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**The Theatre of Thrills: The Princess Players, 1913-1915**

**Hemingway, Alan Eugene, Ph.D.**

**City University of New York, 1991**

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THE THEATRE OF THRILLS:  
THE PRINCESS PLAYERS, 1913-1915

by  
Alan Hemingway

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



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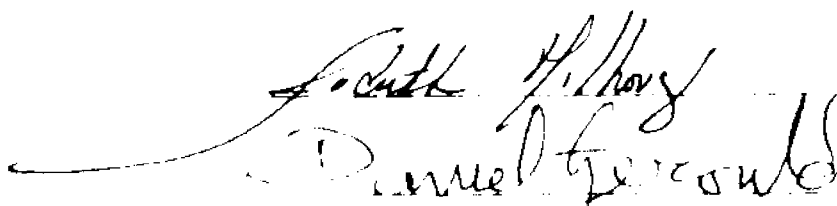
This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the members of my committee Dr. Walter Meserve, Dr. Daniel Gerould, and Dr. Judith Milhous, for their helpful suggestions and guidance. I would also like to thank the staff of the Billy Rose Theatre Collection at the Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts, Kathy at the Theatre Collection of the Museum of the City of New York, and Mary Anne at the Shubert Archives for their generous assistance. Also, a special thank you to my parents, Carol and Al Hemingway, for their encouragement in all my dreams, and to Helen, without whose patience and support this project would never have been completed.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

During the first two decades of the Twentieth Century, there was a movement developing in the American theatre: a movement to create an art theatre, to reestablish the repertory stock company, and to encourage the growth of an indigenous American drama. In the amateur theatre around the United States, this movement toward an art theatre was carried on by the Drama League. Organized in Evanston, Illinois in 1910, the Drama League's goals, according to the Dramatic Mirror, were to "crowd out vicious plays" by boycotting the performances of overly commercial and non-artistic productions, and to restore drama "to its honorable place."<sup>1</sup> However, the Drama League did not begin to organize in New York City until mid-1913, leaving the New York commercial theatre to search for an art theatre on its own. Dissatisfied with the generally poor quality of the dramas seen on Broadway, many professional theatre artists, such as Arnold Daly, Frank Keenan, Winthrop Ames, and Harrison and Minnie Maddern Fiske, attempted to establish a new theatre in New York City concerned with the quality of a production rather than its commercial merit. Between 1900 and 1910,

these independent producers and managers began to win recognition for the modern European dramatists like Shaw and Ibsen as well as to champion the cause of more a realistic acting style. Influenced by the news of developing theatres in Europe and England such as the Freie Bühne, the Independent Theatre, and the Théâtre Libre, as well as commercial off-shoots like the Grand Guignol, and later, by touring companies such as the Irish Players from the Abbey Theatre and the Manchester Players during 1911 and 1912, Keenan, Daly, and Ames turned to these "free theatres" of Europe for their models.

It was during this period, between March 1913 and January 1915, that Lee Shubert, William Brady, Archibald Selwyn, F. Ray Comstock, and Holbrook Blinn worked together to create the Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills--a theatre patterned after both the Théâtre Libre and the Grand Guignol. Although the theatre lasted only three seasons, a study of its contributions is important because of the Princess Theatre's relationship to both the New York commercial theatre and, more importantly, to the "Little Theatre" movement that was under way in America at that time. The Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills provided an important model for the "little theatres" that developed in New York City during 1915 through the organization of its seasons and the proof of the viability of the one-act play. The Theatre of Thrills further influenced the creation of such theatre

groups as the Provincetown Players, the Washington Square Players, and the Neighborhood Playhouse through the work of young writers affiliated with the company, such as Edward Goodman, and others such as Eugene O'Neill, who submitted their plays for possible production.

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the history of the Theatre of Thrills--a theatre dedicated to the presentation of new and, sometimes, shocking plays. Also, this study will illustrate how the Princess Players, through their presentation of eclectic bills of one-act plays, became the first American commercial theatre to support successfully a resident stock company in a sustained repertory of plays modeled on the programs of theatres within the European system. While members of the principle acting company at the Princess Theatre also played an important role in the development of the Players, none of them, with the exception of Holbrook Blinn, achieved major success or was noted for influencing the American theatre. As a result, this study focuses primarily on the general policies enacted by the theatre administrators and the plays presented at the Theatre of Thrills. This dissertation will further illustrate the way in which the Princess Players, through its success, influenced the development of the New York little theatres and, consequently, the American theatre.

The opening of the Theatre of Thrills represented an important attempt to introduce into the commercial theatre,



indeed the theatre as a whole in New York City, a viable alternative to the general fare seen on Broadway at that time. It was also an attempt to reintroduce the idea of a permanent repertory company, a concept that had been all but forgotten in the New York theatre. From the earliest times in the American theatre, plays were generally performed in New York and other cities by resident stock companies--a permanent company of actors that worked in one theatre. By the 1830s, New York City had become the country's leading theatrical center, and had more and better stock companies than other cities. Audiences, however, began to tire of the same actors playing all the roles and, in an attempt to attract more people to their theatres and increase revenues, theatre owners brought actors and actresses with recognizable reputations. This dependence on star players increased, and by 1870, rather than enhance a resident company with a leading actor, producers generally hired complete companies for each new play. Each production of these "combination companies" was a separate enterprise with the "star" and the supporting actors hired only for the run of the play. By the 1890s, producers in New York found that a stock company performing in repertory was not economically feasible. To insure maximum returns on their investments, New York producers completed the move away from repertory that had begun before 1850, and turned to the long run.<sup>2</sup> The profit motive had become the important aspect of the

theatre, and the long run the way to achieve financial success.

In 1896, to facilitate the booking of productions into New York theatres as well as theatres around the country, six theatre men joined to form the Theatrical Syndicate. A.L. Erlanger, Marc Klaw, Charles Frohman, Al Hyman, S.F. Nixon, and J.F. Zimmerman, through questionable business practices, attempted to create a theatrical monopoly. The Syndicate succeeded in obtaining control of a substantial part of all theatrical booking and play production for the next 15-20 years and was, in effect, in control of much of the American theatre. According to Alfred Bernheim, within eight years of its formation, the Syndicate leased, owned, or controlled the booking of at least 700 theatres across America, and, as noted by Marc Klaw, virtually all the first-class theatres and their management belonged to his organization.<sup>1</sup> By producing their own plays and booking them into theatres under their control, as well as denying other producers access to those theatres, the Theatrical Syndicate turned the theatre into a successful business that produced a standardized product--much the same as other mass producing industries of the period. Although the Syndicate was a "boon to the theatre business," as Norman Hapgood noted, "its overwhelming power over [the] dramatist, producer, and actor had a depressing effect on the art of the theatre."<sup>4</sup> It was against this mass production revolution

in the theatre and the natural competition it bred, that the art theatre movement reacted.<sup>5</sup>

The Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills was the last in a series of commercial companies in New York that tried to capitalize on the European trend of the independent theatres--non-commercial theatres in small houses performing varied bills of one-acts with a permanent repertory company. Although there were scattered attempts to create art theatres prior to 1900--James A. Hearne's 1891 production of Margaret Fleming in Boston and New York, the Theatre of Arts and Letters in 1894, and the Criterion Independent Theatre in 1897--these theatres were not involved with the professional art theatre movement in New York City.<sup>6</sup> The first prominent effort to establish a professional theatre patterned after the "free theatres" of Europe was that of Frank Keenan in 1905. Keenan's Théâtre Antoine, however, was short lived and performed only one bill. The second attempt was that of Arnold Daly to create his "Theatre of Ideas," but, because of foolhardy business practices, Daly's company lasted only five weeks. The best known attempt to establish an art theatre, although not based on the "free theatres," was Winthrop Ames's New Theatre. The New Theatre's attempt to reestablish a repertory-stock company lasted two seasons and failed primarily because of severe economic problems created by the theatre's oversized auditorium.

The Princess Theatre was one of the last intimate

theatres to be built on Broadway during a trend toward smaller theatres.<sup>7</sup> With the failure of the New Theatre in 1911, it had become apparent to the theatrical community that to revitalize both the resident stock company and the idea of a repertory system, they must move away from the larger theatres and into a more economical environment. The founders of the New Theatre made plans to move their operation from the theatre on Central Park West and to build a smaller theatre in the heart of the theatre district behind the Astor Hotel on Forty-fourth Street and Broadway. Winthrop Ames followed suit in 1912 and built his Little Theatre at 238 West Forty-fourth Street, west of Broadway and directly across from the land acquired for the New Theatre's smaller house. Later that same year, the Shubert brothers built the Princess Theatre at 104-106 West Thirty-ninth Street, near the Southeast corner of the street, just off Sixth Avenue.

The Princess Theatre was originally built to house Annie Russell's Old English Repertory Company and was to operate on a subscription basis. The Old English Repertory Company was an attempt to create a viable stock company and what might eventually become a national theatre. Unfortunately, due to problems in construction, Annie Russell's company never played the Princess Theatre. The Old English Repertory Company was moved to the Thirty-ninth Street Theatre, down the block from the Princess at 119 West Thir-

ty-ninth, where they played for one season.

The Princess Players opened in March of the 1912-1913 season. During its brief existence, the Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills was both controversial and contradictory. The Theatre of Thrills was, from the beginning, a commercial theatre patterned, by the producers' own admission, after Antoine's Théâtre Libre and Théâtre Antoine--theatres created to be free of commercial restrictions. As the Princess Players developed, however, the policy at the Theatre of Thrills moved away from its original naturalistic intent and, hoping to draw larger crowds, toward plays with more shock value. This change by the Princess Players to produce more sensational plays prompted criticism from both the press and local officials because of the subject matter of some of the pieces. In general, this pattern of administrative adjustment roughly echoes the development of the Grand Guignol as an off-shoot of the Théâtre Libre and the Grand Guignol's own move toward the horror play.

To understand fully the development and the subsequent evolution of the Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills and its underlying contradiction, one must first look at the two European theatres upon which the company modeled itself. It is important to identify the type of plays and the style of production at the Théâtre Libre, the techniques used by Antoine, and the way in which they were adapted and transformed at the Grand Guignol by Oscar Méténier and, later,

refined by Max Maurey. While the Grand Guignol evolved from the Théâtre Libre, both had separate and distinct goals. It is necessary to look carefully at these goals and the basic differences of intent because the Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills, by emulating contradictory objectives, ultimately caused its own collapse.

In 1887, André Antoine founded the Théâtre Libre with the idea of introducing new playwrights and experimenting with the newly developed realistic staging methods of Saxe-Meiningen and Henry Irving. Organized as a private membership organization and using mostly amateur actors, the Théâtre Libre occupied three different locations during its existence. As a "theatre club," Antoine's group fell outside the jurisdiction of the censors and provided an outlet for playwrights whose works had primarily gone unproduced due to the conservative nature of the producers and censors.

The plays that Antoine produced were generally realistic and naturalistic, one-acts organized into programs of several plays each. During each year of its operation the Théâtre Libre averaged about seven of these programs, or bills, each bill playing no more than three nights. Throughout the theatre's existence, Antoine presented 184 such plays organized into 62 bills. In all, at least sixty-nine authors were represented.\*

One author represented, and a co-founder of the Théâtre Libre, was Oscar Méténier (1859-1913), whose one-act En

Famille was presented on the second bill at Antoine's theatre 30 May 1887. Because he supported himself for many years working as a secretary for the police commissioner, he was able to observe closely the lifestyles of the tough working classes and the criminal element in Paris. It was this knowledge that Méténier brought to his plays, several of which were produced at the Théâtre Libre prior to its closing in June of 1894.<sup>9</sup> As a result, he gained the reputation as a "militant Naturalist and chronicler of the lower depths of Parisian society."<sup>10</sup> Antoine, however, began to grow "tired of the offensive and vulgar genre"<sup>11</sup> that Méténier was developing, and the two men separated. In April 1897, three years after the closing of Antoine's theatre, Oscar Méténier founded the Grand Guignol.

Méténier obtained a small theatre at 20 bis, rue Chap-tal called the Théâtre Salon. A converted chapel seating 285, the theatre had originally been created in 1896 and operated by Maurice Magnier, a well-known Paris publisher. Magnier had hoped to take advantage of the little theatre movement by mounting a season of miniature dramas and one-acts. But the Théâtre Salon was unsuccessful and closed before the end of the 1896-1897 season. For two years after acquiring the theatre, Méténier produced naturalistic and often shocking plays. During this period Méténier also developed the technique of the douche écossaise.<sup>12</sup>

The douche écossaise--hot and cold shower--was a

technique that alternated horror and humor. With this technique; Méténier directed his audience and let them experience each emotion in turn. The douche écossaise was organized by alternating plays. The program would begin with a comedy, then a dramatic piece, another comedy, the horror play, and finally, a farce.<sup>13</sup> To produce the douche écossaise, Méténier employed three styles of drama: the fait divers, the comédie rosse, and farce.

Fait divers, a journalistic term that referred to short, sensational news items that were not important enough to warrant an entire article, appeared in the French press during the Nineteenth century. Following in the same style, the plays patterned after the fait divers were short, gory accounts of events in the lives of unimportant people. Generally, they dealt with true-life crime stories in which the action of the play focused upon one event that creates an intense emotional shock for characters that existed only in the context of that event. These fait divers plays were similar in some respects to melodrama, except that they never ended happily. The author preferred, instead, to finish on a generally disturbing note.<sup>14</sup> The best examples of fait divers at the Princess Theatre were Any Night by Edward Ellis and The Denial by J.B. Larric.

The lighter side of the bill was represented with traditional farce and the comédie rosse. With an emphasis on physical action, Méténier depended on farce to counteract



the heaviness and violence of the dramas. These plays usually evolved around domestic situations and often made light of sex, marital triangles, or questions of honor.<sup>15</sup> The comédie rosse, although lighter than the fait divers, could be brutal in its humor. These plays were often cynical and vicious, with the comic element arising from the mere fact that they lacked the violence of the fait divers. The purpose of the comédie rosse was to expose the false pretensions of society by undermining social, religious, and economic ideals. Vice was often triumphant.<sup>16</sup>

Métènier's Meat-Ticket is a good example of comédie rosse.<sup>17</sup> It is the story of a young girl who has just taken communion. Nini has learned through her catechism classes that one thing a devoted child should never do is abandon her parents. So, following in her elder sister's footsteps, she will become a prostitute and earn a great deal of money to support her parents in their old age. Meat Ticket distorts the moral lessons learned and illustrates the different values held by the lower classes of Paris. At the Princess Theatre, the closest examples of comédie rosse were the plays of Stanley Houghton, whose Fancy Free and Phipps, however, are less biting than Métènier's work and focus on the mores of the middle and upper classes rather than the lower. They also offer a commentary on the social and sexual pretensions of these classes by exposing their shallow values.

With these three styles, Métènier created bills that in turn shocked and delighted audiences. Still, while the plays at the Grand Guignol became more and more shocking, the transition from a theatre more closely aligned with that of Antoine's, to that of one devoted to mere sensationalism was not truly accomplished until after Métènier gave up his interests in the theatre. In 1898 Métènier released his control of the theatre and left, feeling that he could no longer sustain the novelty.<sup>18</sup> At this time the Grand Guignol passed into the hands of Max Maurey.

Under Max Maurey (1871-1947), the Grand Guignol made the move toward a truly commercial enterprise. Convinced that the theatre could be a financial success, Maurey turned away from experimentation and plays that might have a social comment. He preferred to produce plays that were "sure fire formulas of terror and fear."<sup>19</sup> Where Métènier focused on Naturalism's "slice of life" dramas, Maurey turned toward the "slice of death" and made no pretense to avant garde art. He pursued the role of the leader in popular entertainment.<sup>20</sup>

Promoting his theatre as a "House of Horrors," Maurey advanced the idea through cartoons in both playbills and advertisements. One such cartoon suggested that it would be advisable for patrons to have medical check-ups before buying tickets.<sup>21</sup> With this type of advertising and the play selection policy which Maurey had adopted, the Grand

Guignol soon became a theatre form unique to Paris. By 1910, the theatre had become a major tourist attraction.<sup>22</sup>

Though the Grand Guignol was a direct off-shoot of the Théâtre Libre and at first produced naturalistic plays by many of the same authors, its transition to a theatre devoted to sensationalism points up the underlying differences in the philosophies of their respective artistic leaders. Antoine had created his theatre to give new authors a place to develop, a place to experiment in a non-commercial atmosphere, without the threat of censorship or financial failure. Consequently, the Théâtre Libre championed the new movements in the theatre and looked to the development of art.

The Grand Guignol, on the other hand, evolved into a popular theatre, catering to the average theatre-goer's tastes and intelligence, and was concerned, especially under Maurey, with financial success. As the Grand Guignol presented more plays dealing with horror and violence for their own sake and pandered to sensationalism, Maurey made no allusions to any ethical, social, or artistic point of view. Operating in this manner, the Grand Guignol survived under several artistic leaders until 1962; however, after the late 1930s the theatre lost its novelty and appeal.<sup>23</sup>

The Théâtre Libre was innovative and influenced many theatres around the world with its original techniques. Whereas Antoine was concerned with the development of an art

theatre, the Grand Guignol adapted techniques from other styles for its own purposes and was, in the end and under the leadership of Maurey, concerned primarily with financial survival.

By choosing these two theatres to emulate, the Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills created an unreconcilable split between the pursuit of an art theatre and that of a commercially successful theatre. While looking to Antoine's non-commercial theatre for artistic inspiration, the producers at the Princess Theatre would find it impossible to maintain a commercially viable operation. But by turning to plays that more closely resembled those produced by Métènier and Maurey, they would move away from the initial intent of the theatre--to develop a new American drama based on the modern European plays--and toward the objective of producing more and more sensational plays.

Through its brief existence, the Princess Players offered a glimmer of what the combined efforts of the art theatre movement and the commercial theatre could produce. The Theatre of Thrills introduced to the New York public a new style of theatre through the presentation of one-act plays and opened the way for further experiments. The lasting influence of the Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills is that, in a pre-Drama League New York, it encouraged young American playwrights like Edward Goodman and Edward Ellis to experiment with the one-act play, and pre-

sented an avenue for other authors, like Eugene O'Neill, to pursue in hopes of producing their work. Through its successful organizational example, that of the free theatres of Europe, it provided a model, or a cornerstone on which the smaller amateur theatres could build. Although the Princess Players eventually failed, due to tremendous economic pressures, their three seasons broke new theatrical ground and, by their example and artistic success, made it easier for theatres such as the Washington Square Players, the Provincetown Players, and the Neighborhood Playhouse to come into existence in the years immediately following the demise of the Theatre of Thrills.

The Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills is a largely overlooked topic in theatre histories. It has been only lightly touched upon in studies involving the Grand Guignol with its limited influence in America, and in biographical studies of such figures as Holbrook Blinn, William A. Brady, and the Shubert brothers. Mel Gordon's The Grand Guignol: Theatre of Fear and Terror (1988), gives the Theatre of Thrills less than half a paragraph, listing the Players simply as one of the failures in the development of a Grand Guignol in America. Jerry Stagg's The Brothers Shubert (1968) makes no mention of the Princess Players, though the Shuberts built the theatre and were partners in producing the programs. The writers of general theatre history books, like Brockett, Hewitt, and Wilson<sup>24</sup>, deal with the Little

Theatre movement on the amateur level using as illustrations Maurice Browne's Chicago Little Theatre, the Boston Toy Theatre, or the three best known New York examples--the Neighborhood Playhouse, the Washington Square Players, and the Provincetown Players. They often speak of the attempts to adopt the European techniques into the American professional/commercial theatre, only in reference to the New Theatre or Winthrop Ames's Little Theatre. More experimental attempts like the Princess Players', Arnold Daly's company, or Frank Keenan's company go largely unnoticed.

Even critics and historians closer to the period in question tend to ignore or dismiss the Princess Players. Arthur Hobson Quinn recognized the Theatre of Thrills as a genuine effort to develop a new form of American theatre and drama; however, he dismissed the Princess Players for their tendency to produce mainly foreign plays.<sup>15</sup> The eventual movement of the Players toward the presentation of more shocking material also prompted Sheldon Cheney to note that "the Princess Theatre, in the beginning gave promise of valuable aid to American [theatrical] progress....," but after "it turned to the almost exclusive pursuit of "shockers," it proved to be a false hope."<sup>16</sup> The creation of the Theatre of Thrills is not seen as a historically significant move, nor are the economic reasons for the transition to more sensational plays considered. These critics fail to recognize the influence that this company had on young

American theatre artists and the development of American theatre.

Along with the published material available, several dissertations have been written on subjects from the same period as the Princess Players. Works such as "A History of the New Theatre, 1909-1911," by John Jennings (1953), "A Study of the Theatrical Career of Winthrop Ames," by David MacArthur (1963), or "The Theatrical Business Practices of William A. Brady," by Lawrence Wilker (1973)<sup>27</sup>, provide a wealth of information concerning the period of the Theatre of Thrills. However, the Princess Players, while existing in the same time frame, are not mentioned.

The only study that does look at the Princess Players Theatre of Thrills is "The Stage Career of Holbrook Blinn," by Ronald Hirszen (1975)<sup>28</sup>. While Hirszen does look at the plays presented and some of the policies enacted, he does so in a cursory manner dealing with the Princess Players only in the context of Holbrook Blinn's career. Here again, the history of the Players--their development, their goals, and their problems--is not taken into consideration. The present study goes beyond the others and takes an in-depth look at why and how the Theatre of Thrills developed and how it fits into the history of the American drama and theatre.

The primary research for this study was conducted at the Billy Rose Theatre Collection at the Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts, the Theatre Collection of

the Museum of the City of New York, and the Shubert Archive, all located in New York City. These collections provided a wealth of material in the form of clippings and revues, programs and advertising, memos and other papers having to do with the everyday running of the theatre, as well as personal recollections. These materials, as well as the Dramatic Mirror, Theatre Magazine, Variety, and several other newspapers and periodicals of the period, constitute the major sources for this study.

This research provided the information necessary to reconstruct the events that led to the formation of the Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills, as well as the day-to-day workings of the organization, and its eventual influence on the development of the American theatre. As a result of this reconstruction, this study is able to demonstrate that the Princess Players were the first American commercial company to assimilate successfully the techniques of both the independent theatres of Europe and the Grand Guignol of Paris. By doing so, the Princess Players Theatre of Thrills was able to offer a sustained and viable repertory company and provide a suitable model for the New York City little theatres that followed in 1915.

A survey of the development of an American art theatre and the role the Princess Players took in that process opens this study. Chapter Two discusses several attempts to develop an "art" theatre based on European models and to



reestablish the repertory idea in New York City's professional/commercial theatre. The theatres of Frank Keenan, Arnold Daly, and Winthrop Ames are discussed in their relationship to the establishment of a permanent stock company, the trend toward more intimate theatres, and the development of a more naturalistic American drama. Tracing the development of the Princess Players from the original lease agreement on the building that would house the theatre, Chapter Three examines the beginnings of the company through the opening of the Theatre of Thrills. This chapter also discusses the Shubert brothers' relationship to the Princess Theatre, the history of the actual building at 104-106 West Thirty-ninth Street, and the way in which this theatre helped solidify the Shubert stronghold. The building of the theatre as a reaction to the trend toward smaller theatres and the attempt to found an artistically minded repertory company, is related to both the artistic and producing teams at the Princess Theatre, and how their intertwining relationships and various attitudes and approaches to the theatre affected the development of the Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills.

All shows during the three seasons at the Princess Theatre are carefully analyzed in Chapter Four, with each bill of one-act plays recreated either through a direct examination of the scripts and programs, or if such material was not available, through reviews and other critical writ-

ings of the period. This recreation illustrates the make-up of each bill and its resemblance to those presented at the Théâtre Libre and the Grand Guignol. The role that censorship played in the running of the Theatre of Thrills is also considered, as the press, the authorities, and, more importantly, the public reacted to the sometimes graphic and disturbing plays presented.

The final chapter presents the legacy of the Princess Players--both their achievements and failures--and the possible influence that they had on the companies that followed during the years immediately after their demise, and on the American theatre and drama in general. These chapters are followed by two appendices. The first includes a listing of the programs presented by the Princess Players and the cast from each play, as well as two documents that were influential in the development of the Princess Players. This section illustrates not only personnel changes for each play, but also the day-to-day workings at the Princess Theatre. The second part of the appendix consists of the complete and un-cut version of Russia--In the Pouchinskaia by Gaston Charles Richard. This unpublished play was performed only at the Princess Theatre and is included in this study with the permission of the Billy Rose Theatre Collection at the Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts in New York City. As one of the more controversial plays performed at the Theatre of Thrills, or during 1914 for that

matter, it is interesting to note the power that Russia... retains, both in content and performance possibilities.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Development of an Art Theatre in America

Even though there was important work being done between 1900 and 1913, the American commercial theatre in general had become stagnant and stereotyped, producing a standardized product, and had, for that point in history, reached the heights of commercialism. According to the critic and historian Arthur Hornblow, the making of money had become the primary goal that "gradually destroyed the art of acting... turned playwrights into hacks and the drama, from an art, became a business."<sup>1</sup> With the exception of theatre artists such as David Belasco, Harrison and Minnie Maddern Fiske, and Richard Mansfield, and playwrights such as Edward Sheldon and William Vaughn Moody, William Winter felt that

[The theatre had] passed from the hands of those who [should] control it--the hands either of actors who love and honor their art or of men endowed with the temperament of the actor and acquainted with his art and its needs--and almost entirely, it [had] fallen into the clutches of sordid, money-grubbing tradesmen, who [had] degraded it into a bazaar.'

Many factors contributed to this decline. Chief among them was the intense competition between the Theatrical Syndicate

and the Shubert brothers, which diminished the place of American drama in the business, promoted the decline of the repertory system, and prevented the reemergence of the stock company.

The result of this extreme competition was that "Art found itself compelled to give way to Big Business," and the theatre found itself in an "era grossly commercial and conscienceless, with not an idea above piling up the dollars."<sup>3</sup> These competing producers were no longer concerned with artistic quality, but with how much money they could generate.

Established in 1896, the Theatrical Syndicate, by manipulation of bookings and theatre management both in New York City and across the country, gained control of the entertainment business and was on the way to establishing a theatrical monopoly. Although there were many independent producers and actors willing to fight them--Belasco, the Fiskes, Sarah Bernhardt--none were powerful enough until the Shubert brothers emerged into the New York City theatrical scene in April of 1900 with the leasing of the Herald Square Theatre and the formation of the Richard Mansfield Company.<sup>4</sup>

As the two teams of power brokers vied for position by attempting to out-produce and out-build each other, the theatre and the drama suffered. To gain a foothold, each organization began to build more theatres--both in New York and around the country. To survive, they needed to fill

these theatres with any play that they thought would sell.

Consequently, the theatre as a business could no longer be concerned with art or experimentation. Because of the fierce competition, only plays that were commercially viable were considered. Play production degenerated into play speculation, and producers mounted only the plays that they felt appealed to the masses.<sup>5</sup> To sell their work, playwrights were forced to "repeat a given formula or adapt a foreign success," because producers "refused to risk money on untried types of plays."<sup>6</sup> As a result, the drama became stagnant, and the theatres were filled with "an unending stream of musical comedies, and revues, and crook plays, and society farces."<sup>7</sup>

The marketing techniques employed by the producing powers also changed and caused the disappearance of the American repertory company. During the final decades of the nineteenth century the production of long running plays had become popular. The result of this was that "repertory suffered a quick death since one long run costs less than a frequent change of bill."<sup>8</sup> Consequently, as Sheldon Cheney noted, there had not been a viable repertory company in this country since the last decade of the nineteenth century when "Augustin Daly's company had marked the last glorious stand of the repertory idea."<sup>9</sup> Both the Syndicate and the Shubert brothers, realizing that the constant changing of productions was very expensive, determined also, that the primary

way to make money in this new system was through the long run.

But even as commercialism was running at a fever pitch, there were theatre people looking beyond the box-office receipts toward a theatre more concerned with higher artistic standards and the eventual development of a truly American drama. Along with Belasco and the Fiskes, there were many other producers, actors, and managers who had a different vision for the American theatre. Even as the two "syndicates" were running wild, an "art movement" was creeping back into the commercial theatre. For solutions to what they saw as a rapidly declining theatrical atmosphere and because the "art theatre [had] no past in America,"<sup>10</sup> these people turned to European models.

There were several attempts to establish an art theatre in America. As early as 1905, American producers were trying to emulate the European theatres, hoping to create an artistically open environment, free from commercial pressures. One group, including Winthrop Ames and his backers, would look to the older, more established state theatres; the others, among them Frank Keenan, Arnold Daly, and ultimately the producers at the Princess Theatre, would look to the smaller "free" or "independent" theatres. Regardless of the model, both groups had the same intentions: to establish a repertory theatre using a stock company of actors and to elevate the American drama. Though these attempts failed to

bring forth a lasting repertory, it is necessary to examine the companies of Arnold Daly, Frank Keenan, and Winthrop Ames when considering the place of the Princess Players in the history of the American theatre.

The art movement in the New York professional theatre ran parallel to that of the "little theatre" movement in America as a whole. Both were dedicated to "art" and operated with techniques borrowed from the European theatre, but there was one major difference. The little theatres around the country were, for the most part, strictly amateur operations existing in very small theatres. For example, Maurice Browne's Chicago Little Theatre had only 99 seats. Such operations posed no threat to local professional companies. The movement in New York, however, was strictly professional and placed itself in direct competition with the commercial producers. This created a curious paradox: a theatre, for the most part, devoted to the production of plays that were not considered commercial, attempting to survive in a highly commercial atmosphere. The performance of these non-commercial plays in a highly commercial and competitive marketplace created severe financial pressures. Producers lost money trying to bring in adequate audiences and maintain the theatres. In an attempt to rectify this economic crisis, several actors and managers--Daly, Keenan, and Ames among them--determined that for an art theatre to survive in the Broadway arena, it would have to exist in smaller theatres



with lower operating costs. The attempts of Frank Keenan, Arnold Daly, and the producers at the Princess Theatre reflected this determination; each manager moved away from the large Broadway houses. Except for the New Theatre, the theatres of Keenan, Daly, and later Ames at the Little Theatre, attempted to recreate the style of the European free theatres in the New York commercial theatre.

The art theatre movement in the commercial theatre manifested itself in two ways. One part of the movement was modeled on the smaller, more experimental theatres of Europe. The other faction, however, emulated the larger European repertory theatres. This first model was best exemplified by the New Theatre.

The best known attempt to establish a modern repertory company based on a European model occurred in 1909. Growing dissatisfaction with the commercial theatre prompted several of the country's wealthiest patrons to subsidize the building of a theatre that would be run along the lines of the Comédie-Française. Generally referred to as the "Founders," Otto Kahn, John Jacob Astor, J. Pierpont Morgan, and Cornelius Vanderbilt, with many others,<sup>11</sup> combined their efforts and money to build the New Theatre at West Sixty-third Street and Central Park West in New York City. The theatre was to be a 3,000 seat house outfitted with the most modern equipment.

From the beginning, the New Theatre operated with

crossed signals. The initial plan, outlined by the New Theatre's executive committee comprised of Vanderbuilt, Kahn, and Clarence Mackay, was to pattern the New Theatre after the national theatres of Europe. The company would present the great works of the world theatre and also promote new American plays. The committee also felt that the theatre should be built to accommodate light opera--to add income to the house to support the drama.<sup>12</sup>

The size of the theatre worried many people. Harley Granville-Barker was asked to head the new project, but after seeing the plans, refused. He told the founders that the house was unsuitable for dramatic productions. He felt that the only logical fare for this style of theatre would be spectacles, which would put it in direct competition with commercial houses.<sup>13</sup> Winthrop Ames agreed.

Ames (1871-1937), who graduated from Harvard where he studied with George Pierce Baker, was chosen to head the company. In 1907, he had toured Europe, where he studied the major state theatres and noted the best features of each. On his return to the United States, he purchased land and built the Castle Square Theatre in Boston, a small theatre in which he intended to house a repertory company. With this background, Winthrop Ames was signed by the Founders in 1908 to a three-year contract at \$20,000 per year.<sup>14</sup>

Concerned with the size of the theatre's auditorium,

Ames warned the Founders that the New Theatre was too large for drama and better suited to opera. In a report entitled Abstracts from a Prospectus Submitted to the Executive Committee of the New Theatre prepared by Ames and presented as a portion of the Report of the Executive Committee to the Founders of the New Theatre, Ames outlined what he believed to be the "serious artistic evils involved in the size" of the New Theatre. He urged the Founders to reconsider the size of the auditorium and warned that if something were not done, the New Theatre would "eventually become the home of opera or spectacle."

[He went on to say that] the failure of [the New Theatre's] purpose will come about subtly--but as play after play of the finer type fails, while melodramas and spectacles succeed, the course of [the theatre's] conduct will gradually change, and the failure of one more attempt to uplift the drama may be attributed to the lack of proper appreciation, whereas the real truth will be that the size of the auditorium had been sapping the theatre's artistic vitality from the beginning."

To remedy the situation, Ames suggested that the Roof Garden, already in the plans, be adapted to create a "Théâtre Intime" with a fully equipped stage and a small, compact auditorium that seated no more than five to six hundred. This intimate theatre, he felt, would serve the larger

theatre as the Kammerspiele of Berlin served the Deutsches Theatre. The smaller theatre would provide "a place where noteworthy plays unsuited to the larger house, either because of subject, quality, or subtlety," could be played.<sup>16</sup>

Joining Ames at the New Theatre as the managing director was Lee Shubert. The hiring of Shubert was thought by many to be a foolish move on the part of the Founders. Still, even Lee Shubert warned the Founders of the dangers that lay ahead. Shubert reported that even if the New Theatre were to run at capacity and charge standard prices, they would be unable to break even. Consequently, the proposed plan to run at a profit was soon abandoned.<sup>17</sup>

One of the goals of Ames and the Founders at the New Theatre was to establish a repertory theatre, using a stock company of actors and presenting both classics and new plays--American and European. However, because of the economic strains created by the size of the auditorium, one by one, each of these plans--the stock company, performing in repertory, the development of new drama--was soon corrupted.

During the last thirty years of the nineteenth century the repertory system in America had virtually disappeared. By 1900, the production of a single long running play, both in New York City and around the country, had been found to be economically more viable than the maintenance of an entire company and several plays in a repertory system. As

a result, the resident stock company had all but vanished in the New York commercial theatre. It had been replaced by the combination company--a featured player and a "pick-up" company put together for one show. This "star system," which began originally around 1810, was now the generally accepted way of life in the commercial theatre. Clearly, a very important element of the New Theatre's policy was a rejection of this system.<sup>18</sup> The hope of the New Theatre was to restore the ensemble company to the New York stage. But, in order to attract audiences, the producers turned to name players for their first production--something they would do for their entire existence. With the hiring of E.H. Southern and Julia Marlowe, the New Theatre immediately put into jeopardy the idea of an ensemble acting company and violated their own policy.

During the second season at the New Theatre, 1910-1911, the repertory idea was further broken down by the inclusion of long runs. If the producers found a play that seemed to be popular at the box office, they would extend the run and eliminate or reschedule other productions. This enabled them to keep money coming in and to rid themselves of a work that might be draining the budget, such as Galsworthy's Strife or Cabin in the Air. For example, in the spring of 1911, Maeterlinck's The Bluebird proved to be the biggest draw of the season. Because of the play's success, its run was extended to 75 performances. Later, the entire produc-

tion was moved to the Shubert's Majestic Theatre on West Forty-fourth Street, where it played an additional 105 performances. By moving the production of The Bluebird, the New Theatre lost its resident company, and a pick-up company was formed to carry out the season. This destroyed the repertory idea for the second season and left any actor not in that production without a job.

The idea of developing American playwrights also failed. In a letter to the Founders dated 31 December 1910, mid-way through the New Theatre's second season, both Winthrop Ames and Lee Shubert stated that they felt the size of the New Theatre had scared playwrights away. They went on to note that it would have been impossible to produce any of the "modern plays" that had been written. These "more advanced plays," they wrote, were intended for smaller theatres. Ames and Shubert then recommended that the repertory company be closed and the New Theatre devoted to the other forms of entertainment for which it was better suited--opera and musicals.<sup>19</sup>

The failure of the New Theatre and its policies was, ultimately, the result of the size of the theatre, its overwhelming overhead, and the theatre's inability to generate a suitable income.<sup>20</sup> Unable to support itself, the management had turned to the time-honored techniques employed in the commercial theatre--the star system and the long run. The size of the auditorium, with its poor acous-

tics, had limited the works that could be performed there. Consequently, the newer, more realistic pieces that called for a more naturalistic acting style failed. The directors and the Founders attempted to remedy the situation by reducing the size of the house and correcting the acoustics, but to no avail. The only logical step for an organization of this kind was to move into a smaller house better suited to their policies. On the advice of Ames and Shubert, the Founders began the search for a smaller more intimate theatre. On 9 March 1911, the Founders announced that they would build a theatre of a more moderate size on the property immediately behind the Astor Hotel on West Forty-fourth Street. They further promised a healthy subsidy to keep the New Theatre out of competition with the commercial houses and to enable the theatre to run along the lines of the smaller European theatres.<sup>21</sup>

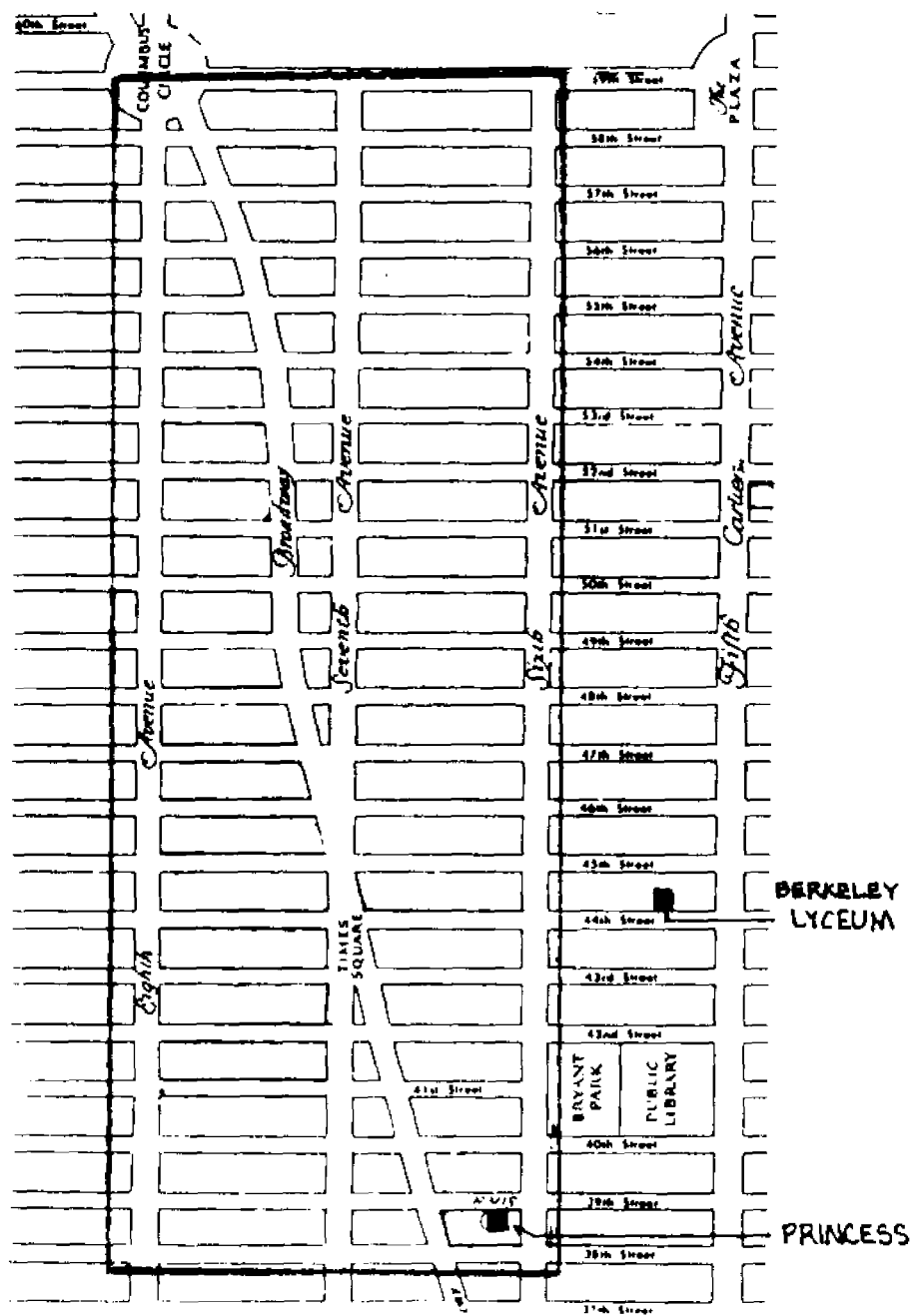
The second European model studied and emulated was Antoine's Théâtre Libre. Antoine's theatre, and the other Parisian theatres that it inspired, were small, independent theatres that produced varied bills of non-commercial one-act plays. During the early 1900s there were several American companies that attempted to recreate this style, but none was successful until the Princess Players.

The first recorded attempt in the New York commercial theatre to run an company based on the policies of the Théâtre Libre, was made by Frank Keenan (1858-1929). Born

in Dubuque, Iowa, Keenan later moved with his family to Massachusetts, where he attended Boston University. After leaving school, he made his professional acting debut with the Boston Museum Theatre Company in 1879. While Keenan spent a large part of his career on the road appearing in many different roles, including Rip Van Winkle in San Francisco, he also achieved great success on Broadway, and was best known in New York for his portrayals of Jack Rance in David Belasco's 1905 production of The Girl of the Golden West, and General Warren in William C. DeMille's play The Warrens of Virginia the same year. Even though Keenan was later very active in silent films, achieving recognition in the Triangle Company's The Coward, he always returned to the stage. At the time of his death in 1929 Keenan was working in New York and very active in Actor's Equity Association."

In February 1905, Keenan assembled a company of players and rented the Berkeley Lyceum where he planned to establish an American Théâtre Antoine. To do so, he moved away from the oversized Broadway theatres and into a smaller theatre more closely resembling the French little theatres. At this time, the Times Square theatre district was bordered on the south by Thirty-eighth Street, the north by Fifty-ninth Street, the west by Eighth Avenue and on the east by Sixth Avenue. Located on West Forty-fourth Street off Fifth Avenue, nearly a full block east of the theatre district





New York City theatre district after 1900.<sup>73</sup>

proper, the Berkeley Lyceum was small by the standards of regular Broadway houses that seated up to 2,000 people. Advertised as perfect for lectures, concerts, recitals, and amateur theatrics,<sup>24</sup> the auditorium of the Berkeley seated approximately 400 people: 200 in the orchestra and the same amount in the balcony and boxes that ringed the auditorium in horseshoe fashion. The stage was also very small. It measured no more than twenty-five feet across the proscenium, with a depth of twenty feet and no wing space. The stage was so small that two or three stages of its size would have fit on the stage of any other Broadway theatre. In fact, the apron at the Academy of Music afforded more playing area than did the stage at the Berkeley Theatre.<sup>25</sup> Not typical of the Broadway theatres, it probably resembled a high school auditorium in both its construction and seating capacity.

Very little is known about this venture beyond the fact that the company presented only one bill, consisting of three one-act plays. However, two weeks prior to the opening of his Théâtre Antoine at the Berkeley Theatre, Keenan distributed a printed prospectus that stated that his aim was:

To inaugurate a series of unique one-act plays, presented in triple bills, following, in general the plan of the Antoine theatre, Paris.<sup>26</sup>

The company opened on 27 February 1905, with At the

Threshold by Jackson D. Haag. Called a "capital bit of melodrama" by the New York Times,<sup>27</sup> At the Threshold is a moralistic play about a young married woman who is planning to leave her husband and elope with her young lover. As the play begins, a burglar is set to break into a house when he hears footsteps and hides. The lover enters and signals to the young wife, who comes out of the house to meet him. Just as the couple are about to leave, the burglar, having overheard their plans, jumps into the action to prevent the girl from running away and ruining her marriage. It is only later that the audience finds out that the burglar is the young woman's father. The second play on the bill was The Strolling Players, a dramatic adaptation by Arthur Hornblow of the opera I Pagliaci. Unfortunately, the little available information on these productions, noted that this piece suffered from the players' tendency to overact.

By far the best-received play on the bill was Henry Tyrell's adaptation of Edgar Allen Poe's short story, The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Feather. Senator Ponsonby, Chairman of the State Lunacy Commission, has arrived to inspect the sanitarium and is greeted by Dr. Tarr. After the inspection, Dr. Tarr forces the Senator to join him for dinner. Dr. Tarr begins to act quite mad, and the situation disintegrates to the point of the doctor suggesting that Ponsonby follow the example of Feathers, his assistant, who claims he can float in air. The Senator finally realizes

that he is in the company of a lunatic who has taken over the asylum and that he is in great danger. Just then the Sanitarium guards escape from their confinement and rescue him.

It is difficult to tell from the reviews if this adaptation was original or based on André de Lorde's 1903 version that played at the Grand Guignol, but it was noted in the review that this "weird tale" played up the farcical qualities inherent in Poe's story. But even if the comic elements were brought to the foreground, the New York Times noted that the play was not lacking in thrills and had a quality of grotesqueness. Frank Keenan was also commended for his "highly effective" portrayal of Dr. Tarr, which indicated an exceptional resource and versatility.<sup>28</sup>

Though Frank Keenan's Théâtre Antoine had initially raised doubts within the theatre community in New York and prompted critics to wonder whether the theatre's eventual "end would be short and peaceful or painful and drawn out," Keenan produced a bill of one-acts that exceeded all expectations.<sup>29</sup> The productions were well received, and the critics praised both the acting of the company and Keenan's staging. The New York Times gave Keenan credit for an evening of exceptional satisfaction in spite of the overwhelming obstacles he faced at the Berkeley. Through his staging of what the Times called a "Tempest in a teapot, a tragedy in a bandbox and a sermon in a nutshell,"<sup>30</sup> Keenan

overcame the physical problems at the Berkeley Theatre. Because of the small size of the stage and the limited wing space, there were long delays between scenes and between plays, while the scenery was folded and stored. However, even with all the distractions and long waits, "the experiments were so interesting that they prompted an enthusiastic response from the audience."<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult to determine why Keenan decided not to continue his project. Artistically, it appeared that he had accomplished his goal, but his decision to discontinue producing the Théâtre Antoine at the Berkeley Theatre, may have been due to the tremendous problems that Keenan faced in mounting the program. The small stage and almost non-existent wing space of the theatre apparently hampered severely his ability to stage the three plays and to store the necessary scenery for the program.

A second attempt to produce a season in the tradition of the Théâtre Libre was led by Arnold Daly (1875-1927). Daly, born in Brooklyn, began his theatrical career as an office boy for Charles Frohman and later worked as a call-boy at Augustin Daly's theatre. His first appearance on the stage was in The Jolly Squire in 1892; after that he spent three years on the road, touring with various productions, before his New York debut in Pudd'nhead Wilson in 1895. Through his relatives in Ireland, who were friends of George Bernard Shaw, Daly had become acquainted with the great

dramatist and, in 1903, after pooling his money with Winchell Smith and amassing \$350, Daly produced a special matinee of Shaw's Candida. Later, in 1905, he achieved his greatest success with the production of a repertory of Shaw's plays that included Candida and the highly controversial Mrs. Warren's Profession. Called an erratic and temperamental actor, Daly at one time was predicted to assume the role of "America's foremost actor" after the death of Richard Mansfield, but due to his eccentric nature and alcoholism he failed to do so. Even as Daly moved away from the stage and into film roles, becoming one of the early stars at Pathé Studios, he continued to act in the theatre. At the time of his death, Arnold Daly was appearing in the Theatre Guild's production of Maximillion and Juarez.<sup>17</sup>

In 1907, two years after his fairly successful repertory company was closed by the police and he and his leading lady jailed for performing Mrs. Warren's Profession, Daly put together another company of actors to present a "Theatre of Ideas." During April of 1907, Daly was performing in The Boys of Company B by Rida Johnson Young at Charles Frohman's Lyceum Theatre on West Forty-fifth Street. Subsequently, using members of Frohman's company, Daly created his "Theatre of Ideas" initially as an experiment scheduled only to play four special matinees in the Lyceum Theatre. The one program to be presented by this prototype company offered three short plays.<sup>18</sup>

The first matinee opened on 30 April 1907 with The Lemonade Boy by Gladys Unger. This "slice of life" drama, called a "bit of low-life,"<sup>14</sup> told the story of Maria, a street vendor, who is loved by two men--a "bathing master," and Pippy, the lemonade boy. When a strolling player makes advances toward Maria, Pippy comes to her aid. However, Maria resents the boy's interference and turns to the well-to-do bathing instructor, leaving Pippy broken hearted."

The second one-act on the bill was Charles Kenyon's The Flagstation. Kenyon's play is the suspenseful story of Dick Anderson, a telegraph operator at a railroad flagstation in the Canadian Rockies, who has been at his post for three days straight during a blizzard that has kept his assistant away. In his exhaustion, Anderson makes a terrible mistake in transmitting a signal to a train and sends the train into a certain head-on collision with another train. Anderson believes that with the imminent crash of the trains he is guilty of murder. He decides to shoot himself--as well as his wife Mary, so she will not suffer any guilt--when a transmission comes across the telegraph, telling Anderson that one train had been delayed and that the accident had been averted.

The final play on the bill was a Louis Parker dramatization of a story by W.W. Jacob. The Monkey's Paw, "a weird little tragedy,"<sup>16</sup> deals with the mystic power of an old charm in the shape of a monkey's paw. This talisman grants

the wish of whoever is in possession of it. In this instance the holder is an old man who wishes for \$200 with which to pay his debts. His wish is granted, but there is a catch. In repayment for fulfilling his wish, the old man must now give up the life of his son. Unfortunately, while The Monkey's Paw may have been a "good story, [it was] insufficient drama."<sup>37</sup> Full of mystic and bizarre episodes, The Monkey's Paw was "so weird that the audience went out of the theatre disheartened."<sup>38</sup>

Overall, Arnold Daly's initial experiment at the Lyceum Theatre received mixed, if not poor, reviews. While the Dramatic News praised the acting of the company and called Daly's performance admirable,<sup>39</sup> and another reviewer found the afternoon "as a whole interesting if not thrilling,"<sup>40</sup> others were less impressed. The critic for the New York Telegram found Daly's acting to be hysterical and high pitched.<sup>41</sup> Another claimed that he "never got under the skin" of his roles and that they appeared to be "entirely beyond Daly's scope."<sup>42</sup> Of the bill itself, Daly's direction was called slipshod and "while the three one-act plays were not without some merit, no one of them had sufficient solidarity or cleverness to recommend it particularly to theatre-goers."<sup>43</sup> The problems at the theatre were further compounded by long delays between scenes and plays that "made the afternoon drag."<sup>44</sup> With reviews as lackluster as these, it is difficult to determine why Arnold Daly wanted



to continue in his efforts to establish his "Theatre of Ideas," but within the month he released news of more plans.

During the week of 24 May 1907, Daly announced his intention to move his experimental "Theatre of Ideas" to a new home. He understood that in order for the "Theatre of Ideas" to succeed, his company would have to play in a smaller, less expensive theatre than was found on Broadway. Looking to the fringes of the commercial theatre district and to a smaller theatre, Daly leased the Berkeley Lyceum--the "scene of various experiments [including Frank Keenan's], none of which attracted much attention."<sup>45</sup>

As outlined, Daly's plan also included the formation of a permanent company of actors performing "slice of life dramas," and was scheduled to open in October, 1907.<sup>46</sup> Daly wanted to produce his "Theatre of Ideas" in a non-commercial atmosphere where short plays of high artistic merit could be staged without the pressures of the commercial theatre. The plays would be chosen not for their popular appeal, but for their artistic merit and would change every five weeks regardless of the business. The primary goal of the "Theatre of Ideas" was to "establish a playhouse where only the best plays by the best authors [would] be produced by a company chosen for their ability to act."<sup>47</sup>

Besides renting an out-of-the-way theatre, Daly distanced himself and his company from the New York City theatre and newspaper communities in several other ways. It

was determined that to break even financially with the "Theatre of Ideas," he would need to gross at least \$3,000 per week. In an effort to increase the revenue at the box-office in order to compensate for the small house at the Berkeley, Daly raised ticket prices from the normal top price on Broadway of \$1.50, to \$2.00.<sup>40</sup> Also in his effort to cut expenses, Daly announced in an interview with the Chicago Record that:

There will be no free tickets issued to anyone. If the dramatic critics come to review my plays they will have to pay for their seats. I shall not advertise in any newspaper. The money that I would have to spend for this purpose, amounting to almost \$1,000 a month, will be devoted to the development of the company.<sup>41</sup>

With this statement Daly alienated the press, not to mention cutting off his main source for generating both audiences and revenues--newspaper advertisements. To add insult to injury, Daly later stated that he could not "too strongly condemn the attitude of the New York press toward the stage," because the New York reviewers did not know how to deal with the serious works that he was planning to produce. He felt that his plays would be too intellectual for critics used to the normal Broadway fare, and, consequently, beyond their reasoning.<sup>42</sup>

Daly had created a situation that would prove to be impossible to overcome. The resentment engendered by his

comments regarding the press, combined with the use of an out-of-the-way theatre--the name of which he changed from the recognizable Berkeley Lyceum to the Americanized Theatre Antoine--plus the changing of curtain time from the normal eight-thirty to nine o'clock, would all work to keep audiences away from his theatre.

The Arnold Daly Repertory Company opened 15 October 1907. The opening bill included C.M.S. McLellan's The Shirkers, Charles Frederick Nirdlinger's Washington's First Defeat, and The Martyr, performed not by the company but by a guest Japanese repertory company under the direction of Mme Hanako.<sup>1</sup> The newly renamed Theatre Antoine was "packed to suffocation opening night," with an audience comprised of "many theatre people" and New York City's "elite."<sup>2</sup> Although critics were not offered complimentary tickets or even invited, several papers did review the opening.

C.M.S. McLellan's The Shirkers, called a "gruesome bit of writing" by Variety,<sup>3</sup> is the story of John Belper and his wife Margaret. They live in the isolated and bleak area of Sussex Downs, England. The couple's baby has just died, and they are suffering from extreme guilt and monotony. Belper plans to kill himself and his wife, but, after he has botched an attempt on Margaret's life, a traveler arrives at their home. Richard Murray, is a rich Londoner who is tired of the city and during a conversation it is decided that the two men will trade places.

After Belper has left for London, Murray finds Margaret, nurses her back to health, and the two live happily for several years. Murray, however, begins to miss his former life in London. He would like to return and take Margaret with him. She refuses to go and, in her despair at losing Murray, takes a knife and kills herself. Belper then returns, admitting that he could not stand London. As the play ends, Murray leaves, and the each man is where he began. While one critic found The Shirkers to be a grim and simple play that at times compelled "breathless attention," others found that McLellan's play, designed to illustrate the "monotony of life," only illustrated "the monotony of acting as practiced by Arnold Daly [Murray] and Holbrook Blinn [Belper]."<sup>44</sup>

The second play fared a little better. Washington's First Defeat by Charles Nerdlinger was praised for its "dainty humor" and for the excellent acting of the company.<sup>45</sup> Nerdlinger's play is a historical comedy based on George Washington's courtship of Lucy Grymes when he was eighteen years old. The defeat the title refers to is Washington's failure to marry the "clever little coquette."

The final piece on the bill was difficult for the critics either to praise or condemn. The Martyr, as performed by Mme Ohta Hanako's company, was completely in Japanese, though it was rumored to have been written and choreographed by Loie Fuller (1863-1928), an American dancer

who was popular at that time for her Serpentine Dances.<sup>56</sup> The plot of The Martyr was not recorded; however, Mme Hanako and her company were commended for their acting. Hanako, who began her career as a child actor at the Imperial Theatre in Japan, made her Western debut in Paris in 1905. While she toured Europe extensively, her appearance with Daly was her first in the United States. Called the Japanese Duse by the critics, she was especially praised for her dancing which was called exquisite.<sup>57</sup>

This first bill presented by Daly received mixed reviews for both the acting and the choice of plays, and it left New Yorkers with conflicting opinions. On one hand, Daly's "Theatre of Ideas" was condemned because the plays presented were nothing more than "ideas of murder and suicide."<sup>58</sup> Yet, on the other hand, it was noted that Daly deserved "great praise for his courage and daring to produce plays that New Yorkers do not yet understand."<sup>59</sup> Neither kind of review attracted an enthusiastic audience to the Theatre Antoine. By the twenty-third of October, little more than a week after opening, Daly had begun to run advertisements in the New York newspapers, quoting the few critics who reviewed the program favorably. But, as the writer for the Dramatic News noted, the houses remained very small, and it was suggested that Daly "might need a lot of ads to keep afloat."<sup>60</sup> As a result, though the initial offering was scheduled to last five weeks, Daly hurriedly assembled a

new bill.

In an effort to attract an audience, Daly substituted plays and changed entire bills almost at will. He also changed the name of the theatre back to the more recognizable Berkeley. The first bill had been scheduled to play until 19 November; however, Daly closed the program early and spent a week preparing a new bill that included The Van Dyck, After the Opera, and Hanako's company in the Japanese Lady.<sup>61</sup>

Eugene Perinque's farce, The Van Dyck, translated from the French by Cosmo Gordon Lenox, had been previously performed at the Grand Guignol in Paris. Called a "capital comedy sketch" by Variety, the plot focuses on a young bachelor who, as the curtain rises, is discovered playing the piano. Soon, a stranger enters the apartment, apparently attracted by the music, and begins to relate the story of his life. The stranger then begins to chase the young man around the apartment, until they are interrupted by a doctor and his aides. The doctor explains that the stranger is really an escaped lunatic and that they are there to take him away. The young man is asked to leave the room while the doctor and attendants put the stranger into a straight jacket. The young man obliges, and as he leaves, the doctor, his attendants, and the stranger all pull out large bags and begin to steal everything in the apartment--including the piano.

The second play on the new bill involved adultery, murder, and mistaken identity and had been popular at the Théâtre Antoine in Paris. Gladys Unger's adaptation of Jean Reibrach and Georges Doquois's play After the Opera involves a romantic triangle among a husband, a wife, and her young lover. As the play begins, the young wife and her lover are together when they hear a noise in the house. Thinking that the noise is the young woman's husband returning home after the opera, the lover escapes out a window. Once outside, the lover sees the husband approaching the house and realizes that the sound he heard inside must have been a burglar. The two men enter the house only to find the young woman murdered. After the discovery of the body and through a strange series of events, the lover confesses to the affair with the other man's wife. The husband, by putting together circumstantial evidence, accuses the young lover of the murder of his wife. The lover, to save the woman's reputation and salvage his honor, shoots himself and, as the play ends, the husband cries, "He has confessed!"<sup>62</sup>

Mme Hanako's production of Japanese Lady completed the bill. Again, performed in Japanese, the plot eluded the press, but they continued to praise her abilities.<sup>61</sup>

Unfortunately, the second bill fared no better than the first, and Daly admitted that his "Theatre of Ideas" was suffering financially. But he also added that plans were proceeding for a spring season.<sup>64</sup> On 19 November 1907, Daly

announced that he had hired Leibler and Company, a theatrical management company, in an attempt to improve business. Leibler attempted to change the image that the public had of the "Theatre of Ideas," from an elitist establishment with high ticket prices and "high-brow" plays, to one that attracted all classes.<sup>65</sup>

Daly, in a continued attempt to attract audiences, substituted plays that he hoped would be more popular and on 22 November, The Shirkers replaced After the Opera. However, Variety noted that there was still "row after row of empty seats in the orchestra and a nearly vacant balcony," which was "evidence that this type of entertainment [was] not popular with the public."<sup>66</sup>

By 27 November, The Shirkers had been replaced with The Flagstation from Daly's initial spring experiment and a new Japanese play was added: Hanako's production of Joshiwara replaced The Japanese Lady. This bill was compared to the side show at Coney Island, and the reviewer for the Evening Post suggested that "as the produce of a theatre of ideas, [this program] was a crop suggestive of barren silt and a long draught."<sup>67</sup> With the poor reception of the program and the failure to increase audiences, Arnold Daly's "Theatre of Ideas" closed during the first week in December 1907. Although the "Theatre of Ideas" reopened on 11 December, Daly chose to present full-length plays rather than one-acts. His first production was a revival of Shaw's Candida,



a play that had proven profitable for him in 1905, followed by My Mamie Rose.<sup>68</sup> Daly's Théâtre Antoine, however, never produced again in New York.

Daly attempted to resurrect his Théâtre Antoine in Chicago at the Studebaker Theatre in May of 1908, but failed.<sup>69</sup> By June 1908, Arnold Daly was bankrupt owing \$40,246.40 against assets of \$1,375. Listed among his creditors were Lee Shubert and Loie Fuller, to whom he owed \$7,300 for royalties.<sup>70</sup>

Arnold Daly's "Theatre of Ideas" lasted six weeks at the Berkeley Theatre and failed not because of artistic reasons but primarily because of financial problems. The company was generally praised for its performances, and it was noted that "better acting of that particular kind [could] not be found on a New York stage."<sup>71</sup> According to Holbrook Blinn, a member of the company,

The company was good, its purpose serious, its plays noteworthy, but the manner of presentation was inadequate.... The undertaking was not sufficiently capitalized.... But, the real deterrent factor was the house in which we gave these plays.... Because it is a lyceum, the public looks upon it more as a town hall than a theatre, and refuses to take anything seriously that is presented there.<sup>72</sup>

Not only did the theatre have a reputation to overcome, but the Berkeley Lyceum was outside the theatre district and, at

first, was operating under an unrecognizable name--the Theatre Antoine. Added to the physical problem of location were Daly's general attitudes of theatrical elitism and his alienation of the press which caused his theatre to suffer from lack of press coverage, and resulted in poor audience turn-out. Without a paying audience, Daly was forced to close his "Theatre of Ideas" and turn to more reliable and profitable plays such as Candida.

Frank Keenan's attempt to emulate the Théâtre Libre, along with Arnold Daly's effort to establish his "Theatre of Ideas," and Winthrop Ames's work at the New Theatre shared a common ideal. They each attempted to create a repertory theatre using a stock company of actors based on European models--albeit not the same model--with the intention of bringing to this country a higher artistic standard than they felt it had been experiencing. With the establishment of the New Theatre, Winthrop Ames and the Founders had hoped to elevate the American drama and establish a national theatre--something that may well have been in the minds of both Frank Keenan and Arnold Daly had their companies survived. But perhaps the most important point in common was that each of their failures was due, in part, to the size of the theatre in which they performed and the excessive costs of production.

At the New Theatre, it was established by Lee Shubert early on, that for the theatre to break even--covering the

upkeep of the house, salaries of the company and crew, and royalties--the company would have to gross \$750,000 annually. Unfortunately, the maximum gross the theatre could generate was exactly \$750,000--provided that each night, every seat was sold at \$2.50, a full dollar higher than the normal Broadway top ticket price.<sup>73</sup> Without a capacity audience every night, the New Theatre was destined to financial failure.

The smaller, four hundred seat Berkeley Theatre presented a less drastic situation, and even though there are no financial records for Frank Keenan's company, the monetary problems that Arnold Daly encountered at that theatre were probably similar. Daly estimated the break-even point of his "Theatre of Ideas" at \$3,000 a week; Keenan may have required a little less. However, basing the weekly gross on \$2.00 per seat, at fifty percent capacity, which may have been high in both Daly's and Keenan's cases, the weekly box-office receipts would total only \$3,200. Add to the expenses the cost of advertising after his first week of operation, which Daly had estimated at nearly \$1,000 a month, and the company would be running at a deficit.

Each producer attempted to recreate the style of the non-commercial European art theatres through choice of material and staging while remaining within the highly competitive commercial theatre. The one thing forgotten was that the Théâtre Libre and the other independent theatres

used as models operated on an amateur basis and in very small houses with very low overheads. By remaining in the commercial arena, these American producers were forced to accept the professional theatre's economic obligations such as rent, advertising costs, actors' and stage managers' salaries, and the even higher salaries of the unionized stage hands.

Through these experiments, those producers interested in developing a professional art theatre in the United States learned an important lesson. It was impossible to compete in a highly commercial and professional atmosphere with experimental and perhaps risky works originally intended for the smaller, more intimate, amateur stages of the little theatres of Europe. The plays presented by Ames, Keenan, and Daly were of the type that needed to be played in a more intimate theatre, requiring a more naturalistic and less presentational acting style. Daly and Keenan gave up the experiment, but the board of the New Theatre, Winthrop Ames, and Lee Shubert, still felt that there was a chance to reestablish an artistically minded repertory company on the professional stage. They all saw the vast sizes and high seating capacities of the average Broadway theatre, as well as the high overhead of operating such a theatre, as the major stumbling blocks to success. If they could eliminate the high cost of maintaining a large theatre by building a smaller, more intimate auditorium better

suited to the new plays and their naturalistic style of acting, they felt that the experiment could work.

By March 1911, the New Theatre had purchased land directly behind the Astor Hotel, just west of Broadway between West Forty-fourth and West Forty-fifth streets on which to build such a theatre--but, unfortunately, the project was abandoned later that year. Ames also had moved along with his own plans and by March 1912, had opened the Little Theatre at 238 West Forty-fourth Street, on the south side of the street directly across from the New Theatre's property.<sup>74</sup> Following in the footsteps of Ames and the Founders at the New Theatre, Lee Shubert decided--whether for artistic reasons or monetary, it is difficult to say--to build the Princess Theatre on West Thirty-ninth Street, an intimate theatre of his own.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Creation of the Princess Players

It is difficult to determine why the Princess Players was formed--out of an artistic motive or simply to compete in an increasingly diverse market. No matter what the reason, there were several contributing factors. Among these were the competition between the Theatrical Syndicate and the Shubert brothers and the subsequent over-building of theatres, the influence of both the European touring companies and the amateur movement in this country, and the trend toward smaller theatres. All may have influenced both the building of the Princess Theatre and the policies that the company enacted.

The battle between the rival theatrical trusts--the Syndicate and the Shuberts--had increased theatre building in New York City. During 1912, a year after the demise of the New Theatre, the New York Times reported that "all records in the construction of new theatres [had] been exceeded," with nine new theatres "devoted to high class drama."<sup>1</sup> The addition of the Longacre, Sam Shubert, Booth, Palace, Cort, Illington, Eltinge, Martin Beck, and Playhouse theatres to the Times Square area increased the number of legitimate theatres to thirty-nine.

Even as several large theatres were being built--the Palace on Seventh Avenue and Forty-seventh Street and the Eltinge on Forty-second Street among them--there was a noticeable trend toward smaller theatres. Arthur Hornblow noted in 1919 that

Of late years there has been a marked change in the policy of theatre construction. Instead of big, costly buildings with imposing facades as was formerly the custom, the new method is to build a smaller house, or theatre intime, allowing of an auditorium with limited capacity so that no seat will be very far from the stage.<sup>2</sup>

This theatrical building boom had already prompted Chester T. Calder to write in Theatre Magazine that the "decadent condition of the American stage" could be blamed in part on the over-building of theatres and the consequent over-production of plays. However, he praised the building of the new intimate theatres and hailed them as a "distinct step forward in the growth of the dramatic art." Calder felt the intimate theatre would allow American producers to move away from the "cheap, vulgar play" produced solely to make a reasonable profit and toward a more artistic theatre.<sup>1</sup> This trend toward more intimate theatres was evidenced in the building of several smaller houses--the Punch and Judy, the Playhouse, and the Henry Miller--but none were as small as Winthrop Ames's Little Theatre and Lee Shubert's Princess

Theatre. Perhaps because of the lessons learned at the New Theatre or from the ever increasing influence of the "little theatre" movement in America, Ames and Shubert developed theatres that were better suited to both the idea of a repertory company and the new, more realistic drama.

The first of the intimate theatres built was Ames' Little Theatre in 1912. Having recognized the problems inherent in producing the newer dramatic works at the New Theatre, Ames limited his seating capacity to 299. Although Hornblow credits Ames with producing "from time to time plays of a higher intellectual order than are usually to be seen in Broadway theatres,"<sup>4</sup> others criticized him:

The New York Little Theatre is not a place for experiment. With its extended "runs," its high prices of admission, and its business organization, it runs not with the amateur and experimental playhouses, but with the professional and commercial theatres. It does not push into untried fields, seeking new methods of creating dramatic interest, and learning through occasional failure; rather it carries into the commercial theatre field what the experimental theatres already have proved to be worth while.<sup>5</sup>

Though the artistic standards of production were high, no new ground was broken. No repertory company was developed, and Ames found the cost of trying to produce plays of high quality prohibitive. Even by raising the top ticket price



from \$1.50 to \$2.00, Ames was unable to offset the increasing costs of labor and materials. Consequently, the theatre ran at a loss, and was eventually enlarged to include a balcony.

In 1912 Lee Shubert (1875-1953) was making plans to build an intimate theatre of his own. The Shubert brothers--Lee, Sam, and J.J.--began acquiring theatres and real estate from the time of their arrival New York in 1900. They bought their first piece of property on West Thirty-ninth Street in 1902, directly down the street from the Casino Theatre, their first headquarters. Lee Shubert felt that the one way to make money in the theatre was through real estate--theatrical real estate that was then leased at either fixed rates or at a percentage of the gross receipts.<sup>6</sup>

As their empire grew and competition with the Syndicate increased, Lee Shubert would buy property for a proposed theatre and also various frontages along the same block to prevent competitors from invading the territory. By 1912, with three of their twelve theatres on one block--the Maxine Elliot, the Casino, and the Thirty-ninth Street--West Thirty-ninth Street between Sixth Avenue and Broadway had become a Shubert stronghold.<sup>7</sup> Lee Shubert's idea was to increase that number, and plans to build the Princess Theatre were underway early in 1912. On March 30 of that year, F. Ray Comstock signed the lease agreement acquiring the building

at 104-106 West Thirty-ninth Street.

While he would later become a respected producer bringing to America both Elenora Duse and the Moscow Art Theatre, F. Ray Comstock (1880-1949) was a Shubert deputy. Even though during this period he was recognized as an independent producer, he was actually controlled financially by the Shubert brothers. Comstock began his theatrical career as a treasurer at the Star Theatre in Buffalo. Affiliating himself with the Shuberts as early as 1904 when he was hired to manage several of their theatres in the Mid-West," Comstock and his managing/producing company, had the dubious honor of becoming the "first wholly owned Shubert subsidiary."<sup>9</sup> Working as the front man, or "'independent producer' who was backed, booked, and controlled by the Shuberts,"<sup>10</sup> he would set up deals, such as the Princess Theatre lease, in his name and then assign the rights to the Shubert organization. In this way, the Shuberts were released from the financial responsibilities of renovation while holding controlling interest in the theatre. Comstock would then be named as manager, responsible for up-keep of the house and payment of rent, as well as payment of royalties of 12.75% of the gross to Lee Shubert.<sup>11</sup>

During the first two decades of this century, the Times Square area experienced a period of rapid growth and as new theatres, shops, and restaurants were built, the older buildings were either razed or converted. The property at

104-106 West Thirty-ninth Street just off Sixth Avenue, was originally part of the John Taylor family farm that had been parcelled off into 50'X 98.9' lots in the latter part of the nineteenth century as New York City moved north on Manhattan island. Primarily a residential area until shortly after the turn of the century, the homes that stood on that site were torn down, and in 1902 a new six story brick structure was built. This building was originally intended to be used as a stable; however, as New York's new automotive district moved uptown, it was converted into a garage. It was this compact 94'X50' building that Comstock acquired in 1912.<sup>12</sup>

The lease that was signed with William MacDonald, the owner of the property, was to run 20 years at a cost of \$10,000 per year. Also included would be the cost of renovating the former garage. The initial cost of \$40,000 would be broken into yearly payments of \$3,000 per year, to be paid by Comstock, at 6% interest. This lease agreement, with its guaranteed annual payment of at least \$13,000, would later come back to haunt the producers.<sup>13</sup>

On 13 May 1912, the lease was assigned to the Princess Theatre Company. This newly-incorporated company included the producing partners Lee Shubert, William A. Brady, and Archibald Selwyn. F. Ray Comstock was then named manager of the theatre.

As a minor partner, Archibald Selwyn (1877-1959), was known primarily as a play broker--an agent who would procure

plays from authors and sell the rights to interested producers. In 1903, with his brother Edgar and Elisabeth Marbury, he formed the American Play Company to do just that. During its existence, his company represented many top playwrights from around the world, including Henry Arthur Jones. Around 1912, Selwyn turned to play producing, but did not have great success. However, he later found his fame and fortune in Hollywood, where he co-founded Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps the most dynamic force behind the Princess Theatre was William A. Brady. Brady (1863-1950), later known as the "Dean of American producers," was at one time the most prolific and successful producer in America.<sup>15</sup> Of the three original partners at the Princess Theatre, Brady best represented the commercial side of the endeavor. He was known for producing anything that might make money. In fact, as Lawrence J. Wilker notes, "All of Brady's working relationships, decisions, and agreements in assembling the elements of production seem to have been motivated by one goal--the achievement of maximum profit."<sup>16</sup> If he could sell it, he would produce it.

To this end he was successful in presenting not only Boucicault's After Dark in the 1890s--which, it is said, he purchased for \$1,100 and then grossed over \$1,000,000 on the road,<sup>17</sup> Ned Sheldon's The Boss in 1911--co-produced with Holbrook Blinn,<sup>18</sup> and Elmer Rice's Street Scene in 1929, but also, bicycle racing and prize fighting. He felt that,

regardless of the attraction, "the fundamentals of getting people to pay to see something happen [were] the same in any arena."<sup>19</sup>

Around 1898, Brady associated himself with the Syndicate with whom he produced thirty-five plays over ten years<sup>20</sup>, but he found that this affiliation severely hampered his ability to control his productions and their profits. In 1909, it became evident to both Brady and Lee Shubert that, in order for them both to survive, they must join forces against the Syndicate. With an agreement dated 31 March 1910, William A. Brady, Ltd. was incorporated, naming Lee Shubert as the major stockholder. This partnership enabled Brady to produce and control what he wanted and gave the Shuberts new plays with which to fill their theatres.<sup>21</sup> This sometimes stormy relationship lasted until 1925 when it was dissolved, and Brady turned his attentions to the film industry.

After the incorporation of the Princess Theatre Company and the assignment of the lease, plans for the renovation of the one-time garage were begun. William A. Swasey was hired as the architect, and work commenced at the end of May. Swasey had designed three other theatres for the Shuberts, including the Winter Garden--which had been adapted from the Vanderbilt's stables on West Fiftieth Street.<sup>22</sup>

With work under way, plans were made for the opening of Annie Russell's Old English Repertory Company on 8 September

1912. This company was to operate on a subscription basis and already had the patronage of prominent New Yorkers--many of whom had been supporters of the New Theatre.<sup>23</sup> Operating along the same lines as the New Theatre, the company would present classic plays whose standards were already established.<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, on 30 July 1912, the first of several delays in construction occurred.

Work was stopped originally by the New York Building Inspector for alleged violations of the fire safety code.<sup>25</sup> Swasey had proposed the elimination of exposed fire escapes and fire alleys. Instead, he wanted to build enclosed fire stairs. Swasey felt that this stoppage was due in part to:

The appalling loss of life in the Iroquois Theatre catastrophe [which] started such a crusade in theatrical laws that some demands have been overdone, and are not only ridiculous, but an imposition on both the owner and the manager.<sup>26</sup>

The Iroquois Theatre in Chicago had burned on 30 December 1903, killing over five hundred people in just eight minutes. As a result, building codes of many major cities incorporated fire regulations that required certain safety features.<sup>27</sup> However, because of the size of the house--fewer than 300 seats--Swasey was able to avoid the strict fire regulations that would have been in effect had the theatre been larger.<sup>28</sup>

Several other delays encountered during construction

resulted in additional costs amounting to \$25,000. Chief among these delays was Swasey's inability to complete the plans for the auditorium, which were not finished until 22 November 1912.<sup>29</sup> Unable to open on the original date of 8 September, the Annie Russell Company was moved to the Thirtieth Street Theatre, where performances began on 12 November 1912.<sup>30</sup> This left the Princess Theatre Company with no attraction to open their theatre once it was finally completed.

It is not clear how or when the producers decided on their new plan. On 3 January 1913, however, Variety reported that the Princess Theatre had been rescheduled to open on March 1, but at that writing, no attraction had been booked.<sup>31</sup> No other reports were issued until March 2, when an advertisement appeared noting that the Princess Players would open on 10 March 1913, under the artistic supervision of Holbrook Blinn.<sup>32</sup>

Holbrook Blinn (1872-1928) had a long association with William Brady that included not only acting in his productions, but also acting as co-producer and director of The Boss in 1911. At the time of his death, Blinn was considered one of America's foremost actors. He was born in San Francisco to the actress and teacher Nellie Holbrook who was, at one time, David Belasco's teacher.<sup>33</sup> Introduced to the stage at an early age, Blinn first appeared in the Streets of London in 1878. He made his professional debut

in 1893 as Corporal Ferry in the San Francisco production of The New South--produced by William Brady--and accompanied the play to Broadway the same year. After touring the show for two seasons, he left to join the Effie Ellsler company.

In 1897, Blinn went to England with Brady's production of The Cat and the Cherub where he achieved great success. Remaining in England for the next eight years, Blinn performed with several leading repertory companies, working with Martin Harvey and Seymore Hicks, and also produced a season of one-act plays at London's Coronet Theatre in July of 1900 that included Ib and Little Christina--a play he would later produce at the Princess Theatre as well. Unfortunately, this company received "little approbation and encouragement from the public" and did not last.<sup>14</sup> He returned to the United States in 1905 with a production of The Duchess of Dantzic, playing the part of Napoleon--a role that established his reputation on Broadway.<sup>15</sup>

After his return from England, Blinn appeared with several major companies, including those of Arnold Daly. At the time of the formation of the Princess Players in 1913, Blinn was known in America as Mrs. Fiske's leading man, having spent three seasons with her company (1909-1911), performing with her in Salvation Nell, Becky Sharp, and The Pillars of Society, among others.

Following the demise of the Princess Players in January of 1915, Holbrook Blinn continued to act and direct. He



became one of the first well-known stage actors to appear in films while continuing his career in the theatre. He died in 1928 during the run of Molnar's The Play's the Thing, which he also directed.<sup>16</sup>

With the addition of Blinn as the "artistic supervisor," in charge of reading new plays, assembling the programs, and directing the productions, the management team had been finalized. As construction on the theatre neared completion with the finishing touches on the auditorium, the task of deciding on a specific policy of operation was the next order of business.

For the first two decades of the twentieth century, managers in the professional theatre were dependent on both the long running hit and the extensive touring of a show to make money. Consequently, producers tended toward full-length plays that fitted a certain formula and guaranteed popular appeal. From its inception, the policies of the Princess Players ran contrary to all the commercial practices of the time. These policies were agreed upon by both the artistic staff and the producers. However, there was one area where they clashed.

According to the noted critic H.E. Stearns, it was necessary for the producing team at the Princess Theatre to "develop a definite artistic tradition of its own" even while emulating the little theatres of Europe, and to create "something personal and individual, something which can be

seen nowhere but in New York and nowhere but at this particular theatre."<sup>37</sup> To do this the Princess Players was organized as a permanent stock company of ten actors. One of the "most firmly fixed policies of the management," Blinn noted in an interview with Eva vom Baur for Theatre Magazine, was "to avoid the long run of its plays."<sup>38</sup> This was accomplished by operating in a modified repertory setting. The "bills" of four or five one-acts would change periodically, approximately three times through the course of the season. This would not only give the public something new, it also would allow the actors an opportunity to play several parts and develop their versatility.<sup>39</sup> The manner of presentation--changing bills of one-act plays--was not, however, what was disputed.

There appeared to be a rift between Holbrook Blinn on the artistic side of the Princess Players and the producers on the commercial side, as to which theatre they were to model themselves after--Antoine's theatre or the Grand Guignol. Blinn, a veteran of Arnold Daly's Theatre Antoine in 1905 and of his own one-act company at the Coronet Theatre in London in 1900, favored the Théâtre Libre. He saw the Princess Players as an experiment, an American theatre devoted to one-act plays that were not necessarily commercial or profitable--in the manner of the little theatres of Paris. Believing that the Princess Players "ought to act as a developer for native dramatists," Blinn

felt that the theatre should be a place where writers could "acquire the techniques that enable them to present their ideas effectively."<sup>40</sup> He wanted a theatre, as did Métènier, more along the lines of Antoine's Théâtre Libre, where he could mount plays that might be "odd and original with a peculiar twist to them," plays that might thrill, but by no means were created expressly to thrill.

Blinn also felt that American audiences were not as accepting as the French. Just as the sight of two men kissing might be quite natural and accepted in Paris, in New York it would not be tolerated. Equally, the plays of the Grand Guignol were fine for the French, but they were "such that the American theatre could not duplicate them," because they presented "subjects that could not be touched here [America]." Consequently, Blinn announced that "our little theatre is not a horror house," but one that would appeal to the tastes of jaded theatre-goers by offering them something new. To do this, he would look for scripts that were "simple in construction, readily understandable, and of a wide appeal."<sup>41</sup> The producers, on the other hand, had a different view of things.

Although the producers at the Princess respected Holbrook Blinn and his opinions, Messrs. Shubert, Brady, and Selwyn saw the Princess Players as a commercial venture in direct competition with the other commercial houses on Broadway. To survive, they needed to attract audiences.

Aware of the work being done at the Grand Guignol in Paris, and knowing that the producers there had attracted much attention through the presentation of varied bills of one-act plays, the producers at the Princess, according to H.E. Stearns, being "far too shrewd and too experienced in things theatrical not to have recognized some sort of tangible demand for this sort of thing..." took "a natural, if deliberate step forward."<sup>42</sup> Their decision to pattern the new Princess Theatre after the Grand Guignol in Paris manifested itself in their advertising.

The ads run by the producers claimed that the Princess Players would operate "with a policy similar to that pursued at the Grand Guignol," and included their new nick-name, "The Theatre of Thrills."<sup>43</sup> These new advertisements prompted Eva vom Baur to wonder if this "press-agent nomenclature" would do "more harm than good--as it often does--since this enterprise has a more serious and deeper purpose than the mere providing of pure sensation." The producers felt, however, that it was necessary for a theatre to advertise itself in such a manner simply to "entice patronage in these days of over stimulated competition."<sup>44</sup>

In the end, a compromise of sorts was reached. The first bill reflected a mix of the two Parisian theatres. With the choice of The Switchboard, Fear, Any Night, and Fancy Free, the Theatre of Thrills was set to open 10 March 1913. However, the theatre was still not finished and the

opening was postponed until 14 March.<sup>45</sup>

When the final touches had been put on the Princess Theatre, what the public found was a "perfect little play-house, fitted out in good taste, with admirable acoustics," decorated in pearl, white, and gold.<sup>46</sup> The stage of the new theatre, with a proscenium opening of nearly fifty feet and a depth of twenty-eight feet, was said to appear almost as large as the auditorium with its seating capacity of 298. The seats were arranged with 244 in the orchestra divided into fourteen rows, and eight boxes that held 54.<sup>47</sup> In a building that measured just ninety-four feet in depth, with a stage occupying twenty-eight feet, no seat in the house could have been more than seventy feet from the stage. The intimate size of the house and its proximity to the stage would greatly enhance the audience/player relationship and serve as a perfect theatre for the new, more realistic drama.

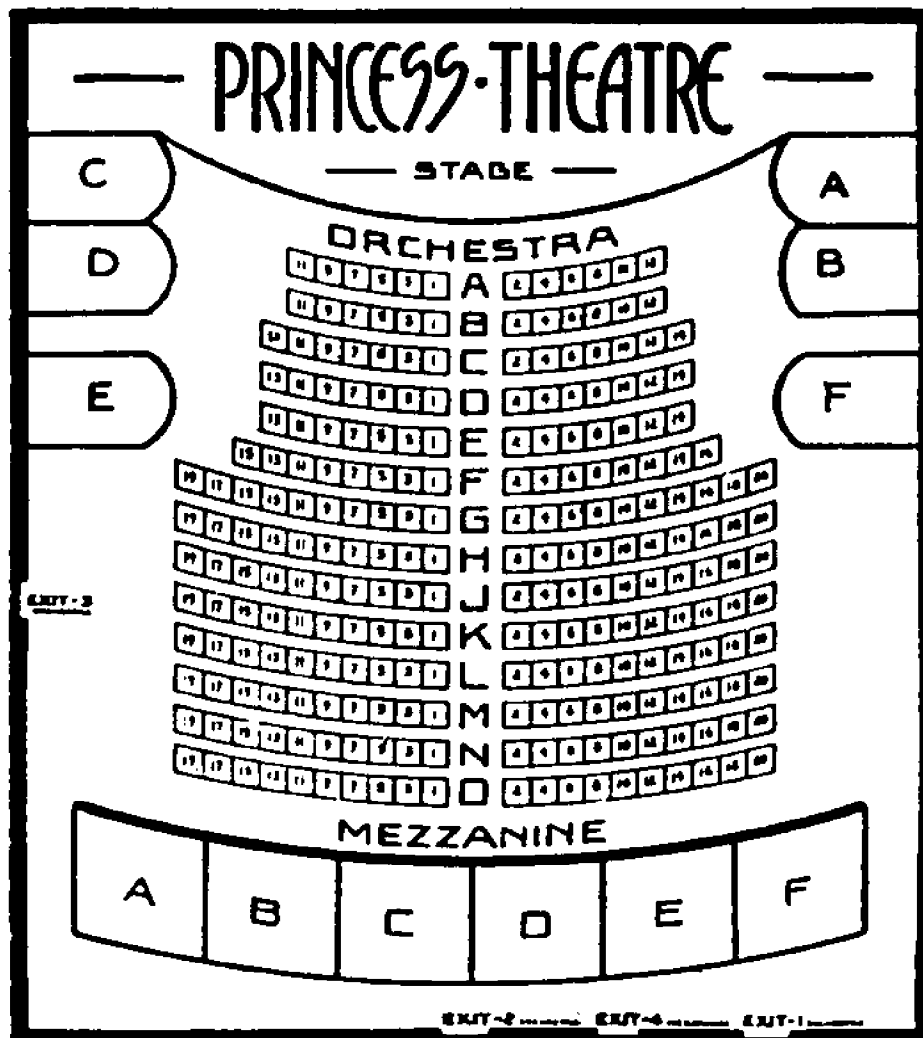
After nearly a year from the date of the initial lease signing, The Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills was ready to open.

|                                                                     |                                                               |                                                                                              |                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>PRINCESS THEATRE</b><br><small>(12 Days continuous play)</small> |                                                               | <b>FRIDAY EVE., MARCH 14</b><br><small>Let's break the U.S. seats on date to morrow.</small> |                                                                                               |
| WITH A POLICY SIMILAR TO THAT PURSUED AT THE GRAND GUIGNOL, PARIS   |                                                               |                                                                                              |                                                                                               |
| THE INITIAL PROGRAMME<br>WILL INCLUDE THESE<br>FOUR PLAYS           | <b>ANY NIGHT</b><br><small>By<br/>Edwin Ellis</small>         | <b>FANCY FREE</b><br><small>By<br/>Stanley Houghton</small>                                  | <b>FEAR</b><br><small>As presented for two<br/>years at the Grand<br/>Guignol, Paris.</small> |
|                                                                     | <b>THE SWITCHBOARD</b><br><small>By<br/>Edgar Wallace</small> |                                                                                              |                                                                                               |
| STAGING OF PLAYS UNDER THE ART SUPERVISION OF HOLBROOK BLINN.       |                                                               |                                                                                              |                                                                                               |

Advertisement for the opening of the Princess Theatre<sup>48</sup>



Interior of the Princess Theatre<sup>49</sup>



Seating plan for the Princess Theatre™





Princess Theatre, 104-106 West 39th Street, March 1913<sup>11</sup>

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Three Seasons at the Theatre of Thrills

#### Spring Season, 1913

The 1912-1913 theatrical season in New York City was the biggest and, perhaps, one of the most diverse since the turn of the century. There were forty-five operating Broadway houses in which 162 productions were mounted.<sup>1</sup> The season opened in September of 1912 with Arthur Wing Pinero's The "Mind the Paint" Girl at Frohman's Lyceum Theatre starring Billy Burke, followed by Bayard Veiller's Within the Law at the Eltinge Theatre with Jane Cowl. A generous mixture of farces, musicals, and dramas followed.<sup>2</sup> The productions that season ranged from Alice Bradley's The Governor's Lady, which opened 9 September 1912 at the Republic Theatre directed by David Belasco, with the now famous interior of a Child's restaurant recreated on stage, to George M. Cohan's Broadway Jones at Cohan's Theatre or Rudolf Friml's operetta Firefly. By far the most successful play of the season, according to Burns Mantle, was Romance by Edward Sheldon.<sup>3</sup> Though the quantity of plays produced (both musicals and straight) was at an all time high, the quality was lacking. The over-building of theatres caused by competition among the Syndicate, the Shuberts, and the

independent producers encouraged them to mount any play that might have commercial value to keep a theatre from staying dark. As a result, despite the many hits such as Peg O' My Heart with Laurette Taylor, 19 percent of all the productions closed within two weeks of opening.<sup>4</sup> It was in this highly competitive and commercial climate that the Princess Theatre opened.

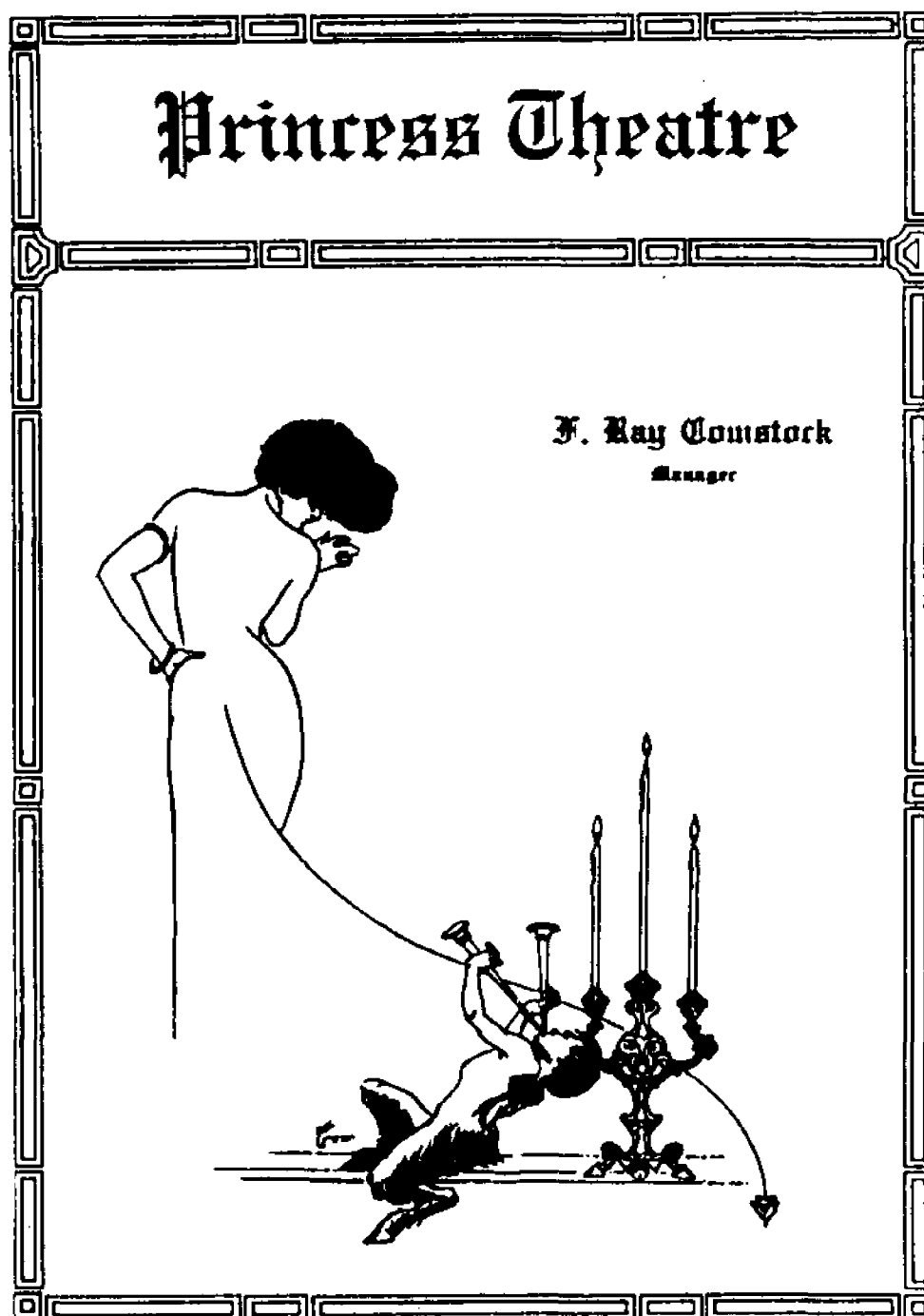
Throughout its existence the Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills provoked controversy and was often forced to alter its policies because of public opinion. These changes in policy, however, were necessary for the company to survive financially. But whether the Theatre of Thrills was being condemned for presenting sensational thrillers or praised for their highly original work, for the next three theatrical seasons, the Princess Players maintained a permanent resident stock company and produced many innovative and daring one-act plays.

The theatrical season in New York City traditionally ran from September to May. Plays generally opened in the fall and ran, hopefully, until the summer, when producers sent them out on the road. However, due to the delays encountered in the construction of the Princess Theatre, the Theatre of Thrills was forced to open mid-season. During March of 1913, the competition was steady, but not terribly strong. John Phillip Sousa's comic opera The American Maid opened on 3 March 1913 at the Broadway Theatre, but lasted

only sixteen performances, Marie Dressler's All-Star Gambol opened the next week at the Weber and Fields Theatre for eight performances, and Liberty Hall by R.C. Carton opened on the eleventh for thirty-nine performances.<sup>5</sup> The most notable competition on 14 March 1913, was Eugene Brieux's Damaged Goods. Turned down by several producers as a sermon on syphilis, Brieux's play opened at the Fulton Theatre on the same day that the Theatre of Thrills opened and received critical acclaim. The critic for the New York Times noted that Damaged Goods was a "highly engrossing and impressive" play, and while the critic wondered if such "sociological propaganda" belonged in the theatre, he noted that it was not safe for anyone, especially a "dramatic reviewer to attempt a final verdict."<sup>6</sup>

Even with the stiff competition that faced the Princess Players, on opening night, 14 March 1913, and a ticket price of \$2.00--fifty cents above the normal top Broadway ticket price--every seat in the theatre was sold, and each person was greeted with a program containing the disclaimer that,

Since much of the modern dramatic material is not suited to the understanding of the very young folk, and since the management does not want to limit its repertoire to the confines of such a censorship, it has been decided to discourage the attendance of any except mature theatre goers to whose intelligence will be submitted the plays of the Princess Theatre.'



Opening night program at the Princess Theatre<sup>8</sup>

The program on opening night (The Switchboard, Fear, Fancy Free, and Any Night) was performed by a company of ten that included: Edward Ellis, Willette Kershaw, Georgia O'Ramey, Fannie Hartz, Frances Larrimore, Harrison Ford (later replaced by Purnell Pratt), Vaughn Trevor, John Stokes, Bennet Musson, and, of course, Holbrook Blinn, who also directed.

The Switchboard, by Edgar Wallace (1875-1932), the well known English writer of thrillers, was called "an ingenuous, amusing, and not important"<sup>9</sup> telephone comedy, the central, and only visible character of which was a telephone operator at a switchboard. Wallace's play is a commentary on the telephone and its use and mis-use of privacy. Although technology has allowed man to by-pass the usual chains of communication, the human element is still involved. The action of the play takes place deep within the world of the operator and her switchboard. She is surrounded by a hazy, scrim-like material--a "gauzy curtain"--against which the silhouettes of telephone poles and crossing lines can be seen. Through various mix-ups and mis-pluggings, the operator tangles the threads of several off-stage conversations that can be heard coming from behind the scrim. These mis-pluggings enable the audience to eavesdrop on crossed conversations that include the voice of a woman making a date with her boyfriend, while the voice of her husband is overheard on another line talking with his attorney. He is heard asking the lawyer to get evidence of adultery against

his wife to enable him to obtain a divorce--so he can carry on his own adulterous affairs. Other situations overheard included a young girl on the line to Bide-a-Wee in search of her lost dog that interlaced with a conversation between two young people involved in "passionate lovemaking." The comedy comes through the juxtaposition of the conversations and the ways in which they comment on each other, either by expressing an opposing viewpoint or pointing up the ridiculous nature of the conversation itself.

The New York Times noted that the premise of The Switchboard was "clever, but would have seemed susceptible to better results" had not much of its humor been lost because of poor performances by the voices.<sup>10</sup> Overall, as the New York Post noted, The Switchboard was a fifteen minute "trifle" that "excited easy laughter but revealed no special brilliance of wit or organization of invention."<sup>11</sup> The Brooklyn Eagle, however, praised the performance and compared the rather expressionistic setting, with its criss-crossing telephone wires, to a jungle where the "human beast" played and hunted. The critic for the Eagle found a deeper and more profound meaning for the play than did the Times or the Post, and tied it into what the reviewer saw as an overall concept for the evening--an illustration of man's weakness and depravity.<sup>12</sup> Already, there was a minor controversy and differing views, and the remaining shows intensified these.

Holbrook Blinn in Fear



Georgia O'Ramey in  
The Switchboard

Scenes from The Switchboard and Fear<sup>13</sup>



The second show on the bill was an import from the Grand Guignol in Paris, where it had opened 15 April 1909 and was said to have run for 300 nights. Fear (Le Grand Mort), by Henri-René Lenormand (1882-1951) and Jean d'Auguzan, was originally produced in Paris as a two-act play, but was condensed into a one-act play with two scenes by the Princess Players to fit their format. Inspired by the work of Freud, Lenormand wanted to create a new tragedy based on the psychology of modern man and his reactions to the problems of a modern world. He was also fascinated with the effects of exotic climates on people from northern climates, as well as placing his protagonists in situations where they have no conscious control over their actions.<sup>14</sup> Fear, a psychological drama that examines the effect of the environment on men and their susceptibility to irrational fear, is a classic example of Lenormand's style.

The play is set in the "curious and exotic" atmosphere of a military construction camp in a "torrid barbarous section of India" during the English occupation. The plot centers on Beverly, a British engineer who has been sent to India to help build the railroad. As was popular in the plays of the Grand Guignol, the location of the action is remote. In this instance it is cut off from the outside world by a long horse ride. Because of the isolation, the extreme heat, and the presence of cholera in other surrounding camps, Beverly suffers from a severe case of fear and

loneliness and has threatened suicide.

Into this situation several more plot devices are thrown, each compounding the other to increase fear in Beverly and tension in the audience. Skipton, another officer, arrives carrying two vials of blood to be examined--one of which is found to be contaminated with cholera. Next, Bruff arrives with cholera serum that only Skipton knows how to mix properly. Bruff also breaks the news of a cholera outbreak in two other camps and the suicides of several of their comrades. As Bruff leaves, Skipton begins to examine the blood and finds that one vial is indeed infected with the disease. During the examination there is an accident, and Skipton pricks his finger. The news of infected blood combined with Skipton's bleeding finger, convinces Beverly that he is now in danger and may contract cholera from Skipton. Beverly's fear takes over, and he shoots Skipton in the back, eliminating the only person who knows the serum mixture.

In the second scene the question of who has the right to pass judgement on life and death is enlarged. The question, no longer personal, includes the burning of an entire camp and the killing of all its inhabitants to stop the cholera. Beverly and Bruff debate whether it is morally acceptable to burn 800 natives in an attempt to end an epidemic. Is it right to kill hundreds of people to insure one's own safety, or should one try to help fight the chol-

era and risk contracting the disease?

Bruff: The real danger isn't the epidemic, but the fear of it. The cause of the contagion doesn't lie in the plague itself, but in the terror that it inspires. The plague stricken are cared for, they are sometimes cured. There is no cure for the cowardly. They always end by dying of the thing they fear.

Beverly: Fear? Not at all. But I serve my country better by saving my own skin than by exposing myself to disease for the sake of brutes who don't even want to be taken care of.... These fanatics, I owe them weeks of terror... I can't be stirred on their account.

Beverly, of course, argues that the burning of the village is the only solution.

In the end, Beverly, having shown little regard for any human life except his own, is killed. Bruff accuses Beverly of the murder of Skipton and of the ultimate sin--cowardice. As an infected native is chased through the hut by an officer, Bruff calls to the officer, telling him that there are actually two cholera sufferers there--the native and Beverly. The officer then does his duty and shoots both the native and Beverly as he tries to flee to save himself. As the play ends, Beverly cries, "Assassins!" In the end, Beverly is not killed by the plague he feared so much, but

by the actions his irrational fear caused him to take."<sup>15</sup>

Not only did Fear attempt to illustrate the inner workings of a man's mind under extreme circumstances, but it also addressed a moral question. Is it right to protect oneself from a deadly disease by killing those who might spread it--either through a cowardly manner or by a government order?

Again there were differing opinions. The reviewer for the New York Post found Fear a "reckless extravagance and misrepresentation... [that] omitted no detail that could add to the gruesomeness."<sup>16</sup> Another critic claimed that the play aroused no sense of emotion but only an intense sensation of pure horror.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, the New York Times praised the production. This reviewer, having seen a production of Le Grand Mort played at the Grand Guignol in Paris, found the Princess Player's production of Fear "grim, terrifying, and full of color...", and added that "it loses nothing in the acting of the Princess company."<sup>18</sup> Walter Prichard Eaton in the Record Herald also commended the Players on their production of Fear, calling it the "best work shown at that strange little dramatic museum of horrors... [a play] of real psychological keenness and dramatic development... although not a pretty tale."<sup>19</sup>

In response to the critics who condemned Fear as pure sensationalism, Holbrook Blinn, the play's director and leading player, explained to Eva vom Baur of Theatre Maga-

zine that "it was primarily a psychological study and as such it appeals to the minds of the audience, not only to their sensations." Beverly's irrational fear is intensified by his separation from a recognizable world and by the unknown--in this case cholera, and the manner in which man contracts it. This sensation of paranoia caused Beverly to react in an irrational and violent manner to what, at other times, might have been normal situations. By observing Beverly in this intense situation, audience members are drawn in and asked to consider what action they might take in the same situation. Not only does the play give the audience a thrill, but it gives them something to think about as well. Blinn also explained that he had taken care not to offend and had "carefully omitted all the shocking details with which the French peppered and seasoned it when it was given at the Grand Guignol in Paris."<sup>20</sup> Even though it was a grim study of psychological fear, and the story was very gripping, it could apparently have been far more gruesome.

In the tradition of the douche écossaise, the hot and cold shower used at the Grand Guignol in Paris--alternating serious with comic--the third piece was "a clever little play with lines as biting as Oscar Wilde or George Bernard Shaw at their wittiest best."<sup>21</sup> Fancy Free was written by Stanley Houghton (1881-1913), a leading British dramatist and regional naturalist from Manchester, who had achieved

great success the previous season in the New York theatre with Hindle Wakes. A type of comédie rosse, Fancy Free is set in a hotel in an English seaside resort, which the Brooklyn Eagle labeled a "human barnyard where the witty and well dressed people swap mates like fowl."<sup>22</sup> A very well written piece, Fancy Free focuses on a premarital agreement that allows for an open marriage, permitting both partners to do what and see whom they please. The only stipulation to the pact is that they never try to hide anything--do what you want but do not pretend that you are not doing it.

The plot revolves around a young wife, Fancy, who takes her lover Alfred, a good looking but rather vacuous young man, to the Hotel Cosmopolitan in the seaside resort of Babylon-on-the-Sea. Unbeknownst to them, Fancy's husband, Ethelbert, has also arrived at the hotel with his lover, Delia--a young woman who picks up men by dropping her glove and telling them, after they have retrieved it, that they have "delightfully wicked eyes." Through a series of coincidences, they all meet. Fancy and Ethelbert, who both sought out others for the usual reasons--she spends too much money, he has poor table manners in the morning--feel they must reevaluate the terms of their marriage agreement. They apologize to their respective lovers, and leave them together. Alfred and Delia, a perfect match on their own, then exit as a couple.<sup>23</sup>

This "very naughty, very witty" comedy where morality

is undermined is somewhat reminiscent of Noel Coward's Private Lives. While the New York Times found Fancy Free to be a "delightful bit of satire which had the audience in gales of laughter,"<sup>24</sup> many critics felt that Fancy Free was too immoral in the way that it, more or less, sanctioned an exceedingly free relationship between married and unmarried people. Blinn defended the piece to vom Baur, claiming that it was "too frothy and inconsequential to be shocking."<sup>25</sup> He called it simply a beautifully absurd, simple satire. From their comments it seems that both Blinn and the critics may have missed the point. Houghton, in a light and satirical way, comments on what he saw as the general lack of morality in upper-class British society generated through the boredom of the rich. In an attempt to make this point clear, Houghton cautioned in a note that Fancy Free should be played straight and not in the spirit of burlesque. Though Fancy and her husband are involved in extramarital relationships, both feel, when discovered, that their marriage agreement needs reevaluating. The two find that they belong together, making the play not one of immorality, but of a new found morality on their part.

The final play of the evening, originally written for the Lamb's Club, was a one-act of brutal, unpleasant realism. A play in three scenes, Any Night was the first play written by Edward Ellis (1872-1952), a member of the acting company who would later have a very successful acting career

in films. A type of fait divers, Any Night is a naturalistic treatment of the underworld life of New York. Previously titled In Forty-fourth Street, Any Night, described by the author as a "melodramlette in three scenes," deals with prostitution, police corruption, premarital sex, and infidelity. It was by far, as the Brooklyn Eagle described it, the "rawest"<sup>26</sup> of the plays presented and the most controversial.

The first scene focuses on Mary, a consumptive prostitute in search of business, and Mike, a policeman on the beat. It paints a picture of the vice and graft conditions that existed in the city between the police and the women of the street. Mary, who is obviously very ill and has been warned by her doctor that she is killing herself, says that she must work to pay her bills--which include payoffs to the police. Mike feels sorry for her:

Policeman:       After this there ain't gonna be nothing  
                          doin' in the piece of change line.

Mary:               That's alright Mike, you're entitled to  
                          it and as long as I keep going you'll  
                          get yours... And the sargeant'll get his  
                          and the Lieutenant and the Captain and  
                          all the rest of them'll get theirs--and  
                          when there ain't nothin' more to give up  
                          maybe I'll get mine.<sup>27</sup>

During this opening scene, which takes place in front of a



cheap hotel, the two observe an encounter between a young man and woman whose conversation evolves around their eagerness to consummate their relationship even though they are not married. However, the young woman is now hesitant and the young man is asking why she was willing last night, and not now.

Young Girl:       Why? Because last night your arms were around me--your breath was hot in my hair--my lips were wet from yours and the same passionate desires that inflamed you were suffocating me. All I wanted--all I could think of was you--you...

Young Man:       All I want, all I can think of is you; come let's go to the hotel.

Young Woman:     No, no...

Young Man:       Mabel, listen to reason, you have confessed that you want me, I want you; that is the initial wrong and the mere act of satisfying our desires can not make us more guilty than we already are. Come.

The scene ends with the couple going into the hotel as the girl says, "If father should hear about this, it would kill him." The policeman, thinking that the young woman is also a prostitute, reminds her "Don't forget little boy blue."

The next two scenes take place inside the hotel. Mary has arrived with a respectable, yet extremely drunk client and taken a room. After the old man awakens from his stupor and is reassured that nothing has happened between them, their conversation turns personal. She tells him of her sick mother and her younger sisters and how she must stay on the streets to support them. He speaks of his daughter and offers Mary \$100 as a gift from his daughter who, he says, "is clean as I have been until tonight." She takes the money. At that moment a fire breaks out and they find that they are trapped just as the young couple from the first scene burst into the room. There is a moment of recognition between the old man and the girl--they are father and daughter.

The voice of a fireman is heard at the window, and Mary and the young man are rescued. The play ends as the fireman calls, "Anybody else in there?" No response. The daughter and her father have decided to die in the fire rather than live in shame.

Although the language in Any Night is colloquial and often very strong, the play remains a melodrama in its structure. Various devices such as the preparation of the audience with recognizable clues, coincidental meetings, mistaken identities, fire and, ultimately, death, are all employed. Many in the audience found Any Night to be an extremely realistic picture of the corruption to be found in

New York, and an excellent, "biting picture of the underside of life in the streets."<sup>28</sup> The New York Globe called Any Night impressive and forbidding, "assuredly the strongest meat to be seen in any American theatre,"<sup>29</sup> and the New York Telegram noted that Ellis' play was "worthy of translation and presentation of the stage of the Grand Guignol."<sup>30</sup> However, Any Night was probably better suited for Antoine and the Théâtre Libre.

While the critics at the Globe and the Telegram praised Any Night, others, including the police, were greatly offended. Its detractors condemned Any Night as "a crude bit of photographic realism... [with] no imagination or dramatic value."<sup>31</sup> The critic for the New York Times, though he commended the play as an excellent "example of dramatic light and shade and rampant realism," questioned the worth of Any Night. The review went on to ask whether this "graphic, if possibly unnecessary presentation of that phase of life should be encouraged on our stage, since its actual effect on general morale seems doubtful."<sup>32</sup> Would a presentation of this kind actually deter people from acting in a like manner? When Holbrook Blinn was asked why he had selected a play that showed the lowest reaches of the city's depravity, he replied that Any Night did indeed illustrate "what toll is sometimes extracted from those who travel on the wrong and 'easy' road," and explained that if the public sees what can actually happen in a world of crime, they will



Scenes from Any Night"

avoid it.<sup>34</sup>

The police, however, found other problems with Any Night. The police department was not so much concerned with the general morale of the public or the influence that Any Night might have on that morale, as it was with the department's image as portrayed in Ellis' play. After opening night, news of the scene between the policeman and the prostitute reached the Police Commissioner, who in turn contacted the producers at the Princess. On 17 March, an interoffice memo was sent by William Brady to Holbrook Blinn telling him of his meeting with the Commissioner. At that meeting the Commissioner "requested" that the lines in the scene between the policeman and the streetwalker referring to police payoffs be eliminated at once. To insure that his instructions were carried out, the Commissioner was sending another delegation to the theatre that evening. The memo went on to say:

Since there will be two Commisioners and another party at the play tonight, it is necessary to cut lines for tonight. Nothing offensive to the police or against public morals must be spoken. If changes are not made, the bill must be changed to prevent preemptory action by the police.<sup>35</sup>

Because of this memo, sections of the dialogue between the young couple were cut, and the scene between the Mike and Mary was shortened to:

Policeman:        Sorry about the lungs.

Mary:             See you later, Mike.

In production for less than a week, the Princess Players had encountered the first attempt to censor their performances, and they acquiesced to the Police Commissioner.

On 14 April 1913, William C. DeMille's play Food was added to the bill extending the program to five plays. DeMille (1878-1955), brother of Cecil and father of Agnes, had been a student at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. His first play, Strongheart, was produced in 1905 after which he wrote several others, most notably The Warrens of Virginia. Subtitled a "tragedy of the future," Food takes place fifty years ahead when the economic conditions in America have worsened to the point where a simple egg costs thousands of dollars.

Basil and Irene, a husband and wife, live in fairly luxurious surroundings and are well off by the standards of the day. But even making \$100,000 a year they must be careful what they eat. Because of increasing inflation, food has become the most expensive commodity of life. In a world where sugar is sold by the grain, bread costs \$100 a loaf, and six drops of milk and a cracker are considered a luxury, a weekly grocery bill can exceed \$5,000. The plot figures around an egg. Irene is ill, and the doctor has prescribed an egg as a remedy. Basil reminds her that she had an egg once and that they had to mortgage their house to

buy it. Shortly after Basil goes to bed, Harold, an officer from the food trust, arrives with a delivery of a slice of bread. As it turns out, he is an old admirer of Irene's and just happens to be delivering an egg to some billionaire. She persuades Harold to give her the egg, telling him that she will run away with him and be his forever. Harold gives in, realizing that not only will he be committing adultery, but also grand theft. At this point Basil returns to the room and, after he realizes what has occurred, there is a struggle between the two men. Basil grabs the box that contains the egg and Harold draws his gun. Basil reminds Harold that if he is shot, the egg will be dropped and destroyed and then tells them both that they are free to leave--but the egg stays. Then, all at once, Basil dashes the egg to the floor. Harold, doing the noble thing, says that he will give himself up for losing the egg--even if it means certain death. As Harold leaves, Basil and Irene embrace as all is forgiven.<sup>36</sup>

Food, called by the Dramatic Mirror "an entertaining trifle,"<sup>37</sup> is a very thinly written play, but at times amusing. The New York Times noted that DeMille's play was well acted by the Princess Players and that Food added "another enjoyable feature to the unconventional proceedings at [the] theatre of tabloid theatrics."<sup>38</sup> But the reviewer for the Times also felt that the play touched on a more important issue. The Times critic noted that Food spoke to a condi-

tion that was growing in America at that time--high inflation due to the large quantities of imported foreign goods. It was rumored in the press that the Princess Players were to be invited to perform the piece before the legislative committee in Washington that was working on the revision of the Underwood tariff bill--a serious move toward free trade that would lower the tariff schedules for the first time since the Civil War and permit the importation of even more goods.<sup>39</sup> Through the exaggeration of the situation, many felt DeMille's play might show Congress to what extent future generations might suffer if the already high cost of living continued to rise.<sup>40</sup>

This program of five one-acts ran at the Princess Theatre until mid-May 1913. During its initial eleven week season that spring, the bill that was assembled at the Theatre of Thrills closely resembled the programs presented by Oscar Méténier at his first season at the Grand Guignol in Paris. Following the manner in which the Grand Guignol organized the bills presented there, the producers at the Princess Theatre used the technique of the douche écossaise--alternating slice of life, comedies and fait divers. As was the case at the Grand Guignol, The Princess Players opened the evening with a comedy, The Switchboard, and then moved to the more sensational Fear. Next, to allow the audience to catch their breath, a lighter piece would be presented at the Grand Guignol--at the Princess the play was



Fancy Free. The next play in the running order at the Grand Guignol would be the most thrilling and horrifying of the evening. At the Princess this slot was filled by Any Night. Finally, the evening at the Grand Guignol would conclude with a lighter play to relieve the shock from the previous play. With the addition of Food to the bill, the douche écossaise at the Princess Theatre was complete.

Though critics found the Theatre of Thrills a place where tired businessmen, jaded theatre-goers, and those who demanded a more highly seasoned drama, could go to "escape the hackneydom[sic] of the everyday theatre,"<sup>41</sup> there were others who found the experiment less than desirable. Nearly all the critics commended the acting and praised the versatility of the company. The Dramatic Mirror noted that the plays were "acceptably played," and the Brooklyn Eagle found the plays to be presented with skill and realism.<sup>42</sup> The New York Times also praised the company for "some excellent acting," singling out Holbrook Blinn and Edward Ellis in particular, and found the first bill a very "engrossing blend of suspense and fun."<sup>43</sup> The major concern, however, was not with the Princess Players, but with the material the company chose to present.

Even the critics who praised Blinn and his company for their experiment and thanked them for presenting a new style of theatre that was far superior to the formula comedies, slick musicals, and operettas that filled the Broadway

stages of 1913-1914, had their reservations and offered warnings. Many felt that the Theatre of Thrills was nothing more than a novelty, that the newness would soon wear off, and the public would return to the type of theatre with which they could identify. H.E. Stearns, writing in the Dramatic Mirror, noted that the producers at the Princess were "far too shrewd and too experienced in things theatrical to not have recognized some sort of tangible demand for this sort of thing. In other words, the Princess Theatre is a natural, and deliberate step forward." However, Stearns went on to remind the producers that the Princess Theatre was a commercial enterprise. As such, the Theatre of Thrills "entered into direct competition with other dramatic entertainments," and could "survive only if there [was] a lasting public demand for this unusual type of dramatic fare."<sup>44</sup> William Thompson Price noted in the American Playwright that, while the opening was triumphant, the Princess Theatre's only chance of success was to offer a field for plays of high quality and effectiveness and in that manner the Theatre of Thrills could greatly stimulate play writing. However, Price also noted that the Players ran the risk of failure if the producers limited the field to only those plays that were meant to shock their audience.<sup>45</sup>

The most eloquent words of caution came from Walter Prichard Eaton. In the American Magazine Eaton wrote that the Theatre of Thrills was an "unusual entertainment...

[that had] been tried before in [New York City]... but never so realistically and so sedately." He also noted that he would be very interested "to watch the fate of the experiment."<sup>46</sup> Yet in the New York Record Herald he offered this warning.

As a matter of fact, we venture the prediction that the Princess Theatre will share the fate of all attempts to graft upon a different civilization a form of entertainment entirely alien to it, if it persists in the effort to give New York a Grand Guignol. If we have such a theatre, it must be a natural growth. The fact that we have never had, is pretty good evidence that we don't want it.<sup>47</sup>

In order for the Theatre of Thrills to survive, it must look to American writers and American subjects rather than continuing on with foreign plays that meant nothing to the average American theatre goer. Eaton suggested that American writers look to O'Henry rather than De Maupassant for their inspiration.<sup>48</sup>

At the box office, the Princess Players did remarkably well. On 4 April 1913, less than a month into the season, Variety reported that the Theatre of Thrills in their small 299 seat theatre was playing to capacity houses and averaging about \$6,000 weekly.<sup>49</sup> In fact, there were only four weeks throughout the fifteen week season ending on June 21 when the box office showed a loss, and that was during the

Easter season--a period when all theatres suffered.<sup>40</sup>

The encounter with the Police Commissioner over the content of Any Night, and the consequent word of mouth it generated, may have done more good than harm--initially. Even though the producers gave in to the authorities--starting a trend that may have contributed to their downfall--the subsequent notoriety of this conflict advertised the Theatre of Thrills far better than any newspaper advertisements or press releases could have hoped to do. The resulting publicity gained from the incident may have helped to build audiences. What at first seemed a problem may have become an advantage by drawing larger crowds to the Princess Theatre.

Though the crowds and the box office ledgers indicated that "the season too, established the fact that New York will support a theatre devoted to playlets,"<sup>41</sup> what was received through admissions was not enough to sustain the recently renovated theatre with its costly building overhead. The Princess Players, even with a profit at the box office, showed a loss of \$14,726 at the end of the season.<sup>42</sup> This loss prompted people to note that while New York was ready to support a theatre of this kind, it should, perhaps, organize on an amateur basis. A theatre that presented plays such as "the Princess was designed for, should be supported by a subscription list rather than depend upon the public through the box office."<sup>43</sup> The Princess Players should move out of the commercial market and look for other

means of support. However, existing on a subscription basis was not an option for the Theatre of Thrills, as it would eliminate, or at least greatly diminish, the possibility of profits for the producers.

Walter Prichard Eaton noted in the American Magazine of 13 June 1913, that a repertory system like the Princess Players' was impossible in the highly commercial, centralized system of theatrical management in existence then. A repertory company, especially a new and daring company like the Theatre of Thrills, needed to be guaranteed against the fear and continual threat of loss. Only a public or private endowment could support a theatre of this kind. Commercial managers were not philanthropists and could not give that kind of support.<sup>4</sup> Others suggested looking to a subscription audience for support rather than depending on the general public's support at the box office.

The first season closed with several warnings and predictions. While the Theatre of Thrills proved to be controversial--offering plays that were "served raw without much sauce or garnishing,"--the initial season gave assurance that something new was in town. The Theatre of Thrills was successful, both critically and, to a certain extent, financially. Besides having their first encounter with the authorities over the scene in Any Night, and succumbing to the pressure from the city authorities, the Theatre of Thrills received mostly favorable notices and survived

financially better than was expected.

Though the plays presented at the Princess Theatre during that first season were varied and hinted at something new in the American theatre, the New York Post noted that the first program, while having great variety, often fell short of expectations.<sup>56</sup> Each of the five one-acts presented was well played and "admirably, even sumptuously staged;"<sup>57</sup> the problem with the season was found in the producers' choice of plays. Each play, although making a comment on society, speaking to a particular human condition, and having substantially more content than the comedies, operettas, and musicals that were usually seen on Broadway, was found by some reviewers to be harsh, depressing, or raw sensationalism. One reviewer felt that while there was certainly room in New York City for a theatre dedicated to the production of one-act plays, the Princess made no real bid to artistic or refined tastes.<sup>58</sup> H.E. Stearns of the Dramatic Mirror warned the Princess Players that the only way for them to survive would be to change the subject matter of their programs.<sup>59</sup>

Unfortunately, the producers at the Princess Theatre did not heed the advice of Eaton, Stearns, and the others. In fact, Holbrook Blinn and the producers at the Princess Theatre felt that "the more rugged plays" fared better than the others, and Blinn noted that while the comedies provided pleasant interludes, "people came [to the Princess] for Fear

and Any Night."<sup>60</sup> Consequently, the producers decided to shift the focus of the theatre to even more thrilling and sensational work. In another twist of policy, on 2 May 1913, shortly before the close of the season, Lee Shubert sailed for Europe to be joined shortly by William Brady--to search out new plays. Thus contradicting their policy of promoting American drama.

### Second Season, 1913 - 1914

The second season of the Theatre of Thrills was scheduled to open in September 1913 and run through May 1914. The fall program was organized during the summer of 1913 but not without difficulties. Internal problems among the producers surfaced and led to a reorganization of power. Shifting public opinion caused problems from the outside and resulted in a change of the initial bill. Still, the producers failed to see the real problems that lay ahead.

Holbrook Blinn and the producers at the Princess Theatre considered their first season a success. Having looked on the Spring 1913 season as an experiment, they were satisfied with the returns because, as Blinn noted, they "did not expect to make money until [the fall]." The producers also felt, though the numbers may have proved them wrong, that the "ten or eleven weeks [during the spring] were enough to clear an initial heavy expense and put something in the bank."<sup>61</sup> After this "successful" season, however, rumors began to circulate in the press that Blinn would move on; he faced these rumors head on and denied them. However, in a letter from William Brady to Lee Shubert, Brady wrote that

Comstock will tell you that I think Blinn and Selwyn



have their heads together to pull the Princess scheme over to the Eltinge.<sup>62</sup>

Apparently, in league with Archibald Selwyn, Blinn felt that the Theatre of Thrills would be better served by moving to a larger theatre, and that such a move would be necessary to accommodate the larger crowds that the Theatre of Thrills would attract, and, consequently, to make more money. They felt that the newly built Eltinge Theatre on West Forty-second Street would provide a more suitable location. With its larger seating capacity and central location in the heart of the theatre district, the Eltinge offered a better venue for their now successful experiment.<sup>63</sup>

It is not clear how the differences of opinion between Blinn-Selwyn and the other producers regarding the future of the Theatre of Thrills were resolved. However, in his letter Brady assured Shubert,

[That he could] handle Blinn if it becomes necessary, but if you [Shubert] find him disloyal my advice is to let him go. He is not indispensable. Loyalty and gratitude at the Princess is a necessary quality for the Director.<sup>64</sup>

Archibald Selwyn soon withdrew from the group, and on 20 August 1913, Blinn signed an exclusive two-year contract with the producers in which he was guaranteed \$400 per week or 10% of the gross receipts--whichever was larger. In turn he was to "perform in any and every capacity as directed by

us as actor and stage manager and pay strict attention to make-up as well as to properly rehearse all the members of the Company."<sup>65</sup> With this move, it became apparent that the managers, not Blinn, were in control. The new partnership now included Morris Gest and was incorporated under the name of the Managing Producers Company.

Gest (1881-1942), was educated in Boston where he made his debut as a producer in 1903. His first affiliation as a producing partner with F. Ray Comstock was in 1905. After their work at the Theatre of Thrills, Comstock and Gest continued their partnership and together produced the 1923 tours of the Moscow Art Theatre and Elenora Duse and Max Reinhardt's production of The Miracle in 1924. The partnership lasted until the late 1920s after which Gest had very little success in the theatre.<sup>66</sup>

This restructuring of the producing organization with the elimination of Selwyn and the addition of Gest did not disrupt the plans for the new opening of the Theatre of Thrills. Brady, Comstock, and Lee Shubert had already chosen the plays for first bill at the Theatre of Thrills and had begun to promote the new season. While in Europe during the summer of 1913, William Brady had been in contact with several playwrights affiliated with the Grand Guignol in Paris. Through agreements with Max Maurey, Maurice Level, and Gaston Charles Richard, Brady purchased the rights to produce their plays at the Princess Theatre. Each

author was paid the equivalent of one dollar for the rights to produce English versions of their plays in America and Canada, plus a \$400 advance against royalties.<sup>67</sup> With the purchase of these plays, it became clear that the Theatre of Thrills was about to head in a new direction. The Princess Players were moving away from their stated policy of promoting new American plays and toward a policy more in line with that of the Grand Guignol.

Reflecting that change in direction, the Princess Players began an advertising campaign that closely resembled a public relations gimmick used by Max Maurey at the Grand Guignol. Maurey, whose primary interest was bringing in larger crowds, had claimed that because many patrons had fainted during performances at the Grand Guignol, he had added a house doctor to the theatre staff as a precautionary measure. In an attempt to increase their own audiences, the producers of the Theatre of Thrills claimed, in press releases, that they had experienced thirty-six faints during their first season, and as a result, just to be on the safe side, they were installing a clinic on the premises for all fainters and other injuries.<sup>68</sup>

In addition to establishing medical facilities, the Princess Players felt that they had begun to create their own specialized audience and, as illustrated by the plays acquired by Brady, they began to cater exclusively to it. Essentially, the Theatre of Thrills had developed a reputa-

tion for producing plays that would not be considered elsewhere because of their questionable subject matter. They also found that the comedies had not fared as well as the stronger dramatic plays. Again echoing the Grand Guignol under Maurey and its shift toward the horror play, the Theatre of Thrills turned to more shock, sex, and thrills--despite Blinn's denials in the press and the warnings from the previous season. This move would, as in Paris, cause outrage among the critics, the censors, and eventually, the public.

The first bill of the 1913-1914 season was scheduled to open 20 September 1913 with a company that included Kershaw, Ellis, Trevor, and Blinn from the previous season, as well as Lewis Edgard, Dallas Tyler, Charles Mather, Emilie Polini, Wayne Arey, and William O'Neill. The opening program was to be comprised of The Bride, En Deshabille, The Black Mask, The Eternal Mystery, and Russia--In the Pouchinskaia. However, after the dress rehearsal, the producers were forced to withdraw two of the plays. Their content had shocked and offended even their invited audience. To prepare replacement plays, the management postponed the opening of the season until 10 October 1913. The removal of the offending plays was a move that many critics felt was a bad one; by eliminating the controversial plays, the Theatre of Thrills was giving in to public opinion.<sup>69</sup> The two plays removed were Russia--In the Pouchinskaia by

Gaston Charles Richard and The Eternal Mystery by George Jean Nathan.

In 1913 there was a growing sentiment against plays that dealt with disreputable situations. However, this controversy did not erupt specifically over the plays by Richard and Nathan. During the summer of 1913, several plays were produced on Broadway that were said to be capitalizing on the popularity of Any Night.<sup>70</sup> These productions--The Lure by George Scarborough, The Fight by Bayard Veiller, and Owen Davis' The Family Cupboard--each dealt with what was called the "underside of life" in one way or another. The Lure was set in a brothel and involved "white slavery"; The Fight, the story of a woman politician exposing a corrupt local government, also included a scene set in a brothel; and The Family Cupboard was a sexually charged revenge play. The subject matter of these three plays prompted a move against plays that were deemed to be indecent.

This movement may have been due, in part, to the growing influence of the Drama League in New York City or that of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice founded by Anthony Comstock (1844-1915). Comstock's organization fought an on-going battle against vice and corruption and apparently carried considerable weight with elected officials.<sup>71</sup> While it did not happen often, the interruption by police or closing of plays considered to be immoral was not

unheard of. Arnold Daly's production of Mrs. Warren's Profession was closed by police in 1905, after a crusade by Comstock.<sup>72</sup>

During that summer editorials reflecting dissatisfaction with what were generally referred to as vice plays appeared in the daily newspapers. The New York Herald called for an end to "brothel plays," saying that while New Yorkers were not prudish, the limit had been reached. The Times called these plays thinly veiled attempts at deploring social evils, which in reality were being presented as mere sensationalism. Rather than instructing people how to avoid evil, the plays only provided sensational thrills and to that end served no real purpose. The critic for the New York Mirror went on to say that though authors must have the freedom of choice of subject--high art, serving an ethical purpose, or illustrating vice--they must not use their material purely for sensationalism. The editorials warned further that if this trend toward sensational plays continued, managers needed to be on the look-out for reform cranks, who might take the opportunity to start a campaign against the theatre in general.<sup>73</sup>

Two of the offending plays that summer, whose producers did not listen to the warnings, were closed by police even as their producers claimed that they were carrying on a war against vice and corruption. Both The Lure (produced by the Shuberts and presented in the Maxine Elliot theatre--direct-

ly across the street from the Princess) and The Fight, produced by William Harris, fell victim to Chief Magistrate McAdoo who issued warrants to close the plays for indecency and a tendency to corrupt morals. Both producers were then brought before Assistant District Attorney Anthony Bostwick and the Grand Jury, where they promised to ammend their plays by removing the offensive parts, and the charges were dropped.<sup>74</sup> The theatre community of New York City reacted against the closings and what they saw as increasing censorship. E.H. Southern, one of America's foremost actors of the period, condemned the actions of the Drama League calling its members "policeman of the drama" and noting that they were nothing more than "young men fresh from college encouraged by octogenerian critics out of joint with the time."<sup>75</sup> Another reaction resulted in the producing of J.M. Barrie's The Censor and the Dramatist.<sup>76</sup> Performed only once, on 14 October 1913 during an intermission of The Doll Girl at the Globe Theatre, Barrie's "burlesque on dramatic censorship," was used to point up the foolishness of the censors and their general lack of knowledge of the theatre. To relate the piece specifically to what had occured in New York, a prologue by the actor William Carle was added.

The stage is in a fearful state  
of thrillers there's a crop.  
And audiences see of late  
the underworld on top.

As day by day, and play by play  
     the moral sense grows denser,  
 We'll have to try Old England's way,  
     and leave it to a censor.

The company then proceeded to illustrate the arbitrary and useless nature of the censor.

The producers at the Princess Theatre were very aware of the situation. Blinn was quoted in an interview in the Dramatic Mirror as saying that the Theatre of Thrills was in no way attempting to capitalize on the uproar that Any Night might have started. In fact, because of the recent problems between Chief McAdoo's office and the producers of both The Lure and The Fight, the producers at the Princess Theatre were holding off on producing Barry Benifield's Daughters of Joy during the 1913-1914 season. Blinn noted that Daughters of Joy, a play that had been considered at the Grand Guignol before William Brady purchased the rights, involved underworld figures and features "not yet revealed in other plays showing scenes from houses of prostitution." Holbrook Blinn felt the decision not to produce Benifield's play to be a wise one because "there [had] been too many daughters of joy on the stage lately." It was this climate coupled with the invited audience's reaction that prompted the Princess Theatre's management to pull Russia-- In the Pouchinskaia and The Eternal Mystery.

The Eternal Mystery, while not dealing with prostitu-



tion or any other crime, was found objectionable on religious grounds. George Jean Nathan (1882-1958), who then was writing for the humor magazine Smart Set, called his play a drama of metaphysics. But the critic for the Brooklyn Eagle, in the only available review of the dress rehearsal, found it a religious burlesque and a well-phrased tirade against God and the Bible.<sup>79</sup>

The action of the play focuses on an atheist on his death bed. Having trusted in scientific explanations of nature his entire life, he refuses to believe in God even as his wife begs him to see the way. Surrounded by busts of Darwin and Thomas Paine, and books by Kant, Nietzsche, and Huxley, the man raves at his wife.

Husband: If people would turn their churches, their pious, peacockery praying cabarets into laboratories, and begin thinking and inventing instead of getting on their knees to a superstition, then hundreds of thousands of tubercular human beings like myself might be spared. Save souls? Save lives! I never believed less in a god in all my life than I do now... Knowledge and fearlessness have given me strength.

Wife: [In a moment of frustration crying out to God] Make him see!

All at once, the shadow of a cross appears on the wall, the

wife takes it as a sign, a miracle, until her husband knocks over the candle-stick causing the illusion.

Husband: Make me see? Why doesn't he save me? All belief in God rests upon a miracle. Why doesn't he prove his divinity? Miracles, bah.... Who can believe in such things? I tell you they never could be, never were! Miracles? Imagination, crazy chatter, insanity....

The shadow then reappears and the dying man, thinking that this is truly a sign from above and beyond his explanation, rises out of bed crying "A sign... a miracle. Christ, I believe! Forgive me, I believe at last!" as he dies. At that moment a young boy enters with his kite that has caused yet another false shadow.<sup>80</sup>

The Eternal Mystery is a well-written play that addresses man's basic questions about religion and science. Where do the laws of nature and science, and the laws of God and religion separate? The critic for the Brooklyn Eagle found Nathan's play to have a grim power and a certain irony, but, also, that it was ineffective where it should have been the most convincing. The Eagle's critic felt that the moment in The Eternal Mystery that brought "conversion and beliefs by a shadow to a man who [had] spent his life railing at shadows of belief" should have made a stronger point in support of religion.<sup>81</sup>

Nathan never forgave the producers at the Theatre of Thrills for giving in to the pressure and, according to F. Ray Comstock, took every opportunity to "slur or sneer at the work of the Princess Theatre."<sup>82</sup> Nathan later wrote of the "valiant but dim-noodled deities" who at that time directed the theatre, that they "tucked [their] tail between [their] legs and scooted for cover," because they did not understand The Eternal Mystery.<sup>83</sup>

Russia--In the Pouchinskaia by Gaston Charles Richard (1875-1934), was seen as offensive for several reasons, the least of which was the staging of the play in a brothel. The culminating offense was the crucifixion of a priest made up to resemble "Our Savior" by the invading military.

Set in St. Petersburg in January during the 1905 Revolution, the action takes place in the Pouchinskaia--presumably a "red light" district--in the parlor of "Le Belle Poulets." Business is off because "revolution turns a man's thoughts from love to war," and the girls, Lea, Tatiana, Marroussia, Avdotia, and Xenia, are relaxing with Wassia, the manager. They are drinking, discussing the merits of individual clients, and talking of the revolution. Revolutionaries have no money. Soldiers, on the other hand, have pockets full of money, but who would want to make love to a murderer? Madam Bichoff recounts seeing the slaughter of one hundred revolutionaries at the Winter Palace by the cavalry as the crowd cried that they were innocent. Lea

tells how she saw 5,000 Jews killed, piled up, and sprinkled with lime. All the while Xenia is reading what she calls a remarkable book. She says that every time she opens it, she finds something new--it is the Bible. The remaining girls prefer to drink and dance to make themselves forget the atrocities that are occurring around them.

All at once, Wassili Pavlovitch, a revolutionary priest, runs through the door. He is wounded, having just escaped a massacre of men, women, and children and asks for refuge. There is an argument as to whether he should stay. Some of the girls feel that he will be bad for business, and they cannot let him die in the house. On the other hand, he is a priest, and they must take care of him. Gun shots and a police whistle are then heard, and the girls decide that they must hide the priest. The only safe place is in a trunk at the foot of a bed upstairs.

As the police enter with their weapons drawn, Xenia loses control. In a moment of religious frenzy, she sees the priest as a Christ figure, the police captain as Herod, and gives away the priest's hiding place.

Xenia:     He had the face of Jesus. You shall not kill him, you Herod.... You know Herod--he was handsome too... and you are handsome. But he did not kill the little Jesus Christ. And you shall not kill him either. You shall not kill him, because he cannot die... I know

him... he came down among men with his  
forehead bleeding and his hands pierced....  
Yes... yes, it is he, it is the Master. He  
is there.

The police make a search of the house and find the priest.  
Striking him, the Commander warns the priest:

And you try to play Christ with these hysterical women  
of the night... by the living God, we'll make a real  
Christ of you. Seize him, nail him up against the  
wall... his arms outstretched.... With your knives.

The police oblige using their knives to secure the priest to  
the wall. At this picture, Xenia, still in ecstasy, goes  
insane and is shot. The remaining girls are killed and the  
priest is left hanging to die as he says, "God forgive them,  
God forgive me."<sup>84</sup>

Russia... is a very powerful, well written play, as  
well as gruesome at the end. Its political commentary is  
biting, as is the picture it paints of authority figures.  
It is easy to see how this piece could be considered sacri-  
legious with its mock crucifixion and offensive to some  
people, but it is not "all lust and murder," as the Brooklyn  
Eagle reported. The critic called Russia... morbid, vulgar,  
and blasphemous, and said that while it may have had "flash-  
es of artistic achievement... never in all of New York's  
history has an intelligent and wholly unsuspecting audience  
been coerced to sit through such a mass of gruesome

filth."<sup>85</sup> The political overtones of the play were completely ignored. The critic for the Eagle paid no attention to the obvious anti-military, anti-Czarist attitudes taken by the playwright. The recounting of the atrocities inflicted upon the people was seen as vulgar and dismissed. The reviewer chose to focus instead, on what was termed sacrilegious, and, as a result, was unable to see Russia... as a commentary on either the military's disregard for the people's religious views or the rumblings of unrest in Russian society as a whole.<sup>86</sup>

It is uncertain why the Theatre of Thrills decided to attempt these two plays in the first place, given the public sentiment at the time. Apparently the producers at the Princess Theatre felt the plays were important, or more likely, trading on the reputation of Fear and Any Night from the previous season, that they would make money. Both The Eternal Mystery and Russia... had stories of great strength and, while both had sensational qualities, neither was what might be termed salacious. The producers were also maintaining the policy of the house by presenting two plays that were daring. Neither The Eternal Mystery nor Russia... was as suggestive as the Daughters of Joy might have been, because it dealt primarily with prostitution. Instead, the two plays dealt with moral and somewhat abstract questions. The producers of the Theatre of Thrills, assuming that they knew their audience and had given fair warning through their

advertisements and stated policy, gambled that the advanced ideas of these plays would be appreciated. They were proven wrong.

After two postponements, while rehearsing replacements for the two withdrawn plays, the Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills finally opened its second season on 10 October 1913. The plays included from the original program were The Bride, En Deshabille, and The Black Mask. The replacements were Felice and a piece from the Grand Guignol that was advertised as still running in Paris--A Pair of White Gloves, by André de Lorde and Pierre Chaine.

Felice, written by Hernaiz Becerra,<sup>87</sup> was found by Theatre Magazine to be an ineffective, wordy trifle and the weakest of the plays presented, although exceptionally well acted.<sup>88</sup> It is the story of Armand, an artist, who befriends his outcast brother just before he is mysteriously shot on the street. The killer, a young woman seeking refuge from the police, tells the artist of the abuse that she has suffered at his brother's hand. There is a moment of suspense when the police arrive and the artist must decide whether or not to give the girl, Felice, up. The curtain lowers as the police leave and Felice appears at Armand's door. Although the critic for Theatre Magazine found otherwise, Felice is a simple piece using misdirection, recognizable clues, and mistaken identity.

The second play on the bill was written by Pierre

Chaine and the "Prince of Terror," André de Lorde. Chaine and de Lorde had coauthored several plays performed at the Grand Guignol in Paris, including La Petite Rogue, La Petite Fille, and Bagnes d'Enfants. A Pair of White Gloves, while not necessarily the best received play on the bill, later proved to be the most controversial. Translated from the French Au Rat Mort Cabinet and also known in English as The Dead Rat, Room No. 6, the locale of A Pair of White Gloves was moved from a Paris hotel to the private dining room of the Savoy Hotel in London.

A Pair of White Gloves is the story of Sonia, a young Russian girl who is seeking revenge for the death of her husband. Sonia is a stenographer who has met General Gregoff in an office. (The original French play has Sonia as a prostitute with whom the general falls in love, but, owing to the previous problems in the season, her occupation was changed). Realizing that Gregoff may be the general responsible for torturing her husband, Sonia has agreed to meet him for dinner at the Savoy Hotel. Once there, in a secluded, private dining room, Sonia seduces Gregoff with liquor. After getting the general drunk and allowing him to brag of his cruelty to the revolutionaries, Sonia reveals that her husband was one of those that he tortured. She then removes her gloves, strangles him, and leaves.

A Pair of White Gloves was praised for its ingenious plot. However, it was noted that the thrills would have



been much stronger had the role of Sonia been played by a more adept actress. While Willette Kershaw played the role of Sonia with "variety and nervous power,"<sup>89</sup> Burns Mantle noted that Kershaw "acted with as much emotional strength as [she] has, not much."<sup>90</sup>

By far the most controversial production of the new fall season, En Deshabille, was written by Edward Goodman (1888-1963), a twenty-five year old English teacher from Patterson, New Jersey, who would later help shape the American theatre through his role in the formation of the Washington Square Players and the Theatre Guild. Here again opinions on the play were widely split. While one critic praised it as being brilliantly written and claimed that "one seldom hears better dialogue in contemporary theatre,"<sup>91</sup> and another noted that En Deshabille contained "some of the smartest dialogue heard on the New York stage of late,"<sup>92</sup> others were deeply offended. The Times called the play "unquestionably, an offense against good taste," and Charles Darnton of the Evening World wondered "Just how far indecency may be allowed to go on the New York stage," finding Goodman's play to be "the worst thing morally that has ever found its way into an American theatre."<sup>93</sup>

The action of En Deshabille takes place in the bedroom of a country house where Gregory is preparing for bed. Claire enters, and they engage in a sexually charged cat-and-mouse game centering on the sleeping arrangements. They

apparently do not know each other, find that they have both been set up by a mutual friend, and now must share not only a bedroom, but possibly the same bed. They decide to make the best of an awkward situation. Though Claire is flirting with Gregory, she is unwilling to allow him to sleep with her. She will sleep on the bed, he on the lounge. As they are both settling in to their respective "beds," Gregory calls Claire his wife and she suddenly recognizes him--he has grown a beard and taken voice lessons to lower his speaking register. Upon finding that she has been flirting with her own husband, Claire tells him that he has ruined everything. On the other hand, she is attracted to the beard.

The remainder of the play discusses the reasons for Claire and Gregory's separation, how their marriage was monotonous, and where the blame for the break-up should fall. There is a minor reconciliation when Gregory reveals to Claire that he has planned the meeting, and as the curtain falls he is seen advancing toward the bed.<sup>44</sup>

The play, as performed at the Princess Theatre, was not so much offensive as it was poorly constructed and contrived. The original play had much more to do with matrimony and morality, but several lines were cut for this production. In one section of dialogue that was eliminated, Claire and Gregory are looking for a possible solution to their problem--they enjoy being married, but have difficulty

living with each other. In an attempt to provide a solution, Gregory suggests an option.

Claire: What do you propose?

Gregory: A separated marriage--with unexpected returns.

Claire: I...

[cut begins at this point]

Gregory: You even have the added advantage of being sure of my monogamy. Should I have bothered so to change for you if I weren't so monogamously inclined?

Claire: The proposition has its striking points. But should you want me to pledge my conduct too, between visits?

Gregory: Not at all. I am convinced of what it would be by tonight's visit.

Claire: I think that's common.

Gregory: I have no doubt that fidelity is--in spite of the critics.

[end cut]

Claire: There is no doubt the beard becomes you...

With this section of dialogue ending after the first three lines, the audience might assume that Gregory is suggesting an open marriage--one where partners are free to see whom-ever they wish during their separation. Their arrangement for a mutually faithful marriage is not known, and all that

remains are the "unexpected returns." Claire's consideration of the proposed arrangement then turns from one of mutual faithfulness to one of mutual but allowed infidelity. This section, with other lines that had been eliminated, tended to soften the impact of the piece and turn it into a "morality" play that questioned the ethics of marriage and fidelity. Without these lines the play has less substance and becomes more of a sex farce than Edward Goodman may have intended.

Another sex farce, although much less objectionable than Goodman's play, was The Bride by William Hurlburt (1883-1957). Hurlburt's first play, The Fighting Hope, was produced in 1908. By 1913 he had written seven plays, including The Writing on the Wall, The Lone Hand, and New York, but The Bride was his first one-act play. The critics found it clever and amusing, if not cynical and amoral.<sup>43</sup> Three suitors come to visit a young wife while her husband is away, each of them bearing jewels and other gifts for the young woman. As each lover arrives, the previous one is hidden away. The husband arrives unexpectedly, and to avoid trouble the young wife calls the police and turns the three suitors in as robbers, but not before she has them searched and the jewels given over to her.

While The Bride was the least offensive play on the bill, critics found the Hurlburt piece to be lacking in substance. Unfortunately, it was also further hampered by

acting that was termed exceedingly "heavy-footed."<sup>96</sup>

By far the best play on the bill was The Black Mask. A tale of tragedy set in Northern England, and a genuine thriller, it was written by F. Tennyson Jesse (1889-1958) and H.M. Harwood (1874-1959). A British husband and wife, Jesse and Harwood wrote together until 1951. Among their other plays were Billeted, The Hotel Mouse, and The Pelican. The Black Mask, written in 1913, was their first collaboration. The critics were in general agreement that this play about infidelity and revenge was the best acted and the best written piece on the bill.<sup>97</sup>

A man, whose face has been disfigured in a mine explosion and who wears a mask to hide his disfigurement, forces a young girl to marry him by holding her over a well and threatening to drop her in unless she says "yes." After the marriage, the husband is called away from home. Returning early, he finds his wife entangled with a young man with whom she was involved before her marriage. There is a struggle between the men, and the young lover knocks the husband unconscious. Thinking that he has killed the man, the young lover puts on the mask that the husband had been wearing so that he can assume the husband's identity to avoid arousing the neighbors' suspicion until the couple can leave the area. But the husband, hidden in the half light of a far corner of the room, is not dead. He slowly inches his way across the floor and stabs the lover. The girl



A scene from The Black Mask<sup>98</sup>

returns, thinking that her husband is dead, to help throw the body down the well. The play ends with the girl going upstairs, being followed by the man she thinks is her lover, but who in reality is her husband. As the curtain falls, the husband is seen taking off the mask, and a scream is heard.

It is interesting to note that The Black Mask did not play the Paris Grand Guignol theatre until 1916--three years after the Princess Theatre production.<sup>99</sup> While several plays presented at the Princess Theatre--Fear, A Kiss In The Dark, A Pair of White Gloves, and others--also played the Grand Guignol, The Black Mask was the only play to begin at the Princess and then later play in Paris.

This combination of plays proved to be popular and ran through the middle of November 1913, until A Pair of White Gloves was pulled from the bill in violation of the International Copyright Law that had been passed nearly four years earlier. The International Union for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works was established in 1908 in Berlin. Based on the Berne Convention in Paris 1896, this organization protected authors, under what was generally recognized as the International Copyright agreement, from the pirating of their works. This agreement also guaranteed authors monetary compensation if their works were reprinted or performed by anyone within a country belonging to the Convention.

Unfortunately, the United States did not belong to the Convention, nor did it recognize any international copyright until 1909. In that year, while not specifically joining with the other countries, the United States passed its own copyright act. The United States Copyright Act of 1909 offered reciprocal protection to authors and playwrights whose works were protected under the International Union for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works in their nations of origin.<sup>100</sup> It was the United States' recognition of international copyrights with this Federal act that enabled the authors of A Pair of White Gloves to bring suit.

On 26 November 1913, F. Ray Comstock was indicted and charged with copyright infringement under the United States Copyright Act of 1909. He surrendered to the Assistant District Attorney and was released on \$1,000 bail. The suit was brought by André de Lorde, who claimed that his play, Au Rat Mort Cabinet was being performed without his permission. A representative of the Princess Theatre said that the play had been obtained legally through Elisabeth Marbury, an American literary agent and play broker with an office in England. However, the American representative of the French Society of Authors and Dramatists made the claim that the rights to Au Rat Mort Cabinet were released to the play broker for sale to other producers without the sanction of the authors. De Lorde and Pierre Chaine wanted damages amounting to \$10,000. Comstock, speaking through William



Klein, house attorney for the Shubert organization, claimed that the play had been purchased in good faith and that the producers did not know that they were infringing on the authors' rights.<sup>101</sup>

The case never came to trial.<sup>102</sup> The play was permanently removed from the repertory and, given Klein's reputation for bargaining, a satisfactory monetary settlement was probably agreed upon by both parties. Whatever the negotiated fee was, de Lorde and Chaine were said to be delighted and responded in an article entitled "A Lesson to Pirates...."<sup>103</sup>

Chaine: You see, we are the Princes of Terror, even in America, because it is apropos of one of our works that the new protection begins. Unscrupulous directors will find here-after a salutary legal restraint. Our adaptor was not without a certain delicacy. He changed the title of the play, otherwise it is exactly the same.

De Lorde: Quite by chance we were informed a month ago that our piece was being played in New York without the authors' names. We immediately put the matter in the hands of the French playwrights society and we hope that this example will prevent the wholesale pirating of French works heretofore done with impunity, and encourage other authors to defend their rights under the law of April, 1910.

The first bill of the 1913-1914 season had not only offended New York theatre-goers and the local authorities, it also earned the Princess Theatre the title of New York's wickedest playhouse, and the Theatre of Thrills also achieved an international reputation. Being the first producers, according to Pierre Chaine, to be prosecuted under the new copyright law,<sup>104</sup> brought a notoriety to the Princess Theatre.

To replace A Pair of White Gloves, the producers brought back Fear until a new play could be prepared. Because of Fear's length, Felice was also removed to accommodate it. Finally, on 5 December 1913, the replacements were ready--Hari-Kari, and a reworked version of Russia...

Hari-Kari was written by Julian Johnson (1886-1965), who then was working as the general press representative for the producer Oliver Morosco. It is an intense, tightly written piece involving intrigue, revenge, and murder. The plot focuses on Madeline, the daughter of the Chief Construction Engineer of the United States Navy, based in Washington, D.C.. She has fallen in love with an attaché from the Japanese Legation, and they are planning to elope. But, through a series of events, Madeline finds that Ito, the Japanese, has been using her to get access to and to steal top secret blueprints and other naval secrets from her father.. Upon this realization Madeline experiences a "burst of patriotic desperation" and grabs a knife that Ito had

given her--a family heirloom, the same knife with which his grandfather had committed hari-kari. She stabs him repeatedly and he dies as he cries "Banzai!" Her father enters, sees the scene, and telephones the police, telling them that a Japanese intruder had broken into their house and had committed "that national thing of their's--hari-kari."<sup>105</sup>

This play addresses several issues of importance as it deals with cultural differences, interracial marriage, stereotypes, and fear of the unknown. Hari-Kari looks at America's fascination with Japan at a time of increasing Westernization in the Orient, and also, at Americans' feelings about the Japanese stealing their culture and their industry--and doing it better. Johnson's play, called by the Dramatic Mirror an "intense little playlette,"<sup>106</sup> is a very effective melodrama. It is structured so that every event leads up to the climactic killing of Ito. The conflict is then neatly and happily resolved by Madeline's father. The play is suspenseful, and the actual killing of the spy, while being the central point of the play, is a natural outgrowth of the action that uses many twists of the plot to build to the climax. One unfortunate aspect of Hari-Kari is the exaggerated portrayal of Ito. He is shown as the archetype of the evil Japanese--scheming and devious--with no redeeming features.

The new version of Russia... fared a little better than its first incarnation. There were a few minor cuts made in

both dialogue and costumes. The priest was no longer made up to resemble Jesus Christ and most of the references to Him had been softened. But even as the Dramatic Mirror saw Russia... as "a frightful picture of Russian cruelty and violence," and the critic for the New York Review found the play in its new format "a fascinating photograph," in which, "the power, the passion, and the primitive dramatic force of Russia are indescribable,"<sup>107</sup> the New York Times found the play, with its seven murders, just as offensive and disagreeable as they had in its first version. The Times wondered why, with the very minor changes that had been made, the producers at the Princess Theatre would even consider Russia... "fit for the stage."<sup>108</sup> Again, it missed the political statement being made. This revised program ran until the middle of January 1914. However, it was noted in the New York Times that with the addition of Russia... and Hari-Kari with their eight murders, audiences left the theatre "in none too happy a state of mind."<sup>109</sup>

As they were after Princess Players' first season, the critics and the public were split on their opinions of the Theatre of Thrills. James Metcalf of Life wondered if it would be possible for the Princess to become "a nice, good little theatre" and recommended that the only way for this to occur would be to keep the artistic standards high and to confine themselves to the "territory of the clever, the humorous, the satirical, and the shocking, after the manner

of the Parisian thrillers, but without venturing into the field of the sacrilegious and risky." Metcalf went on to suggest that the management of the Theatre of Thrills had finally learned that most audiences disliked risqué material. Knowing that, he suggested, the producers should "have some regard to that side of their bread which is buttered."<sup>110</sup> In other words, the management at the Princess Theatre needed to give the people what they wanted--which was not plays such as Russia... and The Eternal Mystery.

While some felt that the shock value had been curbed and "the thrills moderated to suit the frightened palate,"<sup>111</sup> others compared the Theatre of Thrills to a side-show and said that most of the plays were "so close to the gutter that the street cleaning department should be called in to deal with them."<sup>112</sup> This prompted the critic for the Dramatic Mirror to remind his fellow reviewers that the "Princess Theatre is for grown-ups, a class which does not include all the New York critics."<sup>113</sup> The Dramatic Mirror went on to commend the Princess Players for their work. The reviewer noted that the Theatre of Thrills was attempting to develop its own distinctive audience and that "the Princess Plays are thoroughly enjoyed by the sophisticated public to which they appeal.... It is certain that there is a public for these plays, risqué or brutal as the case may be."<sup>114</sup>

During the holiday season, on 25 December 1913, the Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills opened a production of

Basil Hood's Ib and Little Christina. Hood (1864-1917), wrote over twenty-five plays, but was probably best known for his English adaptation of The Merry Widow in 1907. Whether the producers felt it necessary to vindicate themselves in an effort to overcome the season's negative press, or whether it was merely a holiday gift to the children, Basil Hood's play did not fit into the reputation the Princess Players had built for themselves. Based on a Hans Christian Anderson story, Ib and Little Christina traces the romantic relationship of the title characters through three stages of their lives: as they meet, separate, and finally reunite. This romantic drama was "calculated to grip the heart and bring tears to the eyes,"<sup>15</sup> rather than evoke fear or shock audiences through gruesome or sexually charged situations. Ib and Little Christina was composed of "simple directness and genuineness" that was intended to "reach out and get sympathy." Holbrook Blinn's acting was also praised for its directness and for his ability to evoke sympathy for his character. Indeed, the press praised the entire production, calling Hood's play a "truly exquisite thing." Ib and Little Christina played matinees through the holidays, and the press urged people to go see it.<sup>16</sup>

The second complete bill of the 1913-1914 season opened, with some minor changes in the acting company (see appendix A), on 31 January 1914, and included The Neglected Lady, The Hard Man, The Fountain, It Can Be Done, and A Kiss

in the Dark. While the reviews ranged from pleasantly amusing to revoltingly terrible, the new program presented by the Theatre of Thrills illustrated to the New York Post that the "management [of the Princess Theatre] had seen the light..., [and had] learned that there [was] no insistent public demand for drama with no other recommendation than its offensiveness to ordinary intelligence and decency."<sup>117</sup> It seemed to the press that the producers at the Princess had finally given in to public opinion and eliminated such offensive plays such as Russia... and En Deshabille. But, even as the New York Times thanked the producers for the "complete elimination of smut," they went on to note that there was still room for improvement.<sup>118</sup>

Max Maurey's The Neglected Lady opened the bill. During his career, Max Maurey (1871-1947), wrote over twenty-five plays that included Le Chauffeur, Le Pharmacien, Stradivarius, and a stage adaptation of David Copperfield. By 1914, Maurey had written several top rate thrillers for the Grand Guignol, of which he was director, and it was under his leadership that the theatre made its transition from a naturalist theatre to one dedicated to horror plays.<sup>119</sup> The play chosen to represent Maurey at the Princess Theatre, however, was a light comedy on theatrical life.

The Neglected Lady was translated and adapted from the French by Roi Cooper Megrue (1883-1927). Megrue was a play

reader in the office of literary agent Elisabeth Marbury and was also a playwright, known in New York for Her Only Way, White Magic, To Kill a Man, and An Unlucky Star.<sup>120</sup> Megrue moved the action of The Neglected Lady, which centers on the marital problems of a couple, from Paris to an apartment house in the Bronx, New York. The play begins as the husband enters the apartment, claiming that he is ruined because he has lost both his money and his wife's jewels. A loud argument erupts between the man and his wife. The two are overheard by their landlord, who threatens to evict them. It is then that they reveal, to the landlord and the audience, that they are merely actors rehearsing their vaudeville act. At this point, the landlord is so impressed with realistic acting of the team that he hires them to perform for his friends.

The Neglected Lady is a light farce in which the comic element evolves from mistaken identities and a twist in the plot--the discovery that the arguing couple are actors. The critics found the play to be nothing more than an amusing skit or a trifle. Still, the reviews commended the acting of the Players, saying that the roles were excellently played with a vivacious spirit.<sup>121</sup>

Campbell MacCulloch's The Hard Man, is a very intense drama about a British general who condemns a young traitor to death. While MacCulloch (1881-1941) would later become an important executive in the film industry, The Hard Man



was this American author's only play. Set in the Sudan, the action of the play occurs in the tent of the Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces. Into this scene is thrown a captive, a young Englishman who has been working with the rebel troops and firing on the British army. After hearing the charges against the young man, the general sentences him to death and then convinces the young man to take his life to salvage his honor. It is only after the traitor is dead that the general admits that the young man was his son. The Hard Man is a very strong drama whose twist at the end is completely unexpected. The action of this powerful piece was condensed into seven minutes and the company, Holbrook Blinn in particular, was praised for their acting.<sup>122</sup>

The Fountain was written by the American playwright C.M.S. McClellan (1865-1916), a former newspaperman best known then for his operetta librettos for The Belle of New York and The Pink Lady. The Fountain, through which the New York Times noted the audience suffered from monotony rather than gruesomeness,<sup>123</sup> is the story of a ragpicker, Godinard, who once loved a young girl. The scene is set in a Paris park next to a fountain with a white marble statue of a beautiful girl. In his youth, Godinard idolized a model named Theresa, who left him for a sculptor who later became famous and immortalized her in the statue that is now part of the fountain. Godinard comes to the park daily to throw flowers in the water. A policeman approaches him as he



Holbrook Blinn in The Fountain

casts his flowers into the pool, and it is during their conversation that Godinard tells his story. The policeman moves on, and Godinard sits gazing at the statue of the young girl. He soon falls asleep and into a dream. In this dream, as the lights change, the statue of Theresa comes alive. She reaffirms her love for Godinard and tells him that he can join her and become young again by plunging into the magical waters of the fountain. As he approaches the fountain to be reunited with Theresa, there is a lighting change, he awakens and finds himself seated on the bench. All is back to normal. He rises from the bench, throws one last flower into the water, and slowly strolls off.

While the critics found some of the acting in the piece dull, they applauded The Fountain as a bold step toward a truly "creditable and artistic" production.<sup>125</sup> Praised as a poetic delight destined to last beyond the Princess Players' production, The Fountain was called a charming bit of symbolism.<sup>126</sup> It was, indeed, out of the ordinary for the Theatre of Thrills. With the dream sequence and the use of lighting effects to create a mystical mood, the Players had moved away from the stark realism of their previous pieces. The Dramatic Mirror found this bit of romantic idealism very moving and delightful, calling it "one of the most beautiful little dramas of recent times."<sup>127</sup>

Maurice Level's play, A Kiss in the Dark, provided the horror element on this bill. Level (1874-1926), was a

French journalist and playwright who contributed several plays to the Grand Guignol. Called by the New York Times a horridly morbid, "revolting, unnecessary sort of thing,"<sup>128</sup> A Kiss in the Dark, also translated by Roi Cooper Megrue, was found by others to be a "real thriller, quite shocking in its poignant horror."<sup>129</sup> Either way, A Kiss in the Dark is a fascinating and exciting play of intrigue and revenge. Henri, having had his face badly scarred with vitriol, refuses to testify against his attacker, his former mistress. Upon hearing that she has been acquitted, he calls for her to visit him on the pretense of forgiving her. Once there the two recount their lives together, including the incident with the acid. All this time he has kept his scars hidden from her. He reveals his face, tells her of the pain, and asks for one last kiss. He lures her closer, grabbing her and crying, "You've fallen into my trap." He will now do to her what she did to him. As he holds her and slowly pours vitriol onto her face, the curtain comes in.<sup>130</sup>

A Kiss in the Dark is a graphic and frightening piece. The language used is sometimes overpowering. For example, there is the episode of Henri explaining to the girl what it is like to be so badly disfigured:

I want you to understand, to feel the scars in my face--these gashes--if I pressed your hand into them now your fingers would sink as if it were mud... And here, near the mouth--when I eat, the flesh is so fragile

that it sometimes tears out and the blood flows into my mouth.

Language and images like these prompted one reviewer to note that one's desire for shock and horror would have to be abnormally high not to be satisfied with A Kiss in the Dark.<sup>131</sup>

The last play on the bill was It Can Be Done, by Laurence Rising. On 7 January 1914, while the producers at the Princess were organizing the current program, they had announced that they would now look primarily to developing young American playwrights. The first of their discoveries was Laurence Rising. Rising had studied playwriting at the University of California at Berkeley, concentrating on French authors, and in 1913, prior to the acceptance of It Can Be Done by the producers at the Princess, his play The Man in the Clock had been produced in New York.

The plot of It Can Be Done figures around an attempt by a confidence woman to con \$500 from a man who, saying he is from Manhattan, claims that you cannot fool a New Yorker. The action takes place on the rear platform of an express train out of New York. During the course of the play, "the woman" attempts to get "the man's" money through several different schemes, but to no avail. The man then assures her that being from New York, he knows every trick that has ever been used by "professional sharpers." Yet, while he is caught up in his explanation, the woman easily picks the

man's pocket proving that "it can be done."

It Can Be Done is a light-hearted play whose outstanding feature was the "marvelously realistic representation" of the back observation platform of the train, which was called a "capital scenic illusion."<sup>132</sup> Producing It Can Be Done was an attempt by the Princess Players to begin "discovering and upbringing[sic] distinctly American writers for this distinctly American Grand Guignol."<sup>133</sup> Unfortunately, it was noted that while there were some clever lines in Rising's play, overall It Can Be Done was "rather weak."<sup>134</sup>

This bill played until the middle of March 1914, when it was announced that the company would go on a national tour. Evidently, the season was being cut short for financial reasons.<sup>135</sup> Not only was the fall opening of the 1913-1914 season of the Theatre of Thrills delayed due to the problems with the controversial first bill, but F. Ray Comstock was later notified by the New York City Department of Buildings in November of 1913, that in order for the Princess Theatre to be brought up to fire code, a sprinkler system had to be installed. These delays cost the producers both playing time and box office receipts, as well as \$9,008.33 for the sprinkler system.<sup>136</sup> Again, though the Theatre of Thrills did fairly well at the box office, these unexpected costs and losses helped to ruin the second season at the Princess Theatre.

During the 1913-1914 season, the Princess Players per-

formed about 170 nights, and during that time, all but five weeks showed a profit. Even at that, after the yearly expenses were paid, which included the renovations ordered by the Department of Buildings, the Players showed a net loss for the year of \$22,198.37.<sup>137</sup>

The Princess Theatre, however, was not the only theatrical organization experiencing financial difficulties. It was reported by many critics and managers that the most notable feature of the 1913-1914 season was the bad business. Abe Erlanger, one of the heads of the Theatrical Syndicate, felt that it had been one of the worst seasons in seventeen years, both on Broadway and around the country.<sup>138</sup> Theatre managers and critics alike looked for the reason. Some claimed that the theatre was suffering from the new found competition of movies and the recent ballroom dance craze. Others looked closer to home. In a season that saw such popular and long running hits as Seven Keys to Baldpate, Peg O' My Heart, and the Yellow Jacket, there was no question of variety. However, even though the season had started strongly, many felt that the controversy over the "vice" plays at the beginning of the season, the subsequent closing of The Lure and The Fight, and the debate over censorship that ensued, may have kept people away. As noted by James S. Metcalf in Life, "Sic transit the season of 1913-14, which has not been exactly gloria mundi."<sup>139</sup>

Still, the 1913-1914 Theatre of Thrills season was a

success for no other reason than the introduction of the plays of the Grand Guignol to American audiences on a large scale. With the success of the experimental first season in the spring of 1913, the producers at the Princess Theatre felt that they had begun to develop an audience for their style of theatre, and turned to the Grand Guignol for more shocking plays for the 1913-1914 season. Even though the Princess company was forced to modify the initial bill of the season due to the controversy that erupted over the presentation of "vice plays," it was through these plays--A Kiss in the Dark, Russia--In the Pouchinskaja, and A Pair of White Gloves--that the Princess Players achieved notoriety and a reputation as a daring, experimental, and, sometimes offensive company. This recognition of the Theatre of Thrills as a theatre willing to present new and controversial drama, would eventually stimulate conflict and lead to a revamping of the company's policy.

To recoup the losses at the Theatre of Thrills during the 1913-1914 season, the producers at the Princess Theatre did as other producers around New York would do: they turned to what was in the past a money maker--the road.



### The Tour

On 4 March 1914 it was announced that the Princess Players would begin a tour of the United States on the 16th of that month and that while they were away, a new policy would be adopted for the summer months. The Shuberts, meanwhile, would use this time to book in a new comedy and make money. Concluding that the last bill of the Theatre of Thrills had not been as successful as they had hoped, they now saw a chance to bring in a show that they had no financial stake in--all they would do is rent the theatre.<sup>140</sup>

The first city outside New York to see the plays of the Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills was Detroit. The Theatre of Thrills was scheduled to open at the Garrick Theatre on 16 March 1914, and for nearly two weeks prior to the opening, the Detroit press heralded the coming of the Princess Players. Both the Detroit Free Press and the Detroit Tribune noted in press releases on 8 March 1914, that this unique company, the Princess Players, promised to be one of the most interesting engagements of the year and that the plays scheduled to be presented represented the "acme of laughter, sensation, and surprise."<sup>141</sup> The Free Press went on to note that the "Princess Theatre's triumphant career... [and] artistic achievements in acting,"

whetted Detroit's curiosity, added to the expectancy, and promised that "Detroit play-goers [would] certainly have a rich feast of the unusual in drama at the Garrick, interpreted by artists of the first class."<sup>142</sup> On 12 March 1914, the Detroit News ran a story that welcomed the Princess company and noted that "the coming of Mr. Blinn himself [was] welcome news, for Detroit playgoers have delightful memories of his past achievements [with Mrs. Fiske's company] in such dramas as Salvation Nell, The Boss, and The Pillars of Society."<sup>143</sup> With all this advance press, the city of Detroit was prepared for the arrival of the Theatre of Thrills.

Advertised to play one week and present two bills of five one-acts each, the Theatre of Thrills had chosen plays that were considered to be the "cream of all the dramas yet produced by the Princess Players" and offered a "comprehensive idea of the character of this unique theatrical institution."<sup>144</sup> The first bill, scheduled to open Monday the sixteenth, included Hari Kari, Fear, Fancy Free, The Fountain, and It Can Be Done. The second bill, which opened mid-week, included "by special request," Any Night, the play that "caused the greatest talk of them all... [and] made the Princess Theatre famous or was it notorious."<sup>145</sup> The remainder of the second bill was filled with The Hard Man, En Deshabille, The Black Mask, and The Bride.

The first program of one-acts presented by the Players

was well received by the critics. The reviewer for the Detroit News praised the company and noted that the city of Detroit had been "introduced to the one-act play deluxe," and that "no matter what direction your taste [in thrills] may incline, you will be sure to find something that will strike in you a responsive cord."<sup>146</sup> Calling the Theatre of Thrills a distinct novelty with carefully trained players, the Free Press commended the company for its ability "to incite laughter, breed horror, [and] appeal to the tenderest and noblest sentiments of humanity with more than usual ability."<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, it was noted that Hari Kari contained acting that was "powerful, definite, and impressive," that Fancy Free was a capitol amusement bristling with good situations and pungent dialogue," and was "cleverly played," and that Fear, while "not a reassuring spectacle from any point of view, was vividly and thrillingly played." Further, The Fountain was called "touching, beautiful in thought, exquisite, and altogether lovely," and, it was noted, that Holbrook Blinn in the role of Godinard the ragpicker was a "pure gem."<sup>148</sup> This first bill played through the Wednesday evening performance.

The second bill of one-acts--The Hard Man, The Black Mask, The Bride, En Deshabille, and Any Night--opened Thursday, 19 March 1914. This program received reviews similar to those of the first. Blinn was again praised as "an actor of fine talents and rare versatility," and the company was

praised for its "high level of histrionic excellence."<sup>149</sup> With the addition of the more risque En Deshabille and The Bride, the reviewer for the Detroit News reported that the "big audience" at the Garrick Theatre "seemed to enjoy the excitement of observing just how far the [Princess Players] dared go."<sup>150</sup> Yet, while the critic for Detroit Free Press found The Black Mask to be "gruesome but gripping," and commended The Hard Man for the play's dramatic qualities, the reviewer also noted that the realism of Any Night came very close to offending. The Free Press went on to condemn this "slice of life" play and challenge "those who would defend [Any Night's] invasion of the Drama [to] find what justification they can."<sup>151</sup> With this final bill, the Princess Players continued until their scheduled closing date of 21 March 1914.

Except for the minor controversy over Any Night, the Theatre of Thrills had received good reviews. The Detroit News commended the Princess Players. It noted that "a great deal [had] been done in the way of showing American theatre-goers what may be accomplished in [one-act] plays," and that the plays presented by the Princess Players were "unusual and recommended themselves to the regulars whose tastes may have become a bit jaded with a full season of "usual" things."<sup>152</sup> Finding the Princess Players to be a first class company that introduced a new and novel form of theatre to Detroit, the Detroit Free Press suggested that

the "results [of the two programs presented] justify the hope that the example of the Princess Players will not be lost on other promoters."<sup>153</sup> While the audiences for the Theatre of Thrills may have been small, it was not necessarily due to the Players' reputation or the content of the plays. According to both the Detroit Free Press and the Detroit News, theatre-goers in Detroit had never seen the one-act play, except in vaudeville, until the arrival of the Princess Players, and that the people of Detroit needed to be educated in the ways of the new drama.<sup>154</sup> The Detroit Tribune went on to note that there was definitely "room for the Drama League to do some educating"<sup>155</sup> there.

After the advance press and build up of the Theatre of Thrills as one of the most interesting programs to play Detroit that year, the reviewer for the Detroit Tribune was prompted to wonder what the fuss was about when it came to the Princess Players. The reviewer noted that while several of the Theatre of Thrills' plays threatened to offend, they never did.<sup>156</sup> Though up to that time there had not been a producing organization mounting one-acts in Detroit, especially of this type, "Mr. Blinn's programs were not heavily patronized and there did not appear to be any enthusiasm of the genuine sort." However, the critic did qualify his assessment noting that it was "Lenten season," and the plays of the Princess Players "were hardly of the Sabbath school persuasion."<sup>157</sup>

The subject matter may have kept crowds away, but there was no doubt whether the Theatre of Thrills was a success. After a week's performances the Detroit News wrote that Holbrook Blinn and the Princess Players were "embarked on an ambitious and worthy enterprise, [and were] deserving of every encouragement."<sup>158</sup> The Detroit Tribune noted that, though it would be safe to say that the Detroit public would survive the Princess Players, "Mr. Blinn should not be discouraged," because it was "extremely doubtful if the Detroit theatre-goers understood the nature of the [Theatre of Thrills'] entertainment." Wondering how other cities on the Players' tour would view the Theatre of Thrills, the critic for the Tribune said that he looked forward to Chicago's reaction.<sup>159</sup>

Chicago had developed an audience for both the one-act play and the "art theatre," having seen several European companies, among them the Irish Players from the Abbey and the Manchester Players. They also had their own pioneer in that form--Maurice Browne and his Little Theatre--and felt that the quality of production in Chicago was far superior to the Princess Players'. However, it was not the quality of the acting or the production values that offended the city fathers, but the content of the plays themselves.

The Princess Players Theatre of Thrills opened in Chicago's Princess Theatre for what was supposed to be an extended run. The Princess Theatre in Chicago was managed

and operated by William Brady's production company, and the original program was to include The Bride, Any Night, Fear, and It can Be Done. But owing to the reputation of Edward Ellis's Any Night, and perhaps looking to avoid problems with the local authorities, Holbrook Blinn opted to eliminate the Ellis piece. This rather tame bill attracted little attention and was considered a failure. The poor performance of the first bill prompted the manager of the theatre, a Mr. Frank Phelps, to cable J.J. Shubert, telling him of Blinn's decision to eliminate Any Night from the program. Phelps felt that a mistake had been made by taking out the more sensational piece, and the underlying reason for doing so, he felt, was to allow Blinn to showcase himself. In Phelps' opinion it was not a good idea for "an actor to butt into the business end.... We are not in the showbusiness to elevate the stage or for the benefit of actors but to make money and to make money we must cater to the public and give them what they want."<sup>160</sup> What the public wanted, according to Phelps, were the sensational plays that they had heard about. As a result, Any Night was put back on the bill 30 March 1914. This program did, indeed, attract attention, and, while reporting to New York that the bill played 100% better, Phelps noted that if they could just overcome the censors, they were in for a long run.<sup>161</sup> This conflict between Blinn and Phelps again points up the contradiction of the Theatre of Thrills--a theatre, accord-

ing to policy, devoted to the presentation of plays that may prove to be non-commercial, attempting to survive in a highly commercial atmosphere.

On 1 April 1914, the bill at the Princess Theatre was changed. The producers retained Any Night and added Hari-Kari, The Black Mask, and En Deshabille. Unfortunately, with the addition of Any Night and the opening of the second bill, not only did the Theatre of Thrills attract the censors, but they created a debate that would follow the company to the end of its tour.

James O'Donnell Bennet's review in the Chicago Record-Herald titled "An Evening in the Chamber of Horrors," called the bill shoddy and shameful, among other things.<sup>162</sup> The article ignited the flame of controversy not only under the powers that be, but under the public as well. With the inclusion of the more controversial plays--Hari-Kari, The Black Mask, En Deshabille, and Any Night--Phelps reported to the Shuberts that business had doubled. In the same cable he also reported that, on April 4, they had been served notice by the Mayor's office, to either pull the offensive plays off the bill or close the Theatre of Thrills entirely.<sup>163</sup>

Rather than attend himself, Mayor Carter Harrison sent his Commissioner of Police, Major Funkhauser, and the head of the recently organized Chicago Board of Motion Picture Censors, John Callahan. Based on the report of his two



deputies, the Mayor, calling the plays suggestive and comparing them as art to a house of prostitution, warned the Theatre of Thrills that the bill either had to be changed or the theatre would be shut down. The Shuberts defended their position, claiming that what they were presenting was, indeed, high art. Holbrook Blinn called the action simply "small town stuff," and went so far as to invite the Mayor to see for himself, reminding him that movies and plays were not the same and should not be judged as such. Mayor Harrison declined the invitation and went on to note, even after Blinn proved that Callahan had misrepresented the plays in his report, that the Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills would be closed unless the offending plays were eliminated.<sup>164</sup>

Rather than close down completely, the Theatre of Thrills softened the bill. The controversial sex of En Deshabille and the "true life drama" Any Night, were replaced with The Fountain, The Neglected Lady, The Hard Man, It Can Be Done, and A Kiss in the Dark. The result of this highly controversial situation was far reaching, both for the Theatre of Thrills and for the theatrical community of Chicago. Because of the initial review and the subsequent problems, the Shubert Organization banned James O'Donnell Bennett from all their theatres and withdrew all advertising from The Chicago Record-Herald--a trick that the Shuberts had already become well known for in New York.<sup>165</sup> The

Shuberts also announced on 8 April 1914, that they would close the Theatre of Thrills on the next Saturday.<sup>166</sup> Holbrook Blinn, perhaps sensing what effect this giving into the authorities might have, cabled:

I strongly urge our continuing here another week for the future good of your enterprises. In Chicago it is dangerous to be so easily and unjustly defeated by part of the press and a corrupt administration when several papers and public sentiment are with us. Much publicity, certain loss could not be great.<sup>167</sup>

He felt the bad press would be used against them in the future, whereas, if the company stayed, they could work the controversy to their advantage. Blinn's argument did not sway the Shuberts, however, and the Chicago run of the Theatre of Thrills ended 11 April 1914.

The effects of this controversy would not be felt by the Princess Players until their return to New York City in the fall of 1914, but the people of Chicago voiced their opinions immediately and in several ways. The first, and probably the most important, was that after Bennett's review in the Record Herald of 2 April and the subsequent investigation by the Board of Motion Picture Censors, this controversy sparked the public's curiosity and brought people into the theatre. It was reported that during the week ending 11 April 1914, the Theatre of Thrills' last week in Chicago, there was a 15-20 minute wait at the box office and that the

houses were often filled to the back row.<sup>168</sup>

Second, since this was the first attempt of the Board of Censors to review drama and since they proved themselves to be so "autocratic, pigheaded, and incompetent,"<sup>169</sup> their actions prompted the Chicago press to react. Members of the press wrote that the Board was in no way qualified to judge art and compared them and Bennett to Anthony Comstock and his New York Society for the Suppression of Vice. They went on to say that the idea of a "moral dictator" and of "suppression was long ago abandoned by people who have progressed mentally and morally beyond the status of a backwoods village."<sup>170</sup> Again, the Theatre of Thrills had alienated some of the press and the authorities, but found backing from the general theatre-going public.

After a week's layoff, on 20 April 1914, the tour continued back in New York City on what was known as the subway circuit, playing the Majestic Theatre in Brooklyn. Tours on this circuit would play theatres in and around the boroughs of New York City, with the actors usually reaching their destinations via subway. The Princess Players Theatre of Thrills was scheduled to play in Brooklyn for one week and present two complete programs. On opening night, the bill at the Majestic Theatre consisted of Any Night, The Bride, The Hard Man, The Black Mask, and En Deshabille. Each of these plays, perhaps except for En Deshabille, had proved popular across the river in Manhattan. Unfortunately-

ly, the Chicago controversy had followed the Princess Players back home.

The Brooklyn Eagle, a paper that had once praised Blinn and company for bravely exposing the human beast, now condemned the Theatre of Thrills as an attempt "to subvert art to sensation [in] the sole hope of attracting dollars." Even as the Eagle praised the company for its "splendid acting" the reviewer went on to note that Brooklyn audiences agreed with the Chicago censors, and that the "authorities discontinuance [of the Princess Players] was well founded."<sup>171</sup>

While none of the plays on that first bill received great notices, the piece that had offended most was Any Night. It was reported that on opening night many people had walked out after Edward Ellis' "especially obnoxious piece" was performed. Any Night, a play that the Brooklyn Eagle had previously praised and said was presented with skill and realism, a play that "lays bare the human animal,"<sup>172</sup> was now a "puerile, tiresome, and nasty exposition of social evils."<sup>173</sup>

The reviewer for the Eagle went on to warn the producers of the Theatre of Thrills:

Brooklyn play-goers possessing any vestige of self respect will doubtless remain away from the performances at the Majestic Theatre until Any Night is taken from the bill.<sup>174</sup>

However, the large crowds that turned out for the Theatre of Thrills prompted the Dramatic Mirror to write that the "Princess Players [were] approved by theatre-goers in spite of the local press...."<sup>175</sup>

The second program, opening 23 April, included The Fountain, Hari Kari, Fancy Free, It Can Be Done, and Fear. This bill fared a little better. Any Night was gone, as was En Deshabille, a play the Brooklyn Eagle had found to be on the "borderland of propriety." In their place was a program that the Eagle found "cleaner and more sane" than the first. The critic noted that Fear was the best play presented and that while the program was not "entirely free from evil suggestion," the audiences did not leave.<sup>176</sup>

In general the Brooklyn critics praised Holbrook Blinn and company for their skill. The Brooklyn Daily Eagle called Blinn "one of the few actors on the American stage who possesses genuine ability" and commended his "unquestioned skill in direction." The reviewer went on to note that during the Brooklyn engagement the "Princess Players [were] seen at their best."<sup>177</sup> The problem, however, was not so much with the company, but with the plays. The Brooklyn press felt that there was a trend developing in the American theatre toward sensationalism, and that this trend, intended to attract audiences and dollars, was responsible not only for the "deluge of white slave plays which last season cast discredit on the theatre," but for the bad

business the theatre was experiencing. But even as the Brooklyn Daily Eagle noted that it was "a pity that such excellent material [the company] should be employed to exploit what in the last analysis and as a whole must be regarded as cheap sensationalism,"<sup>178</sup> the Dramatic Mirror noted that "the dramatic treat of last week, April 20-25, was unquestionably the Princess Players at the Majestic."<sup>179</sup> The Chicago controversy had travelled ahead of the Theatre of Thrills and again the programs presented generated conflicting opinions, but the Players still seemed to have the support of the majority of the people.

The Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills next travelled to Philadelphia for what was supposed to be a two-week engagement at the Adelphi Theatre. Advertised as the "redoubtable" Princess Players, the company opened on 27 April 1914, with the "five most famous plays from [their] repertoire." Guaranteed to provide "laughter, surprise, and sensation,"<sup>180</sup> the program included The Hard Man, The Bride, En Deshabille, The Black Mask, and Any Night, and was, for the most part, well received.

As in previous stops on the tour, the acting of the Princess Players was praised by the local newspapers. Both the Philadelphia Inquirer and the Philadelphia Telegraph called the company a "cast of unusual excellence," singling out Holbrook Blinn as an inspired actor with "extraordinary discipline."<sup>181</sup> The plays on the first program were also

well received. En Deshabille was found by the Inquirer to be an "excellent diversion" with a "crisp and incisive-style," and while The Black Mask was "horrible in the extreme..., [it] thrilled as much as it repelled." Of The Hard Man and The Bride, it was noted that they both were well played and diverting.<sup>182</sup> The only problem that either the Inquirer or the Telegraph had with the program was with Any Night.

As in Chicago and Brooklyn, the critics in Philadelphia found Edward Ellis' Any Night to be pure sensationalism. While the Telegraph noted that Ellis' play provided an important "exposition of the economic basis of prostitution [and was] a fine polemic," the reviewer called Any Night a "bad play."<sup>183</sup> The Inquirer critic gave Any Night credit for its realism and Ellis' ability to present "more of the sickening details" in a play that was "more uncompromising than its contemporaries." However, the critic felt that this "pioneer of the gutter series of plays" was revolting with an overall "effect [that] was offensive."<sup>184</sup>

During the first week of performances, on Friday, 1 May, the Princess Players advertised that they would present an entirely new bill the following week.<sup>185</sup> However, on Sunday, 3 May 1914, in the Philadelphia Inquirer's weekly theatre gossip and news column entitled the "The Callboys Chat," the Players' production of Any Night was severely chastised, which may have caused the producers at the Prin-

cess to reconsider their plans. The column was organized as a dialogue between an all-knowing Shakespearean actor and a theatre's callboy--a boy employed to run through the theatre and announce the calls in the days before intercoms. During their conversation that Sunday, the actor noted that the sole purpose of the Princess Players seemed to have been for thrills, which they assuredly achieved. The actor found Any Night, "the most thrilling play," to be an offensive piece that did not belong in the theatre. The actor went on to warn the Theatre of Thrills:

Whether they were thrills of disgust and revulsion, or of anticipation, or of horror, or yet again of the daring theme [of the plays]... [the Princess Players] must aim for something of more enduring value than the mere artificial and superficial effectiveness if they are to win the favor of the public who supports them.

[A play such as Any Night] no matter how well done, has no more excuse for its existence on the stage than a painting of a garbage heap at an art exhibition.<sup>186</sup>

After one week of eight performances, the Princess Players closed in Philadelphia on 2 May 1914. As in the other cities on the tour, the Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills was commended for its abilities and at times praised for the material they presented, but in each case Any Night was condemned as pure sensationalism.

The Philadelphia engagement concluded the first part of



the Princess Players' tour and the company returned to New York. During the last weeks of May 1914, rumors surrounding the company surfaced in the media. Whether it was a plan to bolster their credibility or an actual invitation, it is difficult to determine, but press releases in the New York Telegraph and the New York Review announced an extension of the Theatre of Thrills' tour to include Europe. The papers reported that Holbrook Blinn and Emelie Polini, one of the better actresses in the company, had been invited by Max Maurey to appear at the Grand Guignol. Staying in Paris for one week, they would perform The Black Mask, and then move to the Colosseum in London to perform It Can Be Done. While it was reported that Blinn sailed to Europe aboard the Mauritania, saying that he "expected" to play the Grand Guignol, there is no evidence that these performances ever took place.<sup>187</sup>

At the same time the Dramatic Mirror ran an article announcing the total revamping or dismantling of the present Princess Players' organization. The article reported that the Princess Theatre was to be reorganized into a regular long run house producing full length plays.<sup>188</sup> Blinn, when asked if this were true, assured them that it was not. But he did tell them, that although the one-act policy of the theatre would remain intact, they would now produce one-acts "built along the happiness plan." There would still be some thrills, "but in the main next year's policy will be to

present plays of happiness.... We are firmly convinced that the American public doesn't want gloom, morbidity, or horror for its own sake."<sup>189</sup> It appeared that the company's policy had been weakening under the pressure that had been brought to bear by the press and elected officials.

Blinn's suggestion that the public was no longer interested in the sensational and often gruesome drama that had become the hallmark of the Princess Players, may have reflected the opinions of those in Chicago and Philadelphia, but not necessarily of all Americans. During August 1914, the Theatre of Thrills travelled to San Francisco where the company found praise and general acceptance. The reasons for the Theatre of Thrills' success in the Bay Area are difficult to determine. However, being a city, as some suggest, with a European flavor, as well as a bolder, rougher, and more open society as illustrated by its Barbary Coast and Tenderloin districts, it is possible that the people of San Francisco might have been more accepting of this style of theatre. It also might have been that Holbrook Blinn was coming home. Blinn, having been raised in San Francisco and having spent the early years of his career there, was now a recognized actor from New York City. His notoriety and celebrity as a local actor made good, may have helped to bring people to the theatre. However, the audiences may have been due to the advance publicity that proceeded the company's arrival.

The San Francisco Chronicle ran its first story about the Theatre of Thrills on 2 August 1914, a week prior to the company's 10 August 1914 opening at the Columbia Theatre. In that article, the paper traced the Theatre of Thrills' journey to California, reporting that Holbrook Blinn and his players were on the way, and telling of the three carloads of scenery and special effects that would soon arrive. They told of the high number of requests for seats already made and how this engagement promised to be the most sensational series of one-acts ever presented. After all, while other theatres around the country had closed, the Princess had paid dividends.<sup>190</sup>

Once there, the Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills performed their most controversial plays. The first program, although fairly mild, included Hari-Kari, En Deshabille, Fear, and The Bride, and was overwhelmingly received. Requests for tickets remained high, and the local press was very enthusiastic. Given what had occurred during the first week in August--World War I was declared, and the nation was in mourning for the wife of President Wilson--the reaction to the Princess Players from the press and the public may have been one of relief. The Princess Players offered the public something to distract them from overpowering problems. On the other hand, it may have finally been an honest response to what the Theatre of Thrills was trying to accomplish. Amy Leslie of the San Francisco Chronicle

wrote:

If last evening gave only faint assurance of the pleasure in store for those who attend the Princess Players, there will be not only prolonged delight in their presence, but ample reasons for endorsing Mr. Blinn's admirable discovery of a long felt want in drama. His players are eloquent and gifted... his little plays selected with the greatest sense of variation and compact entertainment... nothing could have been more fascinating than the whole evening passed with such artists.<sup>191</sup>

Reviews of this sort enticed audiences into the Columbia Theatre, causing the Theatre of Thrills to extend its stay to five weeks.

During the San Francisco engagement the Theatre of Thrills went through its entire repertory. The plays for the second week included The Neglected Lady, The Black Mask, Fancy Free, and The Fountain. Not only were the regular plays presented, but, also in the second week, Blinn announced that a new play would be added to the bill--War, by Rounceville.<sup>192</sup> Billed as a "thought play," War was an allegorical play that was said to have a salient and timely message.<sup>193</sup> Aside from this, there is no indication of why it was included. This unusual addition is mentioned only once, and, unfortunately, the plot has not survived. The production of this piece does point to a possible movement

away from the thrillers and more to meaningful, thought-provoking plays that reflect the times. This movement toward more socially conscious drama was something Holbrook Blinn had at one time hoped the Princess Players might do. Whatever the reason for its appearance, War played for one week and was withdrawn.

If there was any controversy over the Princess Players' stay in San Francisco, it occurred during the third week. The program assembled that week included not only Phipps and Food, but Ib and Little Christina and Any Night. To include Any Night, "the piece over which the East made so much ado and which created all sort of comment..., exactly as it shocked New York... and made Chicago gasp,"<sup>194</sup> on the same bill with Ib and Little Christina, caused Walter Anthony of the San Francisco Chronicle to question the reasoning of the producers of the Theatre of Thrills. But he noted that while Edward Ellis' play was nothing more than a "great show of vulgarity," Ib and Little Christina justified the time wasted on Any Night.<sup>195</sup>

The final two weeks at the Columbia Theatre were as well received as the first three, and the Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills had become "a firmly established success,"<sup>196</sup> "the fad and furor of San Francisco,"<sup>197</sup> and the darlings of the theatre and social sets. During the San Francisco engagement, the Theatre of Thrills played to capacity houses with only minor controversy. In the final

week that ended 12 September 1914, the Princess Players grossed over \$11,000.<sup>198</sup>

The California segment of the tour continued in Los Angeles where the Theatre of Thrills opened 14 September 1914. This Los Angeles engagement may have been an after thought for the producers of the Theatre of Thrills. During the San Francisco run, the weekly advertisement in the San Francisco Chronicle noted that the engagement at the Columbia Theatre would be the company's only California appearance.<sup>199</sup> But with the Players' success in San Francisco, the producers apparently decided to move on to Los Angeles for a two week engagement. As it turned out, the extension of the tour proved to be a mistake.

The Theatre of Thrills opened at the Mason Opera House in Los Angeles with Hari-Kari, En Deshabille, Fear, and The Bride. Variety noted that the producers of the Theatre of Thrills had expected to gross at least \$14,000 for the first week, but with a return of less than \$5,000, the Players were forced to close after one week on 19 September.<sup>200</sup> One reason for the Players' failure in Los Angeles was probably the lack of advance publicity. In the previous cities on the tour, the producers ran articles and press releases that advertised the Princess Players' arrival and thereby generated business. However, in Los Angeles, if the engagement was truly added to take advantage of San Francisco success, the producers were unable to capitalize on these methods.

Another reason for the poor showing of the Theatre of Thrills in Los Angeles, was a bad review in the Los Angeles Times. Harry Christeen Warnack, the critic for the Times, noted that the bill at the Mason Opera House consisted of "tragic filth..., filth in episodes..., filth under a microscope..., and filth humorized." Warnack commended the acting of the company, but went on to condemn Holbrook Blinn and the Players for their presentation of plays that were "violent..., pessimistic, exaggerated, and inexcusable," and recommended that the citizens of Los Angeles stay away from the Mason Opera House. Warnack continued:

Mr. Blinn should carry a tent in which he could give private views of his chamber of horrors. He could take his enemies there, among which henceforth count me [Warnack] the dearest. Such things [as the Theatre of Thrills] are no death blow to art. They merely wallow in their own mire. It is too bad the stench cannot also be confined to the few who create it.<sup>201</sup>

The poor publicity and the scathing review worked in tandem to keep people away from the theatre. Though the company ended its run for primarily financial reasons, Blinn took the opportunity to chide Warnack and the people of Los Angeles, and note that the "people [there were] unappreciative and [did] not know art when they [saw] it."<sup>202</sup>

The national tour of Princess Players' Theatre of

Thrills opened in Detroit on 16 March 1914 and finally closed in Los Angeles on 19 September 1914. During that time the Players performed a total of eleven weeks in six cities. Overall, the tour was successful. The programs presented were generally well received by the public and, except in Los Angeles, given good reviews. The acting ability of the company, especially of Holbrook Blinn, was unanimously praised. Any problems on the tour were a result of one play--Any Night. Without exception Ellis' play caused controversy. Even in San Francisco, where the Theatre of Thrills played to sold out houses and extended its engagement to five weeks, Any Night was seen by Walter Anthony of the Chronicle as a waste of time.

In spite of the minor problems caused by Any Night, however, and the Players' bad reception in Los Angeles, the Princess company achieved a greater goal. The Princess Players Theatre of Thrills introduced to the American people at large, a form of theatre that had been inaccessible to them until that time. As in New York prior to the establishment of the Players, most of the country had seen the one-act play as either a curtain raiser or a vaudeville sketch. Now, after the performances of the Theatre of Thrills, the one-act play could be considered an art form in its own right. With this tour the Theatre of Thrills showed the American public what was possible through the production of non-commercial and unusual one-act plays.



### Third Season, 1914 - 1915

Returning to New York "after having been treated indifferently in the Middle West, including Detroit, roasted alive in Chicago, and feted on the West Coast,"<sup>203</sup> as the Times reported, the Theatre of Thrills opened its fall season with the new policy, announced earlier that year, of happiness. The company was made up of several familiar names including Mestayer, Polini, Edgard, and Trevor, as well as a host of new players (see appendix 1). But, with the new bill of five one-act plays that opened on 17 October 1914, the reviewer for the New York Telegraph noted that "Blinn and company attain[ed] a consistent monotony in variety," and the audience "was comatose."<sup>204</sup> There was no pleasing the critics.

Included on the bill, that tended toward comedy, were Phipps, The Forest of Happy Dreams, The Cat and the Cherub, The Goal, and Little Face. Probably the most controversial piece on the program was Roland Oliver's Little Face, although not for its shock value.<sup>205</sup> Roland Oliver, a pseudonym for Henry White III (1869-1934), began writing as a newspaper man in Brooklyn, New York and later became the drama critic and editor-in-chief of the Sacramento Star. A satire set in the year 190,000 B.C., Little Face is a domes-

tic comedy that is a satire of sexual relationships during the prehistoric era. Set in the forests of Central Europe, the play is the story of Little Face and her search for a mate. During the action of the play the town gossips, Gabgab and Much-talk, are introduced. They tell Little Face, to get a man she must be aggressive; however, she must also be careful. For once she has a man, he will do nothing and she will be responsible not only for raising the children, but for the up-keep of the cave. All at once a sabretoothed tiger threatens the village and the inhabitants flee for their caves. Little Face is blocked out of her cave and escapes up a tree where she meets Short Leg, the town bachelor. She claims him as her mate, but Short Leg will have none of it. Rejected, Little Face decides to go off on her own to prove that she can survive by herself as she proclaims, "Little Face belongs to no man, but will take from all!" The reviewer for the New York Times compared Little Face with its commentary on the beginnings of the eternal problems of marriage--mothers-in-law, children, and adultery--to Mark Twain's Adam's Diary.<sup>206</sup> This cave-man comedy, complete with bear skins, allowed the actors to appear partially clad. In fact, the critic for the New York Herald suggested that "the bare legs and feet added authenticity," resulting in one of "the most daring and at the same time shockingly funny plays ever produced."<sup>207</sup> It is difficult to tell what the intent of this piece was--whether it was

meant purely for entertainment or as an attempt at social commentary. But from all reports, it seemed that the Theatre of Thrills had at last given into popular tastes and the public's preference for slick "girlie" comedy.

Stanley Houghton's Phipps is a commentary on class structure in England. As in Houghton's Fancy Free, the story is of a couple bound for divorce for ridiculous reasons. Lady Fanny is upset because Sir Gerald refuses to buy her a set of pearls that she covets. However, to obtain a divorce, she must claim cruelty. The couple agree to stage a fight in front of Phipps, their butler. During the quarrel, Phipps comes to Fanny's defense and knocks down Gerald. It is only then that Phipps learns that the fight has been for his benefit. As the situation is explained, the couple decides that it would be easier for Gerald to divorce Fanny--all she would need to do is leave with a lover. Phipps offers his services, claiming that he has loved her for some time. Fanny finds it wonderful that a man of Phipps' position could love her, and at this point Gerald jumps in offering to buy the pearls for her. The divorce is now off, but Phipps, having exposed himself as "a man," feels that he can no longer stay with the couple. As Phipps is leaving, Fanny turns to Gerald asking, "Why can't you be more like him?"<sup>208</sup>

Houghton's Phipps is a play about lost principles and is a biting look at the social classes in England. The

conniving pettiness of the upper class is compared with the humble and self-deprecating loyalty of the serving class. Through this comparison, Houghton points up the decadence of England's elite and the quiet nobility of the working man. As with Fancy Free, Phipps is a play of delicate language and situations that calls for a subtle, dry acting style, which the Princess Players, unfortunately, could not achieve. Houghton's play was called both an inconsiderable travesty and an immature, foolish fragment. While it was found amusing in spots, the primary achievement of the play went unnoticed.<sup>209</sup>

The Goal, by Henry Arthur Jones (1851-1929), was called by the author "a dramatic fragment," and by others an admirable little play.<sup>210</sup> Jones, the noted author of plays such as Saints and Sinners and The Liar, along with George Bernard Shaw, and Arthur Wing Pinero, had helped to develop the "theatre of ideas" in England, and was known for his naturalistic dialogue and the creation of dramatic tension. During the rehearsal period at the Princess Theatre Jones assisted Holbrook Blinn in the staging of his play.<sup>211</sup> The Goal is the story of Sir Stephen Famaris, a dying engineer, who has lead a rich, full life. This gruff, but loving man has accomplished a great deal during his lifetime, but one project remains uncompleted. It is Famaris' dream to create a system for trans-continental travel that would bring America and Britain to within four days travel. Before his

death, he wants to be certain that his son will carry the project through, but in order for this to happen, there must be a reconciliation of an old grievance between the two. Upon his son's arrival, the two men discuss their problems, and Famaris explains to his son Daniel why he acted as he did--he only wanted his son to excel. Daniel, knowing that these are his father's last few hours, apologizes, and as the two are at last going over the plans for the project, Famaris, caught up in a renewed excitement, dies.<sup>212</sup>

The Goal is a charming little play dealing with the reminiscences and reconciliations of old age. However, though the acting in the piece was praised and Holbrook Blinn was called superb, the critics thought that the play itself was lacking in substance. The critic for Theatre Magazine, for example, noted that The Goal, a play from the 1890s, while being an admirable work, was little more than declamation with a few characters thrown in.<sup>211</sup>

By far the most interesting play on the bill was The Forest of Happy Dreams by Edgar Wallace, the British playwright represented on the opening program of the Theatre of Thrills with The Switchboard. Wallace and Stanley Houghton were the only authors to be produced more than once by the Princess Players. Wallace's play is a non-realistic, almost expressionistic story of a man and his encounter with death. Called a dream play, The Forest of Happy Dreams moved away from both comedy and thriller and, following in the vein of

C.M.S. McClellan's The Fountain, produced by the Players during the 1913-1914 season, brought a mystical quality to the Princess Theatre through both the stylized settings and the use of lights to create the various moods of the piece. The man, Welbury, has come to the Ituri forest--a luxurious, tropical jungle--to get away from the "White man," society, and his past failures. Having contracted a serious disease, he is near death, and his servants have brought him to this place to die. There is an incessant beating of drums that tell of a sick man in the forest of happy thoughts--a forest of death for the natives because all diseases flourish there. However, Abiboo, a servant, reminds Welbury that "in this forest all bad thoughts turn to good and all sorrow turns to gladness." As the man becomes delirious from pain and fever, and tells of his tragic life before coming to the jungle, he is given an injection of morphine that sends him into a series of dreams. The stage darkens, and as the lights come up, Welbury is seen sitting on a stool. During this "dream," Wilbury is visited by various people from his former life. They enter and play out scenes of the way his life should have been. All his past problems are reconciled, and relationships that were ruined are put right. Again, the drums of death are heard, and as the lights change, Welbury is seen in bed. He has died during the night, and, as Abiboo notes, "in the dark hours--he was happy--walked in the forest of happy dreams." All is set

right because in the forest of happy thoughts, he has found peace and forgiveness.<sup>214</sup> Unfortunately, the Players' attempts at creating an expressionistic atmosphere and different moods through their scenic effects went unappreciated. The Times noted that the staging was not particularly ingenious and suggested that "a more discreet use of the theatre's lights would [have been] an improvement."<sup>215</sup>

The program was rounded out with The Cat and the Cherub by Chester Baily Fernald (1869-1938), a play in which Holbrook Blinn had appeared nearly twenty years earlier. Blinn and Fernald had first met as students at Stanford University. A former Washington correspondent for the San Francisco Chronicle, Fernald adapted The Cat and the Cherub in 1897 from his short story at Blinn's request. The play, set in San Francisco, is an "interesting study of life in Chinatown" that illustrates "all the suave cruelty, sneaking savagery, and impenetrating passivity of the yellowman." The Cat and the Cherub is a graphic story of revenge, involving murder and mistaken identities, and was found to be "colorful and at times richly amusing."<sup>216</sup>

The first bill of the 1914-1915 season was fairly well received primarily because of the absence of shocking plays. However, while the New York Times noted that the new bill at the Princess suggested "that the directors of this enterprise [had] finally abandoned their once vaunted ambition to send cold chills up and down the more susceptible spines,"



Scenes from The Cat and the Cherub and The Goal<sup>217</sup>



the reviewer went on to note that it was a "matter of considerable regret that in this Autumn program of the only playhouse in New York dedicated to the production of the shorter forms of dramatic works, there is not one really good example of the art of the one-act play."<sup>218</sup> Others also found the present state of affairs at the Theatre of Thrills to be declining. The critic for Theatre Magazine maintained that

The thriller did not hold a prominent place in the first new program at the Princess, but if some did not like the shockers of yesterday, there were not a few who looked upon the present season's first bill as a sad falling off in humor, pathos, and literary value from its predecessors.<sup>219</sup>

The stated policy of turning to American authors and to new plays seemed to have been overlooked. Not only were most of the plays written by English playwrights--Wallace, Houghton, and Jones--but two were old and previously produced. George Jean Nathan, writing in Smart Set magazine, found the first program of the 1914-1915 season at the Princess "so antiquated, so cheap, and so supremely bad," that he compared it with the Columbia Burlesque--a low-class vaudeville theatre. Noting further, that while the producers at the Princess promised the "best and newest of one-act dramas," they had contradicted themselves by producing Phipps, written in 1912, The Goal, written in 1898, and The Cat and the Cherub,

written in 1897.<sup>220</sup> It seemed that the Theatre of Thrills was no longer looking to produce plays that lay outside the realm of commercialism, that they had given up looking for plays that might have been risky or controversial. In doing so, perhaps they were attempting to increase their box office take--something in which all producers were interested.

During the Fall of 1914 the ever expanding influence of World War I and a severely depressed American economy were threatening Broadway. Articles began to appear predicting that the 1914-1915 theatrical season could be the worst in history.<sup>221</sup> The Dramatic Mirror reported that, in a desperate attempt to ward off disaster, managers were exceedingly active despite what they called the most unprofitable period in history. Many other producers were either closing their theatres or converting the legitimate theatres to film theatres, hoping that they could off-set the bad season.<sup>222</sup> Reflecting this poor economic climate, the management at the Princess Theatre decided to cut their loses after a run of less than three weeks, and close the first bill while they prepared the next program.<sup>223</sup>

On 24 November 1914, after a two week rehearsal period, the Theatre of Thrills reopened with what would be their final and, perhaps, most ambitious program. Just as the previous bill that fall had been condemned for its lack of quality, this final program was praised for the Princess

Players' ability to "nobly... rise above the fiasco of its first bill of the season."<sup>224</sup> In a move away from the thriller and toward plays of more substance, the Princess Players produced a bill that included The Denial, The Fog, Nettie, and Across the Border.

George Ade's Nettie was the lightest of the pieces. Ade (1866-1944), an American playwright and humorist, was known for his "fables in slang"--plays and stories written in the American idiom. His plays dealt with contemporary American life and include The County Chairman (1903), College Widow (1904), and Just Out of College (1905), as well as the books for several musical comedies.<sup>225</sup> Nettie revolves around a "modern situation." Three men, Donalson, Nichols, and Bates, have met by chance at the Palm Court of the Plaza Hotel. Each believes that he has a date with Nettie and has brought her an expensive gift. However, through the evening, the three men discover that each has been duped into thinking he was the only man in her life. In reality, they have all been tricked, and are being used by Nettie to support her ambitions as a "musician." As the play ends, a waiter appears and informs the men that "the lady" has arrived and Bates, Nettie's newest conquest, goes to meet her. Donelson and Nichols bring out the gifts that they have brought her, leave them on the table so she knows that both have been there, and exit as Donelson notes, "It will be such a surprise for her."<sup>226</sup>

The one piece that might be called a thriller was The Fog, the first, and only play by Frederick Truesdale (1873-1937), an American actor who, at the time, was appearing on Broadway in On Trial--the first play by Elmer Rice, who would later create The Adding Machine and Street Scene, for which he would win a Pulitzer. Called both very dramatic and promising, The Fog was the only play on the bill by a contemporary, working theatre professional. Although The Fog was found to be gruesome by some critics, others praised it as dramatic and true to life.<sup>227</sup> It is the story of a sailor who returns home unexpectedly, to find his young wife dressed for a ball and waiting for her lover. The sailor lies in wait, and as a man, dressed in evening clothes, approaches the house to find shelter from a very dense fog, he kills him thinking he is the lover. When he discovers that he has killed the wrong man, the sailor calls the police and disappears into the fog, leaving the woman and her lover to account for the dead man. Truesdale's play was said to be a "richly dramatic situation" and "nicely constructed," except for its tricky and somewhat abrupt end.<sup>228</sup>

J.B. Larric's The Denial took less than seven minutes to unfold. An American newspaperman turned playwright, Larric (1888-1941) wrote several plays during his career; however, The Denial was his first. It takes place on the morning of a young man's electrocution at Sing-Sing. Confronted by his mother, he convinces her that he is not her

son, only someone who looks like him. By doing so, he has spared her the disgrace of having raised a murderer. As he is led away, the whir of the electric motor is heard, and the curtain lowers. While the Dramatic Mirror found The Denial to be unconvincing, others found Larric's play to be very strong and genuinely moving, even if roughly written.<sup>229</sup>

The most challenging of the plays to be presented was Across the Border, by the American author Beulah Marie Dix. Dix (1876-1970), had written A Rose O' Plymouth Town (1902) and The Road to Yesterday (1906) prior to being produced at the Princess Theatre, but Across the Border was her most ambitious work. What might be best described as an anti-war play, Across the Border could be seen as part of a trend at the Princess. In the summer of 1914, the Players had presented War during their San Francisco engagement, a play that spoke to current situations and the tensions created by the outbreak of the World War in Europe. Again, during the first part of the 1914-1915 season, there was talk of replacing Phipps with Outcry, a play by H.K. Webster with what was called a war theme.<sup>230</sup> However, the records of the theatre do not show that this play was ever produced, nor are there any reviews. The point is, that whoever was making the artistic decisions, Blinn or the producers, there seemed to be a movement toward a more meaningful and relevant drama.

Across the Border, a play in four scenes, focuses on a young soldier, trapped with his unit in a hut, in the heat of battle in an unnamed war. During the first scene the audience goes through the soldier's brave posturing as he sets out to save his trapped regiment. He assures his comrades that he is not afraid of death and if caught will take the cyanide capsule he carries. As the first scene ends, there are gun shots--the soldier is assumed dead.

The next two scenes are "other-worldly," and the young soldier is guided through them by a mysterious, tall, dark man. The first takes the audience and the young soldier to a world without war: a land of eternal Spring. The people inhabiting this world do not know what war is or what guns are for. The young soldier tries to explain that war is waged by enlightened countries for the sake of humanity. He is then told that he has "crossed the border" into an ideal land, but he is not allowed to stay until he understands why war is wrong.

The third scene, eternal Winter, is the aftermath of war. Here the soldier remembers the atrocities he has committed. He is forced to see a burned village and the charred body of a child as his guide says, "All we ask is that a man should take a quiet look at what he's done."

In the final scene, the setting is the same as the second except for surgical equipment and wounded men. The young soldier, lying in a bed, tries to convince other

soldiers that war is wrong--but no one listens. At this point death enters in the form of a young girl that the soldier had met in the second scene. She has come to take him home; now that he understands the evil of war. As the body is being cleared, a surgeon admonishes an orderly to get the bed changed because "this is war."<sup>231</sup>

Across the Border was hailed all around as an impressive and worthy piece. Although one critic felt the play fell "short as drama," he praised Across the Border as "the most effective sermon against war that has ever been preached," and noted "one does not soon forget the awe-inspiring mysticism of the second episode."<sup>232</sup> Dix's play was called a protest against the horrors of war and the most ambitious and elaborate work that the Princess Players had presented to date. The New York Times praised the piece as a great "voice in the theatre raised against the monstrous horror and infamy of war."<sup>233</sup> The critic for the Dramatic Mirror went as far as to say that Across the Border with its message of peace was "so powerful in its appeal, that its presentation alone, justifies the existence of this playhouse."<sup>234</sup>

For many, with this final bill, the Princess Players had achieved success. Critics praised not only the acting, as they usually did, but the choice of plays. At last the producers had truly moved away from plays that were thrilling and at times gruesome for their own sake and moved

toward plays that had some substance. The New York Times commended the Players on their selection of plays and noted that "as written and performed, each is the development and embodiment of a dramatic idea. Each is entire, complete. Each is a real play."<sup>235</sup> Further more, the Times felt that this combination of plays would bring in a wider audience and went as far as to recommend that people not miss this bill. Having at times condemned the Theatre of Thrills for the content of the plays, the critic for the Times now wrote that, "there are no reasons why any theatre-goer should stay away from the Princess now, and there are several reasons why he would find a visit there well worth his while."<sup>236</sup>

Unfortunately, the praise from the legitimate press was too late in coming. Due to the generally poor economic climate and the bad business of the first bill of the season, the Princess Players Theatre of Thrills was forced to close after approximately eleven weeks. During the fall of 1914, the Players presented nine plays, none of which was found to be too sensational, with the final bill made up of all American plays. Prior to this bill, the management at the Princess apparently felt that the more sensational plays were necessary to make a profit, consequently they turned to foreign writers. However, this program represented the type of theatre that Holbrook Blinn had been attempting to achieve--one dedicated to the American playwright. Though the Princess Players had finally gained some respect from



the New York Times for moving away from the more sensational plays to plays with more social relevance and artistic content such as Across the Border and The Denial, the Theatre of Thrills was unable to attract sufficient audiences and overcome the apparent financial disaster of the first program of the 1914-1915 season. Although there are no financial records available for the Players' last season, given the financial situation of the New York theatre and the fact that many managers were closing their theatres to cut losses,<sup>237</sup> it is not surprising that the producers at the Princess Theatre followed suit.

There was some talk of mounting a tour of Across the Border to play Chicago and Boston, opening in the Toy Theatre there, but it did not develop. The company was disbanded by the second week in January 1915, and Holbrook Blinn was released from his contract. By January 18th, Blinn was back at work making his vaudeville debut in his own production of Nettie, at the Palace Theatre on Forty-ninth Street and Seventh Avenue in New York City.<sup>238</sup>

Over the period of twenty-two months, between March, 1913, and January, 1915, the Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills produced twenty-eight one-act plays and maintained a permanent resident acting company. They had accomplished these goals where other companies before them had failed. During this time the Players encountered both praise for their productions of plays such as Across the Border and

Fear, and harsh criticism for the sensational qualities of plays like Russia... and Any Night. Though the producers at the Princess Theatre adapted their policies to the pressures brought to bear by the authorities and the press, they were, ultimately, owing to the high cost of operation and the depressed economic situation of the New York theatre, forced to close. But, after surviving three seasons and producing nearly thirty plays, the Princess Players had realized their goal. The Theatre of Thrills had maintained a resident company of actors working in a repertory situation--something that had not been done in New York City in nearly three decades.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Legacy of the Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills

Though the Princess Players lasted only three theatrical seasons, they made a significant mark on the history of the American theatre. It is important that Holbrook Blinn and the producers at the Princess created a theatre that echoed the production style and techniques used by Antoine and Maurey at their theatres in Paris. It is also important that the policies enacted at the Theatre of Thrills--successfully working for three seasons as a resident stock company, performing in repertory, and being dedicated to the one-act play and showing the viability of that format--encouraged theatre artists such as Edward Goodman, Eugene O'Neill, Roi Cooper Megrue, and others, and may have spurred them to further creativity. While some policies of the Theatre of Thrills were more fully realized than others, the ideal of promoting a new American drama was just beginning to be fulfilled when the Theatre of Thrills ceased production. Still, in the end it was not due to any artistic failure that the Princess Players closed.

The first season of the Theatre of Thrills in the spring of 1913 must be called a success. Termed an experiment by Holbrook Blinn, the Princess Players proved that it

was possible for a permanent company to perform in repertory and develop an audience. Had it not been for an extremely high overhead, the Theatre of Thrills also might have been able to break even financially. Except during the Easter holidays, the Players attracted capacity crowds and appeared to have found a following for their style of theatre. Unfortunately, with the installment payments covering the cost of the building renovation as well as lease payments, the first season, overall, showed a loss.

But for a change of policy the Players might have succeeded in their second year. During their first season, however, the popularity of Fear and Any Night prompted the producers at the Princess Theatre to ignore the warnings of their critics who advised the management to look to American writers and not to produce plays merely for their sensational qualities. Rather than adhere to one of their primary policies, however--focusing on native playwrights--the producers at the Theatre of Thrills chose to do just the opposite for their second season. Holbrook Blinn had noted after the first season that the more "rugged" plays had attracted a greater audience. As a result, during the 1913-1914 season, the producers turned to the playwrights of the Grand Guignol and others who emulated that style. Although the choice to move to more sensational plays was purely economical and intended to increase revenue, this switch in policy created a controversy that followed the company

throughout its existence and was, in part, responsible for the theatre's falling off in business.

In spite of the fact that the Theatre of Thrills experienced a decline in attendance and showed a substantial loss for its second season, the Princess Players did make a contribution to the New York theatre with the introduction of the playwrights and plays of the Grand Guignol to the American public. Prior to 1913 the plays of Level, de Lorde, Chaine, Richards, and Maurey had not been produced in the United States. With the introduction of plays such as Russia . . ., A Kiss in the Dark, and A Pair of White Gloves, the American public became aware of a new and daring style of theatre. Unfortunately, the 1913-1914 season proved to be too sensational for the public at large and for local officials. Because of increasing concern over plays that were considered to be morally controversial and the growing fear of an imposed censorship by city authorities, the producers altered their policy.

The final season at the Theatre of Thrills showed the Players beginning to find new direction, one which suggested an original goal for the Theatre of Thrills. While the first bill of the 1914-1915 season played poorly and was withdrawn, the final bill of one-acts at the Princess was very well received. This program was comprised entirely of American plays, and it appeared that with the production of Across the Border, the Princess Players were heading in a

new, and perhaps more creative, direction. Had the Princess Players been able to weather the severe financial crisis that faced both the New York theatre and the country in general during the last months of 1914, and to take advantage of the renewed financial strength of the country when American business began to invest in the war effort in early 1915, they might have survived.

It is difficult to tell whether the Princess Players, without the thrillers that had originally attracted attention and audiences to the theatre, could have continued on an economically viable course. Though the final bill was critically well received, it is impossible to predict whether the Players could have survived without the "shockers" in a normal economy. While the producers had achieved one of their goals, the presenting of new, and at times non-commercial plays, they did so in a highly competitive and commercial marketplace. Without the more sensational plays, the producers might have continued to create an economic situation that would have been impossible to overcome. Ultimately, the contradiction the company had faced from the start, may have won out. Again, the remarks by Walter Prichard Eaton and the warnings issued by other critics after the first season were a telling prediction. At that time Eaton warned that for an organization like the Theatre of Thrills to survive, it must develop naturally outside the commercial realm. It would have to be an indigenously American

theatre, well subsidized--either privately or through subscription, and operate on a smaller more intimate scale. While the Princess Players had developed in a small theatre, they depended upon foreign writers for a large part of their repertory, with twelve of the twenty-six plays produced coming from Europe. They also existed solely on box-office receipts.

Organizationally, the Theatre of Thrills adhered to the policies that Holbrook Blinn and the producers at the Princess developed prior to the Spring 1913 season, and as a resident stock company, the Princess Players succeeded where others had failed. Where the New Theatre had co-opted their stock company by hiring in name performers and, in the case of The Bluebird, bringing in an entire replacement company, the Princess Players maintained a constant ensemble each year. Company members may have come and gone between seasons, but once an actor joined the company he or she stayed for the season. There was no "star policy" at the Princess Theatre. Holbrook Blinn, being director of the company, was often featured, but then so were other members of the Players--Edward Ellis, Willette Kershaw, Emelie Polini, Edward Mestayer. The company acted as an ensemble and were generally praised for their work.

The repertory system at the Princess Theatre functioned differently from the one usually employed in other theatres. Rather than rotate several different plays during each week,

the Princess Players would play one bill of four or five one-acts for several weeks and would change the complete program once or twice a season. By using this method, modeled after the European theatres, the Princess Players held to their policy of eliminating the long-run. The programs were changed regularly, no matter whether one play proved more popular than the others.

There were many benefits to the "Princess system." The Princess Theatre offered an actor a place to grow and develop by playing multiple roles, a training ground that had been lost with the disappearance of the old stock companies. The Theatre of Thrills also offered audiences an opportunity to see several different types of theatre during one evening. This repertory system and ensemble company at the Princess Theatre offered what the New York Times called "a seldom mentioned side product . . . , the real satisfaction an audience gets from seeing one player do several parts."

If there was one artistic area in which it might be said that the Princess Players were lacking, it was in the advancement of the American playwright and in the development of American drama. During the Players' existence, the Theatre of Thrills produced the plays of twenty-six authors, and while fourteen of these playwrights were American, only four plays were new or developed for the Princess Theatre. Most of the plays, both American and European, were either



by already well-established authors, or old plays written years before. For example, the French authors, represented by Max Maurey, André de Lorde, Maurice Level, and Pierre Chaine, had already achieved great success at the Grand Guignol. Other authors such as Henry Arthur Jones, Edgar Wallace, Stanley Houghton, and the Americans George Ade and C.M.S. McLellan, were also well known and their plays were familiar to American audiences. The point is, that many of the authors produced at the Princess Theatre were either already well established, no longer writing, or in Houghton's case, dead. While the Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills can be credited with introducing the works of many of these European authors to a wider audience in America, even if they did so in a sometimes unscrupulous manner that eventually led to their problems with the International Copyright Law, the producers at the Princess did not, at first, appear to be too concerned with American drama. It was not until near the end of the company's existence that the Players turned to newer American works that spoke to current situations.

It is not known how many plays were sent to the Princess Theatre for possible production. However, Holbrook Blinn encouraged many playwrights to submit their work, and the company received "a flood of manuscripts," both unsolicited and requested, from authors hoping to have their plays produced.<sup>2</sup> These scripts, as well as those acquired by

Brady and Shubert through play brokers in Europe, were read and either selected or rejected by Blinn--with the help of Archibald Selwyn during the first season, and F. Ray Comstock and Morris Gest during subsequent seasons.<sup>3</sup> Even with this meager number of plays, the idea of developing the American playwright might have succeeded had the Princess Players continued to produce and nurture the playwrights working at the Theatre of Thrills, such as Edward Goodman, Edward Ellis, Julian Johnson, and Roi Cooper Megrue. Unfortunately, cause and effect relationships are difficult to determine, but after the closing of the Theatre of Thrills, many of the American authors represented at the Princess moved away from the theatre and turned toward the more lucrative and challenging film industry.

The producers of the Theatre of Thrills, therefore, may have unwittingly helped the development of the film industry more than that of the theatre. Of the fourteen American writers at the Princess, six left the theatre to work in films. After a successful career writing and producing plays with David Belasco, William DeMille was summoned to Hollywood by his brother Cecil in 1914 and went on to become one of the founders of the Famous Players film company where he wrote many screenplays and directed several films. While there is no indication that he ever wrote for the professional stage again, DeMille continued to influence the American theatre through his teaching. Besides working at

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wrote or translated nineteen plays during his career, and though most of his work was done prior to the Princess Players, he continued to write after their demise. Fernald wrote his last play, The Princess in the Cage, in 1933.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the most prolific of the Theatre of Thrills alumni, William Hurlburt continued to write for the theatre until 1937. Hurlburt wrote twenty-seven plays that included Lilies of the Field (1921), Timothy (1921), which he co-authored with David Belasco, and On the Stairs (1922), and was a significant contributor to the popular theatre of the 1920s and 1930s. Still, after his many successes on Broadway, even Hurlburt accepted the lure of Hollywood where he wrote several screenplays, the best known of which was Universal Studio's Imitation of Life.<sup>10</sup> Laurence Rising continued to write farces. None were well received, however, and after his last known work, His Bridal Night, produced in 1916, Rising seems to have disappeared entirely from the entertainment business.<sup>11</sup> Roland Oliver also continued to write and produced Night Hawk (1925), On Call (1928), Forbidden Roads (1928), and Kansas City Kitty (1929), while George Frederick Truesdale continued as an actor on Broadway in several leading roles, but wrote no other plays.<sup>12</sup> Even after the notorious success of Any Night, Edward Ellis wrote only one more play, The Last Chapter, which he co-authored with his sister, Edith Ellis in 1930, but there is no indication that it was ever pro-

duced in New York. After appearing in The Inside Story in 1932, Ellis turned to film acting. Featured in over eighteen motion pictures, and best known for his role in RKO's Remember in 1939, he never returned to the theatre.<sup>12</sup>

Although several of these playwrights had respectable careers, only Edward Goodman and Roi Cooper Megrue went on to positions that influenced the American theatre. Roy Cooper Megrue's career was, unfortunately, cut short by his death in 1927. Still, during the period that followed the Princess Players, Megrue wrote many plays, including his most successful work, co-authored with Walter Hackett, It Pays to Advertise (1914), as well as An Unlucky Star (1914), Tea For Three (1918), Where Poppies Bloom (1918), and his last, Honours Are Even in 1921. However, Megrue's greatest achievements in the American theatre after the Princess Players, occurred with the Dramatists Guild. As an important member, and a driving force behind the scenes, Megrue co-authored the Basic Minimum Agreement between authors and theatrical managers that was adopted in 1926 and continues in effect today. Thus, Roi Cooper Megrue can be credited not only with helping to shape the Broadway stage through his playwriting in a rather minor fashion, but through his work to further the protection of the rights of the playwright.<sup>13</sup>

After working with the Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills, Edward Goodman entered the American Academy of

Dramatic Arts in 1915 and later that year, with Philip Moeller and Lawrence Langner, drafted the manifesto to found the Washington Square Players. Throughout his career Goodman wrote several more plays. Both Saviors, and Eugenically Speaking, called a naughty piece of impudence, were produced by the Washington Square Players in 1915 and were well received. He also wrote Mommar (1921) with Theresa Helburn, which was never produced in New York, and Other Lives (1921). Though Goodman wrote only a handful of plays after the Theatre of Thrills, he went on to make his mark in the American theatre as a director and teacher. Directing over seventy productions for the Washington Square Players and, later, the Theatre Guild, he was responsible for Rosmersholm, The American Tragedy, and No Questions Asked, among others, and during the Great Depression of the Thirties, became the director of the Popular Price Theatre, an arm of the Federal Theatre Project. Throughout his active career in the theatre, Goodman also found time to teach. Shortly after the founding of the Washington Square Players, he returned to the American Academy of Dramatic Arts where he taught acting and directing until he retired in 1953.<sup>14</sup>

Ironically, Eugene O'Neill was one of the rejected playwrights who submitted his work to the Princess Theatre in hopes of having it produced. During 1914, O'Neill submitted both The Web and Recklessness, a play he would later characterize as "an extremely lousy one-act thriller."

During the summer of 1914 in a letter to Dr. David Russell Lyman, however, O'Neill wrote that he had submitted the two one-act plays and that he felt sure that they would "eventually be produced by Holbrook Blinn at the Princess Theatre, New York."<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, with the end of the Theatre of Thrills in January 1915, Recklessness and The Web went unproduced. Had the Princess Players survived a little longer, there is no telling how a possible association with O'Neill might have developed.

The legacy of the Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills, and the one feature in which the company truly did succeed, is that it brought the one-act play out of the realm of the curtain raiser and the vaudeville black-out sketch and established it as a viable art form. Prior to the Princess Players, except in a few rare cases such as the efforts of Arnold Daly and Frank Keenan, the one-act play had been used primarily as a curtain raiser or an after-piece. The Players elevated the one-act form, proving its worth as dramatic material. Their productions illustrated that the one-act play was not necessarily limited to the realm of sketches or black-outs as seen in vaudeville, but in fact, was a complete dramatic entity in a shorter format. Ultimately, this "introduction" of the one-act form to the public and the proof of its viability as an art form was a major influence in the development of the theatres that followed in 1915. By following the Princess Players' format, based on the free

theatres of Europe, the little theatres of New York were able to thrive and introduce many new American playwrights such as O'Neill, Susan Glaspell, and Edna St. Vincent Millay.

This championing of the one-act form, combined with the encouragement and opportunity that the Princess Players offered young people like Edward Goodman and Eugene O'Neill, may have helped to set the course for the American theatre. Within two years of the close of the Princess Players' Theatre of Thrills in early 1915, America would have a "new theatre" based on European models and, perhaps, the Princess Players. Although not direct off-shoots of the Theatre of Thrills, the productions by the Provincetown Players, the Washington Square Players, and the company at the Neighborhood Playhouse, may owe to the Princess Players some of their future for developing and successfully operating a theatre modeled on the free theatres of Europe. By showing that this type of non-commercial theatre could exist in New York, albeit not in the highly commercial atmosphere of Broadway, the Princess Players may have made it a little easier for those amateur theatre groups following them to develop.

In the fall of 1915, after the closing of the Theatre of Thrills, F. Ray Comstock retained the sub-lease from the Shuberts at the Princess Theatre and was joined by Elisabeth Marbury to produce a series of intimate musicals. These



small innovative productions, which became known as the "Princess Musicals," opened with Jerome Kern's Very Good Eddie, and included Oh, Boy!, Lady Be Good, and several others now looked upon as the first authentic American musicals. Following these two revolutionary periods at the Princess Theatre--the Theatre of Thrills and the Princess Musicals--the theatre had a checkered existence until its demolition due to a break-up of the Shubert empire.

During the Winter of 1920-1921, the Princess Theatre became, coincidentally, the first commercial home of the Provincetown Players with their productions of O'Neill's Emperor Jones and George Cram Cook's The Spring. Later in 1921, Brock Pemberton's production of Six Characters in Search of an Author premiered at the Princess, and in 1922 the theatre was the home of Maxwell Anderson's first New York production, The White Dessert. Several plays were produced in the following years, and in 1928 Lucille LaVerne, who had acquired the sub-lease on the theatre, renamed it after herself, and produced one season of plays. After several other name changes, the Princess was renamed the Rio in 1930 and turned into a film theatre. Late in 1937 the Princess Theatre was reclaimed for theatrical productions by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union for their production of Pins and Needles, which played at the "Labor Stage" for 1108 performances. As the Labor Stage, the Princess Theatre also served as the union's

meeting hall and recreation center.<sup>16</sup>

After three editions of the I.L.G.W.U.'s production, the Princess Theatre was again turned over to films. Renamed, yet again, the Cinema Verde, the theatre operated as a film theatre until its final closing. In 1955, the Shuberts, who had retained the primary lease throughout, were forced by the Sherman Anti-Trust Act to divest themselves of several of their theatres, and the Princess Theatre was razed.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

## Plays and Their Cast Lists

Spring Season, 1913

Opening Night - 14 March 1913

## The Company

Holbrook Blinn   Edward Ellis   Willette Kershaw  
 Georgia O'Ramey   Fanny Hartz   Frances Larrimore  
 Harrison Ford   Vaughn Trevor   John Stokes   Bennett Musson  
 (Purnell Pratt later replaced Harrison Ford)

The Switchboard by Edgar Wallace

The Operator.....Georgia O' Ramey  
 Voices on the Wires.....The Company

Fear by H.R. Lenormand & Jean d'Auguzan

Beverly.....Holbrook Blinn

Skipton.....Edward Ellis  
 Bruff.....John Stokes  
 Holkar.....Vaughn Trevor  
 Chanda.....Harrison Ford  
 Courier.....Bennet Musson

Fancy Free by Stanley Houghton

Fancy.....Willette Kershaw  
 Delia.....Fanny Hartz  
 Ethelbert.....Holbrook Blinn  
 Alfred.....Vaughn Trevor

Any Night by Edward Ellis

A Policeman.....Holbrook Blinn  
 A Street Walker.....Willette Kershaw  
 A Young Man.....Harrison Ford  
 A Young Girl.....Frances Larrimore  
 A Hotel Clerk.....Vaughn Trevor  
 An Old Man.....Edward Ellis  
 A Fireman.....John Stokes

(Added to the bill 14 April 1913)

Food by William C. DeMille

Basil, a New Yorker.....Edward Ellis  
 Irene, His Wife.....Fanny Hartz  
 Harold, An Officer of the Food Trust.....John Stokes

Fall Season, 1913

The Company

Holbrook Blinn   Edward Ellis   Lewis Edgard   Wayne Arey

Emilie Polini   Charles Mather   William O'Neill

Vaughn Trevor   Willette Kershaw   Dallas Tyler

(Replacements and additions during the season:

Harry Mestayer, Vera Finlay, Blanche Roland, Ruth Benson,  
 Langdon Gillet, Marion Lindsey, May Buckley)

The first bill of this season, scheduled for 26 September 1913, never opened. It was performed once at a dress rehearsal, and no cast lists are available.

The Eternal Mystery by George Jean Nathan

The Black Mask by F. Tennyson Jesse & H.M. Harwood

The Bride by William Hurlburt

En Deshabille by Edward Goodman

Russia by Gaston Charles Richard

Opening Night - 9 October 1913

Felice by M. Hernaiz Becerra

|                            |                    |
|----------------------------|--------------------|
| Armand Fresnoy.....        | Edward Ellis       |
| Jules Fresnoy.....         | Lewis Edgard       |
| Felice.....                | Emelie Polini      |
| Commissaire of Police..... | Wayne Arey         |
| Renaud.....                | Charles Mather     |
| Gilbert.....               | William J. O'Neill |
| Jacques.....               | Vaughn Trevor      |

The Bride by William Hurlburt

Maurice d'Aubiac.....Edward Ellis  
 Clarice d'Aubic.....Emelie Polini  
 Raoul Dufreyne.....Lewis Edgard  
 Andre Despart.....Vaughn Trevor  
 Alphonse d'Arville.....Holbrook Blinn  
 Gendarme.....Charles Mather

A Pair of White Gloves by André de Lorde & Pierre Chaine

Sonia.....Willette Kershaw  
 General Gregoff.....Holbrook Blinn  
 Alice.....Dallas Tyler  
 Maitre d'Hotel.....Vaughn Trevor  
 Waiter.....Lewis Edgard

En Deshabille by Edward Goodman

Gregory.....Holbrook Blinn  
 Claire.....Willette Kershaw

The Black Mask by F. Tennyson Jesse & H.M. Harwood



James Glasson.....Holbrook Blinn  
 Willie Strick.....Holbrook Blinn  
 Vashti Glasson.....Emilie Polini

(A Pair of White Gloves and Felice were withdrawn and Fear  
 was added to the bill 14 November 1913)

(Added to the bill on 5 December 1913)

Russia - In the Pouchinskaia by Gaston Charles Richard

Wassili Pavlovitch, a Priest.....Harry Mestayer  
 Feodora Sergaovitch, Captain of the Guard..... Wayne Arey  
 Sephann Wlasimirovitch, soldier.....Charles Mather  
 Ivan Ossipovitch, soldier.....William J. O'Neill  
 Wassia, Manager of Les Belles Poulet.....Vaughn Trevor  
 Xenia Grigoro Vivana.....Dallas Tyler  
 Adovita LaRouge.....Emelie Polini  
 Marouissa.....Vera Finlay  
 Tatiana.....Dallas Tyler  
 Lea.....Blanche Roland  
 Mme Bischoff..... Ruth Benson

Hari - Kari by Julian Johnson

John Bancroft.....Vaughn Trevor  
 Madeline, his daughter.....Emelie Polini  
 Ito Natsume.....Harry Mestayer

(Added to the bill 25 December 1913 playing matinees only  
 during the holiday season)

Ib and Little Christina by Basil Hood

Ib's Father.....Harry Mestayer  
 Little Ib.....Master Lanaham  
 Old Henrick.....Vaughn Trevor  
 Little Christina.....Joyce Fair  
 A Wanderer.....Emelie Polini  
 Ib.....Holbrook Blinn  
 Christina.....Miss Ives  
 John.....William J. O'Neill

Opening Night - 31 January 1913

The Neglected Lady by Max Maurey

|                   |                |
|-------------------|----------------|
| The Husband.....  | Harry Mestayer |
| The Wife.....     | Emelie Polini  |
| The Janitor.....  | Charles Mather |
| The Landlord..... | Lewis Edgard   |

The Hard Man by Campbell MacCulloch

|                      |                    |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| General Allison..... | Holbrook Blinn     |
| Captain Baye.....    | Langdon Gillet     |
| The Prisoner.....    | William J. O'Neill |
| Fred DeLessops.....  | Vaughn Trevor      |
| Tom Bennett.....     | Lewis Edgard       |
| "Young" Darrow.....  | Harry Mestayer     |
| Sergeant Brown.....  | Charles Mather     |

The Kiss in the Dark by Maurice Level

|                  |                |
|------------------|----------------|
| The Man.....     | Harry Mestayer |
| The Brother..... | Lewis Edgard   |
| The Doctor.....  | Vaughn Trevor  |
| The Lawyer.....  | Langdon Gillet |
| The Nurse.....   | Marion Lindsey |
| The Girl.....    | May Buckley    |

The Fountain by C.M.S. McLellan

Godinard.....Holbrook Blinn  
 Moche.....Vaughn Trevor  
 The Figure on the Fountain.....Emelie Polini

It Can Be Done by Lawrence Rising

A Man.....Holbrook Blinn  
 A Woman.....May Buckley  
 A Pullman Conductor.....William O'Neill

Fall Season, 1914

## The Company

Holbrook Blinn   Jean Murdoch   Vaughn Trevor   Harry Mestayer  
 Lewis Edgard   A.G. Andrews   Mitchell Lewis   Emilie Polini  
 Ruth Benson   W.H. Gilmore   Gladys Hill   Marie Hassell

(Replacements and additions during the season:

Benjamin Kauser, Walter Kingsford, Geoffrey Stein,

Marion Holcomb, Forrest Macomber, Cushing Donnell,  
David Powell, Emily Carrol, Mitchell Gilmore)

Opening Night - 17 October 1914

Phipps by Stanley Houghton

Sir Gerald.....Vaughn Trevor  
Lady Fanny.....Jean Murdoch  
Phipps.....Holbrook Blinn

The Forest of Happy Dreams by Edgar Wallace

The Man.....Harry Mestayer  
The Commissioner.....Vaughn Trevor  
The Jockey.....Lewis Edgard  
The Financier.....A.G. Andrews  
The Headsman.....Mitchell Lewis  
The Woman.....Jean Murdoch

The Cat and the Cherub by Chester Bailey Fernald

Wing Shee.....Holbrook Blinn  
 Chim Fang.....Vaughn Trevor  
 Hoo King.....Mitchell Lewis  
 Wing Sun Luey.....Harry Mestayer  
 Ah Yoi.....Emelie Polini  
 Hwah Kwee.....Ruth Benson  
 Hoo Chee.....Master Kauffman

The Goal by Henry Arthur Jones

Sir Stephen Famariss.....Holbrook Blinn  
 Daniel Famariss.....Lewis Edgard  
 Sir Lydden Crane.....A.G. Andrews  
 Adams.....W.H. Gilmore  
 Peggie Lovel.....Gladys Hill  
 Nurse Clandon.....Marie Hassell

Little Face by Roland Oliver

Scar Cheek.....Harry Mestayer  
 Yellow Tooth.....Marie Hassell  
 Short Leg.....Lewis Edgard  
 Pink Weed.....Jean Murdoch  
 Gab Gab.....Ruth Benson

Much Talk.....Gladys Hill  
 Little Face.....Emelie Polini  
 Click Knee.....Vaughn Trevor  
 Loose Lip.....W.H. Gilmore  
 Round Arm.....Mitchell Lewis

Opening Night - 24 November 1914

The Denial by J.B. Larric

McLaughry.....Benjamin Kauser  
 Stevens.....Mitchell Gilmore  
 Meigs.....Walter Kingsford  
 Burke.....Geoffrey C. Stein  
 Mrs. Burke.....Marion Holcombe

The Fog by Frederick Truesdell

Andrew McTavish.....Holbrook Blinn  
 Kate McTavish.....Emelie Polini  
 William Baggs.....Lewis Edgard  
 Mr. Leigh.....Vaughn Trevor

Nettie by George Ade

Billy Donelson.....Vaughn Trevor  
 Freddie Nichols.....Lewis Edgard  
 Jimmy Bates.....Holbrook Blinn  
 A Waiter.....Mitchell Gilmore  
 A Messenger.....Forrest Macomber

Across the Border by Buellah Marie Dix

Senior Lieutenant.....Vaughn Trevor  
 Corporal.....Walter Kingsford  
 Boy Trooper.....Lewis Edgard  
 First Trooper.....Cushing Donnell  
 Second Trooper.....Benjamin Kauser  
 Junior Lieutenant.....David Powell  
 The Master of the House.....Holbrook Blinn  
 The Old Woman.....Emily Carroll  
 The Little Boy.....Master Carroll  
 The Girl.....Jean Murdoch  
 The Dark Man.....Benjamin Kauser  
 The Woman With the Baby.....Emelie Polini  
 The Man Who Prays.....Benjamin Kauser  
 The Man Who Curses.....Lewis Edgard  
 The Surgeon.....Walter Kingsford



The Orderly.....Mitchell Gilmore

## APPENDIX B

This is the original version of Russia... published in 1913 and performed only once at the dress rehearsal, and then withdrawn. As perhaps the most controversial play performed at the Princess Theatre, it is included here to illustrate the intensity and power that some of the pieces presented offered to unsuspecting audiences in 1914. Also included, are any additions or changes that the producers made to the text in order to soften the play's impact during its later presentation. These alterations will be noted in brackets-- [ ]--immediately following the original line. Russia... is reprinted with the permission of the Billy Rose Theatre Collection at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts.

Russia--In the Pouchinskaia

Gaston Charles Richard

Place: St. Petersburg, in a quarter of the city under surveillance during the revolution of January, 1905.

Scene: The scene represents the parlor of the "Les Belle

Poulets," a disorderly house. It is [not] too luxurious but loud. The furniture old and soiled, but still shows traces of over ornateness. At back is a side table covered with bottles. There is an old piano upstage and an icon over a door.

Discovered: Maroussia and Tatiana are seated on a divan dozing. Avdotia La Rouge is sprawled out in an arm chair smoking a cigarette. Lea is seated at a table sewing buttons on a man's vest. Xenia, seated before another table is reading a large book with red edges. Wassia Le Noir seated before the desk beating time to a phonograph record which is playing a Russian air, perhaps the overture from Tschaikowsky's 1812. Sound of the door bell in distance.

Wassia

(Surly voice)

Its not worth while trying to amuse you girls. You're all half asleep.

Avdotia

Perhaps you're not very amusing and anyhow what do you want us to do...

Wassia

Show a little life...

Tatiana

When there's nobody around...

Lea

(Yawning)

Ah la la I hope there will be customers tonight.

(Tatiana and Maroussia laugh)

Wassia

Small chance... the revolution turns men's thoughts from  
love to war.

Maroussia

It's just as well.

(Voice of Madame off-stage)

Wassia

It's the old woman. Here, you children! Wake up...

Madame

(Out of breath)

No one here... I expected it. Everyone's afraid to go out.

Ah me! Poor girls... poor me...

Avdotia

You were foolish to go out yourself.

Lea

Yes, on a day like this.

Madame

Well, nothing has happened to me anyhow.

Maroussia

They might have killed you!

Wassia

Are things just as bad out there, little mother?

Madame

No! Yesterday's lesson taught them something. And today, over a hundred were killed in front of the Winter Palace... Their bodies are still there.

Avdotia

You didn't see all that yourself?

Madame

Yes... They were charged by the cavalry... you know the ones... all in black with helmets of...

Wassia

I know... The Leuchtenburg carbines... I was a dragoon once... I know them... the Leuchtenburgers--they are devils!

Madame

(Laughing)

You should have seen it. The crowd had to run... they were surrounded... they raised their arms...

(raises her hands)

"We are innocent... we are innocent... we have no arms."

But the soldiers cut them down just the same. The snow was red with blood!

Maroussia

The cowards... the poor workmen...

Madame

(Vehemently)

Yes, by St. Nicholas! It's horrible to see things like that...

(Shrugging her shoulders)

Still... These dirty revolutionists... why pity them... I detest them. They haven't a penny. They're beggars... no

good to me or you... If I could smother them all against my breast, I'd do it... I promise you.

Avdotia

(Looking at the Madame)

There would be plenty of room there! My dear! I couldn't do it as well!

Wassia

(Pinching her)

Shut up!

(Avdotia utters a cry)

Avdotia

(Furious, rubbing her arm)

You pig! You black pig with your yellow eyes.

Madame

Stop that Avdotia. Until tomorrow, children. If any customers come be nice and treat them nice. I'm going to bed.

(Pause)

Days like these use you up.

(She sees Xenia who has her elbows on the table. Xenia has been looking at her steadily and not saying a word)

Still deep in your book?

Xenia

What better could I do?

Madame

(Tossing her head)

The longer you live the more you change. You're interested in nothing now, except to sit and stare. You're in luck to be here at Les Belle Poulets. How different you used to be when you were at the Polonaise... you had a way with you there.

Xenia

At the Polonaise... that was a long time ago...

Madame

Well... if any clients come, drop your book and try to make yourself agreeable. You can, you know.

(Extends her hand)

Good night, little pigeon.

Xenia

Good night, mother...

(Taking her hand)

Madame

Good night, all of you.



All

Good evening, Madame. Good night, pigeon. Until tomorrow, mother.

Wassia

(To madame)

Shall I take you home?

Madame

What do think could happen to me going just next door...

Good Night, Wassia. [and mind no students here tonight. We have also been under a police cloud since last night.]

(Half aside)

Cheer the girls up a bit... [Xenia especially or she'll be having one of her religious fits again.]

Wassia

(At the door)

Good night... Sleep well. Good night dear Vera Bichoff.

(She exits and he closes the door and comes down.)

Now pretty chickens, get busy, sing, shout, do something. It's too stupid as it is... [show a little life you silly girls.]

(Shakes Avdotia as she crosses)

And you, Avdotia, don't be so cross... and you, Xenia, don't be so sad... remember as the French say, you are filles de

joie.

Lea

The French are fools... but I like their music.

(Lea goes to the piano. A few notes of some lively French tune are heard. One or two of the girls hum the song, but Xenia takes up her book. And then there is a noise loud as a cannon [bells and shots]--then Lea stops playing.

Tatiana

Good Heavens! They've begun again.

Lea

Listen... Listen...

(A church bell begins to ring--the sound becoming louder.)

It's an alarm.

Maroussia

It gets on my nerves.

Wassia

Oh shut up!

Maroussia

I'm frightened, I tell you, I'm frightened.

(She begins to cry.)

Avdotia

Don't be a fool... those bells... the cannon... the firing.... They've been going on for a couple of days and we're not dead yet. Don't shake like that, you idiot.

(The firing of the cannon is heard again.)

Maroussia

Oh, that cannon... and those bells, are they never going to stop?

(Another boom of cannon is heard.)

Tatiana

Listen... they're beginning again.

Wassia

Oh, go on with your song.

Lea

There's music enough [out] there.

Avdotia

(Thoughtfully)

People are being killed in the streets... Half the soldiers are drunk... they're murdering even women and children. Do

you think anyone is going to try to have a good time when blood and wine are flowing through St. Petersburg together?

Xenia

(Raising her head and speaking in a slow, low voice--as if in a dream.)

Long ago at the Feast of Balthazar, blood and wine flowed at the same time, and that must stop. Times like these are Revolutionary and those days have passed.

Wassia

(Turning quickly)

On the other hand, you stupid harlot, with the eyes of a cow, don't you know the soldiers have their pockets full of money and you are afraid too... you're all safe... they'll want love. [drink and love.]

Tatiana

(Disgusted)

It's a great world... drunken soldiers... for us.

Lea

(Sententiously)

Drunken soldiers are generous... If they don't kill everybody to begin with--they are very nice to the ladies...

(Pause)

Avdotia

I don't care to be made love to by a... murderer.

Lea

What's the difference?

Maroussia

(Between her teeth--low)

You devil--I believe you could sit on your mother's coffin,  
you wretch! [dance at a funeral.]

[Bells and Shots]

Lea

What's that?

Maroussia

Never mind...

(Bells ring and the sound of guns is heard again.)

Avdotia

Come Maroussia, there's no use in getting angry. I'll buy  
you and Lea a drink...

Lea

(With good nature)

Yes, days like these do upset one. I remember at Kitchineff, I was there when they killed five thousand Jews. It was too bad, wasn't it?

Wassia

What'll you have?

Avdotia

(To the two women)

Vodka?

(They nod)

Give us some vodka, Wassia.

(To Lea)

Did you see those five thousand dead men?

Lea

Yes, I did. A ditch was dug behind the graveyard of St. Basile. They were piled, one on top of the other, like logs... and... bags of quick lime were poured over them.

Maroussia

Five thousand corpses!

(She shivers and hides her face)

Xenia

(In a low tone)

Their blood cries to heaven... for they have never been avenged.

Maroussia

(With a nervous laugh)

Xenia is off again.

Tatiana

Did you read that in your book, Xenia?

Xenia

(Seriously)

Yes, Tatiana.

Avdotia

Come, have a glass, Xenia... my treat.

Xenia

[No] Give Wassia the money for me.

Avdotia

No, no, come drink with us. Come on, be a good fellow.

(Xenia obeys and rises. They drink. Lea and Maroussia take up theirs, Xenia swallows hers at one gulp, then goes and sits down. Avdotia follows.)

Avdotia

You've been reading that book for so long you ought to know it by heart.

Xenia

Yes, but I forget whole parts, and then when I read them over again I feel as if I had found things that I loved and had forgotten for years and years.

Lea

Whatever gave you the idea of reading like that?

Xenia

I found this book in the room at the Polonaise where I was with Vera Bichoff. One day I was bored to death. I had no money to get anything to drink. I picked it up and read it. That day... I shall never forget it... it was marked for me with a white stone.

Avdotia

(Taking the book, reads aloud.)

Let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone.

(She turns several pages.)

"Come unto me, all ye who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest."

(She puts the book down on the table sadly.)



Yes, in those days perhaps, things happened like that... but now there is nothing except when you want to forget, the easiest thing to do... is to drink.

Xenia

Yes, that's what I used to say. I was only happy when I was drunk, but now the bread that I eat tastes like ashes and the wine that I drink is more bitter than the vinegar of Calvary.

(She drops her head in her hands and is overcome.)

Wassia

(With anger.)

Vinegar... Calvary... What's all this anyway? I suppose there's nothing good to eat here. No good wine, eh?

(Firing of cannon is heard again.)

Lea

Heavens, there it is again! Just listen. We must bar the door. If a shot struck this place, we would all be killed.

Wassia

Do you think closing the door would stop a cannon ball... But come, let's have some fun. Avdotia, give us the bear dance. I'll take my accordion, and we'll have the Kanstchek... Come, Avdotia, eh! Hoop-la! Hoop-la! Stamp,

Lea! Hoop-la!

(Avdotia, with her hands at the height of her shoulders, imitates a bear. Lea plays, Maroussia marks time. At the end of the song, Wassili enters.)

Maroussia

(With a stifled scream.)

Wassia! Wassia! The man... There!

(Wassia and the girls turn and perceive Wassili Pavlovitch standing in his blue priest clothes, a cross of enamelled copper hanging by a chain upon his breast. His forehead is lacerated, he is bleeding and from his pierced hands the blood is streaming. He is fair with long hair, curling beard in two points. Exhausted, he leans his back on the jamb of the door.)

Avdotia

(With a shout of laughter.)

It's a priest! Come in, my little father.

Tatiana

(With an air of provocation.)

Do you want to buy us a drink, my dear?

Maroussia

Are you looking for a lady, my blue pigeon?

Avdotia

Come in, come in. We won't hurt you.

Tatiana

He won't talk to us... (To Avdotia) He doesn't like ladies.

(To the priest)

How do you do, my dear?

Lea

(To Wassia in a low voice.)

Wassia, look.

Wassia

(In a low voice.)

What?

Lea

He is covered with blood... his robe is torn... he must be one of those Revolutionary priests.

Wassia

What! Great St. Michael! What does he want here?

(To Wassili)

Hey little father, what do you want with us?

Maroussia

(To Tatiana)

He frightens me... look at him.

Tatiana

Frightens you? Heavens, he doesn't seem very dangerous.

(To Wassili)

Speak to us, my dear. You see, you are frightening the other girls.

Wassili

No, don't be frightened. I am nothing but a miserable fugitive. Just now I was with the workmen at the Port-au-Bois. My companions are massacred... the men disarmed, old men, women, children... the Leuchentenbergers shot them. I... managed to save myself... in the name of the suffering Christ, have pity on me!

(Raising his bloody hands)

Look! I am wounded...

Wassia

(Brutally)

We can't do anything for you. Go! Besides, we don't receive priests in this house.

Wassili

My brother, in mercy don't send me away. If the soldiers find me it is the end.

Wassia

Don't call me your brother... Go! And go quick!

(To the girls)

He'll get blood all over the carpet.

Wassili

I implore you... in the name of the Saviour... I can't go. I am too weak to walk any further... I fell there at the door. I have no more strength. It has gone from me with my blood.

(To the girls)

Have pity on me. Hide me.

Wassia

No, we can't do it. The police, the soldiers, everyone comes here... Don't you know where you are?

Wassili

No...

(Avdotia and Maroussia laugh)

Wassia

You are at a house where those who seek love find it. It is

in the Pouchinskaia, near the Nicholas station. so now you can find your way--and find it quick too. You could find your way again if you were lost... And now get out and be quick about it. Or I'll drive you out with my whip.

Wassili

(Looking at the girls)

Poor children, poor children.

Wassia

Get out.

Wassili

A glass of water.

Wassia

(His hand on the priest's shoulder)

Nothing at all--now get out.

Avdotia

(Pulling his coat, behind him)

Hush! One does not refuse a glass of water to a wounded man.

(To the priest)

Wait there, little father, I will give you a drink.

(she hurries to the table)

Wassia

You be still or I'll beat you.

(Priest faints)

Avdotia

Hold him, you all. Can't you see that he is falling?

(Coming back with water)

There--drink little father.

(Wassia takes her by the shoulder, pushes her off and throws the glass down)

You dirty coward.

Maroussia

To treat a priest like that will bring us no luck, Wassia.

Wassia

Oh you too, would defend him--you'll both pay me for this, my little chickens--my pretty little chickens.

Lea

It does bring bad luck to treat anyone like that, much less a priest.

Wassili

(With an effort)

Poor women... may God help you for you have tried to be

merciful.

(He turns toward the door, then falls on his knees)

I can't... I can't see anything... My eyes are growing dim.

I am going to die here.

(He crosses himself several times)

Xenia

(Rushing to him and lifting him up)

You have no shame, but will you not have pity?

[Xenia]

[Have mercy, have pity, help him, help him. It is the Master.]

[Avdotia]

[No it is only a priest I tell you. She has gone quite mad.]

Wassia

(Also rushing to the priest, with a kind of real despair)

No... listen... [Have mercy] don't die here! That would ruin us. Come...

Tatiana

Try little father. Try ten steps more and you will be out in the street.



Wassili

I... can't get up.

Wassia

(His voice coming pantingly)

Wait... I'm going to help you... It wasn't my fault that I sent you away, it was because of these women. If you were found here, it would bring on a massacre. You don't know the soldiers as I do. Come lean on me... don't be afraid. I am strong. There now, you are standing up. I'll hold you. You can hide yourself very well in those piles of wood near the station. Its only a few yards from here.

[Replaced with: I'll help you... if the soldiers find you here they'll kill us all. Come lean on me, don't be afraid. There now, you can hide yourself in those piles of wood near the station. It's only a few yards from here.]

Wassili

(Staggering)

Yes, help me... I can't see the door. I will go... yes. Oh my God... I can't see anything... I...

(He faints)

Wassia

Damn it, he has fainted. What am I going to do now?

Lea

(Heartlessly)

Throw him outside on the pavement. That's the easiest way to get rid of him.

Wassia

Is it, eh... and have it said that we robbed him and then half killed him? You're a fool. No, the best thing now is to hide him somewhere.

(Whistle is heard)

What's that?

(Whistle again)

Maroussia

We're done for. It's the police.

Wassia

The Police! Quick! Help me! Help me, do you hear? Where shall we hide him? Where shall we hide him... tell me quick... think...think...

Xenia

Wassia, in my room. At the foot of the bed there is a big chest. You can hide him perfectly under the dresses. I'll go to bed as if I were sick.

Wassia

Yes, that's a good idea. Come quick, you all, help me carry him out. Maroussia, stay here. Wipe up the blood from the carpet.

(They carry out the priest. Maroussia wipes up the blood.  
Lea re-enters)

Maroussia

Lea, quick, give me some water.

Lea

Have you got the blood out?

Wassia

Make haste, you daughters of the devil.

(There is a loud knocking noise at the door--made by swords and the butt ends of muskets)

Ivan

(Roughly)

Open the door!

Wassia

(At the door)

Go on your way, this house is not open tonight.

(To Lea)

Lea, have you finished?

Lea

Yes, yes... Nobody'd notice anything now.

Ivan

Open the door in the name of His Majesty, the Czar.

Wassia

In the name of His Majesty! Oh, certainly at once, at once.

(He raises the peephole in the door)

I'll have to go and get my keys. Just a minute your Excellencies.

(To Maroussia)

Maroussia... the sponge, the sponge... get rid of it quick.

(Back at the door)

There. The door is open. Enter your Excellencies.

(The door is violently thrown back, which gives entrance to three officers, with drawn swords, revolvers in their hands, followed by armed soldiers)

Maroussia

(Crying with fright)

Ah, save me!

(The first officer is Feodor Sergueievich, the other two are Ivan Ossipovitch and Stepan Wladimirovitch)

Feodor

(Sword in hand with furious air)

Be alert! Throw up your hands.

(To Wassia)

Are you the head of the establishment?

(To the soldiers)

Search quickly.

Wassia

I am the manager, my Lord.

(Silence during the search)

Stepan

They are not armed, my Captain. [There is only one man, Captain. He is not armed.]

Feodor

We are looking for a priest, a rebel... have you seen him?

Come, answer. Answer, all of you. Put down your hands now.

Avdotia

(With a gay laugh)

But my brave captain, priests never come here.

Feodor

(After looking at the girl)

Stepan, Ivan Ossipovitch, each take two men and search the house... everywhere.

(At the door)

Hey there! Search the courtyard.

(He re-enters, stepan and Ivan exit with the men)

Lea

(In a low tone to Wassia)

Look here, Wassia, denounce him--that priest.

Wassia

Shut up, you. You got us into this trouble.

(He crosses himself)

Feodor

Silence, you two!

(He goes to the staircase and calls)

Men, fire on anyone who tries to escape. Now, move if you like, you scum. [I'll wager this house reeks with revolution.]

(He puts his sword under his arm)

You, move if you dare. If the priest is found here, so much the worse for you.

(He examines the girls, one after the other, goes to the counter, pours out a glass of cognac and drinks it, then throws aside the glass and addresses Wassia)

You have not seen the Priest? You swear it?

Wassia

Yes, your Excellency. [No one at all has been here to-night.]

Feodor

If you are lying... [Who is this, come here..]

(To Avdotia)

And you, you pretty little girl with your beautiful black eyes...

Avdotia

Oh no, my fine officer, what would we be doing with a priest?

Feodor

You little rascal--you are charming.

(To Lea)

And you, you tall one, have you seen...

Lea

(In a stifled voice)

No, I have not seen him!

Feodor

(To Tatiana and Maroussia)

Nor you others?

Tatiana

No one at all has been here tonight.

Maroussia

The house was shut. We were just going to bed.

Avdotia

And since you have kept us from our sleep, you ought to buy us some champagne.

Feodor

(Quickly)

And then?

Avdotia

(Cajolingly)

And then? What ever you choose.

(The women laugh, Feodor strokes Avdotia's cheek with half a smile, but at this moment Ivan Ossipovitch enters. He pushes Xenia in front of him, she wears a long dressing gown of brown frieze, dark, almost monkish, She stands awkward and silent before the soldiers)



Ivan

(With military salute)

I found only this woman, your Highness. She was in bed.  
She said she was sick.

Feodor

You saw no trace of the priest?

Ivan

No, your Excellency.

Stepan

(Re-entering)

He must have gone on further. [There was no one in the  
courtyard but a crazy musician, I knocked him down.]

Feodor

(To Xenia)

You, girl, come here. You say that you are sick.

Xenia

A little fever.

Feodor

Give me your hand.

(She holds out her hand to him)

Damp and cold! You're lying...

Xenia

(Plaintively)

No I'm not. Please, mayn't I go back to bed?

Stepan

(Pleasantly)

Oh, do we bore you?

Xenia

No, no, I am not bored, but I am cold. Let me go, please.

(She passes her hands over her face with a distracted air.)

Feodor

(To Ivan and Stepan)

You have searched thoroughly, everywhere?

Stepan

Yes, Captain.

Ivan

I opened all the doors, looked behind all the hangings,  
under the furniture--nothing, Captain.

Foedor

It's a pity he's escaped us...

[cut begins]

Stepan

Bah! Don't think any more about that damned priest.

Ivan

He certainly will be damned, in spite of his Christlike face.[cut ends] And you gave him a good stroke with your sword, your Highness.

Feodor

I did... and...

(Savagely)

He will not go far, my Stepan. It was with his scull he warded off the blow.

Xenia

(Wildly)

He had the face of Jesus [a saint]. Ah! Ah! Ah!

(She bursts into a strident laugh)

You shall not kill him, you Herod!

Feodor

(Furious)

Don't laugh like that, you fool.

Avdotia

(Half a whisper)

Xenia, be silent--for the love of God.

Xenia

You know Herod--he was handsome too... and you are handsome.

[cut begins] But he did not kill the little Jesus

Christ.[cut ends] And you shall not kill him either. You shall not kill him, because he cannot die...

Feodor

(Brusquely, seizing Xenia by the wrists)

What are you talking about?

Wassia

Your Excellencies, don't pay any attention to what she says.

(To Feodor)

She is a little mad.

Xenia

(To Wassia)

No, no, I am not mad. It is the truth! I saw him, I...

[cut begins] I know him... he came down among men with his forehead bleeding and his hands pierced. [cut ends] Go brandish your arms, lift your sword...

(In ecstasy)

He has come back [cut] to redeem, to judge and to punish.  
He is there. He knew me and my heart leapt for joy at his  
pallid smile.

Avdotia

(In a low tone)

Xenia! Xenia! Hush! [Its only a phase.]

Wassia

(Humbly)

Come, Xenia, you weary their Excellencies!

Feodor

Be quiet all of you, let her speak.

Xenia

(Pointing to the door)

But our sufferings are at an end. Yes... yes, it is he, it  
is the Master. He is there.

(She laughs wildly)

Feodor

Stepan, Ivan, each of you take two men and search this  
woman's room. What she says may not be madness. Go!

(The two officers exit. Feodor turns toward Lea and Wassia)

You drunken wretches! You lied! You lied! He's upstairs,

isn't he?

Lea

(Trembling)

Yes, your Lordship. Wassia and I wanted to denounce him. But the others were not willing. It's the truth, I swear it's the truth.

Wassia

Your Excellency! We were afraid to have a scandal with the police, if they found a wounded priest here. So we hid him. If we had known, we would have given him up at once.

Feodor

(Eying Wassia from head to foot, knocks on the table)

If you'd known! I'll make you pay for this...

(Cries and groans are heard outside. A moment afterwards enter Wassili Pavlovitch dragged on roughly by the two soldiers and followed by officers)

[It's such cabarets as this that give us all our troubles!]

Stepan

[I've found him Captain.] He was hid under some dresses in a chest in her room.

(Striking him)

Rebel!

Feodor

Ha, ha! You're not crying out "Long live the Martyr" little father?

(Striking him)

Take that.

Xenia

(Throwing her on Wassili)

It is thou, it is thou, sweet master!

Feodor

(Pushing her away)

You fool. This is only Wassili Pavlovitch.

(To Wassili)

That is your name, isn't it?

Wassili

Yes, I am Wassili Pavlovitch.

Feodor

(Angrily)

And you try to play Christ with these hysterical women of the night... by the living God, we'll make a real Christ of you.

(To the soldiers)

Seize him, nail him up against the wall... his arms stretched out--like an owl.

(Sneers and turns toward the women)

An owl in your chest--it will bring you good luck.

Avdotia

(Springing towards Feodor)

Ah no, not that.

Feodor

(Pushing her off)

Quiet! Or I'll have them rip up your body, with their boots.

(To the soldiers who hesitate)

Come, you men, obey, nail him against the wall, his hands outstretched.

Stepan

Nail him with what, your Excellency?

Feodor

With your knives.

Stepan

(Threatening the women with his pistol)

Back there, you. Way back. The first one who moves I'll



fire on...

(The women move left except Xenia who remains right, in an ecstasy. The soldiers throw themselves on Wassili and transfix him to the wall with their knives)

Wassili

(With a cry of suffering)

Oh my God! Oh my God! May the Lord forgive you.

Avdotia

Cowards! Cowards! You're a pack of cowards.

Maroussia

Avdotia, hush, hush!

Lea

He'll have us all killed.

Avdotia

Yes, cowards. And you wear uniforms... you were not so brave when you faced the Japanese. You wretches.

Wassia

(Striking her)

Shut up, you.

Feodor

Is it finished?

Soldiers

Yes, your Excellency.

Xenia

(Seeing Wassili nailed to the door. White and livid)

It is He and you know him not.

Wassili

(Dying)

Poor women, poor brothers. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost... I bless you... God.... accept my spirit.

Xenia

Fools, you have shed the divine blood.

Ivan

I've had enough of you.

(Raises his revolver, points it at Xenia and fires. She falls at Wassili's feet)

Xenia

They have killed me... Master I am coming...

(Falls back)

Avdotia

You must be proud of yourselves... And you call yourselves men.

Feodor

Oh, it's you, eh? The beauty of the black eyes, who wanted to drink with us a while ago. Well, you shall drink... and drink to the Emperor's health.

(To Wassia)

Give them some brandy.

Wassia

Immediately, with pleasure. Most high Excellency. Help me, Lea.

(Lea sets the glasses on the table as he gives them to her. He pours out the drinks)

Feodor

Come, take your glasses, raise them and shout "Hurrah" three times.

The Girls

(All together but feebly)

Hurrah! Hurrah!

Feodor

Louder, louder! Shout it, come, Hurrah!

Avdotia

No I shall not drink and I shall not cry "Hurrah."

Feodor

(Threatening)

Oh, you don't want to drink now, don't you?

Avdotia

No, no, no, no.

[Insert

Feodor

if you won't drink to the Emperor's health, at least you shall give us a kiss.

Avdotia

No, no.

Feodor

Oh, you won't kiss us either, eh?]

Avdotia

(Unnerved by tears)

How can you torture poor girls like us and a wounded half dead priest...

Feodor

(Ferociously)

Ah, we torture you, do we? But not for long. We'll put you out of your misery... there beside your friend... you'll be with your owl nailed to the door, with your Wassili Pavlovitch.

(Goes to the door and calls)

Ten men there, in front of the window.

Wassia

Your Excellency... What are you going to do, your Excellency!

Feodor

(To the officers)

Seize that fellow to begin with and shoot him outside.

Wassia

(Horribly frightened)

But I've done nothing, nothing... Your Excellency, pity.

Your Excellence, I was a Dragoon once... One of the Leuchtenberg dragoons... I've done nothing...

(They drag him off)

Feodor

(Commanding)

Hurry... Present arms!

Maroussia

They're going to kill us, help! Help! Help!

Tatiana

Mercy! Mercy! I'm afraid, I don't want to die... I' only twenty...

Lea

(Shaking her fist at the priest)

It's your fault, you wretch of a priest! You needn't have come here. My brave Captain, take care. I am not a Russian, I am a German.

Feodor

Take aim.

Avdotia

(Bounding in front of the guns)

I dare you all, you cowards... You swine...

Feodor

Fire!

(The soldiers fire, the girls roll over dead)

Wassili

God forgive them. God forgive me!

CURTAIN

## APPENDIX C

Excerpts from a letter written to Lee Shubert from William Brady during the Summer of 1913 signed "Mike," regarding the 1913-1914 season and the possible reorganization of the company. Reprinted with the permission of the Shubert Archive.

My Dear Lee:

You will be back in New York a week or over by the time this reaches you and I drop you these few lines to let you know my opinion of what happened in your absence....

Comstock will tell you about the Princess and its managers. The only request I make is that Nathan's play The Eternal Mystery be included in the next bill. There was a very clever play by Bernard Shaw called Over-ruled, a comedy, delightful, published in Hearts magazine. I have been investigating it and he wants \$250 for it. I have offered \$150 but will go \$250 if I can't get otherwise. If they don't want it at the Princess I will take it for my wife. I also advised taking Rudyard Kipling's one act play now in London I hear, for \$250 but Selwyn cannot see it. I arranged with Geo. Ade while at French Lick [Indiana] to write



a one act play. I have bought two French grand Guignol plays that have been the best ones remembered in the past at that theatre and I have The Daughters of Joy that they tried to get for themselves. These I hold for the Princess when they want them, but as Selwyn has entirely different ideas, I am perfectly willing to let he and Blinn arranged the next bill, including Nathan's play if you agree. I have read all the plays that they propose, one of them, The Supper is fairly good. The rest I do not like.

While in London I will buy a one act play for the Princess by Alfred Sutro to use when they need it. I will have to pay him \$500 down for it. It is a delightful comedy that could not fail. I believe that Shaw, Kipling, Sutro, Ade, Nathan, look better than Jones, Brown, and Robinson. This is all up to you and Comstock. I will be back by July 20th or earlier so if you care to you can reserve decision until then. I advise not opening the Princess until middle of September, if it closes meantime....

I hope you won't mind my frankness. This is the third day out and my mind is clear and I purposely delayed writing you until it was.... Comstock will tell you that I think Selwyn and Blinn have their heads together to pull the Princess scheme over to the Eltinge. I can handle Blinn if it becomes necessary, but if you find him disloyal my advice

is let him go. He is not indispensable. Loyalty and gratitude at the Princess is a necessary quality for the Director.

While I am in London cable me anything you want done. I will try and go to Paris for a week but I see little use in it. I hope you are well. Queen Lil sends regards. I have Alice [Brady] and Bill [William Brady, Jr.] with me.

Sincerely,

## APPENDIX D

Holbrook Blinn's contract with the Managing Producers Company. Signed 20 August 1913. Used with the permission of the Shubert Archive, New York City.

F. RAY COMSTOCK  
PRINCESS THEATRE  
20TH STREET, WEST  
NEW YORK

Aug. 20, 1913.

Mr. Holbrook Blinn,  
New York City.

Dear Sir:-

We hereby engage your exclusive services as an actor and performer and to take complete charge of the stage of any and all productions that we produce or cause to be produced or presented at the Princess Theatre in the City of New York during the theatrical seasons of 1913-1914 and 1914-1915, the commencement and termination of each season shall be determined by ourselves. You are to perform in any and every capacity as directed by us as actor and stage manager and to pay strict attention to make-up as well as to properly rehearse all the members of the Company in the parts by them to be performed in the different plays which may be presented.

For your services when so rendered we agree to pay you Ten (10%) percent of the gross receipts for the play in which you appear or which you direct while playing at the Princess Theatre in the City of New York, but said Ten (10%) percent shall in no event be less than \$400. per week for each and every week in which you actually publicly appear and perform or wherein you have staged the said play during the aforesaid term at the Princess Theatre in the City of New York.

You agree to abide by all the rules and regulations of the theatre likewise to conform to all the reasonable rules and regulations of the management and will further agree to appear and perform at any and all performances that the management may require of you, both matinee and evening. You agree throughout the term hereof to appear publicly or otherwise for no person or persons whomsoever without the written consent of the management first had and obtained.

Your acceptance at the bottom hereof will constitute a valid agreement between us.

Very truly yours,

*Handwritten signatures:*  
Managing Producers Co.  
J. Lee  
William H. Brady  
Treas.

Gentlemen:-

I have read the foregoing agreement and the same embodies the understanding between us. I accept the same and agree during the said two seasons aforementioned to appear and perform solely and exclusively for you and for no person or persons whomsoever, and agree to take complete charge of the stage as the same is understood in the theatrical profession, likewise to rehearse all the members of the Company. During rehearsal I am to receive no pay for my services.

Yours truly,

*Handwritten signature:*  
Holbrook Blinn

*Handwritten note:*  
No matter what the play is produced

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| <u>Dramatic Mirror</u> (New York)    | March 1913 - January 1915    |
| <u>Le Figaro</u> (Paris)             | June 1914 - July 1914        |
| <u>London Times</u>                  | June 1914 - July 1914        |
| <u>Los Angeles Times</u>             | September 1914               |
| <u>New York Times</u>                | January 1912 - January 1915  |
| <u>Philadelphia Inquirer</u>         | April 1914 - May 1914        |
| <u>San Francisco Chronicle</u>       | August 1914 - September 1914 |
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