theatre," 18 April 1903, clipping, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[117] Harris, p. 93.

[118] "The Lounger," Philadelphia Press, 12 October 1902.

[119] "Viola Allen Scores in 'The Eternal City,'" Record Herald, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

Her contract with Liebler and Company was due to expire at the end of the 1902-03 season, however. A new contract was not signed. One possible reason for the break might have been financial terms. Early in 1902, the star wrote to Tyler giving her terms for a second season in The Eternal City. She asked for a five-hundred-dollar a week certainty against ten percent of the gross receipts from five to seven thousand dollars; twelve and one-half percent from seven to nine thousand dollars; and fifteen percent over nine thousand dollars. She also requested a percentage of the profit of any second company of the play, as she had been given with The Christian, and noted that the incidental expenses were to be the same.[120] At these terms, if she drew ten thousand dollars a week in business, she would receive nine hundred seventy-five dollars, giving her a yearly income of about fifty thousand dollars. Reports of disagreement between Miss Allen and her management over unspecified policies circulated in the press, though details were not given. But it was noted that the differences were of a business rather than of a personal nature.[121] Tyler provides his explanation of their difference in his account of the break-up:

> . . . I was fool enough to release her from the play [The Eternal City] and my management.
>
> I did it on her own almost tearful request. She had had such signal success in Hall Caine's "The Christian" and "The Eternal City" that the dramatic press with constant regularity referred to her as a Hall Caine star. It annoyed her so much that she begged us to take her out of "The Eternal City." She offered to pay us $50,000 for the play which she, herself, would send on tour with another star in her role. She wanted to play

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[120] Viola Allen, Letters to George Tyler, 15 February 1902, and n.d., Tyler Papers, Princeton.

[121] "Seeks to sign Viola Allen," clipping, 8 March 1903, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

> in "A Winter's Tale" and "Twelfth Night." Finally, after days of arguing, we released her from our management, mostly because we believed "The Eternal City" would continue its success with any woman in the leading role. We were wrong. We sent it on tour with Edward Morgan as the star. It made nothing without her.
>
> Without any written agreement to do so, Miss Allen sent up a large check for allowing her to cancel her agreement--not a contract, her word of mouth agreement. That is the kind of woman Miss Allen was.[122]

Once she left Liebler and Company, the actress did mount a series of Shakespearean revivals, a step that inaugurated a new phase of her career as a star.

In evaluating Viola Allen's five years with Liebler and Company, it would be well to look again at the definition of "star," as the term was applied in the turn-of-the-century theatre. As previously noted, a star had many privileges, including a chance to contribute to the processes of play selection, casting, interpretation and the stage management of the play. A star received a high salary, a percentage of the gross and other benefits befitting the status, such as special traveling arrangements.[123] In the four productions discussed in this chapter--The Christian, In the Palace of the King, The Hunchback and The Eternal City--Miss Allen's influence pervaded the plays and the productions. For three of the dramas, she visited the authors to aid in the construction of the pieces and to secure changes in the scripts that suited her sense of morality. The revival of The Hunchback may be partially attributed to her desire to play a classical role. It was the actress herself who persuaded Tyler, her manager, that The Christian

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[122] George C. Tyler, "I Remember, I REMEMBER," New York Daily News, 26 September 1934.

[123] See above, p. 2.

should be her first starring role.

Miss Allen also shared in other aspects of the production. The frequent casting of actors with whom she had been previously associated shows that she had some influence in the selection of the company which supported her. She planned the production of The Eternal City with the author, although it would seem that they only plotted a general outline since a stage manager was employed for the production. While in Rome, she had an opportunity to check the scenic and costuming requirements of that play for accuracy, though there is no evidence to suggest that she took a leading role in these areas. There is direct evidence, however, that Miss Allen was active in preparing her own publicity. Her letters to Frank J. Wilstach, her press agent, shows that she read her publicity releases, approved of all articles, and sometimes wrote some of these articles herself.

Financially, the star received a guaranteed salary plus a certain percentage of the play's gross receipts each week. For The Christian, she also received a small percentage of the profits from other companies of the play. Such financial arrangements were possible because Viola Allen had become one of the top money-making stars on the American stage, along with Mrs. Leslie Carter and Julia Marlowe. Added together, their earnings were expected to gross a million dollars in one year. The leading male stars--E.H. Sothern, Richard Mansfield and W.H. Crane--could not approach the drawing power of the female performers.[124] One reporter noted that "in these five years, Miss Allen has had the most

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[124] "Women Stars Earn More Money Than Men," clipping, 13 April 1900, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

uniform success which has come to any star, masculine or feminine. Her popularity in all parts of the country has been remarkable. As a business proposition, she is one of the most valuable women on the American stage today."[125] By the terms of the definition, Viola Allen had at last become a star.

Though her gamble had paid off and she had achieved stardom, one might wonder was this new status deserved for the acting ability she demonstrated in the years 1898-1903? While reviews ran the gamut of opinions from great praise to extreme condemnation, the majority stated that she was strong and true to character in some scenes of the play but other scenes were marred by artificiality. One set of flaws frequently noted were vocal peculiarities--monotonous delivery, harsh tones and peculiar pronunciations. Her technical ability as an actress was often praised, but her lack of ability to stir an emotional response drew negative comments. In the critics' estimation, Miss Allen's acting still exhibited much the same strengths and weaknesses she had shown with the Empire Theatre Company. Her new status as a star had not materially changed her acting style.

She was still praised for being charming, intelligent and womanly but in roles that had been supposedly tailored to her abilities. She did not seem to use her talents to their best advantage. Perhaps some of her difficulties can be blamed on the material with which she was working. Both The Christian and The Eternal City were considered poor dramas by the critics of the day. In the Palace of the King was judged to be an acceptable but not extraordinary melodrama, and The

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[125] "Seeks to Sign."

Hunchback was dated by 1900. One reason given for Miss Allen's departure from her management was her desire to play Shakespeare, and this desire might have been prompted by her need to act in better dramas that would offer more artistic challenge.

Despite the weak material and flaws in her acting, Viola Allen, in the space of five years, became one of the top stars in America. Several possible reasons can be suggested for her success. Dramatized novels were popular on the American stage at the turn of the century, and Miss Allen appeared in plays based on three best sellers.[126] She took great care never to appear in any play that could not be called moral, another quality that was very popular in this period. J.E. Williams, a veteran manager, wrote that: "My experience of twenty-five years of management is that no element in the drama appeals to the American audience as much as moral beauty. Nothing moves it so deeply as the disclosure of character or the portrayal of noble acts on the stage."[127] Various reviewers noted Miss Allen's ability to draw patrons who did not usually attend the theatre. Certainly the well-publicized morality of her dramas was in some part responsible for this appeal. One cannot overlook another explanation for her appeal, however. To capture such a large audience and hold it, Viola Allen must have had some portion of that unmeasurable quality--charisma--that has always attracted and held the public's attention. An anonymous newspaperman

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[126] For a fuller discussion of the phenomenon of the dramatized novel, see Glenn Loney, Dramatizations of American Novels: 1900-1917 (Ph. D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1954).

[127] J.E. Williams, "The Formula of American Drama," The Drama (May 1911), pp. 218-219.

summarized Viola Allen's five years as a star:

> Viola Allen, American, deemed the third most popular actress in the country . . . vying with Minnie Maddern Fiske and Mrs. Leslie Carter as an exponent of modern emotional acting and scoring her greatest successes in pieces in which she is not permitted so much as a smile, comes to open the Broad Street Theatre. . . .
>
> It is still a moot question in places where such things are discussed, whether the Hall Caine drama made Viola Allen or whether Viola Allen made the Hall Caine drama. Solution of the problem is of little consequence. the material fact is that Hall Caine's first drama, "The Christian," gave Viola Allen her first great success. . . .
>
> Prior to her advent as the melodramatic figure in "The Christian," Viola Allen was known as a reliable leading woman in New York companies. . . .
>
> Then came Hall Caine with "The Christian," laden with rant and hypocrisy, and with Viola Allen as Glory Quayle. The artist, and Miss Allen is an artist hardly excelled, came to the front in one night. "The Christian" was an impossible piece; Viola Allen made it one of the biggest successes the American stage has known, and incidently she made for herself the place among American's actresses which she has made doubly secure by her success as Roma in the second Hall Caine drama, "The Eternal City," a piece as impossible as was "The Christian. . . "[128]

Having achieved the status of a star, a position that Viola Allen worked for sixteen years to attain, she was not content to merely enjoy her new position. Instead, she left the security of a management firm that had aided her rise to the top in order to pursue one more dream, starring in a series of Shakespearean revivals.

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[128] North American, 8 October 1905.

CHAPTER IV

A STAR IN SHAKESPEARE

"Ever since I can remember, I have heard Shakespeare read at home by my father, a real scholar and true lover of the Bard of Avon," said Viola Allen, in describing her long acquaintance with Shakespeare's drama. She continued:

> So it was natural I should want to follow my first lovely experience with an effort to act Shakespeare parts, the ambition of almost every serious actor sooner or later. . . . At last the time came when circumstances obliged me to choose my own path and I made haste to return to my beloved Shakespeare and felt again the indescribable joy of bringing to life the glowing women of his creation: Viola, Hermione and Perdita, Portia, Rodalind and Imogen--incidentally proving that our American managers, who at that time cried, "Shakespeare spells ruin!" were utterly mistaken.[1]

When she returned to Shakespeare in 1903, Miss Allen was at a high point in her career, one of the top attractions in the country. The actress was also free of any contract obligations since her five-year pact with Liebler and Company had lapsed. With a wide spectrum of possibilities open to her, she chose to return to Shakespeare, presenting Twelfth Night in 1903-1905, The Winter's Tale in 1904-05, and Cymbeline and a four-character classical bill in 1906-1907. Miss Allen would not only be able to fulfill a long held ambition but also would be able to test her abilities as an actress in significant roles.

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[1] May Davenport Seymor, "Viola Allen," Shakespeare Association Bulletin, 28:100-101 (July 1948).

For a star with her popularity to turn to Shakespeare in 1903 was an unusual move. Though Shakespearean drama had constituted an important part of the dramatic repertory in the beginning of the nineteenth century, two developments--the touring company and the star system--had helped to decrease the importance of classical drama. One might argue that the star system was not to blame for the lessening importance of Shakespeare because many of the touring stars--Edwin Booth, Mary Anderson, Lawrence Barrett, and Helena Modjeska, for example--toured almost exclusively in classical roles. What the star system did, however, was to weaken the stock companies of local theatres. Since an important part of the resident companies' repertory was classical drama, it became increasingly difficult for an actor to gain experience in these plays with the passing of the resident troupes. Consequently, a new type of actor emerged, one who was only partially trained in Shakespeare. Shakespearean productions began to suffer because of the lack of adequately trained actors.

Though the starring system began the decline of the resident companies, the touring, single play combination delivered the final blow to stock companies. A theatregoer could now see the latest Broadway success, sometimes featuring members of the company who appeared in it originally, in almost any town in America within a year of its New York run. The public became accustomed to variety in both productions and performers, and the classical plays gradually lost their appeal.[2]

A third factor in the decline of Shakespeare and other classical dramas was the emergence of the Theatrical Syndicate in 1896. Members of

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[2] For more information on changing theatrical conditions in this century, see Garff B. Wilson, Three Hundred Years of American Drama and Theatre (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1973), pp. 56-296.

the Syndicate catered to the popular taste in drama. As a group, the Syndicate would rather book the latest Broadway success, with a guaranteed audience, than take a chance with Shakespearean drama.[3] Charles Frohman exemplified the group's dramatic taste, favoring contemporary plays: melodramas, romantic comedies and the London successes for his theatres and stars.[4]

In fairness to the Syndicate, however, one must point out that statistics would tend to support their view that the public, in the years 1903-1907, was not particularly interested in Shakespeare. In the season of 1903-1904, the total number of performances presented by the four companies that played Shakespeare in New York was eighty, a number that was greatly exceeded by the 264 performances of Piff!, Paff!, Pouf! or the 206 performances of Sweet Kitty Bellairs. For the season of 1904-1905, Miss Allen's production of A Winter's Tale ran for thirty-two performances while the musical Fantana ran for 298, and the play, The College Widow for 278 performances. Miss Allen gave thirty-two performances of Cymbeline in 1906-1907; The Man of the Hour played 479 times and The Chorus Lady played for 315 performances in that season. Only four companies presented Shakespeare in New York in the 1904-1905 season. In comparison, there were fifteen productions with runs exceeding one hundred performances in 1904-1905, and twenty-two in 1906-1907.[5] In New York, Shakespearean productions had become a minute part of the total dramatic offerings.

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[3] Jack Poggi, Theatre in America: The Impact of Economic Forces (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1968), pp. 3-15, and Atkinson, pp. 12-17.

[4] For a detailed discussion of Frohman's dramatic tastes, see above, pp. 60-61.

[5] Mantle and Sherwood, Best Plays, 1899-1909, pp. 434-540.

A clearer picture of how little Shakespeare was being played during this period emerges when one studies the New York Dramatic Mirror. In the 28 November 1903 issue there were 366 touring companies and thirty-two stock companies listed in the "Dates Ahead." a column that gave the itineraries of companies throughout the United States. Only twenty companies performing Shakespeare were mentioned in "Correspondence," "Telegraphic News," and "In Other Cities," the columns of the Dramatic Mirror which reviewed productions throughout the country. On 19 November 1904, 311 dramatic companies, 107 repertory companies, forty stock companies and forty-six miscellaneous companies were listed in "Dates Ahead," with only twenty productions of Shakespeare mentioned in the other columns. The situation was little changed on 24 November 1906. There were 252 dramatic companies, seventy-five repertory companies, thirty-three stock companies and thirteen miscellaneous companies listed in "Dates Ahead" with mention of only fifteen productions of Shakespeare.[6] These statistics are unrefined, but from this informal survey it is clear that to tour in Shakespeare in the early 1900s was a move that went against the general theatrical trend of the period.

The move away from Shakespearean drama was hastened by the death or retirement of the leading classical actors of the previous generation. Replacements for these stars from the new generation were scarce. James O'Neill is the classic example of what happened to many promising young actors. As a young performer, he had won acclaim for his tragic roles and was considered a possible successor to Booth or Barrett. Instead, he played

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[6] "Dates Ahead," "In Other Cities," "Correspondence," Telegraphic News," NYDM, 28 November 1903, 19 November 1904, 24 November 1906.

The Count of Monte Cristo for most of his starring career, trapped in the part by a public that did not want to see him in anything else. William Gillette typifies another kind of actor, the player whose experience and reputation were gained in modern dramas, with his fame coming from parts in plays that he wrote himself, especially the dramatization of Sherlock Holmes. There were, of course, stars who played Shakespeare as well as modern plays. Otis Skinner, Richard Mansfield, and Robert Mantell all toured in Shakespeare during the years 1903-1907. E.H. Sothern was an actor who had successfully reversed the prevailing trend away from the classics. After gaining fame playing romantic heroes, he revived Hamlet in 1900 and devoted the rest of his career to Shakespearean drama. With his partner and wife, Julia Marlowe, he became the principal exponent of Shakespeare in the early twentieth century.[7]

Of the actresses of Miss Allen's generation, Julia Marlowe had the most experience in the classical repertory in both her training and career. Besides her experience in stock companies, she studied three years with an actress, Ada Dow, who trained her in the standard classical roles. Miss Marlowe played in Shakespearean comedy and tragedy during much of her career, winning acclaim as Rosalind, Viola and Juliet. Other contemporaries of Miss Marlowe and Miss Allen had fewer associations with Shakespeare. Maude Adams played Juliet for a season, but with little praise. Her greatest success was in modern plays like Peter Pan. Minnie Maddern Fiske had played Shakespeare as a child, but in her adult career she devoted herself to new dramas and became one of the earliest supporters of Ibsen in America. Mrs. Leslie Carter, though she studied

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[7] Wilson, American Drama and Theatre, pp. 275-286, and Mantle and Sherwood, Best Plays of 1900-1909, pp. 434-540.

Shakespeare in preparing for the stage, specialized in emotional roles in modern melodramas like Zaza. Besides Julia Marlowe, only one other very popular star had appeared in Shakespeare with any regularity, Ada Rehan. Though she was in the last years of her career in 1903, Miss Rehan had been a very popular comedienne in both contemporary and Shakespearean roles for many years with Augustin Daly's company.[8]

From this brief survey of the leading American performers at the turn of the century, several things are apparent. Most of the players had some early experience and preparation in Shakespeare, yet most of them played little Shakespeare in their starring careers. This seemed particularly true of the female stars. Achieving success in a Shakespearean role might still be the ambition of a serious star, as Miss Allen noted earlier,[9] but it seemed that fewer performers chose to be measured by this standard.

Viola Allen's career in Shakespeare shared many similarities with those of her contemporaries. As a young actress, she had played Desdemona, Lady Anne, Cordelia, and Juliet with John McCullough and Tomasso Salvini and Celia in a special production of As You Like It. Except for Juliet, which she played opposite Alexander Salvini, her roles, though the leading female parts, were in plays dominated by male characters. As You Like It was her only experience in Shakespearean comedy, though she did tour for three years in classical comedies with the Jefferson-Florence Company. She had last played Shakespeare in 1892. As a star for Liebler and Company, she appeared in a revival of The Hunchback,

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[8] Wilson, American Acting, pp. 144-152, and Idem, American Drama and Theatre, pp. 260-274, 317-323.

[9] See above, p. 136.

a classic comedy, in 1902.[10] Though Miss Allen might still retain the memory of her earlier training in Shakespeare, her skills had not been seriously tested.

Twelfth Night was the natural choice for Miss Allen's debut as a Shakespearean star since she had been named for the heroine of the play. "In childhood," she recalled, "My happiest moments were when dreaming of the noble girl whose name I bore and who gradually grew into a sort of fairy godmother. Throughout my dramatic career I have felt a longing to some time portray the character and show Viola as I believed her poet creator had meant her to be."[11] With her brother Charles as her manager, and Frank J. Wilstach as her business manager,[12] she turned her dream into reality with her production of the drama.

In preparing a revival of Twelfth Night, the first task was to arrange a version of the text suitable for the staging of the drama. One early announcement stated that no liberties would be taken with the text except for the compression of scenes.[13] Another report, noting that a modern audience would not tolerate a play lasting longer than three hours, said that Miss Allen's version would drop less than three hundred lines and would keep all the lyrics and achieve the desired length. By contrast, the contemporary version presented at Stratford-on-Avon, England, eliminated three lyrics and four hundred lines.[14]

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[10] See above, pp.120, 121.

[11] "Viola Allen's Lifetime Desire at Last is Realized," clipping, 14 September 1903, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[12] In the Viola Allen Collection at Lincoln Center, a Letter to Robinson Locke of the Toledo Blade lists Charles W. Allen as her manager and Frank J. Wilstach as her business manager on the letterhead.

[13] "No Desecration of Shakespeare, clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[14] "The Abridgement of Shakespeare's Plays," clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

One can see the extent of Miss Allen's changes by comparing her promptbook with a printed copy of the play. The printed text is divided into five acts, the promptbook four. In the text, the first act is composed of five scenes; the Duke's palace, the seacoast, Olivia's house, and the Duke's house. Miss Allen's first act has four scenes: the seacoast, Olivia's house, another part of the coast, the Duke's palace. Besides consolidating scenes for staging, this arrangement introduces the characters of Viola and Sebastian earlier in the drama. Act II of the promptbook takes place in three scenes: a kitchen, an ancient street, and the Duke's palace, while the printed copy divides it into five--seacoast, street, Olivia's house, the Duke's palace, and Olivia's garden. Several of the scenes in and around Olivia's house become the third act of the actress' script, and all are set in Olivia's garden. By contrast, the third act of the text is in four scenes: Olivia's garden, Olivia's house, a street, and Olivia's garden. For the fourth and its final act, the promptbook shows three scenes: Olivia's garden, a prison drop and Olivia's garden. The text, however, gives two scenes for Act IV, before Olivia's house, and Olivia's garden. Olivia's garden is the setting for the fifth act of the printed version.[15] Eliminating three hundred lines of the drama would cut the play by approximately one long scene, perhaps twenty minutes of playing time.

To compile her acting version, Miss Allen studied the promptbooks of earlier, noted productions. One account said that Henry Irving sent his promptbook for the play to the actress.[16] Frank Andrews, the

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[15]Promptbook, Viola Allen production of Twelfth Night, HTC, and and Twelfth Night in W.G. Clark and W. Aldis Wright, The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, vol. I (Garden City, N.Y.: Nelson Doubleday, Inc., n.d.), pp. 547-570.

[16]"Irving Sends Prompt Book," clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

member of Miss Allen's company who compiled her promptbook, wrote that she drew on both Irving's and Herbert Beerbohm-Tree's scripts for the version. He claimed that the order of the scenes was taken from Irving.[17] In a letter to Andrews, W. Van Lennepe of the Harvard Theatre Collection, noted that much of Tree's business was lacking, while some innovations of Augustin Daly's version were included--the song, "Who Is Sylvia?," set to Franz Schubert's music and the pantomime at the close of the scene in Olivia's garden.[18] William Winter, in his review, saw the similarities to the Daly version.[19] Miss Allen later stated that "We followed Daly's acting version, using traditional music and a few special airs written for Sir Herbert Beerbohm-Tree's 'Twelfth Night' in London."[20]

With a script ready for the revival, the casting of the play could proceed. "Every player so far secured by Charles W. Allen . . . has had . . . experience in the reading of Shakespeare--a special training that can only be acquired in companies of the first order," one account said. It continued: "The selections already made are performers who made successes in Julia Marlowe's Shakespearean company and Beerbohm-Tree and Ben Greet's companies in England."[21] F. Percival Stevens, the stage manager, had played Fabian in Beerbohm-Tree's production of

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[17] Frank Andrews, Letter to W. Van Lennepe, 7 September 1944, HTC.

[18] W. Van Lennepe, Letter to Frank Andrews, 18 September 1944, HTC.

[19] William Winter, "Twelfth Night," New York Tribune, 9 February 1904.

[20] Ormsbee, "Miss Viola Allen."

[21] "Actors Able to Speak Blank Verse," clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

the play.[22] He recreated that role for Miss Allen's production. Zeffie Tilbury, Tree's Maria, also recreated her role for the new revival. Frank Currier, who played Sir Andrew Aguecheck for Miss Allen, had appeared in Julia Marlowe's production. Nora O'Brien, the Olivia, had once starred in Shakespeare. Mrs. Patrick Campbell's former leading man, John Blair, was engaged for Malvolio. Scott Craven, featured as Duke Orsino, had been a star in South Africa and leading man for Mrs. Langtry in England. Besides his Shakespearean experience with Augustin Daly and Henry Irving, James Young, as Sebastian, added another dimension to the production.[23] Young bore a remarkable resemblance to Miss Allen, as surviving photographs show.[24] He had starred in Shakespeare in the West and South, where he was noted for his portrayal of Shylock and Othello. The previous season he had been in Mrs. Fiske's Mary of Magdala.[25] Other members of the company included the star's father, C. Leslie Allen as Antonio; Robinson Newbold as Valentine; Percy Waram as Curio; Clarence Handyside as Sir Toby Belch; Edwin Howard as Feste; Frank Andrews as the sea captain; F.J. Bennett as the first officer; and C.W. Atwood as the second officer.[26] When the production reached New York

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[22] "Viola Allen's New Stage Manager," clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[23] "Interesting Company," clipping, 11 January 1904, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[24] The photograph of James Young and Miss Allen as Sebastian and Viola in Twelfth Night is reproduced in Wilson, American Drama and Theatre, p. 273, and one can see the close resemblance between the two.

[25] "James Young Looks Like Viola Allen," clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[26] "Twelfth Night," at the Tulane," New Orleans Daily Picayune, 24 September 1903.

in February of 1904, there had been some cast changes. John Craig had replaced Scott Craven as Orsino, and Grace Elliston replaced Nora O'Brien as Olivia.[27]

A third aspect of the production, the staging, was also planned with great care. In an interview, Miss Allen gave her ideas on staging a play. She said:

> I believe in everything that enhances the illusion, provided it be correct--not, for instance, the interior of a colonial church to represent a Spanish Castle, nor an automobile in the time of King George. I believe in splendid scenery, costumes, and efforts to any legitimate extent--that is, so long as they do not make the play and the acting subsidiary to mere paint, cloth and mechanics. . . . Perhaps I am old-fashioned in my ideas of the stage, but I believe that people like beautiful plays beautifully mounted just as they like beautiful things in their homes.[28]

The scenery for Olivia's garden shows the care taken in the preparation of the production. Charles W. Allen, the star's brother, designed the set, patterning it after the terraces and fountains of the Villa d'Este in Italy as shown in George Walter Dawson's painting.[29] Dawson, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, was an authority on Italian gardens.[30] Since the fountain in the garden actually worked, the company had to have a plumber as a member of the troupe and he needed an assortment of pipe couplings to hook the fountains to the fire lines of the different theatres.[31]

The care expended on the scenery was reflected in other aspects of the staging. Edwin A. Abbey, a prominent artist and archaeologist,

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[27] "Knickerbocker Theatre: Twelfth Night," NYDM, 20 February 1904.

[28] Ashton Stevens, "Dressing Room Talk with Miss Viola Allen," San Francisco Examiner, February 1902.

[29] Ormsbee, "Miss Viola Allen."

[30] "Viola Allen's Italian Garden for 'Twelfth Night,'" clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[31] Ormsbee, "Miss Viola Allen."

executed the costume plates for the production. Abbey, one of the few Americans in the Royal Academy, had illustrated an edition of Shakespeare's tragedies.[32] Augustus Barrett, an English composer, wrote special music for the songs "Come, Away Death" and "Oh, Mistress Mine." Barrett had composed the music for the Beerbohm-Tree production. The music for Miss Allen's version was arranged by Robert O. Jenkins, the musical director of the New York Academy of Dramatic Art and an authority on Elizabethan music.[33]

Critics noted the care taken by Miss Allen in staging her revival for Twelfth Night. One, John Kenderick Bangs, felt that:

> Miss Allen's production IS a triumph of "Chromo-lithographic art." There is nothing that modern conditions, pictorially or otherwise, can do to dignify her work that Miss Allen has left undone. We find pretty nearly all our senses gratified in a contemplation of this production. . . . [We] should. . . hail with particular pleasure so successful an effort to give the work of the master pen a setting so worthy of it.[34]

"The scenes showing the sea coast of Illyria and the Italian gardens of Olivia's palace are superbly painted and lighted, handsome pictures which will linger long in the memory," wrote the reviewer of The Boston Herald. He continued, "The costumes and properties were all new bright."[35] Another critic felt that:

> The Italian atmosphere pervades the place with a rare rapture, a poetic inspiration that puts one in the most complacent and romantic mood. In the garden of Olivia

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[32]Unidentified clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[33]Boston Sunday Herald, 31 January 1904.

[34]John Kendrick Bangs, "Shakespeare, Norris and Brunett," Illustrated Sporting News, n.d., pp. 6-7, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[35]"Miss Viola Allen," Boston Herald, clipping,n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

> there is a world of tradition and romance expressed in the colorings and the formalism of the bygone centuries, such as gives the play the right note and sustains it there.[36]

In her debut as a star in Shakespeare, Viola Allen was the center of the critics' attention, especially since she had made her reputation in modern melodramas. John Kendrick Bangs found her portrayal of Viola to be a pleasant surprise. He wrote:

> Of Miss Allen's individual work, as Viola, let it be said that we found it charming, in the face of the fact that we have not been unduly impressed by the lady's impersonation of heroines bearing the mark of Caine . . . [Had] she been born Viola, Miss Allen could not have pleased us more greatly. All the delicate girlish loveliness, all the sprightliness, all the tenderness of a newly discovered, but unrevealed passion; every trifling little note that lends sweetness to this beautiful conception of the poet--all these things were presented to our visions by the star of the occasion as convincingly and with such a refined artistry that we must confess to having yielded up to a feeling of enchantment. Not a mannerism, not a trick or limitation of voice, that we have in the past not liked in Miss Allen, manifested itself in her Viola and we are quite ready to place her now on a plane which, ten days ago, we should have been inclined to deny her.[37]

"To a greater extent than almost any actress of her high standing, Miss Allen is chameleon--like in her personality, taking color from the quality of the piece she plays," wrote the Brooklyn Eagle critic. He continued: "This explains the fact that the same woman who was sometimes turgid and hard in Caine and Crawford melodrama, is poetic and above all, daintly comic as Shakespeare's Viola.[38]

Since Viola was a role played by many famous actresses, Miss

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[36] "Viola Allen in Beautiful Production of Shakespeare's 'Twelfth Night' at the Knickerbocker," clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[37] Bangs, "Shakespeare."

[38] "Viola Allen as Viola in a Fine 'Twelfth Night,'" Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 5 April 1904.

Allen's interpretation was often compared with other stars. One critic wrote that:

> Viola Allen is an actress who has made a place for herself in popular regard that is enviable as any of the celebrated women I have mentioned above [Adelaide Neilson, Modjeska, Marlowe, Henrietta Crossman] Her conception of Viola is not so complex as that of her predecessors. . . . [It] is not the undertow of "Viola's" love story that she makes us feel so much as the witchcraft of a mischievous girl successful in her disguise of a boy.
>
> Twelfth Night is a comedy, first, last and always, and . . . if Miss Allen emphasizes the comedy to the neglect of the feminine complexities of "Viola," her performance is none the less Shakespeare and none the less attractive and none the less a comprehensive reading of the lines.[39]

Another reviewer also compares the actress to others who played Viola:

> Comparatively, there has been no really great Viola within recollection of the living, moving generation who has 'class' with this new one. Closest to the Allen standard is Miss Marlowe. . . . Yet Miss Marlowe, in her fairest moments, was never so rich in humor, so rollickingly boyish and so sweetly womanly as her successor in the part.
>
> Miss Allen has done yet another thing in her step from convention to classic. She has brought her voice and manner quickly to the treatment one expects in Shakespearean speech and theme--with the added advantage of clarity in enunciation that is not always the part of your actor who has been reared in the Bard's famous school.[40]

With the memory of Edith Wynne Matthison's Viola in the Ben Greet, no scenery, "Elizabethan" Twelfth Night fresh in his memory, the critic of the Montreal Daily Star wrote of Miss Allen's performance:

> After a careful study of Miss Allen's conception of "Viola," one willingly admits her earnestness of purpose, and also her honest endeavor to give the character that semblance of reality that without which the comedy becomes a burlesque. Unfortunately, the task of making "Viola" convincing in her masquerade as "Cesario" is beyond Miss Allen,

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[39] "A New Shakespeare Star, Viola Allen's 'Twelfth Night,'" Theatre-Goer, 10 February 1904.

[40] "Viola Allen in Beautiful Production."

> who in spite of much that is pleasing in her performance, is neither sympathetic nor satisfying, and is artificial to a degree.
>
> Ask Miss Allen to stand the test of playing "Viola" with the scenery left out, and in a few short weeks, Miss Allen would again be playing Glory Quayle. . . .[As] "Viola" she is a disappointment . . . Her spontaneity is forced, her archness the outcome of too much effort, her acting too obviously painstaking.[41]

A Newark reviewer felt the actress' reading of Shakespeare did not enhance her performance because:

> As Miss Allen reads Shakespeare's lines there is little music in them, and in consequence, the poetic charm that Viola should radiate is minimized. The delivery of "She never told her love" had the accent of modern conversation, and the dry utterance of its pregnant phrases had an irritating effect. Her frequent employment also of gutteral tones . . . increases the impression of harshness left by her reading, which is further marred by abrupt pauses of no significance. Elocution of this sort, heard so soon after Miss Rehan's melodious recital of Shakespearian blank verse, does not captivate the ear. . . . Miss Allen's embodiment is notable for its freedom from affection of any kind; from any appearance of striving for points; for its refinement, grace, archness, sincerity, picturesqueness and generally winsome quality.[42]

Disagreeing with the comments on Miss Allen's voice, one Chicago critic said:

> Miss Allen's voice is of a peculiarly rich quality; when she made love to Olivia its deep notes were good to simulate masculinity, yet when she made love to Orsino, the velvety quality was there, and no note sounded in the faintest degree masculine.[43]

William Winter, a prominent New York critic who was especially interested in Shakespeare, was not entirely satisfied with Miss Allen's interpretation of Viola, and he gave his reasons:

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[41] "Viola Allen in 'Twelfth Night,'" Montreal Daily Star, 7 January 1904.

[42] "Shakespearian Comedy, Mirthfully Presented," Newark Evening News, 22 March 1904.

[43] "Music and the Drama," 22 December 1903, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

> It is not strange that Viola Allen, accomplished actress though she is, and by superiority of mind, sensibility of temperament, proficient artistic skill, and personal beauty, fitted to act Viola--did not, when thus surrounded with depressing impediments [other members of the cast], make the part as effective as certainly she is capable of making it. There was, moreover, another cause adverse to her success. Whether affected by the influence of prosy, commonplace, professional associates, or guided by deference to the deplorable prevalent proclivity to "realism" on the stage, the actress seemed determined that a play essentially fanciful and romantic should be interpreted as a portrayal of actual, everyday life, and that a heroine almost ethereal in quality should be made literal, probable, and matter-of-fact. . . . Miss Allen in trying to be seemingly a literal boy succeeded only in depleting the essential beauty of feminine allurements, permeating her performance with a prosy instead of a poetic quality.[44]

In his assessment of the entire production, the critic of the Newark Evening News saw both its failings and strong points. He wrote:

> The manner in which the comedy has been revived is by no means faultless, the defects in it being due to the inability of some of the players to do full justice to Shakespeare's verse and comic intent, but the entertainment provided is as finely stimulating as all equally commendable interpretations of his dramas are, and affords such enjoyments as too seldom results from the present day theatrical enterprises. It was evident, furthermore, that Miss Allen fully comprehended the character she essayed, and possessed the technical means needed to denote its salient attributes.[45]

Besides evaluating Twelfth Night's artistic merits, one can judge the revival by its financial success. Two indicators of monetary success are the length of its New York run and the season's profits. Twelfth Night opened on 8 February 1904, at the Knickerbocker Theatre in New York and had sixteen performances.[46] Illness, not lack of business,

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[44] William Winter, Shakespeare on the Stage, second series (New York: 1911, rpt. Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1969), pp. 80-81.

[45] "Shakespearian Comedy."

[46] Mantle and Sherwood, 1899-1909, p. 454.

was responsible for the short run. During the tour of the play, Miss Allen had caught a cold that settled in her ear. In Boston, she had had an operation for an ear abcess, but the abcess recurred and developed into mastoiditis. The actress could not hear and had to take her cues from the movements of the performers. She closed the play and submitted to a second operation only when it became obvious that the infection had worsened to the point of endangering her life. Though she recovered in time to continue the tour, the star was unable to finish the New York engagement. [47] "We were lucky enough to find another tenant for the theatre," she wrote, "for those days you had to rent a Broadway house for a definite period."[48] That tenant, the Ben Greet players, stayed two weeks at the Knickerbocker, which meant that Miss Allen had planned a month's engagement in New York. In the same season, A Midsummer Night's Dream, starring Nat C. Goodwin, gave twenty-four performances in New York and the Ada Rehan-Otis Skinner Company, playing Shakespeare in repertory, played three weeks on Broadway. Miss Allen's original plans for the length of her New York engagement seemed to follow the pattern of other Shakespearean productions.[49]

Without access to the financial records of the productions, one cannot accurately measure the monetary success of Miss Allen's first season in Shakespeare. One newspaper clipping, however, showed that in some cases Shakespeare could outdraw modern plays. In Springfield,

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[47] The account of Miss Allen's illness is drawn from Ormsbee, "Miss Viola Allen," "Viola Allen in a Surgeon's Care," clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center, and an unidentified clipping, 11 February 1904, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[48] Ormsbee, "Miss Viola Allen."

[49] Mantle and Sherwood, 1899-1909, pp. 434-461

Massachusetts, the first night receipts for The Eternal City were a little over fifteen hundred dollars. For the opening performance of Twelfth Night, they were $1,899.00.[50] Profits for the entire season were reported to average two thousand dollars a week,[51] which, if the report is accurate, would mean that Miss Allen earned about seventy thousand dollars, since a normal tour ran about thirty-five weeks.

"To accumulate this profit, Miss Allen has had to do a whole lot of hard work, and she thinks she is not equal to it," one article noted at the end of her first year in Shakespeare.[52] To ease some of the burden of producing her own shows, she signed a contract with Sam Nixon of Nixon and Zimmerman, a firm that was part of the Theatrical Syndicate. For fifty thousand dollars, Nixon obtained a third interest in the tours of the actress for the next three seasons. Miss Allen and her brother retained the other two shares and her brother would continue as her manager. In reporting the signing, A. Toxen Worm wrote:

> An alliance has just been formed between true art and alleged "commercialism." . . .
>
> This contract, made at a moment when theatrical affairs as a rule are at a low ebb in this country, is significant in many ways. In the first place, it means that the so-called theatrical trust is fully cognizant of the fact that in art, as in trade, the best is never too high priced, and that in order to make people purchase seats in high-priced theatres, it is necessary to present stars who can draw full houses at high prices. . . .
>
> Thus, instead of being opposed to art, theatrical commercialism has now reached the stage where it has to reach out and ally itself with art, in order to declare the usual dividends. This is certainly a sign of the times, worth heeding, as indicative of better things to come. And,

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[50] Unidentified clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[51] Unidentified clipping, 11 March 1904, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[52] Ibid.

> therefore, the partnership between Miss Allen and Mr. Nixon is a far more significant event than the usual business arrangement between a star and a manager.[53]

For the first season of her contract with Nixon, in 1904-1905, Miss Allen was to star in her second Shakespeare revival, The Winter's Tale. The same philosophy which governed the production of Twelfth Night was to guide the new play. Again, the text was altered because:

> The exigencies of the modern Theatre demand that a representation of any play shall be kept within the very bounds of a certain stipulated space of time; it has therefore been found necessary . . . to curtail certain portions of the poet's work. That this should be done with reverence and with due respect for plot, poetic value, and literary merit, the opinions of many Shakespeare scholars . . . have . . . been followed with great advantage to the general result. The sequence of the scenes in this edition is almost identical to that of the first folio . . . The only transposition of any moment is that of the storm scene on the coast of Bohemia . . . which here precedes the trial of Hermione in the palace of Leontes. The reason for this transposition is obvious, inasmuch as the end of the latter scenes offers a better dramatic climax.[54]

Another change in the drama was required so that the star, following the precedent of Mary Anderson, could play both Hermione and Perdita. Hermione was eliminated at the close of the second act and did not appear again until the final scene of the play. A double was used in the last scene, where Hermione, disguised as the statue, returns to her repentant husband.[55]

For Miss Allen's production of the drama, it was divided into four acts instead of its usual five. The first act had two scenes with the initial one being the usual first act and the second being scene two of Act II. In the promptbook's second act, there were four scenes which

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[53] "Music and the Drama," clipping, n.d., HTC.

[54] Frank Vernon, "Production Notes," in Frank Vernon, arranger, The Viola Allen Acting Version of the Winter's Tale (New York: McClure, Phillips and Co., 1905), p. vii.

[55] "A Real Shakespearean Revival," clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

corresponded to Act II, scene I; Act II, scene III; Act III, scene II of the text. In the star's version of the third act, the first scene was a blending of scene one and two of Act IV, and the second scene was Act Iv, scene IV. The final act corresponds to the fifth act of the text. Average running time for Miss Allen's version was two hours, fifty minutes.[56]

Frank Vernon, an English actor and producer, directed The Winter's Tale for Miss Allen. Vernon also played Camillo in the production.[57] Henry Jewett, who had played in The Christian, was Leontes, and James Young, Sebastian in Twelfth Night, was Florizel. Zeffie Tillbury, who played Paulina, C. Leslie Allen, who portrayed the old shepherd, and Frank Currier, as Autolycus, had also been members of the Twelfth Night Company.[58] Other featured players included Boyd Putnam as Polixenes, Warner Oland as Achidamus and Sideny Bracy as Clown.[59]

Great care was taken to ensure the accuracy of the scenery and costumes. In his production notes, Vernon explained a change in the usual setting of the play. He wrote:

> [It] has been the custom to cast the play in the early Greek period. . . . It is hoped, however, that many anachronisms and misunderstandings have now been overcome by placing the action at a much later date.
>
> Picturesque dresses and ornamentations of the Byzantime time have been faithfully copied for use in this representation; by doing so, the many references to the Christian faith and to latter day events have been justified. John Ruskin . . . states that "even at the close of the last

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[56] Vernon, Viola Allen Acting Version, pp. ix-x, and The Winter's Tale, in T. Clark and W. Aldis Wright, The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, vol. II (Garden City, N.Y.: Nelson Doubleday, Inc., n.d.), pp. 993-1022.

[57] Philadelphia Public Ledger, 28 August 1904.

[58] See above, pp. 110, 144-145.

[59] Vernon, Viola Allen Acting Version, pp. xi-xii.

> century some of this simplicity (belief in Greek mythology) remained among the inhabitants of the Greek islands." It may therefore be safely assumed that the same adherence to the faith in Olympian gods held sway in Sicily a number of years after the Christian religion had taken root in the lands . . .
>
> The authority for the style of architecture followed in the production is absolute, the plans for all the buildings having been made from classical Greek structures of Sicily which . . . are still in existence.[60]

Thomas Hestlewood, who designed costumes for many of Beerbohm-Tree's productions, did the costume plates for the new revival. York Sheffield, musical director for the Queen's Theatre, Manchester, England, wrote the music.[61]

While the scenic elements of the production were being assembled, Miss Allen prepared her characterizations of Hermione and Perdita. Describing the queen, she wrote:

> In the nature of Hermione are a depth and grandeur that can never be lost sight of. It is as though Shakespeare, in the calm, philosophical review of life from his retirement, had realized that speech and gesture are but outward and superficial marks of what transpires within the deeps of the human soul, and that a great silence can more eloquently express a great passion than the loftiest lines. Thus it is that when Hermione, the statue returned to life, goes to her repentant husband's arms, the joy that thrills her is dumb.

In Perdita's role, the young shepherdess, she saw a likeness of the queen:

> And by how much is Perdita Hermione's daughter! These two characters always occur inseparable to my mind, this mother and her offspring. Airy Perdita is, indeed. . . .
>
> Yet, shining through the innocent rustic maiden, who knows not her origin, one can feel the gentle womanliness of Hermione. For, as Hermione, with all queenly dignity, seeks to shield the jealous Leontes . . . so Perdita, at a moment of the deepest distress, with all the charm of

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[60] Ibid., pp. vii-viii.

[61] "Viola Allen Has Returned Home," clipping, 2 September 1904, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

> simplicity, gives her first thought to the safety of her boyish, irresponsible lover.[62]

The Winter's Tale began its tour on 1 October 1904, in New Britain, Connecticut, and toured until the end of May, a total of thirty-four weeks, playing major cities like Philadelphia, Washington, Boston, New York and Chicago, as well as smaller towns such as Northampton, Massachusetts, Terre-Haute, Indiana, Scranton, Pennsylvania, Fort Smith, Arkansas, and Sioux City Iowa, to name a few.[63] While touring such a wide area, the production was subject to a diversity of critical reaction to all of its elements. Much of the commentary on the staging was favorable. One reviewer noted that:

> [The] production of "The Winter's Tale" is one of a series of stage pictures exquisite in themselves, and thoroughly consistent with the effective working out of the story. Whoever is responsible for the lighting effects should give a special matinee and invite every stage craftsman in the land to come and learn something about the art of properly using stage lights. There is a depth and richness, and engrossing fascination about the scenic display of "The Winter's Tale" which makes it something to marvel at even in these days of remarkable productions.[64]

"The stage pictures, without exception, are in the best of taste, sufficient in richness characterizing the court scenes to lend them the desired suggestion of royal splendor, the outdoor settings being picturesque and the costuming and properties being fittingly ample, yet at no time burdensome," said W.L. Hubbard of Chicago. He continued:

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[62] Viola Allen, "Some Heroines of Shakespeare by Their Impersonators," The Delineator, March 1906, n.p.

[63] The Winter's Tale tour schedule, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[64] "Miss Viola Allen in the Big Production of 'The Winter's Tale' at the Knickerbocker Theatre," clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

> It is a better production than that which Miss Allen gave "Twelfth Night" last season. That was ostentatious and in many respects fussy. This year there is more of simplicity and spaciousness and a corresponding gain in impressiveness. The four acts contain eleven scenes, and yet so swiftly and smoothly are changes accomplished that the performance moves without delays . . . The statue scene is well handled, the lighting being particularly effective.[65]

One reviewer, however, felt that the attention given to the scenery and costumes would be better placed elsewhere. He wrote that:

> No amount of money expended upon fine scenery and elaborate costuming will compensate for the almost total neglect of those literary qualities which have helped to make the play immortal. . . . How much more satisfactory the whole representation would have been, if some of the attention lavished upon the merely spectacular part had been expended upon the text! . . . [The] surviving lines, as a rule, were so badly spoken that the excision of the others seemed to be more judicious than cruel.[66]

Some of the same flaws in the production and performance mentioned in the previous review were noticed by other critics. One who had a negative view of the revival felt that:

> Miss Viola Allen is paving large blocks in hell with good Shakesperian intentions, but this is no reason why one should add to the future population there by mendacity. . . .
>
> Against the modern superfluity of scenery it is perhaps idle to keep on protesting. In the way of stage chromo all of the eleven shifts last night were creditable, and one or two of them had a certain stately beauty. But in the end one got the impression that the protagonist of the occasion was the green velvet curtain. As for the text, passage after passage was sacrificed and often matter vital to the understanding of not only the characters, but even of the very story. . . .
>
> Far more than her scene painters, Miss Allen interprets Shakespeare in the manner of chromo. Grace she has, and winning feminine charm. There were times when she captivated her audience. But purity of elocution and simple poetic

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[65] W.L. Hubbard, "The Winter's Tale," Chicago Tribune, 19 April 1905.

[66] Unidentified clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

> fervor are denied her. The nobel grief of Hermione and the idyllic fancy of Perdita were so blurred and subdued as to lose all of their native and authentic quality.[67]

Another critic who also saw faults in the production was less scathing in his denunciation. "We are not prepared to accept Miss Allen's performance as one that is completely satisfactory," he wrote. Continuing, he said:

> In her own impersonation there are many mistakes of manner, many flaws of elocution. Her company, while in many respects superior to those frequently seen in Shakespeare's plays, even under the best conditions, leaves much to be desired. . . .
>
> Viola Allen's most conspicuous defect in her assumption of both Hermione and Perdita, is one of elocution. As Hermione, she is warm, womanly, tender, gentle but strong. She conveys the idea of calm dignity and saintly patience. Her reply to Leontes, after he has heaped insult after insult upon her, is deeply affecting, and there is a genuine ring of tragic fire in her reply to his outspoken charge. . . . When it comes to the reading of the longer speeches, Miss Allen fails for a lack of vocal expression. . . . [The] mannerisms that mar Miss Allen's speech today are exactly those which marred it when she was reading prose.
>
> In Perdita's scenes that fault is far less noticeable. Here there is the demand for less of elocution, more of actual movement. In Miss Allen's playing of the part, we find the necessary suggestions of an elevated spirit, combined with girlish modesty and charm.[68]

Though some were not totally satisfied by The Winter's Tale, others were pleasantly surprised by Miss Allen's abilities in Shakespeare. In the New York Telegraph, the critic acknowledged:

> That the whole performance from the standpoint of Miss Allen was a surprise must be admitted. To a great many she has been associated with plays of the most tawdry sentiment and cheap theatrical devices, plays in which a certain raucous diatribe was always necessary, and she has filled them so well that there seemed foundation for the belief that she was not born to go beyond the demands of that particular style of staging. Therefore the increased pleasure of

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[67] "Shakespeare in Chromo," New York Sun, 27 December 1904.

[68] Unidentified clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

> last night's performance--always on a plane of grace and understanding of her lines, and in instances showing a fine appreciation of even subtler qualities.[69]

With Viola Allen playing the dual roles of Hermione and Perdita, it was natural for the reviewers to compare and contrast the star in these parts. Amy Leslie of the Chicago Daily News provided a detailed analysis of the actress' performance of both characters. She wrote that:

> As the unhappy queen of Sicilia, Miss Allen was frail, touching and conscientious without reaching any of the sculptural splendors within the heart of the great role. She read with perfect mental elucidation of the sonorous arguments in Hermione's tragic outpourings, but Miss Allen has neither the physique nor the kind of Valkyr idiosyncrasy of Hermione's wrongs to the estate of her misfortunes. Even her pretty musical voice falls a note above the pitch of Hermione's depth of tragic utterance and the valiant color of motherhood, of maternal strength and august martyr spirit are quite beyond the enshrinement of Viola Allen's exquisite gifts. . . . [She] shall always--though this seems paradoxical--be too young to express so much monumental sorrow and dignified grief as there lies in Hermione's statuesque tragedy.
>
> But as Perdita, the fragile angelic child of the sun and flowers, with her own innocent lovelight dancing about her, bubbling in her blossom of poetic effervescence like dripping dew, Miss Allen was the most desirable elf of pretty witcheries.[70]

Ms. Leslie's evaluation of the actress as Hermione was echoed in other newspapers.

"Miss Allen read the lines of Hermione with a fine appreciation of their value," the Toledo Blade reviewer felt. To him:

> Her conception of the dignified queen was excellent, but unfortunately she was not always able to give it adequate expression. Not that her performance was inartistic or inefficient. On the contrary, it had much to commend. But she somehow fell just a trifle short of making it

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[69] "A Sad Tale, Told in Winter," New York Evening Telegraph, 27 December 1904.

[70] Amy Leslie, "Viola Allen Pleases," Chicago Daily News, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

> really great. It never thrilled one, even in its internal and intense moments.[71]

As Perdita, Miss Allen received enthusiastic notices. One critic noted the joy in her dancing:

> It was a rollicking, romping, frisky dancing Viola Allen that won plaudits last night from a big audience . . . And be sure and lay proper stress upon the "dancing" Viola Allen. Often indeed, has Miss Allen wept with us, sighed with us . . . [But] last night she lifted the folds of her loose fitting robes and entered into a frolicsome dance with all the abandon of any healthy Grecian maiden set free on the untrammeled green of Bohemia.[72]

Another, from the Milwaukee Daily News, gives more details of the star's performance as Perdita:

> Childlike in her innocence--beautiful in her youth, playful in the freedom of her life under the free heavens--she is a picture of the rarest charm. She romps through the merry dance of the villagers with the abandon of a child. She makes love with the grace of a born flirt. She smiles and laughs and wins hearts, and finally the applause of an audience that is at first too astonished at this new phase of the work of Viola Allen to recognize its artistic excellence rewards her for the new triumph she was won as well.[73]

As with Twelfth Night, the financial records for The Winter's Tale are unavailable. A clipping, referring to both that production and her next production, stated that the profits from either had never been less than forty-five thousand dollars for a season.[74] Instead of concentrating on the monetary aspects of success, Clark McAdams provides another method of evaluating Miss Allen in Shakespeare. In a long

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[71] Toledo Blade, 8 May 1905.

[72] "Viola Allen in a New Revival," clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[73] "New Honors Fall to Viola Allen in 'The Winter's Tale,'" Milwaukee Daily News, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[74] "To Give Up $50,000 a Year and Retire from Stage," New York World, 28 July 1906.

article he commented on her ability to draw audiences:

> It was wonderful--the crowd. Why would it come to see Viola Allen in Shakespeare when it would not come to see Sir Henry Irving? Why would it come to hear her in Shakespeare when it would not come to hear Rehan and Skinner?--and all of these great in their Shakespeare?
>
> The answer is one of the present-day wonders of the world. It is because Viola Allen has a great vogue in Shakespearean plays. So that one saw in the Olympic [St. Louis] last night a manifestation of something so interesting that it must needs be considered to be not the least of those inexplicable dramatic phenomena which are ever-present among the stars . . . which enable Viola Allen to do what many another as able cannot do . . .
>
> It is worth while to consider just why Miss Allen has such a wonderful vogue; . . . just why the Olympic was filled last night, though the play was among the least known of Shakespeare . . ., just why as many people would go see Miss Allen in "The Winter's Tale" as went to see her in "Twelfth Night," though "The Winter's Tale" is so much less enjoyable in itself than the brilliant comedy she played last season that there is no comparing them in popular taste.
>
> Miss Allen is not quite a great actress. She cannot read like Ada Rehan. She has not the artistic finish about her work that we find in Julia Marlowe. Her Hermione is more good and sweet than it is artistically impressive, her Perdita is more naive and girl-like than it is great acting. And yet she can lay upon her audience a charm which has not been equalled by anyone else seen in Shakespearean roles here within recent time.[75]

Miss Allen interrupted her series of Shakespearean revivals in the 1905-06 season when she appeared in The Toast of the Town by Clyde Fitch. Since this play is not part of her classical revivals, it will be covered in the next chapter. One might rightly wonder why the actress chose to vary what seemed to be a successful pattern of Shakespearean revivals. In the absence of any other evidence, her own explanation must provide an answer:

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[75] Clark McAdams, "Viola Allen Plays 'The Winter's Tale,'" St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 29 November 1904.

> Of course I have not renounced the Bard . . . but, rather, let me say, deferred or postponed the production of other of his plays to a future time, and in this matter I have my manager's approval. Despite my love for the classics, I have always been an advocate of the contemporaneous dramatist. . . .
>
> I could, if I chose, go on impersonating Shakespearean heroines, only I think it a much better plan to vary one's offerings to the public.Experience has proved that it is not well for an actor or actress to become too closely allied with one line of parts . . .
>
> Even the classic actors of the past and those of the immediate present did not consider it beneath their dignity to produce a new play by a living author.[76]

Miss Allen toured in Fitch's play for one season and then returned to Shakespeare with Cymbeline for the 1906-1907 season.

Before her tour in The Toast of the Town, Miss Allen was secretly married to Peter B. Duryea, a wealthy Kentucky horsebreeder. Though the marriage took place in August of 1905, it was not revealed until January of 1906.[77] That following summer an announcement appeared in some newspapers that Miss Allen was planning to retire after her tour of Cymbeline. A vigorous denial was promptly issued by the actress.[78] Astute observers detected the retirement story as another device that Frank Wilstach, Miss Allen's business manager, used to keep her name and her new production in the public eye.[79] One possible reason for such a publicity stunt might

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[76] "Why Viola Allen Forsook Shakespeare," press release, t.s., n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[77] Newspaper clippings give the date as either 11 August or 16 August 1905. Mrs. Sarah Allen and Americas Wagner, Miss Allen's maid, were the witnesses. Rev. W. Frank Hardy performed the ceremony at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Lexington, Kentucky. "Viola Allen a Secret Bride," New York Evening Star, 19 January 1906, and clipping, 20 January 1906, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center. A possible reason for the quiet marriage was the fact that Duryea was being sued for breach of promise by another actress, Sarah Madden. "Breach of Promise Case Stirs New York Society," Chicago Chronicle, 11 March 1906.

[78] For an example of the retirement announcements and Miss Allen's denial, see Toledo Blade, 30 July 1906 and 1 August 1906.

[79] New York Dramatic News, 4 August 1906.

have been to stir up interest in the actress' return to Shakespeare and in Cymbeline. As one observer noted, "'Cymbeline' is rarely played. . . . For some reason 'Cymbeline' has never appealed strongly to the playgoing public. Indeed, it has been a sort of traditional habit of the critics and commentators to belittle this play."[80] The last important revival of the drama had been done by Margaret Mather in 1897.[81]

For Miss Allen's revival of Cymbeline, a suitable acting version of the drama had to be prepared. Unlike her previous productions, the play was left in five acts, although changes were made in the order of the scenes and some were dropped or combined with others. Act I of Miss Allen's promptbook contains four scenes instead of the six in the printed version, with scenes II and III combined in the acting version. Scene IV of the first act is combined with the first scene of the second act for the promptbook. The next two scenes of the second act correspond with those of the printed text. Act III of the acting version opens with scene IV of Act II. The seven scenes of Act III of the text become three in Miss Allen's version, with scene VI transferred to the fourth act, scene VII omitted, and the remaining scenes combined. For the fourth act, all of the scenes in Wales before the cave of Belarius are combined into one for the acting version and the third scene of the second act, set in Cymbeline's palace, is omitted. The fifth act of the promptbook combines the four scenes of the text into two.[82] Perhaps so much rearrangement

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[80] Austin Latchaw, "Viola Allen as Imogen," Kansas City Star, 11 May 1907.

[81] William Winter, Shakespeare on the Stage, 3rd Series (New York: 1916 rpt., Benjamin Blon, Inc., 1969), p. 138.

[82] Cymbeline, promptbook, t.s., n.d., Lincoln Center, and Clark and Wright, Complete Works, vol. II, pp. 936-970.

and combination of scenes was possible with Cymbeline because the play was not well known to audiences, whereas Twelfth Night and The Winter's Tale were played more often.

To direct her revival of Cymbeline, Miss Allen again selected Frank J. Vernon, who had staged The Winter's Tale. Only C. Leslie Allen and Myron Calice from her previous revivals appeared in her new production. Allen played Pisanio and Belarius during the tour and Calice played Philario and also Belarius. Shifting of roles during the season was common in the company. Fuller Mellish played Iachimo and Pisanio at different points in the tour. Iachimo was also played by J.H. Gilmour. Jefferson Winter and William K. Harcourt both played Postumous. Henry J. Hadfield was Cymbeline and Alison Skipworth played his wife. Sidney Herbert was Clothen.[83] Unlike in her previous Shakespearean productions, there were no stories on her cast's experience in Shakespeare. Since Miss Allen had competent press agents, one can assume that this cast was not particularly distinguished in Shakespearean drama.

In an interview, Miss Allen discussed the scenic requirements of the play:

> The period represented in Cymbeline is about 26 B.C., and the scene of the play is laid in Britain and Rome. Of course, we have such a wealth of information regarding the luxurious life and surroundings of the Romans of that period that our work in that direction was comparatively easy. But to acquire the necessary knowledge of all the costumes, arms and architecture of the early Britons that would assume historical and archaeological correctness was quite another matter.[84]

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[83] Cast list, Cymbeline promptbook; W.E.M. "Cymbeline Last Night," Baltimore News, 9 October 1906; William Winter, "The Revival of 'Cymbeline,'" New York Daily Tribune, 23 October 1906.

[84] "Delves into Past for the Exact Staging," Pittsburgh Leader, 3 March 1907.

Franklin Van Horn executed the costumes from plates by Thomas Hestlewood, who had done the costumes for The Winter's Tale. Miss Allen's costumes were listed as being by Madame Freisinger. Hamilton Clarke composed the incidental music and the setting for "Hark! Hark! The Lark," while the overture and entr'acte music was Herr Dietrick's music from Henry Irving's production of the play. Other music was by Norman O'Neil.[85]

Some idea of the atmosphere created by the scenic elements is given by the description in the Washington Post:

> A drop curtain used between the scenes obviated the use of the narrow strip of stage which is seen so often in Shakespearean productions, and leaves the actors no room to move without shaking some edifice to its foundations.
>
> Behind the drop, where light shone dimly through the sentinel pines upon a distant cromlech, the scene changed from the palace of Cymbeline, where rough stones, carved deep with mystic runes made the rude royal habitation, with a Roman temple on the river's brink . . . to the atrium of a patrician palace in the city of seven hills, with snow-clad mountains looming above the stately figures of the noble guests . . . Imogen's chamber, mountains in Wales, countryside and seacoast--picture after picture was revealed by the arrangements of the stage through the artist's craft.[86]

"I cannot recall another occasion where the audience has applauded a 'drop,'" wrote Frank P. Morse in his account of the production. He continued:

> Each stage picture presented is worthy of separate mention. The striking contrast between the rugged grandeur of the British forests and the beautiful bright coloring of the Italian gardens gives one an even stranger appreciation of the beauty of each. The first scene of the play shows Cymbeline's palace. The audience sees only the crude stone construction of the period which is reproduced and the dark

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[85] Cymbeline promptbook.

[86] "Viola Allen Triumphs in Role of Imogen," Washington Post, 2 October 1906.

> forest beyond. The scene would be somber were it not for the color introduced by a profusion of wild flowers. Then comes the beautiful blue and almost barbaric splendor of beauty worshipping Rome. Philario's house is shown, and here again one sees the fidelity to minute details. Even the table ornaments are historically accurate.[87]

One reviewer, however, felt that Shakespeare's text was slighted in the production. "The lines, as far as memory serves, were very badly cut and Shakespeare entirely emasculated here." He also found flaws in the staging.

> In its entirety, the play is beautifully staged, though the captious might cavil that the forrest in the Welsh mountains is entirely too tame and pretty in its Italian sunset for the lair of West British outlaws, and that the very beautiful silver birches . . . may be a bit out of place amid crags and beside mountain firs.[88]

"We are inclined to hazard the guess that she [Miss Allen] brought an old production of the play because it was a bargain rather than because it was beautiful," stated Burns Mantle in his appraisal of the production. He continued:

> It is not a cheap production. Many of the stage pictures which it frames are attractive, and none of them is positively shabby. But it is not as handsome a production as those who know better would have us believe. Its flimsy pillars and well worn rocks lead us to doubt that it is of recent building because they do these things much better nowadays, than they used to do . . . Certain it is that her "Cymbeline" revival is not up to the standard established with "Twelfth Night," which is another reason for its proving disappointing.[89]

Perhaps Mantle's eye was the sharpest of all the reviewers because there is evidence that at least one part of the production was not new. A

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[87] Frank P. Morse, "Viola Allen's Imogen a Pronounced Success," Washington Times, 6 October 1906.

[88] "Miss Allen Comes in Cymbeline," St. Louis Republic, 7 May 1907.

[89] Burns Mantle, Chicago Inter Ocean, 17 April 1907.

costume of Miss Allen's had been worn by Ellen Terry in an 1885 production of Macbeth.[90]

Any production, however, cannot rely on scenery and costumes to win approval. Miss Allen's portrayal of Imogen was vital to the success of the play as one reviewer noted:

> [The] play must depend on the genius of the actress who would picture the unswerving fidelity, the sweet tenderness, the unsullied innocence, the trust and youthful charm of Imogen. So the task that Miss Allen assumes in this instance is by no means small. . . . She cannot invest her Imogen with qualities that she herself does not possess; but to her admirers--and she has, perhaps, a larger and more cohesive personal following than any actress in the United States--her performance appears as one of the most creditable in a highly creditable career. She has grace, dignity, emotion, smooth elocution and the power to denote the swift transition of moods. But the spontaneity, the ingenuousness, and the inspiration inherent and essential to an ideal Imogen she does not possess and cannot acquire.[91]

In the Hartford Daily Times, the critic felt that she was a competent Imogen. He wrote:

> Miss Allen is not of the great actresses and "Imogen" is not one of the great parts. But both are full of interest and emotional demonstration. We always expect Viola Allen to appear at a good level and to render careful artistic works while we hardly look to be lifted up. And, it seems that, in this latest venture, she has really risen above her usual posture and plays the part with charm, naturalness and distinction.[92]

"One thing she did perfectly. She pitched her personation at exactly the right key and held it there," said Archie Bell, and he noted that "Some of her other critics are surprised that she did not rant and

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[90] Marian Spitzer Thompson and Melvin Parks, compilers, Stars of New York Stage, exhibition catalogue (New York: Friends of the Theatre and Music Collection of the Museum of the City of New York, 1970), p. 10.

[91] Brooklyn Eagle, 4 December 1906.

[92] "Cymbeline," Hartford Daily Times, 12 December 1906.

pull her hair when the action of the tragedy looked as if it was going bad for her. If there is any excuse for 'Cymbeline' at all, it reposes in that fact--the gentle repose and endurance of Imogen and Miss Allen knows it."[93] The critic of the Bangor News thought that the star knew something else:

> Miss Allen knows how to present the role of a good woman--perhaps her own personality blends with the character--and she was finely effective as the lovely Imogen. A graceful figure, both in flowing robes and doublet-and-hose, and with enunciation clear as the tinkle of silvery chimes, the audience found much to study and to admire in her delicate yet matured art. . . . There were some passages in which we wished she could have been a trifle less intense, and we did not quite appreciate, or possibly understand, her reading of the letter from Leontes.[94]

As one of the leading actresses in the country, it was inevitable that reviewers would compare Viola Allen to other stars. One, George Seibel, noted how she was better qualified for the role of Imogen than some other actresses. He wrote:

> We cannot imagine a Sarah Bernhardt or a Mrs. Carter playing Imogen. Cymbeline's daughter is made from finer stuff than the tawdry heroines who race and rant and romp around the stage--she is the incarnate ideal of womanliness, and none can play this role who does not wear this jewel in her heart. No trick of stagecraft can atone for the lack of this talisman; to play Imogen Miss Allen had to forget all about Glory Quayle; had to put Hall Caine and Clyde Fitch far away and learn the role from herself.[95]

Another Pittsburgh critic, Jackson D. Haag, compared her elocution with that of other leading performers:

> Miss Allen has her faults . . . Several years ago, for instance, she had a vocal mannerism that at times grated

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[93] Archie Bell, "Cymbeline," Cleveland News, March, 1907, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[94] "Big House to Greet Miss Allen," Bangor News, 3 January 1907.

[95] George Seibel, Pittsburgh Gazette Times. 3 March 1907.

> on the ears as harshly as did the elocution of Mrs. Fiske. With Viola Allen it was a habit of half intoning the most poetical passages coupled with a predisposition to allow her voice frequently to drop to a low register. Happily, that fault has disappeared and her style of speaking has immeasurably improved. . . .
>
> One of the most remarkable things about her this year, especially in the cave scene in "Cymbeline" where she appeared disguised as the youth, the resemblance declamatory, between her and Maude Adams was startling. They have the same tones, the same vocalization.[96]

In his assessment of Miss Allen's performance, William Winter provides a summary of her acting in Cymbeline:

> Viola Allen's assumption of Imogen must justly be placed among the best histrionic achievements of the American Theatre of recent years--a sweet, pure, sympathetic lovable interpretation of an exquisite woman. The dignity of her character, the sincerity of her mind, and the unquestionable truth and depth of her devotion to Dramatic Art . . . and her ample professional experience concurred to justify and require estimate of her achievement as exceptional and of enduring value. . . . entirely worthy of recognition and high respect as one of the leaders and dignitaries of the Stage in her time.[97]

Though critical reaction to Miss Allen's Imogen was more favorable than to that of either of her two previous Shakespearean roles, circumstantial evidence suggests that the production was not as successful as the others. Notices such as "Viola Allen's engagement in 'Cymbeline' hasn't been what might be called an electric success,"[98] appeared in various papers. Another indication of a failing production was the inclusion of other plays in the touring schedule. A double bill, The Countess Jeanne and Love in Livery was played for a few performances.

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[96] Jackson D. Haag, Pittsburgh Sunday Post, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[97] Winter, Shakespeare, 3rd series, pp. 152-153.

[98] Richardson Leander, 4 November 1906, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

Since the plays also were being given a trial production for possible use in another season, they will be covered in the next chapter. For much of the last months of the season, performances of Twelfth Night were interspersed with those of Cymbeline. Miss Allen also presented a four character bill composed of scenes from other Shakespearean plays and from classical comedy.[99] The length of the tour was unusual. The company spent forty-one weeks on the road, instead of the customary thirty-five, and thirty-one were spent in Cymbeline.[100] There seems to be a lack of articles announcing a profitable season, something that any good press agent like Wilstach would not fail to issue. Any one of these occurrences might take place in a normal tour, but together they provide a strong indication that Cymbeline was not as financially successful as the other plays.

Since Miss Allen's four character bill featured her in classical roles, it would be interesting to examine her performance since it showed the actress in a wider range of characters. The program was composed of Rosalind in the wooing scene from As You Like It; Juliet in the balcony scene from Romeo and Juliet; Lady Teazle in the screen scene from The School for Scandal; and Portia in the trial scene from The Merchant of Venice.[101] When asked about her playing in such a varied

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[99]The alternation of Twelfth Night and Cymbeline was noted in William Sage, 7 March 1907, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center. The double bill of plays is mentioned in the Pittsburgh Sun, 5 March 1907, and the four character bill is mentioned in the Omaha Daily News, clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[100]"Viola Allen's Tour Ends," 20 July 1907, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[101]"Viola Allen in Classic Bill," St. Louis Republic, May, 1907, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

bill, Miss Allen replied:

> The playing of any prominent Shakespearean role is an undertaking . . . and in a way the attempt at four roles is hard. It's quite presumptuous in me, but my only regret is that I cannot show the many phases of character in each woman. Each character in itself is great and many sided. . . . There is a certain something about the mere donning of the garments of a character that is a great help toward clothing the mind with the spirit of the role.[102]

In the reviews of the program, critical reaction varied with the character that was portrayed. "Miss Allen's work in 'As You Like It' was undeniably the best of the evening," felt C.R.C. of the Denver Times. He continued his appraisal:

> She seemed to put more of her energy and personality into the interpretation of the mischievous but courageous girl . . . and was a youthful, rollicking Rosalind . . . As Lady Teazle . . . Miss Allen was supplanted in general interest by her father . . . Miss Allen, who, as the wavering wife of the first scene was much better than in the denunciatory climax which seemed to lack the vitality necessary . . .
>
> The Portia of Miss Allen was more to general liking, her artistic rendering accentuating and driving home to every one the beautiful philosophy of human kindness.
>
> As Juliet, Miss Allen appeared lovable enough for any Romeo, but was somewhat handicapped by her voice in pretension of the required girlishness.[103]

The critic of the St. Louis Republic also felt that she succeeded as Rosalind because:

> To be sure, hardly any actress can fail as Rosalind any more than any actor can quite fail as Hamlet. So, upon the whole, Miss Allen succeeded as Rosalind, though it seems to be so much against the grain of her true womanliness to play a boy's part that she is obliged to abandon her muliebrious charm in the immensity of the effort. . . . Hence her Rosalind was all brave boy and very little of sweet woman.

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[102] Foster Henchman, "Hard Work to Play Four Roles in One Night," Denver Daily News, 22 May 1907.

[103] C.R.C., "Viola Allen Seen in Four Varied Roles," Denver Times, 23 May 1907.

> Juliet demands, above all else, a very girlish fresh voice while Miss Allen's is that of a mature woman. So, while Miss Allen presented a pretty scene in Capulet's garden, her Juliet is far from her most befitting role.
>
> As Portia, Miss Allen made what we deem the mistake of, heretofore alluded to, abandoning the woman to play the boy. . . . Then she . . . erred in making the "quality of mercy" speech more of a command than of appealing demand. She spoke it as if she would cram it down Shylock's throat . . .
>
> Though much too fine and noble a lady in appearance to fit the silly, country-bred and foolish Lady Teazle, she did quite well enough with it, though she looked neither silly or country-bred or foolish, all of which things Lady Teazle most assuredly was. Her appeal to Sir Peter for forgiveness was seemingly founded on no basis whatever.[104]

A third critic, also from Denver, summarized the entire bill:

> Whether for this reason or because the part is more germane to her own nature, Miss Allen was fascinating and real as Rosalind. But she failed to sustain the impression throughout the evening.
>
> In the first role she was blithe, but not boisterous, winsome, spontaneous and artistic. As Lady Teazle she was charming and did a strong bit of acting toward the end. But she did not exhibit any really salient characteristic. In the balcony scene from Romeo and Juliet she was too yearning and perfervid. As Portia, she was more satisfying.
>
> Through it all she was Viola Allen, and Rosalind and Viola seem to be more decidedly parts in which her nature revels. The mellow cadence and musical modulation of her voice were evident always, for she reads well.[105]

Though she gave only a few performances of this program, Miss Allen's technical ability to play the four characters adequately was demonstrated. In the case of Rosalind, Miss Allen found another Shakespearean role which was congenial, and with which she could possibly win success in a future revival.

Further Shakespearean revivals would not take place under the management of Nixon and Zimmerman for Miss Allen's contract was not

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[104] "Viola Allen in Classic Bill."

[105] Denver Republican, May 1907.

renewed at the end of its three year term. It is possible that the contract was allowed to lapse because of her less successful season in Cymbeline, but no reason for the ending of the contract is given in contemporary accounts. She returned to her old managers, Liebler and Company, and also returned to roles in modern plays.[106] Not until 1916 was Viola Allen again to play Shakespeare.

One can only speculate as to why the actress abandoned her revivals. The task of fighting the prevailing trend against Shakespeare might have proven too much for her. She might have tired of the work that the revivals required. The explanation might simply be that she had fulfilled her dream. "All my life," she once said, "I have been anxious to play three Shakespearean plays. First, Twelfth Night, which I have done; second, The Winter's Tale, which I am doing; and last, Cymbline, which I will do . . ."[107]

Viola Allen herself provided a set of guidelines with which to judge her venture into Shakespeare. In Theatre Magazine she wrote:

> Contrast the difference in the possibilities of success that confront the woman who attempts Juliet, Portia, or Ophelia, with three hundred years of comparison and tradition to contend against, as compared with those of one who appears before the . . . critics and the . . . audience in a play that is unknown, and a character that cannot excite comparison because her interpretation is the only one.
>
> Another unequal chance is found in the fact that while the modern play is written with the idea of telling a complete story in the two and a half hours allotted to an evening's entertainment in this busy age; with a Shakespearian drama it is necessary in order to conform to this custom to cut or omit passages and scenes that must necessarily detract from the perfect harmony of the printed work.

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106 Rennold Wolf, "Viola Allen Will Return to Liebler and Co.," New York Telegraph, 4 August 1907.

107 Marie Cecil Chomel, "Behind the Scenes with Viola Allen," Madame, May 1905, p. 231.

> The unfamiliarity of modern-day audiences with the beauties of blank verse, and the difficulty of obtaining actors to play the minor roles who are capable of reading it correctly, are still other obstacles in the path of every Shakespearian producer.[108]

In her productions of Twelfth Night, The Winter's Tale and Cymbeline, the actress had faced these problems.

All of the texts were cut and rearranged extensively, sometimes to the detriment of Shakespeare, so that they would fit the requirements of the production. In Miss Allen's view, these requirements included picturesque, historically correct staging in the nineteenth-century realistic mode. Ben Greet and his company were touring Shakespeare in America with minimal scenery at the time, but Miss Allen, in her interviews, defended the older, elaborate method. She also copied from other noted productions, particularly for Twelfth Night. In the staging of Shakespeare, Miss Allen's productions were not innovative. Some reviews note that she did have trouble finding actors capable of reading blank verse.

It is in the comparison of Miss Allen with others who had played the same roles that one sees her strengths and weaknesses as an actress. Her return to Shakespeare revealed in her acting a power that most critics had forgotten she possessed when she was playing in modern melodrama. It was frequently noted that she had lessened or eliminated many of her mannerisms. Her technical ability, diligence, careful study and intelligence as well as her womanly charm and grace were also highlighted by her years in Shakespeare. When she was compared with other performers

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[108] Viola Allen, "The Difficulties of Playing Shakespeare," Theatre, December 1906.

in the same roles, however, her interpretations were not always ranked highly. Though her Viola proved to be most popular with the public, critically it was generally considered to be only adequate.

Her Hermione was also considered merely adequate but the actress' Perdita was praised for its naturalness and grace. It was as Imogen, however, that she had the most uniform critical success. Several of the critics noted that the character was closest to her own womanly personality. Her performance in the four character classical bill, which included Rosalind, Juliet, Portia and Lady Teazle, was also most praised for the role closest to the star's temperament, that of Rosalind. Though no critic placed her among the great Shakespearean actresses of the day, she did show that she was competent and occasionally very good in her handling of roles that have been traditional tests of an actor's ability.

Being recognized as competent in Shakespeare enhanced Miss Allen's credibility as a serious actress. She was no longer considered only as an interpreter of melodramatic heroines. It also added to her prestige as a star, and, though not in the case of Cymbeline, to her financial success. Twelfth Night and The Winter's Tale were profitable ventures, however, showing that art could draw audiences.

Miss Allen's audiences, as noted, were drawn to a large extent from people who did not regularly attend the theatre.[109] By appearing in Shakespeare, she attracted many of these people to plays that would not ordinarily attend at a time when interest in Shakespeare was not

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[109] See above, p. 108.

as great as it had been in previous decades. Two of her revivals, The Winter's Tale and Cymbeline, were seldom seen even when the classics were a larger part of the performing repertory. Though her productions were not innovative, Miss Allen did a lasting service to the American theatre by contributing to the continuance of the Shakespearean tradition in America: bringing the plays to a new audience, reawakening interest in two seldom performed plays, and showing that Shakespeare was not always a financial failure. When she returned to her roles in contemporary drama she could look back on her three seasons as a star in Shakespearean roles not only as a time of personal fulfillment, but also as an achievement in which she could take justifiable pride.

CHAPTER V

THE STAR'S LATE CAREER

"Of course, I am appreciative of the roles that Clyde Fitch, Marion Crawford and Hall Caine gave me, besides those of some other English authors,"[1] remarked Viola Allen in reviewing her long career. From the season of 1907-1908 to her retirement in 1918--her later years as a star--Miss Allen was to play in dramas by many different authors, not limiting herself to the works of one or two dramatists as she did in earlier phases of her starring career. A prelude to the later career was the season's tour in Clyde Fitch's Toast of the Town in 1905-1906, during the Shakespearean revivals, and the inclusion of The Countess Jeanne by Harriet Ford and M.L. Girault, and Marivaux's Love in Livery during her season in Cymbeline. After experimenting with Irene Wycherley, by Anthony Wharton and Illusions, by Henri Bernstein, in the first season that she rejoined the management of Liebler and Company, the actress returned to a familiar dramatist--F. Marion Crawford, author of In the Palace of the King. His new drama, The White Sister, was to be the star's vehicle for three seasons. During the season of 1911-1912, she played in Louis Parker's The Lady of Coventry and Rachel Crother's The Herfords. Pierre Loti and Judith Gautier's The Daughter of Heaven was her play for the following season. Before returning to Shakespeare in 1915-1916, Miss Allen experimented with a new medium, film. She ended her career on the New York stage in another new drama, When a Feller Needs a Friend,

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[1] Ormsbee, "Miss Viola Allen."

by Harriet Ford and Harvey O'Higgins, in 1918.

When Miss Allen interrupted her Shakespearean revival to play in Clyde Fitch's The Toast of the Town in the 1905-1906 season, she stressed in her publicity the need to encourage contemporary dramatists.[2] "The classics are great works of art," she said in an interview, "but art still lives and there is no reason why a play as vital as any of the past should not be produced in the season of 1905. The modern playwright should have every chance to be heard."[3] Though her sentiments are most laudable, it is hard to see how she was encouraging contemporary playwrights in choosing a Clyde Fitch play, for he did not lack opportunities to have his work produced. In 1901, Fitch had achieved the distinction of having four plays running simultaneously on Broadway, an unprecedented feat that has been equaled by only one other author--Neil Simon. In 1905, the dramatist had two other plays on Broadway, The Woman in the Case and Her Great Match. He was, at the time, the most popular dramatist in America.[4]

The Toast of the Town was not even a new work. It had been originally presented as Mistress Betty in 1905 with Helena Modjeska as the star. That actress' illness, however, had forced the show to close.[5] Rather than offering encouragement to modern playwrights, Miss Allen

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[2] Miss Allen's press release explaning her return to modern drama is given above, p. 162.

[3] Willis H. Woods, "Viola Allen, Clyde Fitch, 'Tidaldean' and the Classics," Broadway Magazine, October 1905, p. 32.

[4] Arthur Hobson Quinn, A History of the American Drama from the Civil War to the Present Day, revised ed. (New York: Appleton Century-Crofts, 1936), pp. 265-296, and Wilson, American Drama and Theatre, p. 485-486.

[5] Quinn, History, p. 271.

seemed to be looking for an easy commercial success by her choice of the Fitch piece. Since she was allied with the Syndicate firm of Nixon and Zimmerman at this time,[6] it was also possible that this play was produced through their prompting and, in order to continue her Shakespearean revivals, the actress agreed to produce the Fitch play.

Another factor that might have influenced Miss Allen was the role of Betty Singleton. Fitch's talent for creating female roles that were eminently actable was well known.[7] His creation, Betty Singleton, was supposed to be a stage favorite of eighteenth century London, "the toast of the town." As the play opens, she is preparing to leave the stage to marry the Duke of Malmsbury. She has idealized the Duke and his position in her mind. The Duke is marrying her, however, because she appeals to his vanity. After Betty bids her stage friends farewell in the greenroom, she is called before the curtain to say goodbye to her audience. Using the real audience as the supposed eighteenth century one, the actress delivers her speech to the house at the close of the first act.

Some time passes between the first and second acts. Marital problems have developed between the newlyweds. The Duke, now a drunkard, constantly humiliates his wife, and that causes the couple to separate. Lady Charlotte, his cousin, persuades him to quit drinking, but Betty is jealous of the influence that the noblewoman has on her husband. She tells the Duke to choose between them; he refuses, and Betty storms out of the house. When he finds her at a country inn, they discuss their differences and agree to a reconciliation. A gossip, however, inflames Betty's jealousy

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[6] See above, pp. 152-153.

[7] Atkinson, p. 54.

with tales of the Duke and Lady Charlotte. To free her husband, Betty flirts with an old suitor. The Duke storms out in a rage, and then Betty drives the bewildered suitor away. In the final act, the actress, half-crazed and ill, is living in a cheap boarding house. In her delirium, she recalls her former glory and repeats her farewell speech. A fellow tenant, hearing the speech, realizes her identity and notifes the Duke. The curtain falls on their reconciliation, a change from the earlier version which ended tragically.[8]

In choosing Fitch's drama, Miss Allen also chose to be directed by him since the playwright always staged his own works. His rehearsal methods were unusual for the time. Instead of giving the actor "sides" (containing only his own lines and cues), Fitch first read the play to the entire cast. The actors received their parts, had a week to learn their lines, and then the playwright started rehearsals, with the entire company prepared for the production.[9] Fitch also had the final word on all aspects of the production, including scenery, properties, and casting.[10] One bit of staging attributed to him was the use of two tame swans in the third act of the play.[11] The original cast, which opened the play in Baltimore on 23 October 1905, included Isabelle Irving as Roxana, Fanny Addison Pitt as the dowager Duchess, Alice Wilson as Lady Charlotte, A.E.

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[8] Quinn, History, pp. 271-281, and "Miss Viola Allen in a Picturesque Play, 'The Toast of the Town,'" Baltimore American, 24 October 1905.

[9] "Dramatist Clyde Fitch Changes Old Order of Things," Toldeo Blade, 30 September 1905.

[10] Toledo Blade, 19 August 1905.

[11] "Miss Allen in New Fitch play," clipping, 3 October 1905, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

Anson as the Duke, Harrison Hunter as Lord Fairfax, James Young as Master Harry V. Bent, C. Leslie Allen as Mr. McLaughlin and J.H. Lewis as a lodger.[12] Robert Drouet later replaced Anson as the Duke and Ferdinand Gottschalk replaced Lewis as the old lodger.[13]

A new drama by a popular playwright who was also an experienced director should have provided Miss Allen with an overwhelming success, but there were weaknesses in the formula. One was the play. "Insipidity is the chief characteristic of this Clyde Fitch play," noted the critic of the New York Mirror. He continued:

> [More] strongly marked because of some striking situations and some virile dialogue, like lumps of ginger in a half sweetened pudding . . . [in] preparing the work for Viola Allen, Mr. Fitch has made some revisions . . . The comedy element has very much been developed at the expense of the emotional, and the character of Mistress Betty made to better fit the temperament of the present portrayer. But the play leaves the impression of tastelessness. The plot is devoid of ruggedness as the . . . powdered gallants who move through it, and the characters, with two or three exceptions, seem artificial beyond even the consideration of their customs and costumes.[14]

Concurring with this New York appraisal, a Baltimore critic wrote that:

> Of action there is little and of logic there is less. Mr. Fitch, in preparing this theatrical entree, took a few dramatic and some ethical values and mixed them indiscriminately, seasoned the concoction with a few clever epigrams . . . and trimmed it with elaborate settings and served the result as a dish for his admirers. . . .
>
> The play contains but few of Mr. Fitch's novel stage tricks. The one of note is in the first act, when the scene is the greenroom and the audience is clamoring for a speech from Betty on her last night of stage life. She trips out and a curtain is lowered. Then stepping before this she, still as Betty, speaks to the real audience.[15]

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[12] "Toast of the Town," Baltimore Sun, 24 October 1905.

[13] New York Sun, 3 December 1905.

[14] "Daly's--The Toast of the Town," New York Mirror, 27 November 1905.

[15] "Toast," Baltimore Sun.

While the drama was not judged to be one of Fitch's better plays, it was considered a challenge to Miss Allen's acting ability since "The part of Betty Singleton is enriched with picturesque details, and two incidents, one in which she bids goodbye to the Shakespearean roles which she has played in the first act, and a similar one in the last act when she renews acquaintance with them over an old trunk of stage costumes, are especially attractive." The star, in the opinion of the reviewer, met the challenge of the part. He continued:

> In the little tricks with which she entices the love of her young husband, she uses all the fascination of the personality which so many of her admirers have found charming and she also touches the many moods of her grief, outraged feeling, and abandonment of love . . . with truthfulness.[16]

One reviewer, in assessing her performance, felt that Miss Allen's ". . . dominant attitude is sincerity--the combined truth and fervor of an earnest and noble mind . . . whether simulating joy, levity, pride or grief, she is simple and true. A certain child-like sweetness of voice and loveliness of temperament is the charm of this performance.[17] As she does everything, Miss Allen plays Betty with a distinct originality," noted another reviewer. He continued: "She has a way of imparting tenderness with the flash of her eyes that speaks volumes. Words are not necessary to interpret her meaning, a bare glance being sufficient.[18] A reason for the actress' popularity in this role was given by one commentator who noted that:

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[16] "Viola Allen in New Fitch Play," Milwaukee Sentinel, 18 May 1906.

[17] "The Drama," clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[18] "Viola Allen Shines in Clyde Fitch Play," Toledo Times, 17 November 1905.

> Never before, we are certain, has Miss Allen been so completely Miss Allen, and as always she was generously and heartily applauded. Her interpretation of her character must have pleased the audience, and to his and their verdict of approval we therefore need not add a word.[19]

Not all of the critical response to the star's performance was favorable. One reviewer explains his negative reaction:

> Miss Allen is scarcely seen at her best in a part like Betty Singleton, which is so absolutely artificial in itself that nothing short of the most spontaneous emotion could invest it with the semblance of actuality. In it, the artificiality of her own acting is only too plainly apparent, but she is well versed in stage expedient, and succeeds in giving a fairly effective theatrical interpretation of purely theatrical inventions. By her energy she earns the applause which she receives.[20]

More detailed criticism of her performance is provided in another review:

> Miss Viola Allen is a growing disappointment to me. As the seasons go by her art seems to stand still, and today she is no better than she was in the time of "The Christian." Indeed, in some ways she is not so good, for unrestrained opportunity to indulge in a tendency to gush is being taken advantage of until she is fairly effervescent. The value of restraint and naturalness should make themselves apparent to anyone, but Niss Allen constantly imposes upon all credulity by an animated vivacity and by a smiling aspect that are out of season. She plays too fast, too, so that when she really has a climax she hasn't an arrow left in her quiver wherewith to transfix the attention of the audience.
>
> But any criticism of Miss Allen is the veriest act of supererogation. She is one of the biggest money-making stars in the country and money talks louder than anything else in the world. Everybody knows that, so, what's the use of talking about acting.[21]

That Toast of the Town was a financial success seems probable

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[19] E.F.E., "Colonial-The Toast of the Town," Boston Transcript, 23 January 1906.

[20] "The Toast of the Town," New York Post, 29 November 1905.

[21] C.H.C., Evening Telegram, 13 October 1905, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

from the circumstantial evidence available. Notices such as "a large audience saw the performance and was extremely enthusiastic" appeared in several papers.[22] In writing of Miss Allen's first two years with Nixon and Zimmerman, a period that included her tour with the Fitch play, it was noted that she never made profits less than $45,000 a season.[23] Much of this must have been made while on the road, since the drama only played thirty-eight performances in New York.[24]

After a year in the Fitch play, Miss Allen returned to Shakespeare for the 1906-1907 season. During that time she continued to search for new plays to add to her repertory. Two dramas, The Countess Jeanne, a one act play by Harriet Ford and M.L. Girault, and Love in Livery, an adaptation of Marivaux by Ms. Ford, were given some trial performances during that season. Both plays were set in France. The one-act drama, The Countess Jeanne, was about a young noblewoman in the time of the French revolution. Married to a count whom she does not love, Jeanne is torn between honor and duty when Andre de Beaupre, her real love, is called to join the fighting. Before he leaves, however, revolutionaries storm the chateau and capture Andre, whom they believe to be the Count, since he had so vigorously defended Jeanne from the rebels. At her pleading, Andre is set free. When her husband arrives, and learned from the revolutionaries of Andre's presence, he accuses his wife of infidelity, a charge she emphatically denies. The play ends with the announcement of Andre's death.[25]

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[22] New Orleans Picayune, 3 December 1905. Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[23] See above, p. 160.

[24] Mantle and Sherwood, 1899-1909, p. 509.

[25] "New Play at His Majesties," clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

Contrasting with the tragedy of the introductory piece was the comedy of the Marivaux play. In this eighteenth century piece, M. Orgon and M. Dorante arrange a marriage between their two children, Silvia and young Dorante. In order that they might get an unbiased view of their future partners, both Silvia and young Dorante, unknown to each other, trade places with a servant. The two supposed servants fall in love with each other, fulfilling their father's plan, and the two real servants, disguised as nobles, also fall in love. Everyone's true identity is finally revealed and there is a double wedding at the end of the play.[26]

Miss Allen played the title character in the first play and Silvia in the second, two parts that called for opposite emotions. "In the transition Miss Allen gives another proof of her ability to portray varying feminine moods," wrote the critic of the Toronto Globe, but he also noted "that she cannot translate herself into the characteristics of a Frenchwoman suggests itself, but that is only a passing reflection."[27] One reviewer provided a more detailed analysis of the actress in both parts. As the Countess he wrote of her:

> Miss Allen did a splendid bit of emotional work in the two scenes where such treatment was demanded. While there was no suggestion of ranting, yet her efforts were strong and convincing.

Of Love in Livery, he wrote that:

> Miss Allen essays the role of the maid with all the dash and ingenuousness of a girl who was heart and soul in the frolic. There was a spontaneous charm to her every act and deed. Her smile was contagious, her laugh infectious, and her simulated rage delightful, and withal, the womanliness shone radiant

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[26] "Miss Allen Pleases in Comedy," Pittsburgh Post, 6 March 1907.

[27] Clipping, Toronto Globe, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

and beautiful at all times.[28]

While the actress was praised for her work in the double bill, the plays themselves were not favorably received. "Rochester theatre-goers, however, apparently prefer to see Miss Allen in the classics," one notice reads, "for while 'Cymbeline' drew large audiences on Tuesday night and at the matinees yesterday, the audience last night was disappointingly small."[29] The critic of the Toronto Mail and Empire felt that the plays were "not of sufficient worth to warrant their dividing the week with the Shakespearean offering."[30] One commentator, however, did see merit in the Marivaux drama:

> Occasionally a Marivaux comedy is played at the Comedie, in Paris; but to the greater part of the English-speaking humanity he is unknown. That is a pity; for he was one of the wittiest of mortals. . . . Marivaux is quite as witty as Mr. Shaw, even when his humor has been done into English. All the more credit then is it to Miss Viola Allen that she had the artistic good sense to put on one of Marivaux's delicious pieces.[31]

"It was Miss Allen's intention to add 'Love in Livery' to her repertoire if it proved successful," noted the Montreal Daily Star, and though she worked so hard, almost too hard, it is not likely that the translation will be taken seriously by her management."[32] Though the two plays never became part of her repertoire, Miss Allen showed a willingness to experiment with different dramatic works.

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[28] "Miss Allen Pleases," Pittsburgh Post.

[29] Rochester Herald, 21 February 1907.

[30] "Viola Allen Seen in Old French Comedy," Toronto Mail and Empire, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[31] "Love in Livery," Rochester Post Express, 21 February 1907.

[32] "French Comedy at His Majesties," Montreal Daily Star, 2 February 1907.

Her next two plays, Irene Wycherly, by Anthony Wharton and Henri Bernstein's Illusions, adapted by Louis N. Parker, reflect a change in dramatic material for the star since they were neither classical plays nor romantic melodramas. Both were considered to be problem plays by the critics of the time. The Bernstein drama was to be her first vehicle since her return to Liebler and Company's aegis with the production scheduled for the Christmas season. In October, Miss Allen was in London consulting with both Parker and Bernstein about the adaptation.[33] The new version, however, was not finished by the beginning of December, so Illusions was postponed and Irene Wycherly was produced instead. Anthony Wharton, a Dublin college professor, wrote the drama which had been one of London's most popular plays that season.[34]

"In 'Irene Wycherly,' Miss Allen will be seen in a problem play of every-day life," wrote one paper, "something she has not attempted since she portrayed the leading woman in 'Sowing the Wind.'"[35] In the drama, the title character has been separated from her husband, Philip, for four years. He is a drunken philanderer who has caused the suicide of his mistress' husband. When Irene had reproached him about the suicide, Philip struck her in the face with a riding whip. She then left him, but because she was a Catholic, she would not give him a divorce. After four years, Lord and Lady Wycherly, her husband's parents, come to Irene and to beg her to return to her husband to preserve the family line.

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[33] "Viola Allen's New Play," 28 October 1907, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[34] "Miss Viola Allen's New Plays and Their Authors," New York Telegram, 5 December 1907.

[35] "Viola Allen Off for Baltimore," New York Telegraph, 39 December 1907.

During the separation, Irene has become friends with Harry Chesterton, a man whose personality and interests match hers. She defends this friendship to her husband's parents since her relationship with Harry is platonic, and, of course, she refuses to go back to Philip. Philip is blinded in a hunting accident, however, and Irene is finally persuaded to return to him.

The newly reunited Wycherleys are no more compatible than before their separation. Philip, not grateful to his wife for her aid, is consciously cruel to her. She patiently endures his mistreatment, and he finally begins to admire her for her endurance. When he attempts to caress Irene, she rebuffs him. Angered, Philip sends a note to his ex-mistress who is now remarried, and invites her and her new husband for a visit. When Irene learns of the identity of her house guest, she commands the woman to leave, but the new Mrs. Summers refuses, and Philip takes her side. Harry, meanwhile, is also a frequent visitor. He has rented a house nearby and comes over to flirt with Philip's sister in order to see Irene. He proposes to Irene, but she refuses him since she feels bound to Philip by her marriage vows. Summers, the new husband of Philip's ex-mistress--who, unknown to all, had caused Philip's accident--solves all the problems by killing Philip and then committing suicide.[36]

As a play, Irene Wycherley attracted attention for the dilemma it presented, and American critics found the piece controversial because of its subject-matter. "The play is one of the most powerful in its story and its working out that has been produced by any English writer in several years," commented the critic of the New York Times, but he also

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[36] "Mankind and the Acid Test," New York Times, 26 January 1908.

noted "that it is a play which will enjoy a large measure of success, [and] may be reasonably doubted for, for its theme is most unpleasant."[37] William Winter, of the New York Tribune, was even more forceful in his criticism:

> But whatever may be the meaning of the play, it only drenches the auditor's mind with a vile subject, and for that reason it ought to fail. If the public, made aware of the contents and character of such plays, would restrain its morbid curiousity for the sake of self respect, good taste and the interest of a great institution and a noble art, and manifest that silent, deadly disapproval which is indicated by absence, all such stuff would vanish.

Winter also commented on Miss Allen's performance of the title role. In his analysis of her acting, he noted that:

> She has studied the emotions that she is required to portray. Whether she feels them or not on the stage is unknown--probably she does not; for, if she did, to any considerable extent, that would injure her expression. She makes her audience feel them. In physical aspects, she is somewhat solid for the part. The dark hair, however, the soft brown eyes, the gentle smile, the peculiar little nervous, tremulous movement of the lips, are all appropriate and effective. But there is something in the clear cut nose, the firm chin, and a certain deep, hard note that comes occasionally in her voice that does not accord with the nature of a woman who would submit, for any reason, to the blackguard of her husband Wycherley's beastly ill-treatment, or refrain from putting him at once and forever out of her life. . . . The merit of Miss Allen's characterization is in the expression, not in the creation, of the personality.[38]

Constance Skinner, A Chicago critic, wrote of the star's ability to project feeling:

> She plays Irene as a woman who talks about emotions without feeling them. This may be Miss Allen's reading of the character, but it does not seem to be the author's.
> Miss Allen's worst fault, next to her insincerity, is her

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[37] "Play of Skill, Power and Genuine Insights," New York Times, 21 January 1908.

[38] William Winter, "Irene Wycherley," New York Tribune, 21 January 1908.

> lack of repose. She is never still for a moment. She won't even let the furniture be still, but sits on it all in turn and runs it about the room in the stress of her emotions. She marches up and down flinging her arms about and dropping them with a resounding kerflop on her satined sides til you fairly pray for a little moment of stillness.
>
> Apart from this windmill effect, Miss Allen gives a very well-detailed and entirely artificial performance.[39]

A third reviewer, from Philadelphia, commented on Miss Allen's suitability for modern dramas:

> Temperamentally she is perhaps less well adapted to the demands of present-day tragedy than is an actress, for example, such as Margaret Anglin or Mrs. Fiske. The star of 'Irene Wycherley,' like the author of the play, excels in the direction of technique. Her interpretive powers, admirable as they are, have been more disingenuous than inspired. Intelligence, delightful clarity of enunciation and careful adjustment of dramatic values, have been her leading artistic assets . . .[40]

In describing her approach to acting, Miss Allen explained how she portrayed emotions on the stage:

> We cannot really live any certain emotion every time we play a character, but to a certain extent one must realize the emotion; realize it is there, in order to make the audience feel it. But the emotion must not run away with the technique.[41]

Perhaps it was this attitude toward the expression of emotion that showed itself in her acting of Irene Wycherley.

As the critic of the New York Times predicted, Irene Wycherley did not draw large audiences despite a cast that included Walter Hampden,[42] a promising young actor who was to be a star in later years. The drama opened in Baltimore on 30 December 1907, had a New York engagement of

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[39] Constance Skinner, "Viola Allen gives 'Irene Wycherley' its Chicago Debut at the Grand," Chicago American, 7 April 1908.

[40] Philadelphia Public Ledger, 12 January 1908.

[41] Catherine Linn, "Favorite American Actresses," Pittsburgh Gazette, 10 March 1907.

[42] "Play of Skill," New York Times.

thirty-nine performances and toured after leaving Broadway.[43] In his memoirs, George Tyler called the play a "dismal failure" and noted that "Miss Allen, who had wanted to produce the play, refused to take any salary because she felt so badly about the failure."[44]

Illusions was an even less successful production. The only performances of the play took place in Chicago on the afternoon and evening of 18 April 1908.[45] Based on Henri Bernstein's Le Bercail, the play is the story of Evelyn Vaudry, a young wife and mother who leaves her husband and son to try Bohemian life with an author. After shedding her illusions about the other kind of life, she realizes that her husband is the one she loves. He graciously forgives her and takes her back.[46] Bernstein, the playwright, previously had written a very popular drama, The Thief, but "the play [Illusions] falls short of Bernstein's reputation in all these things partially because the dramatist did not deal with a subject of much importance, and partially because he wrote himself into a hole from which he was unable to save his play."[47]

To Burns Mantle, the flaw of the play was that:

> A repentant wife might be accepted again into the home of the man she deliberately deserted in this country, and her

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[43] Harris, p. 457.

[44] Tyler and Furnas, p. 210.

[45] Burns Mantle, "Illusions," Chicago Tribune, 20 April 1908. A careful search of the Chicago Tribune for the month of April, 1908 did not show any other performances of the play. Harris, p. 457, also was unable to find any other record of performance.

[46] NYDM, 25 April 1908.

[47] "Viola Allen in 'Illusions,'" Chicago Mirror, 20 April 1908.

> more or less public sins might be forgiven, but the situation would be, to say the least of it, exceptional; and, in being exceptional, not likely to prove either an appealing or popular subject. . . .
>
> If, in this play, the sinning wife had died heart broken and disgraced, denied the love of her son and the forgiveness of her husband, the moral point would have been stronger.

He also found Miss Allen to be unsuited to Evelyn for:

> [It] is hard to accept Viola Allen as a woman with problems to solve. She is not the type. She is, as has been said before, instinctively a comedienne, essentially an ingenue. . . . She is never assertive, determined, defiant, strongminded or impressively individual, and when she tries to be so, she is sure to appear more or less artificial. She is earnest, she has a limited emotional range, a certain command of pathos--but nature did not cast her for the modern problem plays.[48]

Though Miss Allen never toured in Illusions, Olga Nethersole later appeared in the drama, which had been retitled, The Redemption of Evelyn Vaudry.[49]

Since both Irene Wycherley and Illusions proved to be unsuitable as vehicles for Miss Allen, one may wonder why these plays were produced. One of the reasons that Miss Allen had left Tyler and Liebler and Company in 1903 was that she was tired of romantic melodramas.[50] When she returned, Tyler granted her wish to play in other types of dramas. The plays selected, however, were not strong, and she could not carry them by her acting.

Viola Allen's unsuccessful season in problem drama may have been responsible for the selection of her next piece, The White Sister, a romantic drama by F. Marion Crawford and Walter Hackett. Based on Crawford's

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[48] Mantle, "Illusions."

[49] Harris, p. 119.

[50] See above, pp. 130-131.

novel of the same name, the play was the story of Angela Chiarmonte, an Italian noblewoman who entered the convent after her fiance, Captain Giovanni Severi, was reported killed in Africa. After five years, Angela, now Sister Giovanna, has become head nurse at the order's hospital near Rome. Severi was not killed, but held captive. He had escaped, and returned to Italy to find his brother, now a patient in Sister Giovanna's ward at the hospital. The two lovers meet again and the struggle between love and duty begins. Giovanni tries every argument to persuade his fiance to renounce her vows and marry him, but she clings stubbornly to her word. In order to escape his presence, she volunteers to go to the order's leper colony in Africa. Finally she is tricked into coming to his room, and there Giovanni threatens to kill himself unless she petitions the Pope to release her from her vows. Reluctantly, she consents but then tries to persuade him to free her from her promise. When the nun's honor is compromised by being found in his room, Severi shoots himself to absolve her from guilt. He dies in her arms, and freed by his death, Sister Giovanna prepares to leave for the leper colony.[51]

The actress toured in The White Sister for three seasons. It first opened in Chicago on 15 February 1909, played there until 27 March, and then toured the Midwest for the remainder of the season.[52] During the summer a Mr. Parker (presumably Louis N. Parker, who had adapted Illusions) revised the drama. In her letters to George Tyler, Miss Allen discussed the progress of the revisions, particularly the last act. In one she offered a suggestion for the coming tour:

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[51] F. Marion Crawford, The White Sister, t.s., n.d., Lincoln Center.

[52] Harris, p. 460.

> By all means let us open in New York on the 27th if you think it is to our advantage--in fact I think it is clearly so--but do do do let us play the week in Baltimore beginning September 20th. I think it is very important to play the week before our New York opening and Baltimore of all places is the very best because it is a Catholic community and--now don't get furious--and I do so earnestly want you to try the new last act on our opening night there. If you really don't like it, or if the sentiment is against it, it is simple to go to the other one night, but I believe you will find it will do just the right thing for the play.[53]

The different version of the last act is not available for comparison, so it is impossible to tell whether Miss Allen's advice on the play was heeded, but her other suggestion was followed. The season's tour did open in Baltimore on 20 September 1909 and toured until late April 1910. The following season opened in August 1910 in Minneapolis.[54]

The White Sister was produced with the characteristic care which Liebler and Company gave to all its productions.[55] Miss Allen's habit, correct in every detail, was made by the nuns of a Baltimore convent. She had been tuaght the proper way to wear the garment by several nuns in Chicago.[56] Two important supporting roles in the drama were played by experienced and popular performers. Minna Gale, returning to the stage after seventeen years, played the Countess Chiarmonte. As a young actress, she had been Edwin Booth's leading lady for four years, and after his death she toured as a star for a year in the classics. When she married a wealthy New Yorker, Archibald C. Haynes, she retired from the stage. James O'Neill was Monsignor Sarinesca in the drama,

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[53] Viola Allen, Letter to George Tyler, 1 August 1909, Tyler Collection, Princeton University.

[54] Harris, pp. 462, 469.

[55] See above, p. 102.

[56] "Miss Allen's Garb," Pittsburgh Leader, 13 February 1910.

the seventh ecclesiastical role in his career. Though he had also played with Booth and had extensive experience in the classics, it was as the Count of Monte Cristo that O'Neill was famous. William Farnum, who played Giovanni Severi, was also a noted player--most famous for his appearance in Ben Hur.[57]

Another member of the O'Neill family received his first job in the theatre with The White Sister. The actor's son, Eugene, was hired as an assistant company manager during the tour. "A courtesy title," the dramatist recalled. "I had to sit at the gallery door and see that the local ticket taker didn't let in any of his friends. We would soon get acquainted and everything would be all right." His job was easy, but the future playwright was dissatisfied because The White Sister was "everything he despised in the theater--sentimental, contrived, wallowing in grease paint emotionalism . . ."[58]

Eugene O'Neill was not the only person to find fault with the play. Several dramatic critics saw flaws in the piece. "It is not good entertainment, and therefore it does not meet the first and most important demand of the theatre," wrote O.L. Hall in the Chicago Journal. He continued:

> It seems devoid of definite idea, without any particular literary value, and to contain no unusual acting value. . . .
> The play tells the story of a nun, and it does it crudely and with little discretion. To be blunt about it, there isn't the least excuse for the play.[59]

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[57] "Four Dramatic Stars in One Play," Pittsburgh Leader, 13 February 1910.

[58] Louis Shaeffer, O'Neill Son and Playwright (Boston: Little Brown and Sons, 1968), p. 157.

[59] O.L. Hall, "Viola Allen in New Play," Chicago Journal, 17 February 1909.

Burns Mantle noted that "It is not a colorful drama, being rather unvaried in theme and actions,"[60] while the New York Times critic found it to be "a play which the professional reviewer need not discuss at great length. It tells a highly colored story in a highly colored way, and generally with acting that is highly colored also . . ."[61]

One Toledo reviewer wrote:

> The story is delicately balanced and reverently handled. It offers abundant dramatic material and it is treated with great reverence by the players. Its message is that of several other dramas produced this season--the beauty and importance of service for others as opposed to self-indulgence and self-glorification.[62]

In an interview, Miss Allen provided some details on the reactions of the Catholic clergy to the play. When asked if the clergy were friendly or unfriendly to the drama, she replied:

> Friendly, always . . . The characters in the play--those characters that are ecclesiastical--are drawn with such sincerity, with such dignity and high mindedness, that clergymen everywhere have endorsed the play. . . . On moral grounds alone, The White Sister should have the endorsement of the church for it upholds the teachings of the church to the letter, and against stupendous obstacles.[63]

Her own reaction to playing a nun was reported in another article:

> To my mind, a nun is the most beautiful character in the world. Just think of a woman renouncing everything in order to work for all humanity. . . . I can think of no greater happiness than that enjoyed by a person big enough to take up such a life.[64]

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[60] Burns Mantle, "The White Sister," Chicago Tribune, 17 February 1909.

[61] "Viola Allen in 'The White Sister,'" Chicago Tribune, 17 February 1909.

[62] "Viola Allen at the Auditorium," Toledo Times, 5 March 1910.

[63] Charles N. Young, "Viola Allen Finds Boston's Quaint Shops Great Lure to Visitors," clipping, n.d., HTC.

[64] V. Carleton Olmstead, "Viola Allen," Pittsburgh Leader, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

For three seasons, Miss Allen played Sister Giovanna and numerous critics commented on her portrayal of the nun. "As Sister Giovanna, Miss Allen has a role that seems to have been created for her alone," wrote Charles Quinn of the Toledo Blade. He explained the statement by describing a scene in the play:

> At the end of the first act . . . the lovers meet for the first time since their parting five years before; the scene between the two is thrilling in its intensity. The nun has just entered the room to take care of the patient . . . The soldier has quietly entered on the opposite side of the room and stands there with his soul in his eyes. Instinctively, she seems to feel his presence and a troubled look comes into her eyes. Not a word is spoken, but slowly she raises her head. Their eyes meet. The soldier would rush to her and clasp her to this breast, but the robes of the nun restrain him. Then an acute pain seizes the little Sister in white. Her senses reel, her hand goes to her tired head; kind oblivion overtakes her; she falls like a wounded bird into the arms of Monsignore Saracinesca.[65]

One critic, Charles Darnton, felt that:

> The play gave Miss Allen little opportunity. Sister Giovanna could only pray for strength to . . . keep her steadfast to her vows.
>
> In her white robes, Miss Allen looked appealingly youthful, and her performance was finely poised between a saintly devotion to duty and a human yearning for the life she had renounced. That more than once brought tears to her eyes. At times there was a curious suggestion of Maude Adams in her tones.[66]

In his assessment, F.H. Young noted the hazards of the role:

> Miss Allen plays with the ease and skill of the experienced actress, conveying clearly the conflict of human passion with religious exaltation . . . The sentiment is outlined with sweetness and charm, but . . . for all the technical certainty displayed, she fails somewhat in sounding the emotional depths inherent in the role. Yet a more fervid effort in this line might result in an effect of overacting

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[65] Charles Quinn, "The White Sister," Toledo Blade, 5 March 1910.

[66] Charles Darnton, "The White Sister Gives Viola Allen Little Opportunity," clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

which would be fatal in this case.[67]

"Miss Viola Allen has always been better in roles requiring a nice reserve, well-bred suppression and refined sympathy than when called upon to represent great emotional stress, as in 'Irene Wycherley,'" noted Frederic McKay. He continued:

> To let the floodgates of a soul, in other words, is not her specialty, as it is Julia Marlowe's, Margaret Anglin's, and Mrs. Carter's.
>
> That is why there is more wisdom than meets the casual eye in casting this particular star as a Sister of Charity. . . . In her perfectly white dress, with her pallid features, with a manner of righteous rectitude, Miss Allen seems the living image of the woman, having taken the vows, who refuses to break them. . . . In fact, it would be difficult to imagine a type better adapted to Miss Allen's sincere intelligence and experienced playing . . .[68]

One reviewer saw her performance twice, and noted the changes after several months:

> Her voice has not outgrown the devices of melodrama. She lingers over the stressed syllable; she clutches adjacent furniture; she courts the . . . organ tones of her deeper notes. All these belong to a third person who is neither Sister Giovanna nor the girl Angela, but Miss Allen, the actress of many parts. Otherwise, the impersonation has become a series of vivid and truthful contrasting episodes between the woman and the nun.[69]

Two New York critics differed widely in their opinions of Miss Allen's acting. Alan Dale felt that:

> For utterly undiluted woe, systematic distress, and the double-distilled essence of luxurious despair, "The White Sister" actually stands alone . . .
>
> Viola Allen had the time of her young life. She simply ate up the agony of the thing in her prim way. With pursed-up lips, she acted with hard, metallic fervor. When quiet, she

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[67] F.H. Young, "Viola Allen in 'The White Sister,'" 18 December 1909, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[68] Frederic McKay, New York Evening Mail, 29 September 1901.

[69] "Majestic: The White Sister," Boston Transcript, 12 April 1910.

> was nice enough, but her agony never rang true, and you could sit through it all wickedly unmoved. It was all cut and dried and stereotyped and artificial.[70]

In the New York Commercial Advertiser, the reviewer was less biting. He wrote that:

> Miss Allen as "The White Sister" looked like a little plaster image that might have stepped down from its niche in some devout convent girl's bedroom. She played with her familiar grace and ease--and her familiar vocal affectations--an almost cloying sweetness of tone changing brusquely to a hoarse unloveliness. She was always in the picture, however, always the spiritual woman in love rather than the passionate soul struggling for freedom. And in spite of her wraith-like habit and make-up, she was youthful and womanly and attractive enough to give reality to the passionate transports of her wild soldier lover.[71]

After spending three years as Sister Giovanna, Viola Allen was to play the role for a little longer in the fall of 1911 while her new play, The Lady of Coventry, was being prepared. The length of the tour was unusual for the actress, but the financial conditions of Liebler and Company might have necessitated such a long tour. In the fall of 1910, the firm had spent lavishly on a planned production of Ysobel, an opera by Pietro Mascagni, based on the Lady Godiva legend, but the production never opened, and the company borrowed money from Abraham O. Erlanger, a member of the Syndicate, to keep going. The White Sister earned a profit of $150,000 during its tour.[72] Rather than investing money in a new production, it seems likely that Tyler chose to continue the tour of the play to get the much needed revenue that the play was producing.

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[70] Alan Dale, clipping, 29 September 1909, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[71] New York Commercial Advertiser, 29 September 1909.

[72] Harris, pp. 78, 93, 475.

When the star appeared again in a new play for the 1911-1912 season it was in a drama that was the opposite of The White Sister. Louis Parker's The Lady of Coventry was a variation on the legend of Lady Godiva. In this version, Lady Godiva, the Countess (or Dorothea, as she is known in the play) takes her famous journey because Leofric, the Saxon conqueror of Coventry, has promised to spare the townspeople if she consents to the ride. Leofric violates his own ban on looking at Godiva during the journey and is saved from being blinded by the Countess, who pardons him and promises to marry him.

Lady Godiva might seem an unusual character for Miss Allen, but the choice of the play further illustrates the financial difficulties of Liebler and Company. For the production, the scenery and costumes built for Ysobel were used.[73] If Tyler was hoping to recoup his losses through The Lady of Coventry, his plan failed. The drama lasted for sixteen performances in New York.[74] Parker's play was considered "turgid and murky" by one critic.[75] The New York Times reviewer found it to be "a play on a very antique pattern, crowded with bombast and choked with incident, none of which is dramatic in any genuine sense." He continued:

> Miss Viola Allen, long an actress of gracious charm, plays Dorothea, otherwise Lady Godiva, in her familiar manner. Why she should continue to play at all is a question, for she has gained all that the stage has to give her in the way of honor, and she has given it all that it is in her power to give. Certainly this play will add nothing to her fame.[76]

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[73] Herber Corey, "Robes of Velvet Take Place of Lady Godiva's Hair for Viola Allen," clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[74] Harris, p. 475.

[75] Alan Dale, clipping, 22 November 1911, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[76] "Lady Godiva Heroine of Parker's Play," New York Times, 22 November 1911.

Other critics commented on Miss Allen's acting of Lady Dorothea. One first gave his opinion on the playing of the crucial ride scene:

> It is true that Lady Godiva came into sight of the audience prepared for the ride and returned to the stage after the ride was over, but, at both times, she was heavily cloaked and a bare arm and a partially disclosed shoulder were the only intimations of nudity. Even her feet, which modern stage license would permit to be disclosed without immodesty, were sandaled and stockinged. Here Miss Allen's regard to prudery went just a bit too far . . .

He then commented on her acting throughout the drama:

> Miss Allen herself has lost none of the good looks which have helped her in her career and her voice, at times, has some of the old familiar cloying sweetness. In strenuous moments her tones become rather rasping and at no time is her presence commanding or impressive, although the action of the play calls for those qualities.[77]

While a Canadian critic felt that "she was particularly good in the love scenes, being true, womanly and sincere,"[78] Alan Dale felt that:

> Miss Viola Allen has not changed her methods at all. She has grown thinner, but not less theatrical. There were plenty of heroics for her to utter and she uttered them in her familiar way. She never managed to do more than touch the edge of emotionalism, but she certainly is a hard worker. Her acting was unchanged throughout. It was also in one key, that finally got on the nerves.[79]

After the failure of The Lady of Coventry, Liebler and Company tried a modern play for Miss Allen, The Herfords by Rachel Crothers. Miss Crothers was the first important modern American female playwright, and she had written such successes as Myself, Bettina and A Man's World.

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[77] James S. Metcalfe, "Viola Allen's Latest," 2 December 1911, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[78] London (Ontario) Advertiser, 16 November 1911.

[79] Alan Dale, "Godiva Wears Bath Robe," 23 November 1911, Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

In this "woman's rights" play, Tom and Ann Herford, two married sculptors, are competing for the same commission. Up until this time, they have been working on an equal basis, but when Ann wins the commission instead of Tom, the balance of their lives is upset. Tom finds himself unable to cope with losing to his own wife, while Ann, caught up in the expansion of her career, seems to be willing to neglect her duties as wife and mother. When their teen-age daughter, Millicent, runs away from boarding school, Ann sees the effect that her career has had on her family. She gives the commission to Tom and plans a trip with Millicent so that she might get to know her daughter again.[80]

"The Herfords gives the reviewer the difficult task of showing and interesting and worthwhile a play might be, and at the same time how undramatic," commented the critic of the Boston Transcript. He continued his analysis of the drama:

> There can be no doubt of the significance or interest of what Miss Crothers has to say. . . . Miss Crothers sees women assuming a disastrous and hopelessly false position. So she writes a play to say so.
>
> Now, to set all this before an audience, there must be a good deal of talk; and the greater part of "The Herfords" is little else. . . . But we are only just learning to expect such unalloyed seriousness of thought upon the stage: and those who write in this vein have found it necessary to write brilliantly . . . Miss Crothers cannot do this.
>
> She does, however, get characterization in her discussion, which is something that few of the brilliant disquisitionists can manage.[81]

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[80] Rachel Crothers, He and She in Arthur Hobson Quinn, ed., Representative American Plays (New York: The Century Co., 1919), pp. 927-962. By the playwright's direction, the play's title was changed for publication, but the cast list given shows it to be the drama in which Miss Allen appeared.

[81] K.M., "Viola Allen's New Play," Boston Transcript, 26 January 1912.

Miss Allen also analyzed the drama and when she was asked in an interview about her part, she replied:

> I love the role. . . . After all, when it comes right down to choosing what is best in the world, the best thing a woman can be is a mother. In ever woman the mother instinct is the strongest feeling.[82]

In another interview she talked about work with Miss Crothers, who also directed the play:

> If you can explain in what way a woman is not just as competent as a man in conducting rehearsals, I should be pleased to listen. Are men more artistic on the stage? . . .I can answer . . . with one word--no. . . . We require a person who knows what the play is about, what it means, and how it should be presented and if Miss Crothers is not more competent than any man, how can we expect to make a success of our work? . . . [That] she just happens to be a woman doesn't lessen her ability to direct rehearsals.[83]

The Herfords premiered on 24 January 1912, in Boston, a city where the critics were very familiar with Miss Allen's acting. "Miss Allen had a different role from any she had appeared in in this city in some years," noted Edward H. Crosby, who continued by analyzing the part:

> It is emotional in the final act, but prior to that the work is more in the light comedy vein and she carried it well. She had her familiar mannerisms but they have been softened by experience and did not intrude in the impersonation. The lines where she wrung the story from her daughter of the engagement, the expression of thankfulness when she learns that the child can still look her mother in the face and seek her advice, were better than anything Miss Allen has recently done here.[84]

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[82] Jessie Henderson, "An Absorbing Interview with Miss Viola Allen," Boston Herald, 28 January 1911.

[83] Boston American, 28 January 1912.

[84] Edward H. Crosby, "Viola Allen in New Role," Boston Post, 25 January 1912.

K.M. of the Boston Transcript felt that:

> Miss Allen acts as she has always acted--unevenly. She has pleasant moments of comedy. . . . But through the better part of the two acts the actress seems nervously feeling about for the emotions that should be driving her. It is hesitating, self-conscious, over-assertive acting. When she reaches her two big scenes, however, all this is gone. She manages the quarrel as very few actresses would dare. There is no attempt to reach high climaxes and make unnatural but effective "points." She is simply driven on by her own desires and the reactions of her husband. Far more deeply in the scene with Millicent, she touches the wells of sympathy. Hardly another actress could have withstood the laughter that the child provoked.[85]

In The Herfords, Viola Allen seemed to have found a play and a character better suited to her ability than The Lady of Coventry. After leaving Boston, the production toured New England and the South until early May. Its projected New York production was postponed, however, when Miss Allen accepted the lead in The Daughter of Heaven for the next season.[86] Financially, The Herfords on its tour grossed at least $2,000 a performance, even in the smaller towns.[87] Had she elected to stay with the play, it seems that Miss Allen would have added to her standing, both as an actress and as a starring attraction.

Instead, for "the first time since she became a star . . . Miss Viola Allen is to be seen as an individual member of a company. But the company will be that of The Daughter of Heaven, the authors Pierre Loti and Judith Gautier, and the production the most tremendous ever made by dramatic producers."[88] The drama was originally written for Sarah

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[85] K.M., "New Play."

[86] Harris, p. 473.

[87] "Starring for the Love of It," Louisville Times, 18 May 1912.

[88] "She Couldn't Resist," Toledo Blade, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

Bernhardt, but that star couldn't afford to produce it. Liebler and Company, looking for a successor to their spectacle, The Garden of Allah, optioned the piece and spent a whole year in providing suitable scenery and costumes.[89] They paid $105,000 in costs for the production.[90] One account of the play provides a detailed picture of the many settings:

> A lonely mountain landscape introduces the spectacle, and then come pictures of the Emperor's Palace at Peking, the garden of the Empress' palace at Nanking, and the throne room of the Imperial Palace--all most beautifully and lavishly presented.
>
> The Pavillion of the Empress, constructed, seemingly, of solid marble introduces the second part, to be followed by a battle scene on the Wall of Nanking. In the latter is a funeral pyre which is the last word in stage realism. In the final act there is an imposing scene laid outside the Great Gate of Peking, and then an interior set showing the Emperor's throne room, where the denouement of the tragic story of the imperial lovers is reached.[91]

Though the scenery was lavish, the story of the play was simple. The Manchu Emperor of China left his court at Peking to travel, incognito, to Nanking to see the beautiful Ming Empress of China so that he can persuade her to consolidate the empires. Though mortal enemies, they fall in love, and it seems that his plan will work, but Nanking is attacked by the Emperor's troops, who have taken the initiative in his absence. The Empress leads her own troops to defend the city, but she is defeated and captured by the Manchu forces. When she is brought to Peking, she learns the true identity of her lover. The Emperor tries to persuade her to marry him, but she, broken by the defeat of her army and the death of

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[89] Archie Bell, "Viola Allen in Chinese Spectacle," Cleveland Plain Dealer, 5 February 1913.

[90] "'The Daughter of Heaven,' a Magnificent Spectacle," Stage Pictorial, December 1912.

[91] Unidentified clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

her son, remains true to her honor as a Ming Empress and commits suicide.[92] "'The Daughter of Heaven' always appealed to me as just my kind of a play and my kind of part," said the actress in an interview. "It is Romeo and Juliet reincarnated in the terms of an art and civilization so ancient that by comparison Shakespeare's romances seem strangely modern. But to me, it is just as human in its emotions as they are."[93]

With all the emphasis on the spectacle of the piece, the analysis of the acting is brief in most reviews. Collier's Weekly noted that "Miss Viola Allen is the queen and her intelligently used and beautiful voice added much to the unhappy lady's charms."[94] In the judgment of the critic of the New York Dramatic Mirror:

> Miss Allen played the Empress with a great deal of dignity and her usual rhetorical charm. The conditions are not conducive to an actress doing impressive work, and her long speech in the assault scene might be profitably cut. She was more than interesting in the last scene, and yet, perhaps, the display of a little more ardor would enhance the impression of the inherently touching incidents.[95]

Charles Darnton, in the New York World, felt that:

> Those who stayed till the bitter end were rewarded by seeing Miss Allen in her one really appealing moment. She played the scene after the Empress takes poison with more feeling than she had shown at any other time. Otherwise her acting seemed largely a matter of routine--a display of those qualities acquired in her long experience as an actress. She was competent, but lacking in the finer shades of tenderness and imagination.[96]

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[92] "The Daughter of Heaven," New York Post, 14 October 1912.

[93] Henry Tyrrell, "A Modern Viola," Cosmopolitan, February 1913, p. 409.

[94] Collier's Weekly, 2 November 1912.

[95] "The Daughter of Heaven," NYDM, 16 October 1912.

[96] Charles Darnton, "'The Daughter of Heaven' Undramatic Spectacle," New York World, 14 October 1912.

Though Miss Allen was judged competent in her character and though no expense was spared on the production, The Daughter of Heaven was a failure. George Tyler gave the reasons for its lack of success:

> So I gave up the idea [bringing the Ballet Russe to America] with great reluctance and went on with The Daughter of Heaven, determined at least to see if we couldn't outdo the gorgeous costuming and the scenery of the Russians.
>
> We really did, I think--the costumes that we had specially made in Milan and the sets that Edward Morange executed for us were just about the handsomest things America had ever seen. Viola Allen played the lead for us, which was always a privilege and a pleasure, but it was no go--the thing ended up with losses all around. For once we could see why too. It was a beautiful play but, being packed full of Oriental calm and decorum, it called definitely for a small theatre where the tiny subtleties could get across. At the Century, we plumb had to step it up to sort of shouting melodrama--nothing else could fill that huge space and reach the balcony--and that was poison.[97]

The failure of The Daughter of Heaven was to be prophetic for the future of Liebler and Company. At the end of the 1912-1913 season, an article in the New York Dramatic Mirror announced the firm's intentions to severely curtail its operations for the following year. The only new productions would be General John Regan, an Irish comedy, and the tour of the English actor, Cyril Maude. "Mr. Tyler announced that the theatrical taste of the New York public had become of a kind that he was unable to satisfy."[98] Even with its severely curtailed operations, Liebler and Company could not survive the new season and the firm filed a petition for bankruptcy on 4 December 1914. Besides being over-extended in its productions, the company was hurt by the decline that the outbreak of World War I in Europe brought to theatre patronage, and by soaring productions costs.[99]

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[97] Tyler and Furnas, pp. 233-234.

[98] "Lieblers Retrench," NYDM, 7 May 1913.

[99] Harris, pp. 132, 484.

Expensive spectacles like The Daughter of Heaven were necessary to counteract the effects of the motion picture industry on the theatre. By 1910, there was a noticeable drop in business on the road as more theatres began to convert to movies. In order to compete successfully for audiences, producers turned to the type of entertainment that movies could not provide: musicals, spectacles and "literary drama." Though some producers survived, Liebler and Company was one of the management firms that had its demise hastened by the changes which accompanied the emergence of film.

Even before the failure of Liebler and Company, it seems that Viola Allen's association with the firm was ending. The tour of The Daughter of Heaven did not last the entire 1912-1913 season, and she appeared in no other new play or revival to close out the year. For the 1913-1914 season, she did not appear at all on the stage.[100] If The Daughter of Heaven had been successful, it would certainly have toured one or two seasons to recoup the huge investment made in the production; but its failure and the retrenchment of Liebler and Company left the actress without a play.

Miss Allen was not without alternatives, however, for as early as the end of 1912, she had become associated with the Famous Players Film Company, for whom she was supposed to recreate some of her most noted roles the following year.[101] Daniel Frohman was one of the managers associated with the new company. It included such stars as Sarah Bernhardt, Minnie Maddern Fiske, James K. Hackett, and Weber and Fields. For the

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[100] Harris, p. 479, and Morehouse, "Broadway After Dark."

[101] Advertisement, Famous Players Film Company, The Billboard, 14 December 1912.

firm, Miss Allen was to star in The Christian and several of her Shakespearean roles.[102]

Neither of these possibilities materialized. Though she was offered $25,000 to appear in The Christian, when the film was finally released in March of 1914, Edith Storey played the role of Glory Quayle.[103] According to an account in the Minneapolis News, Miss Allen had been engaged for Glory, but when the company went to the Isle of Man to rehearse under Hall Caine's direction, the author told her that "You can't play Glory, Viola, you're too fat."[104] In August of 1914, the actress wrote to Tyler asking permission to search the costume trunks of her Shakespearean productions to see what was available for use in a possible film of these three plays,[105] but there is no record of that movie ever being made.

In 1915, however, the actress finally made her film debut in the first movie version of The White Sister.[106] It was filmed in ten days in Chicago for the Essanay studio. Miss Allen, in an interview, gave her reaction to working in the new medium:

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[102] "Daniel Frohman Gets Big Stars," clipping, n.d., Daniel Frohman Collection, Lincoln Center.

[103] Toledo Blade, 5 March 1913, and "The Christian," NYDM, 24 March 1914.

[104] Minneapolis News, 24 February 1914.

[105] Viola Allen, Letter to George Tyler, 8 August 1914, Tyler Collection, Princeton University.

[106] According to the clippings catalogue in the research divisions of the Library and Museum of Performing Arts at Lincoln Center, there were four films of The White Sister made in 1915, 1924, 1928 and 1933. Research and inquiries at Lincoln Center, The American Film Institute in Washington, D.C., and the Library of Congress failed to produce any evidence that a copy of the 1915 version of The White Sister still exists.

> What I dreaded most was the camera, and I find that my fears were baseless, for during the work I am oblivious of it. Film work bears only one comparison to the stage, and that is in the expression of emotion, for while an actress cannot give vent to her feelings in voice, she can convey her mental state and the workings of her emotions through facial expression. In other respects it does not suggest the spoken drama. . . . [The] cold stare of the camera's eye registers the work to be flashed later to millions of people. Even the makeup is different.[107]

When the film was released in June, 1915, a new set of critics had an opportunity to evaluate the actress. "In the first two reels, Miss Allen shows she is no longer young," commented the critic of the Chicago Herald. He continued:

> The pitiless camera brings into view every line in her face. The girlish costumes she wears do not hide the signs of youth's disappearance as later the nun's costume does. The cowl tends to enhance the beauty of Miss Allen's expressive eyes. Her slender figure and rather fragile appearance are set off by the white costume she wears as Sister Giovanna, and she looks years younger.[108]

In his comments for the New York Mail, the critic not only assesses Miss Allen's acting, but also discusses the merits of the film itself:

> This film will attract quite a bit of attention and considerable business because of the name of the star and the popularity of the story as a play and as a novel. The film visualization is very, very weak. There are no beautiful bits of artistry in the way of charming exterior locations or effective interior lighting; the acting of all the principals is too theatrical and never convincing; and the camera work, or rather the directing of the camera work in critical moments, is terrible. . . . This camera trouble was the worst fault with the film, but the story was poorly presented, since it dragged because of unnecessary bits, and the essential points were not registered with sufficient force. The film has been produced very much "old school," and it is too bad, because it might have been a good production. Miss Allen's face does not register "youth" as needed for film work, but a clever director could

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107 "Viola Allen Filmed in White Sister," Chicago Daily News, 27 May 1915.

108 "Viola Allen Wins Praise in Essanay 'White Sister,'" Chicago Herald, 28 June 1915.

> have handled her so that she could have been seen to much better advantage.[109]

Though Miss Allen seems to have shown potential as a film actress in her debut in The White Sister, it is the only film that she made.[110]

From the newness of film, the actress turned back to an old love, Shakespearean drama. She joined James K. Hackett as his co-star in a series of Shakespearean revivals for the 1915-1916 season. Hackett was the son of the famous comic actor, James H. Hackett, who was best known for his Falstaff. The younger actor was most noted for his roles in romantic melodramas like The Prisoner of Zenda. After he inherited a million dollars from a relative, he decided to abandon melodramas and use the money to mount a series of classical revivals.[111] The first, Macbeth, opened in New York on 7 February 1916.[112]

It had been nearly ten years since Viola Allen had staged the last of her Shakespearean comedies. When asked about playing in tragedy, the actress replied:

> I'm sick to death of being sweet. . . . It is a relief to be just as horrid as I can!
>
> As a matter of fact, there is no reason why Lady Macbeth should not be played by a woman whose sweetness of nature betrays itself . . . Lady Macbeth has been a mother, and speaks tenderly of the memory of nursing babes; she loves her husband with a love none the less strong because it is tinged with ambition for him. . . . Injustice is done to both the character and the dramatist in conceiving the former as nothing but

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[109] "Viola Allen in 'The White Sister,'" New York Mail, 24 July 1915.

[110] An article in the Photoplay Journal of July 1917 incorrectly lists Miss Allen as the star of Lady Barnacle, but WID's Independent Review of Feature Films of 21 June identifies the star as Viola Dana.

[111] Wilson, American Drama, pp. 92, 283, and clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[112] Morehouse, "Broadway After Dark."

a strong-minded woman.[113]

"Miss Allen's Lady Macbeth never suggested the petty, self-interested woman that is frequently identified with the character," wrote the critic of the New York Dramatic Mirror. "Rather, she endowed the role with a spirit of unselfishness, a spirit which seemed to regard her husband's welfare as more important than the power which his position gave her."[114] In the New York Times, the reviewer also noted her different interpretation of Lady Macbeth. He wrote:

> Miss Allen, looking much as she did ten years ago, brings a collection of intensified mannerisms, the old throaty delivery and an intense respectability of manner. . . . She presents a Lady Macbeth all her own, a maternal Lady who neither cajoles nor bullies her Lord and master, but wheedles and patronizes him . . . She shares with some others in the drama an apparent intent to achieve distinction for the performance by avoiding the conventional cadences and intonations, and at times the sense and the music are also avoided in the process.[115]

"It is a little hard to tell just the reason for the failure of Viola Allen's Lady Macbeth, but unfortunately there was no doubt about the result," commented the critic of the Brooklyn Eagle. He continued his analysis:

> In the scene of the letter and the daggers she read intelligently and with the proper emphasis, but she evoked not even the ghost of a thrill. . . . Miss Allen was somewhat better in the banquet scene, but still very far from adequate. Her greatest success was made in the sleepwalking scene where . . . she got a touch of awe and mystery which redeemed the scene and perhaps the part as a whole from total failure. But a Lady Macbeth who does not wake up her audience until 10:30 is just

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[113] Katherine Brooks, "Viola Allen Likes the Role of Lady Macbeth--It is a Relief to be Horrid, She Tells Interviewer," Boston Advertiser, 21 January 1916.

[114] "Macbeth," NYDM, 12 February 1916.

[115] "Hackett and Allen Produce 'Macbeth,'" New York Times, 8 February 1911.

a little late in the game.[116]

Another reviewer gives a more detailed account of the actress' performance in the sleepwalking scene:

> Miss Allen simplifies matters by reducing the tragedy to the level of an ordinary sleep-walking episode. Discarding entirely the declamatory manner sacred to her predecessors, she murmurs her words so that she is frequently inaudible, yet leaves a very definite impression through the realism of her anguished hands of the payment which conscience demands of the sinner during the black, uneasy hours of the night.[117]

The second revival, The Merry Wives of Windsor, opened at the Criterion Theatre on 20 March 1916 with Viola Allen as Mistress Ford, Henrietta Crossman as Mistress Page, and Thomas Wise as Falstaff. Hackett was to have played the role his father had made famous, but he had been taken ill a week before the play was to open and Wise replaced him.[118] One critic discussed the acting of the three principal characters:

> It were [sic] not quite fair to emphasize overly the importance of Mr. Wise in last night's production for there are many pleasant things to be said of Miss Viola Allen who played Mistress Ford and of Miss Henrietta Crossman who was Mistress Page of the piece. In the penetration of Sr. John's most material amativeness, and in the plotting of their womanly revenge, they were so naughtily vivacious about it all that even with a certain sneaking liking for that fat rascal, Falstaff, one quite agrees with the artful minxes that old John must be soundly punished . . .
>
> In their good looks are pleasant contrasts--Miss Allen, dark of hair and sanguine . . . Miss Crossman with hair like fine gold and face almost too pale. They were never dull, these competent women, and fairly shared with Mr. Wise the honors of a trying evening.[119]

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[116] "Hackett's 'Macbeth' Thing of Beauty," Brooklyn Eagle, 8 February 1916.

[117] Town and Country, 20 February 1916.

[118] "The Merry Wives," New York Times, 21 March 1916.

[119] "Wise a Delight as the Fat Knight," New York Sun, 21 March 1916.

Though one reviewer felt that "Comedy is always a serious business with Miss Viola Allen, which accounts for the forced humor of Mistress Ford,"[120] another was generous in his praise. He wrote:

> I think Miss Viola Allen deserves more than the usual tribute paid her, for as Mistress Ford she played a comedy role that rocked with laughter and flirtatious charm. After so ponderous a role as Lady Macbeth, it was an enjoyable contrast, and Miss Allen did it beautifully, with grace and spontaneous vivacity.[121]

Later the same reviewer reminisced over the production and noted:

> Indeed, the more I think of Miss Allen's Mistress Ford, the more I realize how much attention she gave to every little point. For an actress who has been accustomed to playing a different line of character, her interpretation was all the more admirable.[122]

Because of Hackett's illness, The Merry Wives of Windsor was his last Shakespearean revival that season.[123]

In both productions, but particularly in Macbeth, it was the scenery designed by Joseph Urban, a practitioner of the new stagecraft, that caught the attention of many of the critics.[124] The new stagecraft, which challenged many of the traditional concepts of scenic design, drew its inspiration from the ideas of Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig. It was one of the forces that was changing the American theatre during the early years of the twentieth century. Ibsen and Shaw had been presented

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[120] "'The Merry Wives' at the Criterion," New York Times, 21 March 1916.

[121] NYDM, 3 June 1916.

[122] NYDM, 29 April, 1916.

[123] "Merry Wives," New York Times.

[124] For a discussion of Urban's design for Macbeth, see "Urban's 'Macbeth,'" Boston Transcript, 12 January 1916.

in the 1890s, and by 1916 one could produce one of their plays without being arrested. With George Pierce Baker and his English 47 classes, drama had become a subject of serious study, part of the college curriculum. Other indications of a new approach to theatre were the community theatre movements and the attempts to establish a permanent repertory theatre, the New Theatre, in New York. Russian performers familiar with the acting principals of Stanislavsky had begun to arrive in America during the early years of the century, while Mrs. Fiske had already developed her own principles of realistic acting. In 1915, three groups which were to alter the American theatre significantly were established: the Washington Square Players (who later became the Theatre Guild), the Neighborhood Playhouse, and the Provincetown Players. Eugene O'Neill's first play, Bound East for Cardiff, was presented by the Provincetown Players that year.[125] The influence of the motion picture on the theatre has already been noted.

One can see many of these changes reflected in the latter career of Viola Allen. While she was in the middle of her Shakespearean revivals, the actress had turned to the work of Clyde Fitch, the most popular American playwright of that time, and presented his play, The Toast of the Town, for a season, mirroring the growing importance of native dramatists. She also experimented with European playwrights, presenting Marivaux's Love in Livery with a curtain raiser, The Countess Jeanne. When she returned to the management of Liebler and Company, it was in two plays that showed the influence of Ibsen: Irene Wycherley and Illusions, both dramas by European authors which discussed the

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[125] Wilson, American Drama and Theatre, pp. 297-354.

problems of contemporary life. The White Sister was her return to the romantic melodrama in which she had first made her reputation as a star. Its profitable three year tour of the country showed that, though tastes were changing, melodrama was still a popular attraction in the United States. Her next play, The Lady of Coventry, was a combination of romantic melodrama and the new spectacle play which the theatre used to compete with the movies.

In The Herfords, she made her first appearance in a play by an American author, a woman, that seriously discussed contemporary American life, again reflecting the growth of American playwriting. With The Daughter of Heaven, the actress returned to the elaborate scenic spectacle. As did many of the stars in theatre in that period, she had a brief career in silent film recreating her role in the first film version of The White Sister. Her appearances in Macbeth and The Merry Wives of Windsor were a return to Shakespeare, the one playwright whose worth was recognized by both the old and new theatre, a stable figure in a swiftly changing scene.

Throughout the years of her late career, as Miss Allen shifted from play to play in order to adjust to the changing theatre, the comments of the reviewers pointed out a consistency in her acting style. Her outstanding virtues were still her intelligence, technical ability, grace, sweetness, and womanly charm. Many critics liked her melodious voice, but some commented on her vocal mannerisms, particularly the use of gutteral tones. One complaint about her acting, a lack of emotional depth, was most clearly illustrated in her unsuccessful portrayal of Lady Macbeth. In The Herfords, however, she showed her womanly charm advantageously, especially in the scene with her daughter.

The Merry Wives of Windsor proved that she still had skill in playing comedy. Perhaps her representative role in this portion of her career was Sister Giovanna in The White Sister, in which she was able to use her sweetness and sincerity, especially in the film version, to give credibility to a melodramatic part.

Hackett's Shakespearean revivals were to be the last time that Viola Allen was seen in a commercial production. Her next appearance, on 1 December 1918, was as Margaret Russell in Harriet Ford's and Harvey O'Higgins's When a Feller Needs a Friend, a benefit production for the State Women's War Relief. This was the premiere performance of the drama, which was written to be used by amateurs to raise money for war orphans.[126] It was the actress' last appearance on the New York stage in a play.[127] After thirty-five years in the theatre, Viola Allen had ended her career. " . . . I felt that I had been most fortunate in having so many wonderful years in the theatre," she said in a rare interview given after she had retired." Then, she explained her retirement:

> People were so kind to me that I wanted to retire leaving my audiences with the memory of myself at my best. . . .
> After all, we each have a certain span of life, and then we must make way for someone else. I think I was greatly favored when I was able to stay on the stage as long as I did. I have been perfectly happy since I retired.[128]

One cannot ignore several other factors which might have

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126 Vera Bloom, "'When a Feller Needs a Friend'--For Amateurs Only," Theater, January 1919.

127 Some accounts report that the actress last appeared on the New York stage as Viola in Twelfth Night in July 1920, but a search of the New York Dramatic Mirror and the New York Times for that summer failed to produce evidence of such a production.

128 Gladys Hart, "Viola Allen Values Memories Above the Risk of a Comeback," New York Tribune, 3 May 1936.

contributed to her decision to leave the stage. In 1918, the actress turned fifty-one and she had been on the stage since she was fifteen. Touring was a tiring experience even under the best of circumstances, and there was no reason for her to continue. She had been one of the top money-making stars in the country for several years and her husband, Peter Duryea, was a very wealthy horse-breeder. She had achieved her dream of producing a series of Shakespearean revivals and had won acclaim for her efforts. It was becoming increasingly difficult to find suitable roles, as the failure of several of her later plays showed. In reviewing the one film that she made, some critics noted that the camera made her look older than she had appeared on stage. Her father, with whom she had made her debut on the stage and toured for many years, died in February of 1917.[129] Finally, changes were occurring in 1918 that were to revolutionize the American theatre. As an actress who had learned her craft in the nineteenth century theatre, who scored her greatest successes in that theatre, and who, in her career, seemed most at home in that theatre, she may have felt no desire to try, at that point in her life, to adapt to new theatrical conditions.

After her retirement, Miss Allen made a brief return to the stage when she played Viola in Twelfth Night in an outdoor production at the Sleepy Hollow Country Club. The production was a benefit for the hospital in Ossining, New York.[130] For several years the Duryeas lived in Europe; then in 1936, she made a brief appearance at a

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[129] "Charles Leslie Allen Dies," New York Times, 24 February 1917.

[130] "An Outdoor Performance of 'Twelfth Night,'" Theatre, July 1919.

benefit for the Actor's Fund in New York. At the 1940 benefit for the Actor's Fund, she played the trial scene from The Merchant of Venice with Otis Skinner. Miss Allen recorded a scene from Twelfth Night and one from The Winter's Tale in 1941 for the International Record Collectors' Club. That year she was also active in the British War Relief Society of the American Theatre Wing.[131] Her husband died on 19 December 1944 after a six-year illness.[132] Viola Allen's last public appearance was on 15 October 1946 when she presented her costumes, programs and photographs to the Museum of the City of New York. In her speech, she talked of her mementos:

> They seemed to have attained a fresh value, newly come to life in this lovely Gallery which I am proud to have the privilege of opening as the permanent home of the theatre collection. May it provide pleasant memories for the older ones who see it, and perhaps bring encouragement to the younger ones.[133]

When she died on 9 May 1948, at the age of 81, the New York Times, in its editorial noted that:

> Well-trained, technically gifted, and with a considerable emotional range, she was for many lovers of plays the ideal heroine of a romantic age. . . . Few woman are so fortunate as to win and hold the love of an entire generation of theatregoers.[134]

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[131] Ormsbee, "Miss Viola Allen," and "Viola Allen Helps," New York Sun, 4 October 1941, and "Broadway Hails the Actor's Fund," New York Times, 27 February, 27 February 1936.

[132] "Peter Duryea Dies: Bred Fine Horses," New York Times, 20 December 1944.

[133] Seymour, "Viola Allen."

[134] "Viola Allen," New York Times, 11 May 1948.

CONCLUSION

In her thirty-five years on the American stage, Viola Allen rose from an obscure understudy to become one of the top stars in the country. The body of this study traces her step by step climb to that position and her starring career. It is now possible to examine the factors that led to her success, to assess her ability as an actress, and to explain her appeal to audiences of the era.

One element which contributed to Miss Allen's career was the influence of her parents. As a child of actors she was introduced to theatre through the works of Shakespeare by her father, C. Leslie Allen. When she made her debut in Esmeralda, both of her parents were in the company. During her early years on the stage, she often acted with one or both of her parents. Even when she was a star, her father was usually a member of her company. It seems probable that the young actress learned the basic skills of acting from her parents; and, throughout her career, she had their support, advice and experience to guide her.

Though Miss Allen's family background was uniquely her own, a second important factor in her career--luck--is an indispensable ingredient in the success of any person who achieves prominence. As a young actress, Miss Allen was fortunate enough to play with some renowned stars: John McCullough, Lawrence Barrett, Tomasso Salvini, Joseph Jefferson III, and Mrs. John Drew, who would help the young actress to refine her skills. Another fortuitous association was with Charles Frohman, whose choice of the actress as leading lady of his Empire Theatre Stock Company

was to give her the prominence necessary to become a star.

Perseverence was the third ingredient Miss Allen needed to become a star. Every performer has a number of setbacks in his career and Miss Allen was no exception. Her earliest attempt at stardom, Talked About, failed. She was replaced in Dakolar because of her poor performance. Several engagements closed unexpectedly, leaving her without work in the middle of a season. It took her sixteen years, nearly one half of her career, to become an "overnight" star in The Christian.

Talent was another factor in the formula for success. Miss Allen showed her ability in many roles: Esmeralda, Desdemona, Florell, Letty Fletcher, Lydia Languish, Cecily Homespun, Gertrude Ellingham, Rosamond, Dulcie Larondie and Audrie Lisden, before she played Glory Quayle in The Christian. Throughout her early career, the critics agreed that she was an intelligent, charming and technically skilled actress.

The elements necessary for success--talent, perseverence and luck--are certainly not unique to the theatre, or to the nineteenth century; yet, many performers, like Miss Allen's father, equally talented and persistent, remained supporting players for their entire careers. One critic of the time described what distinguished this actress from other competent players. He wrote:

> The personality of Viola Allen is a much more virile asset than her art, for it is of that quality that fastens the woman to one's memory when the plays with which she has been identified become vague uncertainties in one's mind, even when adorned with great William's name.[135]

Personality is the keystone to Miss Allen's acting ability and to her remarkable success on the stage.

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[135] Forrest Arden, "Viola Allen Holds Personality Greater Asset Than Her Art," Chicago Examiner, 7 March 1909.

Throughout this study the critical comments on Viola Allen's acting give one a notion of her assets and liabilities as a performer. Listed first among her strong points was her appearance. Though she was never considered to be a ravishing beauty, the actress had a good figure, a pleasing face, and abundant dark hair. Her outstanding feature was her large, expressive eyes. Her intelligence helped her to present carefully thought out characterizations. She understood her characters and conveyed this understanding to the audience through her technical skill on the stage. Most importantly, Miss Allen had charm, "a sort of bloom upon a woman. If you have it, you don't need to have anything else, and if you don't have it, it doesn't much matter what else you have."[136]

One of the actress' tools, her voice, was the subject of a critical debate during her years on the stage. Some critics felt that it was pleasing and musical, while others found it to be harsh and inconsistent. This is one area that a contemporary evaluator can judge, since the two recordings that she made are extant.[137] Though the records were made in 1941 when Miss Allen was in her seventies and had been retired for many years,[138] her voice is still a rich, full alto with no squeaks or cracks. She rolls her "r's" and tends to elongate certain phonemes, as in "for me-e to untie," and "since what I am to say-y . . ." These tendencies might be vestiges of her early training in the recitation of Shakespeare

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[136] J.M.Barrie, What Every Woman Knows, in Bennett Cerf and Van H. Cartmell, eds., Sixteen Famous British Plays (New York: Random House, Inc., 1942), p. 128.

[137] Viola Allen Recordings for the International Record Collectors Club, 1941, Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound, New York Public Library, Lincoln Center.

[138] Ormsbee, "Miss Viola Allen."

and of the nineteenth century manner of reciting verse. In the scene from Twelfth Night, she blurs a few words, and there is a breathiness in her voice and a sing-song pattern in her delivery. The recitation seems artificial, perhaps because one could hear Miss Allen working to sound young enough to be the character of Viola. In the excerpt from The Winter's Tale, however, the sing-song pattern and breathiness are gone and her voice is not forced, but honest, sincere and moving in her plea. Neither excerpt had any gutteral tones or any extreme changes in pitch, two vocal faults that critics attributed to her.

Besides her vocal peculiarities, the critics found a number of flaws in Miss Allen's acting. She was often described as having facial mannerisms and of using over-elaborate gestures to emphasize a point. Perhaps these tendencies are a vestige of more melodramatic acting styles that Miss Allen had learned from the actors of a previous generation, while she was still a young performer. The star also lacked consistency in her acting. She could be very convincing in certain scenes, and artificial in others. She could not always vary her acting with the moods of her characters. In some cases, when she had little sympathy with the character (as in Bohemia), her entire performance was artificial.

The flaws and assets in Miss Allen's acting that were noted by critics at the beginning of her career are the same qualities they described at the end of her career. Miss Allen, of course, perfected her technical acting skills during her thirty-five years on stage, but her acting style did not change during this time. In his study of American acting, Garff Wilson described a group of performers, many from Miss Allen's era, whom he thought had many similar attributes as performers. Wilson designated the group the "personality school" of acting. Defining

the term, he wrote:

> Personality, to be sure, is an ingredient in the appeal of every performer. It flavors and, in some degree shapes, each role which a performer creates. At times, a performer's personality, added to the dramatist's conception of a character, may effect a synthesis which creates a performance of memorable quality.
>
> In contrast to this kind of creative synthesis is the method of the personality school: the substitution of the performer's personality for the dramatic character, or the portrayal of dramatic characters which fit the performer's personality so exactly that the performer and character are practically identical. In either case, the effect is the same: the basic appeal of the acting comes from the individual personality of the player.
>
> [The] actress of the personality school was assisted in her appeal by a lovely face and figure, by a rich or appealing voice, and by great competence in stage technique. She was, in short, a deft and artful performer with unusual personal magnetism who used the stage as a means of projecting her feminine charms to inspire her audience with a feeling of purity and optimism.[139]

From the critical evaluation of her acting, Miss Allen fits Wilson's definition of a personality actress.

"It's personality that dominates the stage today," Viola Allen once commented in an interview. She continued:

> The fact that personality instead of art has become the big factor in the drama leads to the so often asked question, "What great actors has the stage today?" It used to be that the actor had to be the part he played. . . . Now the part is made for the actor and the public insists that he or she shall stick to the chosen type.[140]

It was fortunate for Miss Allen that personality did dominate the stage, because her personality was particularly well-suited to turn-of-the century America.

Besides her abundant charm, the actress had a well publicized reputation for virtue and decency, two qualities prized by many people

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[139] Wilson, American Acting, pp. 140-141.

[140] Arden, "Viola Allen Holds Personality."

of that time, as Reginald Kauffman explained:

> Difficult, then, as it seems to be for some people to believe it, decency can be just as interesting, just as amusing, just as thrilling, and just as melodious as vice.
>
> The same point of view holds good with the actors. . . . [These] players are, in sober truth, far more personally popular and personally successful throughout the country than are those who have identified themselves, or who have been identified with the salacious stage.[141]

To Miss Allen, decency and virtue meant leaving Charles Frohman's Empire Theatre Company rather than play in dramas that she found objectionable. It meant changing the characters of Glory Quayle and Donna Roma Volonna from those of fallen women to virtuous but maligned women. That virtue was a valuable commodity at the turn-of-the-century is illustrated by the profits of The Christian and The Eternal City, a combined total of $650,000. "She built up then and has retained since a peculiar following," noted one critic of the era. He continued:

> People who rarely go to the theater invariably go to see her. The fact that Miss Allen teaches a Sunday school class counts much with them, as well as her elaborate and widely advertised insistance on the virtue of all the characters in her repertory.[142]

Along with Maude Adams and Julia Marlowe, Miss Allen was responsible for a shift in the lingering puritan prejudice against the theatre. People were now going to the theatre because it was moral, instead of staying away because it was sinful.[143] Though most critics judged the plays

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[141] Reginald Kauffman, "For Decency's Sake; the Case for a Clean Stage," The Circle, October, 1909, p. 181.

[142] F. Elderkin Fyles, clipping, n.d., Viola Allen Collection, Lincoln Center.

[143] Wilson, American Drama and Theatre, pp. 273-274.

in which she appeared to be of little literary value, except for her Shakespearean roles, the fact that Viola Allen, in these dramas, helped to break an old prejudice against the theatre can be considered a contribution to the theatre of her day and to the tradition of theatre in America.

Though Miss Allen's personality was uniquely suited to the era, she exploited her talent wisely by using her intelligence to guide her career. The intelligence that critics noted in her acting was a key factor in her success as a star. She chose her early roles wisely, accepting many opportunities to gain experience and exposure with established stars. As a young actress, she recognized Charles Frohman's abilities, and when he asked her to become leading lady of The Empire Theatre Company, she accepted. When she decided that the time was right to leave Frohman and become a star, she selected the manager, George C. Tyler, and the play, The Christian, which were best suited to her abilities. As a star, she played an active role in shaping her career: choosing new plays, aiding playwrights in rewriting their dramas, and supervising (or even occasionally writing) her own publicity. Her retirement was also an indication of her intelligence, for when she recognized that her skills were no longer suited to new theatrical conditions, she gracefully left the stage.

Finally, her choice of plays (where she had a choice) illustrates another way in which Miss Allen's intelligence made the most of a personality that was uniquely suited to the era. She achieved her greatest success in dramatizations of best selling novels. Her own preference in drama was the old plays of Shakespeare rather than the new works of Ibsen. In the production of plays, she favored the established

stage methods rather than the innovations of a producer like Ben Greet. To the Victorian mind, the world was right as it existed; there was no need for change. Miss Allen was a reliable actress, who appeared in plays whose merits were in some way familiar to the public. She was a safe choice in a time that believed in safe choices and proven value. The years of her greatest popularity--1898-1905--were the years in which the Victorian ideals had their greatest influence in America.

Even at the height of the Victorian age, however, forces that were to change the thinking of the American public and their taste in entertainment were already at work. Internationally, the combatants of World War I were already beginning their political maneuverings, and the United States was beginning to increase its involvement in foreign affairs. Nationally, the country was becoming industrial rather than agricultural; immigrants were pouring into the country; and issues such as women's rights and prohibition were being discussed. Though in 1900 the motion picture was considered to be a novelty by most theatre patrons, by 1914 it was a serious competitor of the theatre, drawing both audiences and performers away from the stage.[144] As these influences began to affect the country between 1905 and 1914, Miss Allen's popularity began to slowly diminish. She was still very successful in The White Sister, for in 1909 there were still many people who were resistant to the new ideas around them. One was Miss Allen, whose own personality was so Victorian that she could not adapt to the changing stage conditions. Though many factors influenced her decision to retire

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[144] For a fuller explanation of the turn-of-the-century in America, see Mark Sullivan, Our Times, 1900-1925, vol. 1, The Turn of the Century (New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1926-1971).

in 1918, as noted previously in this study,[145] Viola Allen's appeal was so tied to the Victorian ideals that her popularity could never extend beyond that era.

> "The most beloved woman in America," they used to call her--Viola Allen, Broadway's turn-of-the-century pride . . ., the Hall Caine heroine whose stage sufferings left not a dry eye in the country. . . .
>
> How did she do it? What quality in this one actress among a hundred sisters in the profession who could have been as beautiful and might have been as talented? . . . Part of the answer is in her face. It had so much more than beauty, combining sweetness and strength and a peculiarly haunting charm. But the real secret lies in this--that she was a womanly woman.
>
> Her name was rarely used in print without the amending adjective "gentle." . . . [She] was the public embodiment of every womanly virtue; she lived at home with her father and mother; she turned up her delicate nose at Broadway night life; she was modest and self-deprecating about her art . . . Even in those days, she was an old-fashioned girl. . . . She made womanliness her career.[146]

Miss Allen's lasting influence on the American theatre may be limited to her championing of Shakespeare at a time when he was not commercially viable. In her thirty-five years on the stage, however, she entertained hundreds of thousands of people with her personal charm and her acting ability. For the pleasure she gave to so many people, and for her embodiment of the qualities of an era, Viola Allen, along with many other actors and actresses of the turn-of-the-century stage, deserves greater mention in the history of American theatre than she has heretofore received.

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[145] See above, pp. 218-219.

[146] B.B., "Old Fashioned Girl," clipping, 17 May 1932, HTC.

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