The Influence and Effect of 
German Expressionist Drama 
on Theatrical Practice in Britain and the United States 
between the Wars 
1910 - 1940

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Thesis submitted for the PhD. Degree

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The thesis will consider the impact of German expressionist theatre in Britain and America in the period 1910 to 1940, concentrating on developments in writing, design, criticism and theatrical organisation.

An introductory chapter will provide a resumé of the major trends in European and American theatre in the period, leading to an examination of the detailed aspects of German Expressionism to be pursued in the following chapters. This will be followed by the two major sections of the thesis, dealing with the British and American theatrical scene respectively. The former will concentrate on the growth of the provincial theatre and its response to Expressionism, and on examples of the specialised interest in the style in some British theatres. The latter will concentrate on the genesis of the American literary theatre in groups such as the Washington Square Players, the Provincetown Players and the Theatre Guild, and will also concentrate on the extent to which an expressionist influence in stage design ran alongside the absorption of literary techniques.

This will be followed by a consideration of the influence of Expressionism in the sphere of political theatre, through an examination mainly of the work of two groups, the American New Playwrights Theatre and the British Group Theatre.

Generally the thesis will present an analysis of primary sources from the period, and will largely limit itself to a consideration of the effects of Expressionism within the stated countries and period, rather than extending to a consideration of developments after the Second World War or outside Britain and America.
In the evening she proposed that the three of them should visit the Pit Theatre, in Stench Street, Seven Dials, to see a new play by Brandt Slurb called 'Man- allalive-O!', a Neo-Expressionist attempt to give dramatic form to the mental reactions of a man employed as a waiter in a restaurant who dreams that he is the double of another man who is employed as a steward on a liner, and who, on awakening and realizing that he is still a waiter employed in a restaurant and not a steward employed on a liner, goes mad and shoots his reflection in a mirror and dies. It had seventeen scenes and only one character. A pest-house, a laundry, a lavatory, a court of law, a room in a lepers' settlement, and the middle of Piccadilly Circus were included in the scenes.

'Why,' asked Julia, 'do you want to see a play like that?'

'I don't, but I think it would be so good for Elfine, so that she will know what to avoid when she is married.'

But Julia thought it would be a much better idea if they went to see Mr Dan Langham in 'On Your Toes!' at the New Hippodrome, so they went there instead and had a nice time instead of a nasty one.

Stella Gibbons, Cold Comfort Farm (1932)
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I: INTRODUCTION

Of the many movements seen and identified in Western art in the twentieth century, German Expressionism stands out as the most extreme example of a cultural response to an extraordinary social and political environment, a paradigm of the connections between the creative process and its historical setting. Stylistically it has exerted a continuous influence since its first manifestations in the few years leading up to the First World War, both as an obvious and identifiable example of subjectivity and modernism, but also as a reference point for others who, while not directly involved in or inspired by the movement, nevertheless regard it as a yardstick against which less markedly experimental efforts may be measured. In Germany the whole expressionist movement, in painting, poetry, drama, cinema, music and other branches grew directly out of the involvement of the artists in a combination of social and cultural circumstances, all to a greater or lesser extent connected with the factors that precipitated the War and which prevailed in its aftermath. The crucible into which was thrown the volatile combination of a generation of young artists alienated from a seemingly directionless and cynically materialistic society, inspired and informed by the prophetic voices of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, galvanised by a period of intense and unavoidable change, produced new forms, new styles, and an approach to art that was seen by many as the first aggressively modern movement - a response to the violence of contemporary life without dwelling in the comfort of tradition and humanist syntheses of experience.

In its pure form, Expressionism existed perhaps only as a Germanic phenomenon, for without the roots that brought about the style such a concentrated burst of innovation in the same direction was impossible. Yet there was a definite response to the movement all through Western art in countries where different attitudes prevailed. In the theatre, perhaps the most visible and best-known branch of the movement, an awareness of the developments in Germany
spread quickly throughout Europe and the United States, and even before the outbreak of the First World War it was impossible for artists in that field not to define their work to some extent in terms of its relationship, positive or negative, to Expressionism. There was considerable direct influence in the areas of literary and visual style, and some of the basic techniques of Expressionism were absorbed into foreign idioms, particularly in the visual media where the style was most recognisable; yet in tracing the effect of Expressionism on the theatre and in assessing its long-term legacy it becomes apparent that the most lasting effects are the least tangible, being in the realm of ideas of, and attitudes towards, the artistic process and the conception of the relationship between an artistic expression and the society/audience for which it is created. In these areas there occurred a process of re-evaluation which, in some cases, led to a reformation of theatrical practices; in other cases it caused only a mild flutter of self-examination before being absorbed into an unchanging surface of commercial complacency. The variety of response is to some extent explicable by a consideration of the extent to which any culture 'needed' the impetus offered by the example of German Expressionism; in its original environment the movement grew out of a profound need to express the feelings of conflict, hope and fear that prevailed in that historical setting; elsewhere different facets of the style were developed or adopted according to particular conditions that coincided with the awareness of the style. In America, for instance, the theatre lacked a tradition of serious native drama, and had so far made no first-hand response to the rapid changes in its environment; also it was without a foundation of artistic techniques upon which to build a serious modern theatre. Thus the literary and design techniques that characterised Expressionism were rapidly assimilated into American theatre, providing a springboard to a more genuinely native style in the thirties. In Britain almost the opposite was true: the theatre was conservative and resistant to change, hidebound by an awareness of tradition and past glories which made any wide acceptance of modernist (and particularly Germanic) theatre unlikely;
here it was the debate aroused about the relationship between art and commerce, between theatre-as-entertainment and theatre-as-expression, that had the most lasting effect in the formation of alternatives to the theatre establishment which bore fruit in the growth of provincial theatres and a new-found tradition of 'social conscience' drama.

Approaching the modern theatre with the intention of reviewing a period or a trend immediately raises a problem of limitations and of defining the area to be considered. Among other things the enormous overlap between groups, artists and 'tendencies' makes the singling-out and identification of significant work problematical or even arbitrary; the relationship between primary material and tangential material is complicated, especially when regarding theatre in its social/cultural aspect, rather than solely as an aesthetic phenomenon capable of being discussed along purely self-referential lines. Here, the attempt to trace the influence and effect of one artistic tendency may seem in danger of leading inevitably to an evaluation of the period that is misleading and necessarily inaccurate. However, the apparent problems of undertaking such an approach suggest also a method of dealing with the daunting volume and breadth of material that provides a useful (if necessarily simplistic) framework for analysis and critical evaluation of the work of the period. By following one thread in the tangled skein of twentieth century theatre one is enabled to formulate at least a preliminary critical approach that is not based on purely aesthetic or literary grounds. I am not concerned with formulating or identifying an expressionist aesthetic, or with commenting in detail on the extent to which that artistic phenomenon contributes to a discussion of modernism in the theatre; of prime concern here is the complex process whereby theatre artists arrive at their material, informed by their knowledge of the work of others, inspired by ideas they have received from other cultures and other spheres, and limited by their relationship with the box-office. In the period 1910 to 1940, Expressionism provided many artists both in the United Kingdom and the United States with either a starting-point or a reference
point, and any theatrical product of that period, even if seemingly worlds apart from the fervour and extremity of German Expressionism can be usefully discussed in terms primarily concerned with its relationship to the movement. The West End theatres of London, for example, even though they did occasionally house expressionist productions, provide many examples of work which was regarded as being specifically and deliberately not expressionistic, work which eschewed most of the methods and beliefs espoused by those who openly embraced the influence. Thus not only does a consideration of the role of Expressionism in the development of British and American theatre reveal a good example of the process of influence in the culture of these countries, but also provides a set of criteria, a 'handle', for the broader evaluation of methods and intents in the theatre of the period.

Considering the contribution made by Expressionism to twentieth century theatre also requires some careful examination of aims and methods. While it is true that in neither Britain nor America did any considerable body of expressionist drama emerge - what did was remarkable chiefly for its isolation from the dramatic norm - it is still important to remember that the theatre of both cultures was decisively shaped by its reactions to the movement. Attitudes were formed and defined in response to this artistic extreme; the factor that decided between the artistic left and right was most commonly the extent to which the serious theatre was seen to be developed along expressionist lines. For every critic who bemoaned the morbidities and earnestness of the Germanic style, there was another who was crying out for the new theatre that would do for Britain or America what the expressionist theatre had done for Germany. The most-heeded commentators of the period evolved a critical vocabulary out of these two schools of thought; many new artists (and audiences) were brought into the theatre thanks to a renewed wave of interest in the form generated by the advances of the German theatre, just as their immediate forebears had defined themselves in terms of the realist approach and its Scandinavian exponents. Where the later
influence differs in effect most noticeably from its predecessor is in its coinciding with a climactic period in history: while Realism had undoubtedly been generated in part by enormous changes in the way people lived or perceived their lives, Expressionism was seen far more as being involved with the immediate sweep of history, generated by the forces that had brought about the universally-felt trauma of the Great War and proceeding from that turning point to proclaim loudly the advent of a new world and a new morality that turned with passion against the traditions of the old. For artists it was a direct challenge; the artist who was not for Expressionism was seen as being against it, refusing to see his society in terms of the new seriousness that the style dictated. Against the perception of Expressionism as the last word in serious theatre was a persistent tendency to regard the style as ridiculous, an attitude that concentrated especially on the image of the tortured, humourless German artist who could not see how foolish his bizarre creations were to those of us fortunate to live outside the sick society which had spawned such work and to possess faculties of criticism which would not be fooled by such bluster. As well as being risible, the style laid itself open to accusations of being too serious, too boring or too difficult to gain any real acceptance in the more balanced climate of Britain or America. Certainly the extremes of the movement are easy to reject, and, like any serious attempt to translate into artistic form a new, difficult conception of experience, it tends towards self-indulgence or obscurantism with predictable frequency. However, the desire to make mock of Expressionism can be explained quite convincingly by the inability or unwillingness of its audiences outside Germany to comprehend or accept a style that so relentlessly held up a serious and by no means pleasant or reassuring interpretation of contemporary issues. The War played a large part in this; for the victors any expression of a serious, critical nature from the defeated was bound to receive a rough passage. The reasons for which many critics, commentators and artists embraced or rejected Expressionism were often only tenuously linked
to a genuine consideration of its artistic possibilities; it became a focal point for the definition of the role of the theatre at a time when that role was being forced to change more rapidly than some could keep up with.

Among the many questions raised by a consideration of the influence of Expressionism in the period, those that were perhaps most debated and least resolved centred on the relationship of the theatre to its audience, and beyond that to the political, cultural and social development in which it was set and which it could perhaps influence. Generally it is true of Britain and America in this period that the association between art and politics was regarded only with the utmost suspicion and circumspection; the feeling that it was unsuitable or even dangerous to bring an overt political content into the theatre was adhered to in some quarters at least until the involvement became almost unavoidable in the thirties; still a deep suspicion remained of theatre with a 'bias' or a message, of theatre that sought openly to be didactic in its effects. In Britain the conscious alignment of the theatre with a political purpose remains an area of unease and confused debate, despite the emergence of some openly left wing theatre groups in the thirties and subsequently. In the States the connection seemed to be more easily accepted, as responses to the political and social environment after the Crash in 1929 came thick and fast; yet even these groups were to some extent absorbed into a system which, in its commercial direction and fear of offending, stuck to a code of self-censorship not too far removed from the laughable Hays office code on the movies. The absorption of the left wing theatre into Hollywood was remarkably rapid, although of course not universal, but it will be seen below how many of the young Turks of the workers' theatre had their theatrical careers circumscribed by a 'defection' to Hollywood, where sentimental Realism was the nearest approach to political art to reach the vast cinema-going public.

Of more immediate importance to many of the producers and writers of the time than the relationship between the theatre and its socio-political environment was the suggesti-
on implicit in expressionist drama that the theatre should address itself specifically to the notion of contributing to art, rather than functioning as a business proposition in which the most important criterion whereby any production would be judged was its effectiveness in providing for an audience a type of entertainment that it would be happy to pay for. Challenged by the idea that the theatre was essentially an art form with access to critical criteria as demanding as those applied to painting or poetry, some producers sought to create something that would stand up in the light of an artistic critique; others responded by formulating more thoroughly an idea of the theatre as the place primarily of populist entertainment where 'academic' standards of artistic criticism had no place. Expressionism forced this issue more than Realism, for in the development of Realism there lay an avenue of exploration that did little to challenge the accepted theatrical practices of the day; the result of the merging of realist approaches with old-style models of dramaturgy were the enormously popular 'plays with a bite', problem plays and realistic comedies that provided much of the theatrical fare of the period. Less compromise with the requirements of commercial theatre could be made in the case of Expressionism: again the 'for or against' choice was faced by the theatre managements. The question of what can or should be attempted in the popular theatre was given a new dimension by Expressionism, for it could not be dismissed as a coterie style in the way that Russian Futurism was by its populist critics; it was well known that the expressionist plays had been seen throughout Germany in huge accessible auditoria, and that they had been accepted and discussed as a legitimate part of the German theatre. The suspicion or hope was inevitable that if this worked for Germany, why not in England or America? All knew, of course, that the Germans took their theatre far more seriously than did other peoples, and that after the War more experimentation was possible in Germany thanks to considerable municipal funding of the theatres, but there still remained the example of a serious popular theatre making recognisable advances in artistic and technical fields
which left the other countries far behind, wondering whether or not they could or should attempt anything along comparable lines. The question of whether or not to see the theatre as a public art form, and the allied (and more pressing) question of whether or not it should receive municipal funding or rely solely on the income from box-office, became issues upon which prominent artists in the field were forced to take a stand. In stimulating debate alone, the influence of Expressionism was great; combined with its introduction of stylistic devices, new ideas and the results of an exploration of the field between performance and audience, it can be seen as marking a crisis point in the achievement and self-perception of Western theatre.

II: THE DRAMA OF GERMAN EXPRESSIONISM

In contemporary German thinking I find a concentrated barbaric force of undeniable power, but also seeds of madness: a delirious pride and a sick will, for all its heroic jerkings. Nietzsche dominates even those who fight him. It is a terribly dangerous ocean for the present-day German soul.  

Romain Rolland

Before embarking on a consideration of the responses to expressionist drama in Britain and America, it is necessary to identify some of the main trends within the movement and to recapitulate some of the history and background to its emergence and development. Some of the authors and productions noted below were well known to observers of the movement in Britain and America, while the work of others went almost unheard of; it is necessary to set a context for the evaluation of those products of Expressionism that did find an audience outside Germany. The establishment of the canon of expressionist drama seems to some extent to have been influenced by the degree of acceptance that the German work found in the English-speaking theatre, yet within Germany in the period of Expressionism's flourishing there were many whose work exerted a great influence and yet who remain untranslated/untranslatable. What follows is a resumé of the development of the dramatic movement and some retrospective analysis of its products; it does not aim to be a re-evaluation of the movement, but a prelude
To speak specifically of German expressionist drama, its genesis and its influence, presupposes the possibility of isolating a number of works and seeing them as a distinct literary/artistic phenomenon. The inadequacy of any literary 'ism' is a stumbling block in any such discussion, and in this case the intricate connection of the drama of the period with other artistic and philosophical developments, as well as the lack of much contemporary consciousness among the writers of belonging to a unified group, enlarges the problem. The literary and theatrical movement contains within it a large number of crosscurrents; however, there are grounds on which one can base a fruitful discussion of these works as a loosely unified group. The first of these is the fact that much of the German writing of the period 1910 to 1926 was inspired and shaped by common political and social conditions; secondly one can see in much of the painting, poetry and drama of the period the first full example of the artistic subjectivity that has been the keynote of so much of the modern avant-garde. Because of the decadence and collapse of the Second Reich, the trauma of the Great War and the storms that followed it, the economic disasters and the subsequent rise of Nazism, there existed a generation of artists in Germany who had little choice but to define their work and their calling in direct opposition to the prevailing social and political climate of the period.

One of the prime characteristics of expressionist writing is that, in opposition to the spirit of the age, it sought to establish as its focus the power of the individual perception and the possibility of an improvement or renewal of mankind and society brought about by art and by inward, spiritual revolution. Michael Patterson has pointed out the inevitability of this development by examining the choices faced by aspiring dramatists in the first twenty years of the century: they could try to gain inspiration from the values of the classical and romantic periods, as did Stefan George and Hugo von Hoffmannsthal; they could look to the future in terms of political remedies, as Brecht and Piscator were to do (although it might be said that Brecht looked more truly to an understanding, rather than
a remedy, through political analysis); or they could turn inwards, seeking a solution within the only viewpoint with which they were equipped - the individual self. It is the latter course that was taken by artists we now call expressionists. In much of the lyric poetry and drama of the pre-War years there exists a paradox between the obvious sense of alienation felt by the writers and their passionate desire to create a world of brotherhood and spiritual values. The strengths and pitfalls of this idealism have been fully discussed by Sokel in The Writer in Extremis; it is obvious from reading early expressionist writing that the desire for human brotherhood, however strong and positive it may have been, was based not on an objective belief in its possibility but in a highly subjective expression of alienation. This strain of thought is most succinctly represented by Franz Werfel's poem 'An Den Leser' (1912) in which the poet exclaims: 'Mein einziger Wunsch ist dir, O Mensch, verwandt zu sein!'. The apostrophizing of mankind and the expression of a sense of distance between 'I', the writer, and 'Thou', mankind, characterises much of the drama, as well as the lyric poetry, of the period.

Within the fifteen years or so during which Expressionism was a vital force in the German theatre, there were definite developments and changes of style and emphasis within the movement, linked largely to the effects of the War and the events that followed. The 'O Mensch' strain of lyrical aspiration gave way after the War to a more fully-realised discursive drama which, while retaining much of the heat of the earlier work, subjected its material to a more rigorous analysis and had a more specific subject matter on which to base itself, in the recent experience of combat and social upheaval. Elements of satire, of political didacticism and an increasingly cynical appraisal of social patterns (the tendency in Expressionism that was to enlarge itself into Neue Sachlichkeit) characterised the more sophisticated post-War drama that supplies most of the influences traceable in the English and American theatre. Although lesser known, the pre-War work was of vital importance in showing the way for artists caught up in the responses to the War, not
only in the methods that were emerging in that work but also in the frenzied burst of dramatic creativity and experiment that followed a period of relative sobriety and convention. Many of the elements of pre-War Expressionism crystallised with the impact of the War:

Before I joined up we had an explosive, intellectual poetry of ideas, a poetry of intellectual intuition, blown-off bits of philosophical thinking festooned with scraps of emotional flesh that had been torn away with them. When I came back we had Expressionism.3

The starting point of expressionist drama is generally held to lie in the appearance of two key works: Kokoschka’s Mörder Hoffnung Der Frauen and Sorge’s Der Bettler. Kokoschka’s play, the original Schrei-drama, was written in 1907 and published in 1910 in the newly-inaugurated journal Der Sturm, but remained unperformed until 1917. Its combination of an unequivocal stress on the importance of the visual medium (especially colour symbolism) with a subject matter that constitutes a sex-battle, violent beyond the dreams of Strindberg, as well as its overall pitch and disregard for any quibbles regarding 'good taste' whatsoever, made Mörder enormously influential long before it reached the stage. Kokoschka reintroduced the element of primitivism to drama, a quality that he believed was essential to any artistic expression. The immediate repercussions of Mörder were felt most strongly in the circle of writers that centred round Herwarth Walden, the entrepreneur and editor of Der Sturm. With close associates such as Lothar Schreyer and August Stramm, Walden developed an approach to art that relied on the belief that the most effective form of communication was on an intuitive, non-rational level, and that the best means of reaching the non-rational in the audience was to present a stark vision of an irrational world devoid of the sophistications of reason and interpretation. In theatrical terms, the results of the Sturmtheorie were of dubious merit, tending for the most part to be appreciated only by the sympathetic; the best dramatist of the circle, August Stramm, made the only approach to creating work that was approachable by a non-Sturm audience. Yet Sturm's exam-
pie, and the specific and crucial model provided by Kokoschka, inspired one aspect of Expressionism that emerged throughout the period, namely the primitivist approach that sought to use drama to express concepts on a non-rational, quasi-mythical level. Obvious parallels exist in the works of Bronnen, Hasenclever, and Kaiser; variations on the theme emerge in Brecht’s Baal, Goll’s Methusalem and Uberdramen, and, later, Antonin Artaud and the Surrealists.

While Kokoschka and the Sturm writers sought to reach primitive essentials in their dramas, another direction was being explored by the young playwright Reinhard Sorge who, in Der Bettler (published 1912, it also had to wait till 1917 for its first performance) produced the first, and still the most characteristic, example of what came to be known as the Ich-Drama. The protagonist of Der Bettler is an unnamed poet whose function in the play is to dramatise the aspirations of the author and to serve fairly directly as his mouthpiece. Everything that happens or is shown in Der Bettler exists only in terms of how the poet-character sees it; a presentation of drama through the subjective vision more fully realised than any of its predecessors. Many plays can be seen as more or less direct descendants of Der Bettler, such as Toller's Die Wandlung, Hasenclever’s Der Sohn, Kaiser’s Von Morgens Bis Mitternachts and Kornfeld’s Die Verführung, as well as more extreme off-shoots such as Bronnen's Vatermord and Johst's 'ecstatic scenario' Der Junge Mensch. The model that Sorge took as the inspiration for his play is evidently the later work of Strindberg, notably To Damascus and Dream Play. What marks the difference between Strindberg's subjectivity and that of Sorge is that, while Strindberg used the Stranger or Dreamer characters (who are to some extent authorial spokesmen) to dramatise a spiritual condition that the writer felt was common to all mankind, Sorge was dramatising his own personality far more exclusively. The other characters in Der Bettler are used by Sorge not to represent real challenges to his hero but to define his own feelings of supremacy in opposition to a despised society.
In pre-War Germany there were two main factors that contributed to the artists' sense of opposition and alienation. Firstly, the Wilhelmine society, although very obviously deteriorating with the rise of a middle-class more financially powerful than the military ruling caste, still created a materialism and class-ridden environment whose art, according to Toller, 'twisted the terrible story of mankind ... into empty trifling'. As well as these specific conditions, which inevitably alienated the young generation of intellectuals, there was the decisive influence of the philosophy of Schopenhauer and above all Nietzsche, whose overwhelming importance prompted the jeremiad from Rolland quoted above. The Nietzsche-cult, based mostly on the popular Also Spracht Zarathustra, animated the young writers into a belief that there existed a real possibility of a revolution that would smash down the old system and build a new world of which they were honorary citizens, and their characters prototype Ubermensch. Thus there was a strong sense that some cataclysm was about to take place, and this belief was fuelled by the political events that led to the War. Few, if any, of the first expressionists, however, had any notion of the nature of the real cataclysm that was approaching.

The first manifestations of this Aufbruch were in lyric poetry. The great poets of early Expressionism - Heym, van Hoddis, Trakl and Werfel - captured in their work all the frenzy and anguished expectation of the period, veering between the quasi-humanist passion of Werfel and the brilliantly concise and explosive poetry of van Hoddis, whose poem 'Der Weltende' (1911) introduced a note of abstraction and seemingly prophetic vision without recourse to the passion and rhetoric that characterised other work of that period. Around writers such as Georg Heym and Jakob van Hoddis, and publishers/entrepreneurs such as Walden and Franz Pfemfert (editor of Die Aktion, founded 1911) there grew up circles of likeminded artists from every field. Berlin, Munich, Leipzig and Prague were the early centres of Expressionism and, in each city, there emerged groups of writers, painters and thinkers (and many would-be writers,
painters and thinkers) who converged on the so-called Cafés Megalomania, of which the best-known and longest-lived was the Cafe des Westens on the Kurfürstendamm in Berlin, frequented at various times by both the Sturm and the Aktion circles. In these conclaves were born the cabaret clubs such as Kurt Hiller's New Club that played host to the Neopathetisches Cabaret and later the Gnu Cabaret, where, in 1914, Hasenclever gave a pre-publication reading of Der Sohn: also young writers such as Heym and von Unruh came into contact with the editors and publishers who printed their works. The idealism and excitement of these mutually encouraged groups is expressed in the prose statements of the period, like this from Ludwig Rubiner, a frequent contributor to Die Aktion:

We do not want work because work is too slow. We are intractable about progress; progress does not exist for us. We believe in miracle ... we are those whose skin aches at the idea of postponement, for whom seconds of disappointment can become lifelong sorching wounds of boredom.

The tenor of the movement was to change radically with the event of the War. After a flush of enthusiastic jingoism that affected many German writers at the outbreak, when there was a belief not only that this was the longed-for Kehraus but also that Germany was justified in its action, there arose a growing number of dissentient voices which, by 1916, were calling for an end to what was now obviously a senseless slaughter. As early as December 1914 Hasenclever had written to Rene Schickele, editor of the pacifist journal Die Weissen Blätter:

Shouldn't we, the intellectual warriors, the best and worthiest of them all, hold a council, somewhere in the middle of Germany, in Weimar for example?

The meeting was indeed held on New Year's Eve 1914/15, and is recorded by Kurt Pinthus thus:

At the stroke of midnight we stepped out into the deep snow of the marketplace and put on a race ... We raced out of the old year and into the new, out of the old self-destructive age into the new, into the future.
Even this kind of optimism, characteristic of the desire for grand revolutionary gesture, was soon deflated in the face of the prolonged hostilities. The vague ideas of revolution and rebellion cultivated by the pre-War expressionists were soon focussed on a definite target. The old cries of 'O Mensch!' were clarified in a realisation that as long as there was a war, there was no humanity for men who were forced into mutual slaughter on account of the flag under which they marched. The lyrical, ecstatic strain of Expressionism waned for other reasons as well: by 1916 Heym, Sorge, Trakl and Stadler were dead; van Hoddis was insane.

Inevitably there emerged during the War a group of writers and artists for whom the idealism of pre-War Expressionism was irrelevant. While still hoping for peace and a new age, they no longer had the faith in egotistical rebellion that had inspired Sorge. The movement became increasingly politicised, at first in its opposition to the War and later in its espousal of Socialism, of which Pfemfert at least was an active disciple. In 1916 Schickele transferred his operations to Zurich, where Die Weissen Blätter was published for the next five years, and he gathered a number of similarly pacifist colleagues including Werfel and von Unruh who had either avoided active service or who, like von Unruh, had witnessed the early massacres such as Verdun, and had thus realised their opposition to the War. It was during the War years that expressionist drama established itself beyond the circle of its writers and the readers of relevant journals. The first production of an expressionist play in Germany was in October, 1916, when Der Sohn was performed at the Albert-Theater in Dresden. In 1917 public performances were given of Mörder Hoffnung Der Frauen, Kaiser's Von Morgens Bis Mitternachts and Die Koralle and Kornfeld's Die Verführung, while Der Bettler received a private performance in Berlin in December. Amazingly, also, the Leipzig Stadttheater produced Hasenclever's play Antigone - which presumably passed the censor thanks to its classical setting, but there was little room to doubt its intended target. By 1918 both Goering's Seeschlacht and von Unruh's Ein Geschlecht had been performed, and the connection between
Expressionism and anti-war sympathies was well established. Yet despite the obvious socialist/pacifist tendencies that, from 1916-19, were shared by many writers, it is characteristic of the movement that it produced very little significant work with a high-profile political commitment. Post-war Expressionism shared with earlier work the hallmark of subjectivity. A writer whose political commitments in public life were well known, Ernst Toller, avoided in his dramatic writing the exposition of firm belief in the relevance to the individual of party politics; in his letter to Pehling on the Berlin Volksbühne production of Masse-Mensch (1921) he stated:

In my political capacity I proceed upon the assumption that units, groups, representatives of various social forces, various economic functions, have a real existence; that certain relations between human beings are objective realities. As an artist, I recognise that the validity of these 'facts' is highly questionable.

Masse-Mensch rests its argument ultimately on an ill-defined but highly appealing belief in the regeneration of the spirit of mankind - for Toller, and for other writers who had experienced the War, the Revolution and the subsequent soft-soap approach of the S.P.D., a personal faith in any practical solution was nearly impossible. Although some prominent expressionist writers later went on to join either the Communist party (Becher) or the Nazi party (Bronnen), the period up to 1925 which saw the main bulk of expressionist drama witnessed little stress on a political approach based on pragmatism and objectivity.

This paradox of writers who, at a time when a declaration of belief seemed so necessary, avoided in their work any real political statement, is enlightened somewhat by Piscator (ironically, as he perhaps more than any of his contemporaries tried to force the theatre into showing its allegiances in practical terms). Speaking of his long-held admiration for Pfemfert, he wrote:

Was Pfemfert political? Was Die Aktion? Did they all become Communists? Anybody who has been through a heavy bombardment from about 2,000 guns
aimed at a little section of the front just smiles: the 2,000 guns speak far louder than the Communist manifesto. You don't need to have read Marx or Lenin then! Man screamed. Stammered... That's where the genuine Expressionism was born. No extremism, or radicalism - not the kind of politics commonly confused with diplomacy - no, what was born was the kind of unswerving and unconditional truth that will stop at nothing and nobody - one might almost say not really politics against the politics of war and the subjugation and oppression associated with it, but just the Truth regardless of what one means by it.¹²

This is not to say that expressionist drama lacked dialectical strength or that it failed to speak in human terms. To examine the ways in which some of the writers used the subjective style to produce work that far transcends the original personal inspiration it will be useful to look in detail at two plays, one pre- and one post-War, namely Der Bettler and Masse-Mensch both of them influential on the development of Expressionism in Germany and the latter, at least, being one of the few expressionist works to gain wide recognition in the English-speaking theatre.

At the end of the second act of Der Bettler the poet-protagonist, having accepted a profession of devotion and self-sacrifice from his girlfriend, declares:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{The depths of heaven} \\
\text{Shall surround us,} \\
\text{The beauty of stars} \\
\text{Shall be with us -} \\
\text{What do I care about understanding.} \\
\text{What do I care about comprehending -} \\
\text{Omnipotent power} \\
\text{Will lead me to my goal.} \quad ¹³
\end{align*}
\]

His goal, examined in the first act, is a 'rejuvenated drama' inspired and led by his own writings and productions. In a long monologue in Act I he develops his aspirations thus:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{This will become} \\
\text{The heart of art: from all the continents,} \\
\text{To this source of health, people will stream} \\
\text{To be restored and saved, not just a tiny esoteric group! ... Masses of workmen will be swept} \\
\text{By intimations of a higher life} \\
\text{In mighty waves ... Starving girls,} \\
\text{Emaciated bodies bent, toiling for their children} \\
\text{Out of wedlock born, in this shall find their bread ...} \\
\text{To lofty birth let a highborn} \\
\text{But in many ways corrupted age} \\
\text{Advance towards me!} \quad (p.41)
\end{align*}
\]
We are never shown any example of the poet's art, nor does he ever achieve his dream of running his own theatre. In the second and third acts the action centres on his own domestic problems, generated by an insane father, a sick mother and a pregnant girlfriend. By the end of act III father and mother have both been killed (the latter inadvertently) and in the last two acts the poet urges the girl to put her first child into care so that they can raise his child, which she is carrying. There is no definite conclusion to the plot, but the fifth act culminates in a series of hymnic visions of the future. Seen on a plot level, the play contains all the cliché elements of pre-War Expressionism - the overt subjectivity, the egocentric saviour/artist self image, the chunks of hastily digested Nietzsche, the bizarre and violent domestic strife and perverse attitude towards female sexuality, all of which surface again and again in later writings, perhaps reaching their apogee in Bronnen's Vatermord. Although Der Bettler never reaches such grand-guignol, it does nevertheless contain much that now seems unintentionally risible. Despite that, there are two major points that put this apparent failing into some perspective: firstly, it was an attempt to create, with little precedent, a dramatic portrait of the artistic zeitgeist at a time when extremes of rebellion seemed possible and the generation-gap and feelings of cultural estrangement were stronger than ever before and possibly ever since; secondly, and this goes far to explain why expressionist drama remained essentially a German phenomenon, the style in which the piece is written, alternating between prose and verse, sits at odds with the banal tendencies of the plot. The German language can deliver rhetoric without falling into bathos to this extent, but if the play is uprooted into a different language the divorce between speech and situation becomes so marked as to render serious concentration and sympathy very difficult to achieve. Thus the unreined, Dionysian ecstasy of the poet seems either maudlin or ludicrous, whereas in German the strength of the rhetorical language carries sufficient charge to fill but what in English seems specious.

Failings there are many in Der Bettler, and yet it rem-
ains unquestionably a powerful piece, and, with imagination and some attempt to see it in its original perspective, one can go some way towards appreciating why the play should have such a strong influence. Its strengths lie in two main areas - firstly thematic and secondly theatrical. As the first self-conscious dramatisation of the particular manifestation of youthful rebellion of its age, Der Bettler manages to examine its theme with surprising sensitivity. Sorge, unlike Bronnen or Kornfeld, seems in this play to be relatively untouched by Freudian concepts of parent-child relationships, and manages to avoid much of the black-and-white approach that pushes other efforts in the same vein towards unintentional comedy. The character of the father, who easily dominates the second and third acts, is not easily dismissed as a soulless bourgeois technocrat. Despite his insanity and the cruelty he inflicts on the family, one can see in his visions of Martian technology a distorted but far more crystallised and fervent reflection of the poet-son's own vision. The son's relationship with his father is less warlike than it may at first appear; indeed, it becomes apparent that in this family, despite its dire circumstances, there exist real bonds of mutual affection not weakened by misfortune. The son does not kill the father in order to gain personal liberty or revenge (as do the parricides in Vatermord and Die Verführung) but in order to liberate the old man from suffering and the old lady from the burden of his care. After the grotesque family supper in act II, the father, having exhausted himself by a rapturous description of how his inventions will save the world, experiences a moment of painful, humiliating lucidity:

Ah! I am weary from all that splendour! What splendour! Creating makes one weary! I want to build myself a house by the side of the road, and lie peacefully and view my happiness. From my windows. Lying there, looking, I want nothing else... And I want to die! I am cold. Please cover me... I am so cold! My cover... I want to die... I've longed for this all my days... my work is done! Creating has been beautiful! Create further, my son! You will do it! Thank you! You! Now give me your hand! Love me well and help me to die. Remember... Give me poison... I want my bed... You have no inkling of how I am tormented! Believe your father!
It torments, torments, and no-one knows the true extent.
One is alone... and black with anguish is the world
And one is mute. And turns insane! You too
Will suffer it one day! (pp.64-65)

The son's behaviour to the father is always kind and helpful - never does he curse him, he only complains against his madness and the suffering it inflicts on his mother. By not dismissing a sense of human reality from the play, Sorge succeeds in lending far more credence to his theme than a more extreme, stylized rendering could achieve, and it is the presentation of the father that modifies our appreciation of the poet and, perhaps ironically, creates the most interest in the play for modern readers. The father's visions of Mars are, indeed, far more interesting than the son's nebulous dreams of creativity and power - and the fact that both father and son share this visionary capacity, along with the prognostications from the father that the son is doomed to suffer as he has, makes the play thematically more subtle than, on the surface, it might appear.

It is in theatrical terms, however, that Sorge makes his real coup. Der Bettler is one of the few expressionist plays in which the author actually includes in his text stage directions which not only suggest a type of staging radically different from contemporary norms but which are also conceived with the practical resources of the theatre very much in mind. The first act of the play foreshadows many later works with its film-like, fast-cut technique, and both what it shows and how it shows it marks Der Bettler out more than its subject matter as a play of real importance. Had Sorge survived the War and reached maturity as a playwright (he was only nineteen when he wrote Der Bettler) there is little doubt that he would have been an artist of some stature, judging only from the inventive flair with which he handles his material here. Deploying a range of theatrical stunts and devices, partly copied from Strindberg but largely without precedent, Sorge creates in the first act a sense of universality in which his poet's existence and opinions are far more acceptable and interesting than when viewed in isolation.
The play opens with a straightforward discussion between the poet and his older friend largely about business matters and the poet's domestic problems, but within five minutes, just as the exposition seems well under way and we have been prepared for an important meeting between the poet and a rich patron, the scene switches suddenly to a very stylized, fast-moving sequence in which a group of gentlemen scour the day's newspapers for sensational news in a scene highly reminiscent of episodes in Goll's Methusalem and Ionesco's La Cantatrice Chauve, both of which developed the grotesqueries of Expressionism that have one of their first manifestations in Der Bettler. A sharp exchange of nonsense evens out into a more serious discussion when three critics begin a discussion of the state of modern drama, where the third critic outlines the need for a poet-visionary to revive the art - and yet, in the context that Sorge has set, these high opinions are deliberately trivialised by the previous tone of empty lust for gossip that still pervades the scene. Having provided a sidelight on the poet's artistic endeavours in this manner, Sorge proceeds, with another sudden change of scene, to challenge and redefine his protestations of love for mankind in a grotesque interlude with some very wicked prostitutes and their equally nasty clients, in which relations between man and woman are reduced to a bestial, mechanistic game of supply and demand, in which the characters 'posture as a monument' chanting their demands:

I'll teach you joys that you have never known.
I'll show you nights of which you've never dreamed.
You are hell's bottom and are black with lust.
You are like Satan and I want your thrust. (pp.36-37)

Following immediately on this orgy comes the scene which introduces the girl, seemingly a picture of innocence but already 'tainted' by her unwanted pregnancy. Just as the scene with the newspaper readers seemed to cast a qualifying light over the scene with the poet and the friend, so here the portrayal of the girl is closely associated with the prostitute/client scene, thus calling into question the
love-idyll that follows in Act II. The crux of the first act is the meeting between poet and patron in which the former rejects the compromises offered by the latter and launches into his great monologue about his art, quoted above. The same device is employed again in a choric interlude with a group of air pilots mourning the loss of a comrade whose 'death has been solder for our union' (p.44); the dead pilot is a prototype for the sacrificial role that will be adopted by the poet cast out into the wilderness and in the death of the father.

The first act of Der Bettler closes with the meeting between the poet and the girl; in the subsequent acts, with one or two exceptions, the action carries on in more conventional terms, maintaining the use of verse and prose but largely dispensing with the highly effective interlude scenes discussed above. Sorge's use of material in the play as a whole is inconsistent, but certainly in the first act he displays a good grasp of how to provide a depth for his action by the inclusion of a dramatically effective form of commentary. The theatrical devices that he uses in the first act are inventive: the stage directions quoted above referring to the newspaper readers, prostitutes and pilots, continue to heighten the low-life material and emphasise its choric function. The division of the stage into distinct areas and the description of set design and lighting show a far greater grasp of practical stage experimentation than might be expected in such an early work. The play opens with an effective sleight-of-hand as the poet and the friend conduct their conversation against a curtain illuminated from behind, beyond which there is a sound of voices. They are standing, therefore, on a stage, just after the completion of a performance, with the unseen audience beyond the curtain. As a device for opening a play which deals in part with the relationship between the writer and his audience this is neat and effective. When the curtains part, however, we do not see an auditorium but instead the café where the poet's ideals have their first hearing before passing any further. With this idea of the café being some sort of auditorium, the role of the incidental
groups resembles more closely that of classical Greek choruses, with their double role of observers of, and commentators on, the action. Sorge's lighting scheme is, again, inventive, stressing the importance of complete shifts of focus. 'The sources of upstage illumination are invisible' (p.26) he stipulates, and he is similarly specific in the directions for the opening of the prostitutes' scene:

The right half of the stage is dark and deserted. From somewhere high at the left, a floodlight falls slantwise across the left half of the stage, illuminating the prostitutes ... their voices emphasise the shrill and bare impression made by the floodlight. (p.33)

Sorge's theatrical devices and directions were closely followed by Reinhardt in his 1917 production of Der Bettler which initiated the Junge Deutschland series of plays at the Berlin Deutsches Theater, heralded by many as the first fully expressionist production. However, despite the impact caused by the play and its apparent newness of form and content, it is easy to see in retrospect that it forms rather a bridge between the later manifestations of Naturalism and the fully-fledged Expressionism of the post-War decade. Many of Sorge's devices are simply extensions of Naturalism, especially the domestic scenes in acts II and III, in which one can see stylistic similarities to Ibsen in his The Master Builder period. The more avant-garde experimental elements owe an obvious debt to Strindberg, and indeed to Reinhardt, who had used the device of simultaneous staging in 1916 for The Ghost Sonata. What is new in Der Bettler is an attempt to go beyond Strindberg in centring the play on theme rather than plot, and in the overt subjectivisation of the material in order to express a personal mental picture that nonetheless presents elements of parody and social satire. At this early stage, as the poet in the play discovers, there was really no home for complete theatrical experimentation, but Der Bettler blazed a trail that others were to follow. Sorge lacked the discipline to rein all his material into one powerful direction, and it could be argued that much of the lyricism of the play has more in common with the Sturm und Drang style than with the Express-
ionism of van Hoddis et al; also, the play fluctuates in its ability to hold the audience's attention, especially in the fourth and fifth acts as the poet's monologues take up an ever greater amount of stage time. It was only after the War that plays emerged in which Sorge's willingness to experiment was matched by a powerful dramatic discipline and a sure grasp of dialectics, which, combined, produced the best of expressionist drama in the works of its greatest playwrights, Georg Kaiser and Ernst Toller.

Neither Kaiser nor Toller was as intricately concerned with the practicalities of the stage as Sorge. Both were brilliant theatrical poets, and provided in their writings more fuel for the revolution in stage design than any of their contemporaries. Of the new plays discussed by Kenneth Macgowan in Continental Stagecraft, published in 1923, it is Masse-Mensch that is singled out for the most detailed attention, and indeed it remains the best remembered of all the German expressionist productions. While Kaiser developed along two main lines, the picaresque odyssey-style quests of central figures as in Von Morgens Bis Mitternachts and Hölle Weg Erde, and the satirical/apocalyptic explorations of future states in Gas I and II, Toller drew more openly on contemporary history for the material of his plays, and in this context it is worth considering some aspects of Masse-Mensch as an example not only of the close links in German Expressionism between art and politics, but also to demonstrate the clear developments from the lyrical Ich-dramen of pre-War writing.

The close similarities between the predicaments faced by the heroine of Masse-Mensch and those experienced by Toller in his involvement with the Bavarian Räterrepublik have been well documented by Maurice Pittock, and it is only necessary to note here that the elements of à clef autobiography in Masse-Mensch are sufficiently obvious to make comparisons with the sort of confessionalism of pre-War lyrical dramas worthwhile. Toller's conception of the dramatisation of a personal position vis-à-vis society, however, differs greatly from that of Sorge, and his control over his material and its compression and organisation are
more subtle, yet both Der Bettler and Masse-Mensch have at their centre an original subjective, personal analysis of a situation that is expressed in a poetic style. Masse-Mensch is the more discursive play and, compared with Toller's earlier play Die Wandlung, relies far less on the evocation of ill-defined emotional arguments. This is not to say that it lacks passion, but rather that the enormous power of the piece is created by Toller's ability to make dramatic an essentially moral dialectic. The character of the woman is faced in the play with a sequence of choices, and her response to each enables Toller to define his own position and to elucidate some spiritual concerns which, without the strong discursive framework of the play, would seem extremely nebulous. The play is set in the period of the Räterrepublik, but Toller expands the relevance of a historical event by his use of a poetic style and of commentary-style dream sequences in the same way that Sorge used interludes to add depth to Der Bettler. In Masse-Mensch the link between the alternating realistic scenes and dream pictures is far more subtle, however; because in both cases Toller is representing the consciousness of one character, either in its waking or its sleeping state, he can show how the reverberations of things apprehended in one state affect the other. Thus in the final scene of the play we see the woman in prison explaining to her husband and the priest how she has come to believe in a concept of the expiation of guilt - something that, in the previous scene, had been conveyed to her in a dream:

WOMAN: But I am guilty ... personally ... as a human being.
COMPANION: No. The Masses are guilty.
WOMAN: Then I am doubly guilty ... 
COMPANION: Man is innocent.
WOMAN: Then God is guilty ...
COMPANION: God is inside you.
WOMAN: Then I'll conquer him. 17

Similarly in Scene 2, a dream about the Stock Exchange, the woman sees in its worst light the devotion to society spoken of by her husband in the first scene, in which he is reduced to a puppet of the insane speculators who deal
in 'human material'. By sustaining this sort of realistic psychological interplay Toller makes the basic theme of the play of far more immediate, and less particularized, interest. The woman's debate whether or not to go along with a violent revolution in order to achieve pacifist aims is given a dimension of personal interest beyond its own (albeit gripping) limitations.

It is needless in this context to discuss Masse-Mensch in as much detail as Der Bettler, partly because it is a far better-known play, and has generated a good deal of critical material, and also because it does not show the same tangle of new and old forms that makes Der Bettler of such historical interest. That Masse-Mensch is a more sustained and successful play need not be laboured, but what will be useful to examine is the way that Toller approaches the question of the protagonist-rebel-mouthpiece, as a way of examining how the second wave, the post-War writers, developed and built on the examples of pre-War Expressionism.

The woman in Masse-Mensch, referred to occasionally as Sonia, is the only developed character in the piece. The other main parts of the man, the Nameless one and the Companion, as well as the various workers, soldiers and prisoners, exist in the play simply to create the situations within which the woman has to face her dilemmas. In this respect the play is similar to other expressionist pieces such as Von Morgens Bis Mitternachts and Werfel's Spiegelmensch: where the play differs from many other contemporary pieces is in its single-minded elimination of all material that distracts attention from the main core of the argument. Even the presentation of the woman concentrates only on those parts of her being which are affected by her predicament - what we see of her personal and social life is restricted to some information about her middle-class background and upbringing, and the strife caused in her marriage by her rejection of her husband's request for subservience to his moral and social rules. It is this economy of material combined with the exposure of psychological depths that enables Toller to make his thesis dramatically viable.
Had he presented the woman as a well-rounded character in the naturalistic sense, he would have blunted the force of his argument by bringing to bear too many extraneous value-judgements: as it is, by presenting the woman as the only means by which we can judge the situation, he manages to create a far more immediate sense of the personal predicament, because it is easier for the audience, through single-minded identification with one character, to feel the moral problems without any sense of complicating objectivity. This explains why Toller's drama failed in any real sense to be political: because it chose to employ a technique of subjective identification which obviates concrete judgement, rather than an objective and ultimately analytical presentation of the material.

The woman is a mouthpiece not so much for Toller's own ideas as for his perception of the personal problems that an activist/idealistic faces in such a situation. Unlike the poet in Der Bettler or Friedrich in Die Wandlung, the woman seldom expresses ideals except as a means of countering the impending violence around her. Even in the first scene, before she has realised how her aims differ from those of the masses (represented by the Nameless), her expressions of belief are on a much more practical level than is usual in expressionist drama:

Tomorrow at last my conscience will speak
Sweeping through the assembly hall
At last the voice of conscience will be heard.
And now I know
It's not just me who calls for the strike.
The whole of mankind calls for it
Nature calls for it.

Her words express her excitement about forthcoming events rather than simply being barrages fired against a generally hostile world. This difference in approach is typical of the movement away from idealism towards a more problematical approach to the position of the young rebel figure that is typical of post-War Expressionism and the disillusionment of that age, that found expression not only in the Neue Sachlichkeit and the early work of Brecht, but also in Toller's own post-prison plays such as Hoppla! Wir Leben and
Die Blinde Gottin.

Expressionist drama reached an artistic peak in Toller's prison works, *Masse-Mensch*, *Die Maschinenstürmer* and *Hinkelmann* and the middle-period plays of Kaiser such as *Von Morgens Bis Mitternachts* and *Hölle Weg Erde* in which the revolutionary formal qualities of earlier writing evolved into a distinctive style supported by the authors' skill at creating a consistent, dramatically effective structure. However, the influence of Expressionism, and its part in a more general view of twentieth century drama, stems not only from these individual works but from an extension of many of the threads that were evident also in much of the less successful or lasting work. In conclusion, it will be useful to examine the place of dramatic Expressionism in two main contexts: firstly as the major contributor to the discovery of new forms that has motivated much of the most exciting theatre of later decades, and secondly as a lasting example of the important effect of a close link between the theatre and its cultural/political environment, not simply as a passive reflection of prevailing tendencies but as an indicator of possibilities, a commentator on injustice and an exploration of a variety of personal responses.

The revolution in staging techniques that came to a head in the tens and twenties stemmed to a great extent from a struggle on the part of producers to render theatrically viable the strange, challenging new scripts that were coming to them from the young expressionist writers. This challenge, combined with the ideas around representation and distortion/abstraction in contemporary painting and sculpture, forced producers and designers to match their efforts to the innovations of the playwrights, resulting in a mutually-generated advance in both dramaturgy and staging techniques. Of course, not all the impetus came from the literary quarter; it could be argued, in this 'chicken-or-egg' situation, that it was the possibilities indicated by showmen such as Reinhardt and his team of designers, and theoreticians/designers such as Appia and Craig, that provided for the young writers the opportunity to create a body of drama unfettered by what had come to be seen as
the limitations of Realism, both in writing and design. In the finest examples of productions of German expressionist drama, it is evident that a degree of collaboration has taken place; not necessarily between author and director, but rather a process whereby the director has brought a script from its incomplete state on the page (and much expressionist drama does indeed read very awkwardly) and by imagination and experiment has endowed it with the vital element. Of course this process happens in any successful show, but in the case of Expressionism it was intensified, in part by the general lack on the part of the writers of any great concern with the specifics of staging (leaving directors and designers to supply a working staging), and in part by a fortuitous coming-together of various trends and influences that were cross-fertilised to bring to light the recognisably new style. The directors and designers of the best-known expressionist productions, those who came to be associated in people's minds most strongly with the style, were those whose technical and imaginative expertise were matched by an awareness of the necessity of a functional economy in stage design. The revolution in design for which Expressionism was the catalyst was as much to do with the removal of unnecessary detail, a stripping-down to essential form, as with the innovation of new effects or spectacular devices. Jessner, who, with his designer Emil Pirchan, evolved the system of staging that frequently employed central steps (the Jessnertreppen), was perhaps the most extreme and most popular and successful exponent of a tendency in design that sought to find a synaesthesia between elements of staging such as colour, light, and mass, and to marry this harmony with an interpretative form-finding that would express the essential ideas of the play. The steps, apart from being effective in allowing entrances from the rear of the stage or seemingly from above the stage, and in making possible the grouping of large numbers of people, also tallied with a need to use the simplest of means to express power relationships, conflict and relative status. The use of this simple device was not limited to modern drama; Jessner was justly most noted outside Germany for his Shake-
speare productions, especially the famous Richard III (1920) of which much was made in Continental Stagecraft. It was a tendency in design that stemmed most directly from Appia's work with Wagner and his concern with the idea of rhythmic space; in the work of Jessner and other expressionist designers and directors such as Strohbach and Fehling, the largely aesthetic concern with interpreting sound into vision and creating a unity of effect was applied to the immediately pressing task of interpreting the new drama into visual and theatrical terms, and also of finding a theatrical language to express issues of social and political import that was to be developed particularly in the work of Piscator, who built on the use of horizontal groupings, split levels, and elements taken from Russian theatre to create his 'political' theatre. The anti-decorative tendency in the work of Jessner, Fehling and Piscator, and the preference for a stylized, simplified appearance and use of line in the work of Ludwig Sievert, Karl-Heinz Martin and Robert Neppach, were the most innovative directions of expressionist staging, although the elements that caught on most obviously in the English-speaking theatre were the tendencies towards the grotesque and caricature that stemmed from a partial knowledge or misrepresentation of the original work and was more immediately recognisable, and more acceptable as a gimmick, than the more radical departures of expressionist design.

Similarly in the field of writing, the devices and aspects of Expressionism that caught on outside Germany were the surface novelties rather than the attitudes towards subject and form that underlied these features. The conception of expressionist drama as consisting of unrelieved frenzy, formal disjointedness, grotesque distortion, staccato outbursts and a general lack of analysis or serious discussion stems to a large extent from an unwillingness on the part of critics to consider worthy of examination a style of drama that was openly experimental and modernist, and which saw human behaviour and experience not as the material out of which a satisfying synthesis could be drawn, but rather as a subject for anger, protest, and even tragedy.
The frequent posing of the dramatists of the movement as modern Cassandras did little to dispel any distaste for Expressionism, and indeed the sense of mission and self-importance attached by some of the writers to their work seems faintly ludicrous in the light of their apparent failure to alert Germany to the dangers of fascism; but it is difficult to dismiss the perception of theatrical art as something intensely serious and important when the case is made by one as articulate as Toller:

It (the theatre) has forgotten its great cultural task ... Humanity seeks in Art the solution of various miseries and conflicts. And one must understand these conflicts. Art is betrayed when the terrible story of humanity is misinterpreted in insignificant niceties ... A play must present human beings in all their strength and weakness.

It might be argued that the expressionist drama failed to present a full picture of humanity, but it certainly redressed the balance at a time when the theatre was all too ready to concentrate on the entertaining but empty erotic complications of the upper-middle class. In the work of the best expressionist writers, a fullness of characterisation was indeed achieved by the stripping away of surfaces to reveal psychological workings - as witnessed in Masse-Mensch - a method of truth-seeking analogous to the use of detail to build up a complex personal portrait in the work of Chekhov. Admittedly much of the writing did tend towards a certain crudeness, which is only partly excusable by pointing out that the dramatists were not only pioneers in unexplored country but also that they felt a need, in the political context, to express themselves in uncompromising terms. Much expressionist drama is derivative, either of more original plays or of badly-digested Freud and Nietzsche and half-baked dramatisations of essentially personal problems. Even these cruder works, and I am thinking particularly of pieces such as Brust's Die Wölfe which dramatises the sex-starved fantasies of a provincial woman with hilarious consequences, Bronnen's Vatermord with its acting out of the Oedipus complex, and the same writer's Exzesse with its exploration of the fringe areas of sexual behaviour, possess an undeniable fascination and a measure of effective-
ness in their insistence on taking aspects of human life and pushing them to extremes, ripping away any obstacles of repression, decorum and good taste.

Of the innovations of expressionist writing that have borne fruit, the most significant are in the areas of compression and imagination. The abandonment of Realism in characterisation is perhaps the single most significant trait of expressionist drama, allowing writers to adopt an approach towards character closer to the style of pre-Renaissance drama and its frequent use of symbolic persons. Expressionism favoured this economical use of character in that its prime objectives were not the reasoned dissection of cause and effect but a revelation of forces as perceived by the author and informed by his immediate experience. It would not help Toller's purposes if the financiers in *Masse-Mensch* were shown to have been driven to their callous disregard of mankind by unhappy experiences; Kaiser's drama would have been weakened if *Von Morgens Bis Mitternachts* characterised the prostitutes as victims of an exploitative system. In each case, what is important is the interpretation placed on these depersonalised figures by the protagonist/playwright (the congruence of their opinions varying widely from drama to drama) and the part that this subjective, and essentially non-political, portrayal of perception, however disordered, plays in the overall presentation of a version/vision of human society. In terms of narrative, the compression of significant events into an improbably short space of time tallies with the focussing of a wide range of experiences onto one character, again leading to an intensification of expression and a less cluttered image of an individual perception. With the moving away from Realism in character and time came a parallel extension in the field of plot, of what could happen in a play. The expressionists were of course not the first writers to use fantasy as a means of exploring a contemporary situation, but their insistent turning of symbol into action marks their work out as more extreme than previous uses of the device, in the work of writers like Maeterlinck. The satirical use of fantasy, or 'the turning of unreality into order
to portray states of mind or underlying factors, created some of the most memorable scenes of expressionist drama. In Stramm's *Das Erwachen* walls collapse to reveal a limitless heaven; in Goll's *Methusalem* the continual reversal of logic works through humour to imitate a world seemingly devoid of reason; in Kaiser's *Gas* fantasy is used as a prediction of the future, but its roots are clearly in a satirical criticism of the growing technocracy of companies such as AEG. Perhaps none of the writers ever used fantasy with quite such the poetic effectiveness of Strindberg, whose exploration of these avenues provided a crucial precedent for Expressionism in the technique of characterisation, plotting and subject matter, but the links that were apparent in the later work between the subjective style and its bearing on a particular historical predicament extend the innovations of Strindberg whose work tended to deal with the personal-spiritual-universal rather than the political-social.

It is evident from contemporary accounts and photographs, and film records from the period, that one of the most interesting innovations of Expressionism for the German theatre was its acting style, and yet this seems to be the feature that has had the least influence outside Germany. The ecstatic style of actors such as Kortner and Deutsch was peculiarly of the German theatre, in a tradition that had stemmed at least from the eighteenth century, in which the rhetoric of frenzy was essential to the writer's message. In Britain, the nearest approach to this style was in the histrionic, romantic style of Edmund Kean, or the melodramatic acting of Irving with his penchant for the haunted qualities of incipient madness; by the twenties, when Expressionism was becoming known outside Germany, these were qualities that had become unfashionable, swept away by a realistic style that favoured subtle mannerisms and close-up detail over the grand passion of an earlier era. With its abiding fear of hamming, the British theatre in the twenties found it difficult to assimilate the demands of expressionist drama, which could not be acted coolly. In Germany, Realism had never been seen as sweeping away the passion of the actor; it may have led to an abeyance of that part of the actor's repertoire, but it is also true that the great plays of Realism, the works of Hauptmann and Ibsen, offer much scope
for a grander interpretation than was favoured on the British stage.

III: BEFORE THE INFLUENCE - BRITAIN AND THE UNITED STATES
There is always a temptation to ascribe dates and well-defined periods to theatre history, and in the case of the influence of Expressionism this is more than usually true; the desire to establish a definite break between the pre- and post-War periods is great. Yet this is not even possible in the German theatre, and far less so in Britain and America where the continuity of certain tendencies throughout the period is apparent, unmarked and seemingly unaffected by the developments that, in other areas, had appeared so irresistible. To keep the influence of Expressionism in perspective is important; while it undoubtedly opened many new avenues for theatre artists and contributed devices and techniques of writing and staging, it did not enter into the theatrical idiom of either Britain or the United States as a popular and widespread style. Certainly an awareness of the directions in which Expressionism was heading caused a great deal of debate and reconsideration of the role of the theatre, yet after all the analysis there were few who came out uncompromisingly with a practical embracing of the form. In using Expressionism as a means of pointing up some important aspects of the theatre of this period, one sees again and again that it is just as often a negative reaction to the style as any actual manifestation of the influence that provides insight. So before progressing to a more detailed consideration of the areas in which Expressionism played an important part, it will be useful to note some features of the British and American theatrical scene, many of which were not changed so markedly by the contact with a foreign style, and to give some idea of the kind of theatrical milieu into which Expressionism filtered and against which it had to struggle. The differences between the reception of Expressionism in Britain and the States are largely due to the very great differences between those countries' theatrical backgrounds, and it is necessary to do some scene-setting. Many of the conditions often
Many of the changes which were being introduced into the British theatre at this time were part of a general trend in European theatre after 1905 to 're-theatre-ise' the theatre. Expressionism was one of the paths explored in this attempt, but was by no means the only option available to artists, and should not be regarded as being entirely separate from, or opposed to, other trends. The term 'Expressionism' itself was adopted as representative of this whole movement; thus when the term is used in an examination of the British theatre it will sometimes be to invoke a whole range of tendencies beyond the strict German meaning of the word. 'Expressionistic' devices in stagecraft, as the illustrations at the end of the thesis will show, ranged widely from the subtly expressive use of scenic elements to a more blatant imitation of German examples. Rather than tackle all the related areas of experiment and revolution, this thesis will concentrate on the one movement which was generally seen to be emblematic of the whole.
seen as existing prior to the advent of Expressionism did not disappear in the period; they may have gone into abeyance, but it is debatable the extent to which a response to German developments should be seen as a real watershed.

Many commentators, contemporary or otherwise, on the theatre of the twenties have given the impression that this was a boom period; a time when significant work was being done that would be a reference-point for later artists, an inspiration, an example. The sense of responsibility that emerges from many of the manifesto-style utterances of those involved in the pioneering work of the experimental theatres, the repertory and little theatres, testifies to an awareness of the crisis in the conception of the theatre's role and function in Western society, and to the influence of foreign examples, specifically from Germany, France and Russia. Yet for all the interest and concern, and perhaps the self-importance of those artists, it is difficult to deny the basic truth of the harsh judgement passed on the period by Eric Bentley, reviewing twentieth century drama just after the Second World War:

We have been fooling ourselves into believing that the period 1920-1940 was a great period of drama ... It was not. The period has its important experiments and its important achievements; but the experiments are only notorious and the achievements still almost unknown.\textsuperscript{19}

The period was one of tremendous activity, both intellectual and practical, in the sphere of eclectic experiment and the furthering of a serious or academic interest in the theatre, but one which, for all that, largely failed to realise a distinctive British contribution to the theatrical developments that bore more fruit on the Continent; in the States, a serious native theatre did develop, to some degree as a direct result of the awareness and influence of Expressionism, and yet the style was used largely as a stepping-stone when one was needed, rather than because of any intuitive arrival at the form. J.C. Trewin, in The Theatre Since 1900, recalled that 'the theatre during the twenties always seemed to be working at full and anxious stretch'\textsuperscript{20} - an interesting evaluation in that it reflects something of
The advance of rail travel, making it possible for companies such as Irving's to tour from London encouraged a focus on London productions as the only important theatrical work available, as well as killing off the provincial stock companies.
the unfocussed, slightly hysterical quality that characteri­ses the complex mixture of theory and practice that prevailed in the theatre of the period.

In Britain the influence of Expressionism can be traced most importantly in the growth of autonomously-producing regional theatres and in the activities of small or special­ised 'art' theatres and, later in the period, groups present­ing overtly political material. Before the repertory the­atres were established, the provincial theatres had been completely in the grip of the financiers of the late Victori­an period. From about 1820 onwards, most large towns in Britain had established local stock companies who, although they did produce autonomously, made most of their money and maintained their audiences by acting as supporting players to stars touring from London, such as Macready and Kean, and later providing venues and possibly extras for full­scale touring productions such as Irving's. With much of the financing of these productions in the hands of the stars themselves, the styles of production and the choice of plays were dictated largely by the most popular characteristics of the leading player. The romantic style favoured by many of these stars, and by later actor-managers such as Martin Harvey, often led to the subordination of all other consider­ations to the creation of a functional vehicle for the star; of the resultant sufferings of classics there are many ac­counts. London had never gone long without some alternative to this dubious material; not only did London audiences regularly enjoy the spectacular productions of Irving and Tree and the visits of such foreign practitioners as Rein­hardt, but also there had existed since as early as 1880 the stirrings of the alternative serious theatre, based at that time largely on the first translations of Ibsen and Brieux, but gaining more of a foothold in the nineties with the establishment of Grein's Independent Theatre (1891) and the Stage Society (1899). Drawing their inspiration from such specific models as Antoine's Théâtre Libre and Brahms's Freie Bühne, these organisations served in turn as examples to the interested parties in Britain who were looking, in the first decade of the twentieth century, for
a serious popular theatre that would balance the spectacle theatre and music hall. The appetite for theatre in this pre-cinema age was enormous, and yet, in recording this popularity, Mario Borsa (writing in 1908) could still bemoan the complete lack of certain desirable elements:

London is overrun with theatres! Of these there are 59 - without counting the 61 music halls and the 630 other halls, in which spectacles of one sort or another are presented by day and night. Never has the theatrical art, or, I should say, the theatrical industry, been so prosperous and flourishing ... Still, in spite of all this booming and histriomania, one of the greatest intellectual privations from which the foreigner suffers in London is ... the lack of good comedy and good prose drama.21

If this was the case in London before the War, it was certainly worse in the provinces. It is tempting to interpret the excitement at the opening of the first Reps, and the subsequent hullaballoo about the rise of regional theatre, as the signal of a rebirth of the theatre in the provinces and a general revitalisation by the modern movement. Yet, for all the pronouncements to that effect, and indeed for all the considerable achievements of the early Reps, the process of a theatrical 'renaissance' was slow and by no means universal. It will be seen later that the reorganisation and transformation of the provincial circuit in some senses saw a substitution of one form of commodity theatre for another: while many of the Reps struggled against censorship, lack of funding and a conservative public to produce serious, 'advanced' theatre, there were several who took the establishment of the new regional theatres as an opportunity to produce guaranteed money-spinners in provincial towns and cities with very little, if any, reference to concepts of serious art. As for the London theatre, the period saw the birth of a few genuinely alternative theatres, most notable the Gate Theatre Studio, the Group Theatre and the Unity Theatre, and also the attempts by various managements to introduce into their theatres regular productions of expressionistic drama, not expecting to make a profit - of these the best example is perhaps Basil Dean at the St Martin's just after the War. But once the fashion for Expressionism had waned, by the end of the twenties,
it was left to individual, dedicated producing groups to maintain interest in the style; there were few revivals of the plays that had introduced the style to Britain, and very little new work attempted outside the endeavours of the groups mentioned above, that seemed to draw on Expressionism as an inspiration or influence. Occasionally the style would by used as a device for exploring the unreal, as in Priestley's *Johnson Over Jordan* (1939), or as a convenient means of indicating fantasy or disturbed mental states, or, most commonly, dreams, as in *Beggar On Horseback* and its many imitators. Some of the tenets of Expressionism were absorbed into scenic art, particularly in a growing taste for expressive simplicity and fixed, non-realistic sets, but the influence did not lead artists to produce work that was recognisably expressionist beyond this basic principle. The ideas, beliefs and verbal techniques were far less absorbed, largely, it seems, due to the ineradicable link that was perceived between Expressionism and politics, and a general suspicion that there was something shocking and improper about the style and its contents. Writers such as O'Casey, Johnston, Auden and Isherwood, and Spender, all of whom had cut their dramatic teeth on Expressionism, either moved away from the style in their later work or became the preserve of experimental companies. Much of the work of the West End theatre was totally unaffected by the passing interest in Expressionism; of the provincial theatres, even those who were notable for their interest in the form failed to follow up that interest with a persistent policy of experimentation and eclectic programming.

In America the response was more productive of original work, and found a much greater enthusiasm from the young playwrights of the day, many of whom needed an example of serious theatre on which to base their early efforts and, not finding one in the American theatre, looked instead to the most exciting new trends in Europe. Expressionism found a temporary home in the States in a way that it did not in Britain; and yet, with the passing of the first wave of enthusiasm and the growing maturity of the playwrights, there was a turning away from the style towards a new Realism
in the later thirties, and a lack of consistent interest in the staging style unless refined into the elegant creations of Broadway designers such as Mielziner and Oenslanger. Before the First World War the American theatre had offered little in the way of serious dramatic entertainment, and had certainly done little or nothing to claim an important place in world theatre. The States had never been lacking in dramatic activity, and at the turn of the century had a flourishing show business, but, with the exception of the meticulous and elaborately-staged Realism of David Belasco, had done little to gain the attention of the rest of the theatrical world. In the middle of the nineteenth century, before the Civil War, America had developed a native idiom (that was to re-establish itself many years later) in the genre of vaudeville and folk drama, particularly burlesques and minstrel shows; but this natural growth towards an indigenous modern drama was curtailed by the drastic changes wrought in American society by the interior struggles of the War. In the post-Civil War period the only types of drama to flourish were the 'leg shows' aimed at the proverbial tired businessman, the touring stock companies who capitalised on the expansion of the West that came as a result of the War, and exercises in Realism, often with a romantic content, that reflected the popularity of British writers such as Pinero and Jones, and were the nearest America saw to a serious drama at that time. By the time of the outbreak of the First World War, most of the local companies in the mid-West and West had been put out of business by the success of the New York-based touring companies, and the theatre in America became (as it was to remain) centred almost completely on New York City. The syndicalisation of the theatre managements in New York, whereby the whip-hand over all aspects of production was held by the commercially-orientated businessmen/managers, meant that there was very little scope for any form of personal contribution to the theatre by artists without the strict censorship of business interests.

Compared to the artistic ferment across the Atlantic that had spawned not only Ibsen and his followers but also
Strindberg, Wedekind and the early stirrings of German Expressionism, the American theatre was sterile. However, the apparent resistance in the States to the new European drama sheds much light on the success of the little/art theatres a few years later. Joseph Wood Krutch, in his 'informal history' of American Drama Since 1918 points out that, while the surface tone of many American productions of the first fifteen years of the century was allied to the European taste for Realism/Naturalism, the plays presented in the States had failed to express any of the revolutionary ideas that had attracted so much attention to the work of Ibsen, Galsworthy, Hauptmann and Shaw. Obviously it is tempting to attribute this to the unwillingness on the part of show-business managers to risk confronting an audience with subjects unlikely to win much approbation, or just to old-fashioned American puritanism, but Krutch adds that, by the time the American theatre had absorbed any influences from the realist writers, their ideas were no longer immediately interesting and were in fact verging on the passé. This is not to say that, if a play such as Ghosts had been given on Broadway in 1910 the audience would have been blasé, for it was unlikely that these themes would have been accepted in the theatre; but nevertheless the shock of absoluted newness that Ibsen's ideas aroused in Europe, and which projected Realism so forcefully centre-stage, would not have struck so deep a chord in the American milieu where, by the time of the First World War, many theatregoers were becoming aware of issues such as feminism, Darwinism, class war and sexual hypocrisy - although this is not to suggest that an awareness of these issues had led in any way to an acceptance of their implications. Thus the American theatre was quick to absorb a style of production without importing the subject matter that had originally motivated the style - and this pattern was to some extent repeated in America's response to the new drama and the new stagecraft of the post-War period.

Although neither Britain nor America fully absorbed expressionist techniques into their theatrical language, and can both be seen to some extent to have rejected the
style sooner or later, it remains an important influence in that an awareness of the new ground being broken in Germany forced many artists to re-examine and redefine their work. Even though the ultimate acceptance of the style is limited, it fulfilled the role of a catalyst in hastening changes that were already incipient on both sides of the Atlantic, of decisively altering the attitudes of some, of providing an important reference point for the evaluation of the work of others. Coming at a time when the theatre was in a state of flux, with changes in audience make-up and theatregoing habits, the rise of the cinema and the demand for entertainment that was relevant to all classes, the re-assessment of ideas about the criticism of drama and of its relationship to literature, politics and social change, Expressionism (which had something to say on all these issues) could not help but redefine the attitudes of artists, theatregoers and commentators. Of the major changes that did occur in the theatre in the period 1910 to 1940, there were many that had close links with a response to the influence of Expressionism and the ideas connected with it. For instance, in America, the growth of a serious, artistic native drama was due in large part to the freedom given to writers such as O'Neill and Lawson by the 'little' theatres, many of which at some point in their careers dedicated themselves with varying degrees of deliberateness to the production of Expressionism; similarly the advances in stage design, that are perhaps the most significant development in American theatre of the period, have their roots in a response by designers such as Jones, Simonson and Throckmorton to specific examples of German expressionist theatre. In Britain, the establishment of repertory theatres after the First World War, and the continuation of those which had been working before the War, were viewed to a great extent as the struggle to establish in Britain an art theatre that would produce something along the lines of German Expressionism but of native origin. The debates that were stimulated by the programming of the regional theatres and by the work of such bodies as the Cambridge Festival Theatre and the Gate Theatre Studio usually took as their reference
point the sense of opposition between the commercial theatre, epitomised by light comedy, and the serious or art theatre, epitomised for a while by Expressionism. It is arguable that in neither country, and especially in Britain, did many who were vociferous on the subject have any real idea of what Expressionism was, and were often guilty of referring to their own impressions gathered from diverse sources than any direct knowledge or experience of the style, yet it is important that Expressionism should have come to represent something to writers and artists outside Germany in this way, regardless of the accuracy of their opinions and evaluations.

Throughout this study of the theatre of the inter-War period, certain trends will be considered again and again as the background against which the influence of Expressionism must be regarded. Of these, it would be relevant to introduce a few at this point; most of them have been touched on above. Apart from the artistic developments in writing, staging and acting, there were other major factors that affected the type of stage presentation witnessed during the period. Technical advances in the equipment of the theatres, and new techniques for making, painting and moving scenery, meant that more and more effective illusions could be achieved, allowing for imaginative writers a scope far greater than for some of their predecessors; yet this involved the danger that stage trickery and slickness might take the place of intelligent or significant writing. The advent of Expressionism coincided with great advances in stage mechanics, and to some extent the experimentation attempted by many directors and designers was simply the exhibition of these exciting new possibilities. A technological advance that had different repercussions was the growth of the cinema which, during the period under discussion, progressed from its infancy before the War through a period of amazingly rapid stylistic and technical advances to its maturity, and enormous popularity, in the thirties. As an art form the popular cinema cannot be compared in any useful way to the theatre of the period, although this is not to deny its artistic success, for it certainly produced successful
work in the face of almost crippling censorship and the equally strict constraints placed upon it by business interests. Where it is of significance is in the way that it drastically affected the habits of audiences, many of whom found in cinema the kind of spectacle they wanted; the cinema could provide an immediacy of stimulus, with its ability to focus on close-up detail, its freedom from the constraints of the stage and the growing use in the period of real locations for film-making, and (with the advent of sound) its combination of music, selective aural detail and special effects. The necessity of re-evaluating the role of theatre-as-entertainment in the light of this competition drove many to claim that the theatre maintained standards of art that that cinema could never achieve; besides the highly dubious nature of this pronouncement, it became obvious in the period that the theatre's claim to the status of 'art', if this necessarily implied elitism or non-popularity, could lead to the ultimate supercedence of theatre or at best its survival only as the preserve of a privileged, educated and increasingly rarefied audience. Other factors forced artists to re-evaluate the position of the theatre in relationship to its audience and towards social and political forces, not least the expansion of the provincial theatre into areas where the potential audience was very different from the theatregoing class in London, and the increasing interest in the States in the idea of a workers' theatre, or at least a type of drama that addressed itself particularly to issues pertinent to the predicament of working men and women in the country. Theatres found themselves increasingly concerned with the issue of funding, especially when attempting to produce pioneering experimental work that was not guaranteed an audience in the way that more conventional shows would be. The German theatre was constantly held up as a shining example of municipal funding facilitating the development of serious art, and for many the Volksbühnen represented something of an ideal in their programming and organisation. In Britain the idea of municipal funding for theatres was much discussed, particularly by organisations such as the British Drama League, whose Geoffrey
Whitworth put the case for the establishment of a National Theatre throughout the twenties and thirties, but it was not until after the Second World War that any really widespread public funding occurred. Most theatres were run as business propositions or subsidised by 'angels' who used private money to produce the drama they liked. In both cases it was difficult truly to say that the theatres were able to develop a programming policy that was based on the ideal of serving the needs of the community that used it. Much the same was true in the States, where backers such as Otto Kahn made vast fortunes out of 'promoting' drama; it was not until the Federal Theatre Project in the mid-thirties that any considerable amount of government money was put into theatre, and even then it was with the specific object of providing relief for the unemployed than from a belief in the necessity of the public funding of the arts.

Attitudes towards theatre as an art form were also changing. An awareness of the work of companies such as the Moscow Art Theatre, Copeau's Vieux Colombier group, the Compagnie des Quinze, and the semi-permanent groups that worked under the permanently-appointed directors at the German state theatres developed a realisation of the benefits of long-term collaboration between theatre artists and the creation of a house style. In Britain and America it had been usual for companies to be formed for one production only, perhaps leading to later collaborations but not expected to continue working together after the initial engagement was over. Throughout the period it became more common for writers, directors, designers and actors to group together for the pursuit of mutually agreed aims; the move away from starring that this tendency implied, and the association in most people's minds with some sort of art theatre, showed a widespread desire on the part of these groups to emulate the success of their precursors and to define themselves as an alternative to commercial managements. Not only were the practitioners of the art finding new attitudes towards their work; the critics too were redefining their own role and finding in the influence of foreign models a new set of criteria for the evaluation of theatre. In the Edwardian period dramatic criticism had often contented itself with
a summary of the plot and an assessment of individual performances, witnessing the exclusive attention given to actors and writers as the only significant artists in the theatre. However, with the varied influence of critics and commentators such as Craig, Shaw, Barker, Agate and Ervine, criticism began to pay more attention to wider issues of the production as an artistic whole, the relevance of the play to contemporary affairs, its place in comparison to other productions and in the ongoing debate surrounding the plethora of 'isms' that occupied writers on the theatre at that time. Directors, designers and even managers became part of the concern of the critics, seeking, like the artists, to promote the consideration of the theatre as a serious art form subject to canons of criticism as rigorous as those applied to any other.

All of these changes in practice and attitudes basically focussed on a process of re-evaluating the role and worth of the theatre. In attempting to see it as a serious art form, reference had to be made to the most obvious example of its emergence as such at the time, namely German Expressionism. While the style itself may not have genuinely appealed to many, the seriousness and artistic experimentalism of the movement definitely did, and in this way it became a critical touchstone. In a period of revolution in the theatre, Expressionism played a crucial role in indicating a possible direction when the commercial theatre seemed to be particularly directionless. The realistic movement in the theatre had fulfilled a similar function, raising many questions about whether or not the theatre should try to introduce serious discussion of contemporary (and generally unpleasant) issues onto the stage, and while the opening out of dramatic subject matter was of enormous importance, Realism did not challenge the theatre's notion of itself in such a thorough way as did Expressionism. Realism was primarily a literary phenomenon: what mattered were the ideas expressed and the words that expressed them. Of course, in the case of the Moscow Art Theatre, or when the material presented was by such a master of stage resources as Ibsen, Realism made a fundamental challenge in what it chose to
show; however there was little attempt to go beyond illusionism in the realist theatre - it would have been counterproductive to do so. Expressionism took the visual means of expression as of equal importance to the verbal; partly this was due to the higher profile of directors and designers in realising what were often poetic dramas, but many of the writers were also interested in exploiting the non-realistic potentials of stage imagery, even if they did not give explicit instructions in their texts. In this way Expressionism forced attention onto the theatrical illusion, rather than trying to mask it with a photographic adherence to what was real and probable. By revelling in the unreal as a means of heightened expression, the new wave of designers revealed the unlimited possibilities for interpretation of drama through visual means that led to a renewed interest in the staging of the classics throughout the period and beyond. From a literary viewpoint the developments of Expressionism can be seen as an extension of some of the basic beliefs that had inspired realistic writers. As early as 1885 Strindberg had envisaged a theatre

... where there is room for everything but incompetence, hypocrisy and stupidity! ... where we can be shocked by what is horrible, where we can laugh at what is grotesque, where we can see life without shrinking back in terror if what has hitherto lain veiled behind theological or aesthetic conceptions is revealed to us. 

The realistic theatre did indeed attempt to present experience on stage in a truthful manner, but it could be said also of Expressionism that it revealed the horrible and the grotesque, that it stripped away the veils, in a more direct way than did Realism. That Strindberg himself, at one time the advocate of absolute Naturalism, should turn to unrealistic methods to reveal the things that interested him is an example of the growth of Expressionism out of Realism in the search for ever more profound expressions of truth. The definition of the term avant-garde in this context could be that which recognised no canons of decency and had no respect for tradition in its quest for the expression of truth; both the realist and the expressionist generations in the theatre were perceived by their opponents as
The continuance of Expressionism has largely been through the injection of a wide range of staging techniques which have proved more durable and useful than the plays themselves.
being insurgents, and purveyors of indecencies.

Yet although Expressionism made such a fundamental challenge to the art of the theatre, it has not found itself a place in the repertoire of the modern theatre to anything like the extent that Realism and, later, the theatre of the Absurd have. The main reason for this apparent failure lies in one of the intrinsic qualities of Expressionism, its essentially non-literary nature. There was no expressionist Ibsen or Chekhov; the great writers sometimes associated with the movement such as Wedekind and Strindberg are more properly precursors, sharing some stylistic similarities but, because of both historical reasons and a fundamental difference in the ideas and intentions behind their work, can not really be regarded as expressionists. The playwrights whose work represents the greatest achievements of expressionist drama, such as Toller, Kaiser, von Unruh, Hasenclever, Kornfeld, Werfel and Sorge, have failed to attain the status of classics in post-Second World War theatres. Unfair as this exclusion may be, it is necessary to consider briefly the reasons why the expressionist style of play writing has never found a real welcome outside Germany. Partly it is due to the close link between the plays and their historical setting, yet works such as Masse-Mensch, Die Maschinenstürmer, Von Morgens Bis Mitternachts, Jenseits and Spiegelmensch all transcend the contextual background that provided their initial impetus. Partly it is due to the surface oddity of the style that never translated too well out of German, and was certainly not helped by the stilted, wordy translations made of some plays in the twenties and thirties. Also, a conception of what Expressionism demands from a theatre in the way of elaborate stage machinery, massenregie, extremes of design and acting, have discouraged many producers and directors from considering putting on the work of those dramatists. Perhaps above all it is the fact that Expressionism remained so definitely a German style. In a period when relations between Germany and Britain were at best strained, this was a positive disadvantage. At a time when the German theatre was producing great works in the style, there was a distinct coolness
towards any of the art of that country as a result of political involvements; what German drama did reach Britain or America had to run the gambit of censorship, bad translations and public and press hostility, thus preventing much likelihood of its acceptance into the repertoire of many theatres. Yet, had there been a significant number of successful writers to espouse the style, the acceptance might have been greater and longer-lasting; but a writer such as O'Neill, who could reasonably be claimed to have produced a body of significant and thoroughly expressionist works, not only moved decisively away from the style in his mature work, but also repeatedly disavowed any interest in, or influence from, that movement. Without writers proclaiming allegiance to Expressionism, both critics and public found it difficult to accept a movement that was apparently without leading figures that could be easily identified. With the emergence after 1945 of a new style of experimental writing and staging that has been labelled 'Theatre of the Absurd' there also emerged writers - Beckett, Ionesco, Arrabal - who were recognisably and sometimes volubly committed to the ideas of drama that their work exemplified, thus creating a more acceptable notion of an artistic movement (whether or not this was really the case) rather than what was to become, in the case of Expressionism, a scarcely-definable artistic tendency. The expressionist writers both in and outside Germany were less accessible, less definitive in their methods, more fragmented. Few of them grew to maturity in the style. Without the cachet of prominent literary success, Expressionism seemed somehow unrespectable; its acceptance in Britain and America was hindered by so many factors that this barrier set the style further at odds than ever.

It will be seen in what follows that the career of Expressionism outside Germany was confused, marked by periods of isolated but intense interest, marred by distaste or surprising indifference in many theatrical quarters. That its effect was decisive will be seen simply from the volume of debate that it engendered, and yet this effect was ultimately manifested most often in ways that did not incorporate a positive adoption of the form. Primarily Expressionism
served as a springboard to developments in the British and American theatre, yet, after it had been used to help artists formulate their ideas and practice their craft, and had been considered by critics enough to reach new ideas and theories and then reconciled to the shelves of historical interest only, it seemed to disappear from the theatrical scene. Now, some sixty years after the 'demise' of the first flush of Expressionism, interest in the style is gradually increasing, and in the last ten years this has manifested itself in a few productions of expressionist plays and a revival of scholarly attention to the work of the playwrights and producers that epitomised the style. It is significant that this has occurred at a time when many of the questions that perplexed producers, writers and critics in the twenties and thirties are once again becoming pressing: the funding of the arts, particularly; the lack of any sense of artistic movement and purpose in the theatre and the allied issues of the extent to which theatre should be seeking to express attitudes about contemporary affairs, whether as simple reportage or in the form of agitprop; the competition of alternative forms of popular entertainment, particularly TV and home videos, which are now challenging even the cinema in the way that cinema challenged the theatre, but with the added dimension that people do not even have to leave their homes to absorb video entertainment, leading to a passive and even more consumerist approach towards popular culture; and a social and political situation which has parallels with that of the earlier period - a widening of the gap between the rich and the poor, mass unemployment, governments spending on armaments rather than education, international politics that could almost come from Carl Hauptmann's Krieg - Ein Tedeum, and a general mistrust of notions of citizenship and civic progress and a lack of interest in the media in anything but the banal reflection of an oppressive and puritanical morality. The forms to express an artistic response to these factors are being sought, and one source could be a re-appraisal of an earlier generation's attempt to reveal these qualities in their experience.
If we look back today on that astonishing generation ... (which) impelled by faith and anger, had set out fifty years ago never to arrive, its ultimate fate seems dark indeed ... Seldom has a generation bled to death so quickly. The Great War demanded many deaths; young poets were prevented from maturing in peace. And then the great eclipse that came over our people in 1933 drove others into exile or a brutal death ... Their sad end would appear less fateful if they had left heirs behind. Their works burned and banned, the silence was too long and too deep for their voices to be capable of reaching the right people ... Now, when scarcely anybody remembers them, grandsons and great-grandsons are beginning to ask about them ... What attracts the young people is not only the unique creative expressionism of these poets of the beginning of the century, but also the now legendary fate of the poets associated with it. When the young raise their heads from such books, pamphlets, pictures or journals they seem in some way transfigured; for several of the departed among this noble generation became martyrs and saints in a godless age by reason of the courage with which they professed their faith.

CHAPTER TWO: BRITISH RESPONSES

I: INTRODUCTION

In considering the British response to Expressionism, it is first necessary to define some of the terms used by writers of the period in discussing the theatre. Many distinctions were drawn between different types of theatrical presentation, basing themselves variously on differences in artistic style, audience appeal, funding, geographical location, correspondence to any of the theatrical styles prevalent on the Continent or in the States, or any combination of the above. Theatrical criticism, and the theorising that was generated by the artists themselves, was all too often based on partial knowledge and misconceptions, making a definitive evaluation of much of the work done in the period difficult. Yet, without the benefit of authoritative voices from the period, one can nonetheless construct a picture of the cross-currents of discussion that emerged in the timespan, and by the confusion and contradiction often inherent in such debated begin to gauge the role that an awareness of German Expressionism played in the way that people regarded theatre between the wars.

The first and most basic distinction entertained by most commentators was a different attitude towards London theatre from that held towards theatre in the provinces. The assumption that a London show was automatically superior to a presentation in, say, Birmingham, persisted throughout the period even with the firm establishment of a provincial repertory movement that proved itself time and again to be at least as concerned with artistic criteria as the London theatre, if not more so. It is a distinction that still holds sway. Secondly there was a distinction drawn between the 'commercial' and the 'art' theatre. Both terms were used in the approving or disapproving sense, depending on the context of the debate in hand. For many of those who found inspiration in Expressionism, British commercial theatre was a bête noir, seen as sacrificing all artistic considerations to the task of making a profit for entrepreneurs whose interest in the theatre was financial, and fundamentally opposed to art. For many critics, the art theatre
was seen to be a creation of a handful of over-educated, neurotic individuals who wished to foist their continental morbidities on a public who would rather be provided with solid native entertainment that presented a realistic reflection of life without making claims to being anything other than a simple fulfilment of a basic need for escapism. These were the poles of the highbrow/lowlbrow debate that will be encountered consistently in the consideration of critical responses to the theatre of the period. What is apparent in this debate is that neither side distinguished its argument by any consideration of the variety of cultural needs presented by British audiences, preferring instead to use references to 'the public' or, even worse, 'the masses' in a way that presumed a single amorphous entity that needed to be told what it wanted and was incapable of exercising its own discretion. Expressionism played an important role in the definition of the grounds of this argument, for to many it stood as the ultimate example of the art theatre allowed to develop without the limitations of financial interest. To those who wished for an art theatre in Britain, the German theatre, with its massive public funding, its stylistic and technical advances, and the genuine popularity of its modern works must have seemed like a dream come true. Yet as the period wore on it became increasingly apparent that neither the British nor the American theatre was prepared for such an organisation. Sources of change and inspiration were constantly sought in the desire to find a means of revitalising the British theatre, and it is here that another of the distinctions between different categories of theatre becomes apparent. 'The tributary theatre' was a phrase much used in the journalism of the period, meaning those houses which produced work that might, given a proven popularity, one day find a home on the stage of a major London theatre. In the States, the tributary theatres were those operating outside New York, or those in the city which were not recognised as major commercial houses - what came to be known as 'off-Broadway'. The implication that these theatres somehow served the purposes of the commercial theatres denied them the right to be judged purely on their
own merits, as opposed to their correspondence to what was being done in houses with very different aims and standards from their own. In Britain the situation was perhaps more complicated, as there was not the same need for the rapid assimilation of a body of plays that would supply a repertoire for the theatre; yet there was still a notion that some theatres played a tributary role either in finding new material for the commercial houses, or as try-out houses for cautious managements wishing to test an uncertain proposition on audiences in the provinces before the risk of undertaking a London run. Apart from the implication that the response of a provincial audience was of subordinate importance to the satisfaction of London houses, this practice also ignores the possibility that audiences outside London would have different responses due to cultural and environmental factors that determined tastes and requirements and attitudes towards theatre.

The diverse and often conflicting attitudes that prevailed towards the art of the theatre in the period led inevitably to a confusion of aims in those theatres that sought to produce something more than money-making entertainment. Caught between the desire to justify their programming in terms of art, and the exigencies of the box-office, many managements found themselves trying to please both highbrow and lowbrow tendencies, with the result that the development of anything approaching a house style, as seen in the European theatre, was rare in Britain. The disagreement between those who, like Craig, viewed the art of the theatre as something pure and unsullied by Mammon or the popular demand for easily-digested entertainment, and those who persistently voiced the tired sentiments of anti-'academicism' (and they are legion, foremost among them being St John Ervine) became an insoluble riddle in which the Reps and the small experimental companies, largely unable to afford the risk of an unpopular but artistically satisfying experiment but unwilling to resign their aspirations to being the British theatrical vanguard, could do nothing but hope that the paying public would ultimately dictate the choice of style and repertoire in a direction that suited everyone. That public
taste turned more persuasively to the modern comic style of Shaw, Barrie, Milne, Coward and Maugham than it did to experiments with the work of European writers, and those playwrights and producers who emulated their style, was unsatisfactory to both highbrow and lowbrow critics - perhaps the only point on which they were in agreement.

Whatever the extent to which the many experiments and arguments seen in the British theatre in the period succeeded in contributing styles, ideas or methods to the theatrical language, it is beyond doubt that the belief in a 'new theatre' was prevalent, and it would be wrong to dismiss such claims, however empty they may seem, on the grounds of a purely statistical approach, for they are symptomatic of a challenge that was of direct relevance and importance to that turbulent time. The efforts of theatre artists to steer the theatre away from its glamorous bias, or from beautifully-observed but fatuous exercises in the Realism of the upper-middle-class sex comedy or the rarefied problem-plays of the school of Henry Arthur Jones and the more frivolous of Pinero’s works, highlighted a problem still unsolved but much less-discussed in the present day theatre. The much-heralded new theatre was anything from pedestrian imitations of the Court writers to more-or-less wholesale imports of German Expressionism, and yet, despite the disparity of styles and aims of so many artists, what bound these insurgents together was a common desire to define the art of the theatre in terms other than those dictated by the box-office habits of the Edwardian era and to introduce as subject matter material which seemed to be of first-hand relevance to the currents of post-War history, presented in as direct and powerful a way as possible.

Much of the art of the twenties and thirties has reflected a feeling of the moral uncertainty and disorientation faced by Britain after the national trauma of the Great War. The roaring twenties, with their amazing rise in faddish leisure pursuits, music and fashion that emphasised a hedonistic approach to experience, contempt for the systems that had led to the War, the stress on youth, jazz and the speedy gratification of desires - all these elements rendered the role of the serious artist or moral commentator question-
able and undefined. The development of a body of popular native comic drama in the earlier plays of Coward and Maugham, with their irreverent attitudes, stress on youth and fun, and delight in the absurdities of the British way of life, brought into the commercial front ranks a style of acting and production that saw immediacy of effect and the communication of the writers' witty sallies as top priority. Perhaps an immediate model for this style of theatre was the formula employed by Shaw of presenting unconventional content (ideas, attitudes) in a conventional and commercially palatable form; certainly the success of the Court productions and the subsequent domination by Shaw of amateur and professional stages relied to a great extent on this clever ambivalence. In the hands of a gifted writer like Coward the 'sophisticated' comedy became a fairly flexible means of dramatic expression, and his later work such as Design for Living saw an extension of standard comic situations into more subtle explorations of human behaviour, but what sold this kind of drama was the titillation it provided for the audience in its subject matter (often adultery or elegant fornication) and the opportunity it gave to actors and actresses such as Yvonne Arnaud, Gertrude Lawrence and Coward himself to display the detailed, slightly arch, mannered style that such creations demanded. This style has, of course, provided the staple of many repertory companies ever since, but its effects in crowding out the more serious drama, especially in the West End in the twenties and thirties, have been manifest. In 1922 a reviewer in the Manchester Guardian commented that 'Rubbish or mediocrity is, for some obscure reason, intensely contemporary', thus articulating a yearning shared by many critics and theatregoers for a dramatic style that would encompass all the seriousness of intent and execution and all the advanced ideas and methods of twentieth century European theatre that seemed to be missing from the British scene. Militating against any such development were the seemingly opposed, but in fact related forces of a code of censorship that made serious work very difficult, and the perceived frivolity of the period where values, both moral and aesthetic, were giving way to the seeming
onslaught of ephemeral fads and pulp culture. Whether through demands for decency or a distaste for anything that seemed serious or, worse, had a message, the theatre was effectively prevented from achieving the potential of the artists working in it.

With the opening of the Reps and the growth of small producing groups came a slew of manifesto-like statements of intent, most of which share an enthusiastic idealism, an intention to pursue artistic rather than commercial success, and above all a desire to provide a type of theatre that would fill what was perceived as a serious vacuum in the cultural and intellectual life of British communities. The idea that the Reps should combine the development of the new theatre with the sociological role of fulfilling cultural demands within their communities, as well as the conflicting tastes and ideas regarding theatrical style, makes it difficult to untangle the threads of influence and ambition that affected the work done in the period. To some extent it is true that the brief vogue for the spectacular, imaginative style of Expressionism, especially in stage design, that was evident in the late twenties, was a reaction against the limitations of the Realism that had dominated the theatre since the turn of the century; on the other hand there was a widely-expressed suspicion that any deviation from basic realism, be it in design, writing or acting, would jeopardise the seriousness of a play's intellectual content, rendering it inaccessible or trivialising it by distracting gimmickry. Some saw experimentation in non-realistic presentation as a continuation of an older style of pre-Edwardian spectacle theatre; to others it was distinctly a modern development and looked to Germany and Russia as its only immediate influences and inspirations.

Speaking of this tendency away from Realism in the period, Grace Wyndham Goldie recorded:

The 'Intellectual' drama was dying, if not dead. Most of it was based on a faith in the effectiveness of the intellect, and the apparent ineffectiveness of the combined intellects of humanity when faced with the disasters of the war, plus the trend of psychological studies which were seeping through to the ordinary man by means of popular science, magazine articles and novels, made both intellectuals and the general public look on the intellect as suspect
There was a growing demand for splendid emotions, for heroism ... for visual beauty which was a reaction from the accurate realism of the ordinary straight play?

The combination of a growing distrust or lack of interest in the power of the rational intellect, and the yearning for a throwback to the splendour, glamour and romance of an earlier theatrical style, certainly explains the rise in popularity of ballet and historical pageant spectacles throughout the period. It does not, however, fully explain the related interest in the very different style of theatrical spectacle that grew from the influence of Expressionism. This tendency in the post-realist 'new' theatre was widely referred to at the time as the 'art theatre', and many of the manager and publicists of such ventures who admitted the expressionist influence and who were insistently modern tended to use this term as a rallying point for like-minded theatregoers.

One of the best and most persuasive clarion-calls of the art theatre came from Charles F. Smith, writing on the beginning of the second season of the Leeds Art Theatre:

An art theatre is not a London 'bus to be dominated by a slogan of 'safety first'. It is the duty of its patrons not to be appalled by novelty, either of method or ideas. And the most cursory student of the Drama must feel that we are on the eve of strange developments. Hastened by the War, the continental stage is in an inchoate, transitional condition. But hesitatingly, tentatively, a new type is emerging. Even in England, the last to feel a new artistic impulse, its influence is discernible ... realism has become a prison. Literature, music, painting - all have left this objective method behind, after absorbing its most valuable properties; only in the English theatre does it linger. On the Continent there is a riot of new forms.

Most of the elements of the attitudes that embraced the expressionist influence are there: the arrogant challenge to the conservative, London-style commercial theatre; the stress on the 'duty' of playgoers to open themselves to new forms (and presumably a hope that they will not be foolish enough to dislike experiment or decry failures); a sense of the historical necessity of new theatrical forms and the strong link between drama and social/political developments; the fascination with the developments on the Continent and a delight in the 'inchoate', 'transitional' and 'emergent'
forms; a contempt for the English resistance to these forms and the clinging to unfashionable realism. It is an exciting mixture of enthusiasm, faddishness and a serious interest in theatrical progress. The challenge is explicit in every line: the faith in the supreme importance of new forms is unwavering. That such theatre artists as Smith looked unhesitatingly to Expressionism as an example and model for developments in Britain perhaps shows a naivety about the British public but also reflects powerfully the need during the inter-war period for some kind of theatrical and cultural renaissance, such as seemed to be happening everywhere but in England.

Allied to this direct focus on specific European examples is the persistent interest in the concept of the 'theatre of ideas' and of a theatre with an intrinsic relevance to the life of a community. That drama could express ideas in a way that would contribute to social reform and political and intellectual change was a concern of many of the writers whose work was performed at the Court seasons of course, and that faith persisted even when translated into a different sphere of formal preferences. The insistence that every community needed a serious theatre was also not new in the post-War period, but with the growth of the Reps it became more and more a talking point and an area on which the commercial bias of theatre was challenged. It is not my intention here to explore whether or not the repertory and regional theatre did in fact come into being as a result, direct or partial, of a genuine cultural need for 'serious intellectual drama'; what is of concern here is that this much-expressed idea became inextricably tied up with the expressionist influence to the extent that some of its advocates could claim that what the public needed, whether it knew it or not, was a serious intellectual theatre on expressionist lines. For every stated opinion that the public needed to be educated into an appreciation of new theatrical forms there exists a counterstatement decrying this attitude and translating the term 'need for theatre' into the more basic 'appetite for entertainment'. As usual, both extremes failed to consider the habits and responses of audiences, and in
the area of theatre programming such ill-informed opinionating is generally doomed to failure. An idealism based on the belief that, in the hands of sensitive and educated artists, the theatre would respond in the desired way; or a cynicism about the belief in the improveability of the theatre through self-consciously artistic means, and a greater willingness to take as the only relevant criterion the financial proof of a play’s worth in box-office receipts—these were the extremes of an argument that, despite the obvious shortsightedness of both sides, actually informed much of the programming of the repertory theatres in the period. That the former opinion ignores the difficulty of translating critical awareness of artistic merit into performance terms, and that the latter, by abandoning any aspiration to higher critical values, leaves itself too open to unpredictable fashion to have any trustworthy direction, were factors that were largely unresolved by theatre managements who had to exist without subsidy to facilitate experiment and who came to know all too well the fickleness of popularity.

A great need was felt for authoritative voices in the theatre, and the popularity of critics such as Agate and Ervine testifies to this. Reactions against the onerous limitations of profitability were as common as tirades against the pretensions of art-theatre idealists; in both cases what was seemingly being sought was some kind of excellence that would combine popularity with seriousness—an 'irresistible' theatre in Arnold’s terms. Arnold had been a prophet of the idealists and their belief in the 'need for theatre':

The human spirit has a vital need, as we say, for conduct and religion; but it has the need also for expansion, for intellect and knowledge, for beauty, for social life and manners. The revelation of these additional needs brings the middle class to the theatre.

A theatre that could provide these things not only for the middle class but for the whole community was eagerly sought between the Wars. The expansion of the audience for serious theatre from upper to middle class to working class in the twentieth century became involved in the arguments surround-
ing the cultural necessity of theatre, and, indeed, the links between Expressionism, Constructivism and left-wing politics added to the demand for an artistically relevant theatre and a new demand for a theatre expressive of/instrumental in the coming to power of the working class. This tendency had a far greater impact in the U.S.A. than in England, but nevertheless it became another criterion against which popular, established forms were measured and found wanting. Not content with the argument that the working classes received the entertainment they required and 'deserved' in the music halls, many writers of the period insisted that it was of importance that their ideas be communicated to all classes. A certain element of class-consciousness and snobbery (inverted or otherwise) always confuses this issue, and often the question of relevance to the working class was of little importance except as another brickbat to hurl at the beleaguered commercial theatre. The British resistance to political dogmatism in drama rendered unacceptable the more committedly left-wing affiliations of expressionist drama, preferring politics in the theatre, if at all, to be wrapped in the humorous pragmatism of Shaw or to be ultimately overshadowed by the sentimentality of low-life tragedy in the style of Masefield. When groups such as Unity appeared in the thirties, it was from the U.S.A. that they took their lead, where Expressionism had been a direct springboard to an active, politically committed theatre. In Britain the resistance had been stronger.

The term 'commercial theatre' raises a question of terminology. It goes without saying that one cannot point to one theatre and say that it is commercial while another is not; the objection is generally to a staple of theatrical presentation that makes money without any visible attempt to communicate ideas on a serious level. While it is a nebulous concept, the question of seriousness of intent is an important approach to understanding the theories and practice of twentieth century theatre. So astute a commentator as Shaw, for all his disapproval of romantic theorising, could happily state in 1924:

... that art is kept alive, not by the established trade in it, but by the despar-
ate efforts of art-hungry individuals to create it out of nothing for its own sake.5

This was a reflection on the first decade of the Birmingham Repertory theatre - an establishment which, alongside other major Reps such as the Liverpool Playhouse and the Sheffield Repertory theatre, ran the whole gamut of the experiment/entertainment debate in its long and turbulent history. Against the vicissitudes of economic problems (despite the patronage of Barry Jackson) the Birmingham Rep could boast the approval of no less a critic than Shaw, who had chosen it for the première of the Back To Methuselah cycle in 1923. The question of credibility is a complex and emotive one in any form of popular culture, especially where the well-timed nod towards the standards of academia can ironically be reflected in improved box-office. Throughout the inter-war period the revival of interest generally in theatre awakened in audiences and commentators a desire to be ahead of the crowd; hence the vogue for Expressionism (as opposed to genuine experiments therein) and the popularity of classic revivals and historical plays in the thirties: anything with an air or seriousness that did not necessarily challenge the basic assumptions of its audience was welcome. The reaction against trivial commercialism resulted, inevitably, in a new breed of commercial theatre that was, fittingly, mastered by Coward in his wartime dramas such as Cavalcade. The movement away from the limitations of Realism, through the two major influences of experimentation with form and the ideal of the intellectual drama created a situation (at least by 1930) in which idealism in the theatre was more diversified than ever. Should the artist still pose as a rebel? Or should he seek to improve the existing theatre by concentrating on the purely theatrical qualities of acting and production on the classics? Eric Bentley, in typically dogmatic style, asserted that:

... the commodity theatre constitutes ... a tremendous pressure upon the drama as a whole. Perhaps at some periods of history this pressure can be regarded as on the whole salutary. It may provide a firm convention, a necessary habitat for the playwright to operate in. But circumstances alter cases. The pressure of commercial theatre may also become a tyranny. In that event
the artist can know but one relationship to it: the relationship of antagonism. In such an era the playwright is either a rebel and an artist or a yes-man and a hack.6

This is an extreme view that denies the possibility of changing the situation of tyranny from within the commercial theatre by pursuing excellence in a context other than pure antagonism. It is certainly true that the Old Vic in the thirties and forties with its new productions of Shakespeare, combined an unfussy approach to design, a fresh line of interpretation, and the high-quality acting standards of Gielgud and Olivier; certainly the availability through tours and through work in the Reps made classical productions available to a far wider audience and did much to maintain an interest in theatre after the Second World War; but there was little pretence at continuing a vein of theatrical idealism that had demanded a British version of the 'riot of new forms' in Germany and elsewhere. With certain exceptions, no major producing body in Britain during the period pursued a consistent policy of executing experimental production projects and staging new writing that did not conform to Edwardian standards of what made a good play. In retrospect it is foolish to expect that they could or even should have done so. What is of importance is that a major contrast was recognised between theatre in Britain and elsewhere (especially Germany, France, Russia and the U.S.A.) in that Britain did not respond to the chaotic changes of the interwar years with a native and distinctively modernist theatrical movement. The awareness of the potential for such a response was high: in Ireland writers such as O'Casey and Johnston seemed to be the vanguard of something close to a native Expressionism; and yet their lead was not followed by any significant body of work in that style. Groups such as Unity, the Group, the Cambridge Festival under Gray and the Gate Theatre Studio under Godfrey, were isolated beacons of the longed-for new movement amidst a general outlook of compromise and frustration. Yet, while there never emerged any obvious and assertive response to the challenge of historical change and foreign example, it is true that many of the methods of Expressionism, or at least the ideas
surrounding it, were absorbed into the practice of the Reps and the regional theatres to an unspectacular but significant degree. The chief means by which these influences were introduced were not the polemics of idealists of any colour, but rather the persistent efforts of artists and managers to explore an area of theatre which, while never openly flourishing in this country, has provided an important inspiration and reference-point to artists since the Great War. These attempts could only be made when possible financially, within the strict limits set on stage productions by the Lord Chamberlain's office and with reference to the tastes and needs of a public that many regional managements felt it was their role to serve, rather than to educate or patronise, but the steady flow of expressionistic plays and design work that was presented during the period suggests a significant grass-roots interest in the style.

Outside the historical, social and cultural environment that begat Expressionism in Europe, the degree to which that style and the attitudes behind it found acceptance varies from country to country, but in every case of its influence it has tended to serve as a catalyst to further developments rather than as a serviceable style. The reception was directly affected by the extent to which the countries in which the influence was felt needed the impetus of an extreme, experimental form to galvanize their native theatre into some kind of interesting response. In the States the reaction was more immediate and further-reaching because there was no tradition of native drama upon which new artists could draw; in Britain there was greater resistance because of an overwhelming awareness of Britain's theatrical heritage, an awareness that made the admission of a need for new stimulus unlikely. British theatrical commentators were too often content to rest on the laurels of past ages, considering that their own time would produce similar work without the assistance of German influences. The values of past generations had become rigid and inviolable; the overwhelming conservatism of the press, and its readiness to ridicule the 'excesses' and 'morbidity' of German theatre, no doubt diminished the likelihood of the
expressionist style ever gaining wide acceptance. Blatant experiments in that manner generally seem to have failed to reach a wide audience; the history of the Reps of that period is full of interesting, exciting productions that met with derision and empty houses; however, even in Britain, the expressionist influence did serve as a springboard to something. Maybe nothing more than a shake-up in the ideas of theatre as an art-form, or a few ideas contributed to the designers, or a convenient method for writers to indicate fantasy or mental disturbance; but we will see that the extent to which Expressionism was both praised and reviled during its vogue in this country, and the amount of work that was done with a recognisable debt to an expressionist influence, left a mark on the minds of commentators, artists and theatre-goers that highlighted major contradictions about the function of theatre and which decisively affected the directions in which drama developed in Britain during the inter-war period.

In this chapter I intend to consider the work of some of the theatres which were contributing to this process of re-assessment, and at this point I should give some indication of the inclusions and exclusions in this discussion. Firstly, for they seemed to undergo the whole range of the debates current about theatre in the period, comes an examination of the work of the British repertory theatres. Thereafter some attention is necessary on theatres such as the Cambridge Festival Theatre, the Gate Theatre Studio and some of the other groups which, while not properly falling into the category of Reps, either because of their location, their relationship to other theatrical work, their club status or their means of funding, nonetheless must be considered in the context of the repertory theatre 'movement' such as it was. The reasons for the categorisation of theatres in this way may seem arbitrary, and admittedly imposes a sense of unanimity of purpose and of corporate identity that was not perceived at the time; however it is a necessary evil, considering the vast amount of work that has to be considered. I will leave a discussion of the work of the Group Theatre to a later chapter, as its style and stated
intentions were quite different from those of the Reps. Neither do I intend here to give an account of the Irish theatre. Of the Dublin theatres, only the Gate showed any consistent response to Expressionism, and its work will inevitably be referred to in what follows, but it seems that both the work of the Gate and of the Abbey and other Dublin groups belongs to a different area of enquiry, partly because they do not strictly fall into the category of British theatre, but generally because their work is not to any great degree congruous with that of the British Reps, showing as it does a far more advanced and sophisticated response to the concept of the cultural role of theatre, and to the new ideas of staging and writing, meriting individual study. The theatres that will be given the most attention here are the provincial Reps, which battled on against the varying fashions in criticism, and upon which the critics developed their arguments pro- or con-art theatre. The productions staged in these theatres that could reasonably be said to have an overtly expressionist style are few and far between, but it will be seen that Expressionism was constantly in the minds of those who controlled and influenced the programming of the Reps, as an inspiration, a reference point, or a bête noir. In many cases, it is the gap between theory, ambition and practice that makes the study of the Reps of the period fascinating; the conflict between the desire to produce work that measured up to international standards while having to stay within the bounds of what censors and box-office would allow made for a continuous sense of struggle in the Reps, in the course of which much interesting work was accomplished, and many revealing battles of words were lost and won.

II: THE RECORD OF THE REPS

The public has lost its taste for the artistic and serious drama; its desires are all for the frivolous and commonplace; authors have not the courage to resist the tendency and the managers take very good care not to attempt it.

Mario Borsa, 1908
The immediate pre-(Second World) War theatre showed all the signs of decadence... plays of originality and imagination stood little chance of success, unless by some fluke they happened to appeal to the after-dinner audience... Theatres with consistent policies and high standards of performance ceased to exist. Managers were driven to various expedients to maintain themselves against rising costs and diminishing audiences.

Basil Dean, 1945

Between the frivolity of the Edwardian audience and the decadence of the late 1930s, there had occurred a significant surge of interest, both critical and public, in the doings of the British theatre. Spurred by the example of the Court management, and the enterprising programming of the Stage Society, and by the awareness of foreign experiments, British theatre-goers and artists were, by 1918, busily re-assessing the function and nature of drama. The 1920s saw not only an upsurge in critical interest but also an enormous increase in the amount of theatrical activity in the country, both in professional and amateur groups. The general focus and professional centre remained, and remains, London, but during the inter-war years a decentralising tendency, the growth of regional theatres independent of the West End, and an increasing feeling of artistic autonomy especially in the Northern cities became significantly apparent. The foundation and flourishing of many of the Repertory theatres was instrumental not only in this shift of focus, but also in forcing theatre critics and commentators to re-evaluate the criteria by which they judged drama, especially in its relationship to the cultural needs of its public, and in ushering into the British theatrical arena some of the concepts of 'new theatre' and 'new stagecraft' that came from Europe, either directly or via America. Before progressing to a consideration of the inspirations behind the repertory movement and the responses that were made to various aspects of the Reps' work, it will be necessary to outline the field to be covered under the banner of 'Rep theatres' and to identify some key names, dates and productions. I do not intend to consider to any degree the career of the Manchester Gaiety theatre, even though in many respects it was the prototype of the later Reps; its achievement lies more in the field of establishing a native school of
dramatic literature of distinctly realist tendencies, than in showing any marked response to Expressionism, except by default. The term applies here in a generic way, and perhaps embraces theatres and production companies that do not strictly fit into the category; there will be some consideration in the appendix of small provincial companies such as the Leeds Art Theatre which, while not strictly repertory theatres, complement and contrast with the work of other local theatres in a useful way. Other choices for inclusion or exclusion have been dictated firstly by the pertinence of individual theatres' work to the issue of the expressionist influence, and secondly by the availability of records and archive material on their work. In the ensuing discussion of various elements of Rep theatre, there will be some consideration of most of the following theatres or production companies; the following 'potted histories' should provide the necessary background to that discussion.

LIVERPOOL

Of the Northern cities, the one which saw the largest amount of theatrical production during the period was surely Liverpool. Prior to the opening of the Liverpool Repertory Theatre in November 1911, there were at least half a dozen working theatres in the city, presenting touring productions, musical comedy and melodrama. Chief among these was the Royal Court, where Irving and Terry had performed, and which was to re-open in 1938, again serving mainly as a temporary home for prestigious touring companies such as the Wolfit Shakespeare company, the Ballets Jooss and the Vic-Wells Ballet. The other main theatres in Liverpool before the War were Kelly's, the Queen's, the Rotunda and the Star. Early moves towards the establishment of a serious alternative to the generally lightweight fare of the commercial theatres came with the foundation of a Playgoers' Club in 1910, following the urgings of Charles Reilly at the University Club and inspired by the appearance there in that year of Harley Granville-Barker, Miss Horniman and Nigel Playfair, spreading the gospel of repertory theatre from the Court
and the Gaiety. Before the formation of the first Liverpool Repertory company, there were pioneering trial seasons at Kelly's theatre and the Court: at the former, in 1910, William Kelly produced a very successful short Ibsen season of *A Doll's House* and *The Master Builder*, and went on to try at the Court (with less success) with plays by Ibsen and Maeterlinck. Although Kelly did not pursue these experiments, he had seemingly proved to the Playgoers' Society that there was, in Liverpool, a potential audience for the serious drama which, if properly appealed to, could support the more consistent endeavours of a permanent repertory company. Stepping into a space left by a cancelled visit of Alfred Wareing's Glasgow Rep company, Basil Dean assembled a company mostly of ex-Gaiety actors, financed by Charles Kenyon and co-managed by Miss Darragh, another Horniman protegee. Their work, at Kelly's theatre in February and March 1911, brought together most of the major figures of the first Rep seasons, and comprised plays by writers such as Galsworthy, Sudermann, Dean himself, St John Hankin and Masefield.

Riding on the success of these trial seasons, Dean announced the prospectus of a new company in March 1911 and began negotiations which led to the purchase by the board of directors of the Star Theatre in Williamson Square, erstwhile home of melodrama and once a music hall. Alterations were carried out and the first Liverpool Repertory Theatre production opened on November 11th 1911, after a try-out at the Gaiety. Responses to the production, of Barrie's *The Admirable Crichton*, were enthusiastic, and amidst much public and press attention the Repertory Theatre was launched. Dean's management of the theatre lasted only two seasons, after which he returned to London and the management of the St Martin's theatre, but during his time at Liverpool he had not only laid the groundwork for the continuation and expansion of rep in Liverpool, but had set standards of excellence against which later work would be measured. The material presented in those early seasons was typical of the notion of the repertory play - a mixture of Galsworthy, Shaw, Wilde, Sutro, Hankin and Sheridan, with continental
drama represented by Ibsen and Hauptmann. Pillars Of Society was the financial success of the first season; in the following season the inclusion of Hauptmann’s Hannele dispelled hopes that Liverpool might provide a home for the advanced European drama, provoking hostile reactions that set Liverpool managements against experimentation with serious German drama for twenty years.

The departure of Dean in 1913, with his designer George Harris, began a long period of struggle and uncertainty for the theatre that lasted for the next decade. It became obvious that the serious artistic drama so ardently desired by the Playgoers’ Club had little chance in Liverpool, and with the departure of Dean it seemed unlikely that a policy of new stagecraft (which Dean and Harris had studied in Berlin and Vienna after the first season) would be pursued. Reilly resigned as chairman of the company and was replaced by J.J. Shute, a businessman, not an academic. A series of managements kept the theatre going through the War years, notably the ‘Commonwealth’ of Madge McIntosh, Ronald Jeans and Alec Rea; Bridges Adams from 1916 to 1917 and Nigel Playfair 1921-22. During these years the Playhouse, as it was christened in 1917, produced successful but run-of-the-mill native drama: The Wild Duck in the 14-15 season and Everyman in 16-17 stand as lonely examples of serious or mildly experimental theatre. Playfair came to the Playhouse with the promise of working the same magic he had worked in Hammersmith, and brought with him the prestigious stage-manager/designer team of James Whale (who later became a Hollywood director, famous for The Bride Of Frankenstein and The Invisible Man) and Doris Zinkeisen (who also designed in the West End for Cochran). However, his 21-22 season, which included plays by Shaw, Bennett and Milne, was a financial failure. His tendency to direct and produce in absentia led to flat productions and muddled direction; his choice of plays ignored the requirements of an audience that had been built up by productions of light comedy in the previous five years. The 22-23 season was a make-or-break time. Under the overall direction of William Armstrong, who had joined the company under the Commonwealth management, a
season was announced containing a number of daringly experimental plays. In the event, the management had to tone down their original intentions, much to the disgust of some sections of the audience:

I was present at a meeting last summer ... when the chairman and producer talked glibly of the wonderful productions that would materialise this season - RUR, Greek and Ibsen revivals, Chesterton's Magic ... Now the company have come down to 'brass tacks', we were invited to the fourth revival at this theatre of The Importance Of Being Earnest; now we are threatened with another revival of A Pair Of Spectacles. If the Playhouse desires to justify its existence as a 'rep theatre' and be meted out with intelligent patronage, it must adopt different tactics; let it stick to its promises, and give us new and better plays.6

RUR had been abandoned at this time as being too elaborate and difficult for the Playhouse and its audiences: but of the general change in programming, it would seem that Armstrong had realised that an aggressively serious and experimental approach might alienate a substantial part of the audience - that part that was to make The Professor's Love Story by Barrie the financial hit of the season. The season had opened with Major Barbara and also contained plays by Galsworthy, Ervine, Bennett and Wilde - much the same fare as had been served up by both Dean and Playfair.

Armstrong remained at the helm of the Playhouse until 1939. For the most part of that time the overall flavour of programming changed little. Occasional performances of the work of new American playwrights7 and even rarer nods to the European theatre8 were infrequent interruptions to the main diet of home-grown Realism. J.C. Trewin summed up the Armstrong years as 'steady (and) unsur sensational', identifying Glaspell's Inheritors as its 'most ambitious play of the twenties'9. In the early thirties, the policy of experimental matinées, first tried in the 27-28 season with a performance of Ghosts for the Ibsen centenary, was occasionally revived but was essentially for small, educated audiences which could not realistically support a major production. These matinées were axed in 1933 due to lack of rehearsal time. An adaptation of Raynal's Sous L'Arc de Triomphe (as The Unknown Warrior) and Jensen's The Witch in the 28-29 season, and Rice's The Adding Machine in 1930,
provided a concentration of experimental productions in those two years, but such risks were paid for by the money gathered from the successful comedies that were more generally produced - plays by Coward, Behrmann and Longsdale proving most popular in Liverpool in the early thirties. Looking back on the career of the Playhouse in the year of its 21st birthday, Armstrong delineated the timid, indecisive philosophy that dominated his programming policy:

Many plays I would like to do are either unavailable or would require ultra-elaborate productions, with special type-casting. Obviously it is essential that our plays must please the majority of our supporters. It is undeniable that good plays are in demand - plays with a 'grip' and a humanity underlying them, but they are very difficult to find. Whilst plays of the frothy and farcical nature are 'gall and wormwood' to some of our patrons, it is equally true, on the other hand, that plays of unrelieved gloom are little less irksome to an equal number.10

It is not surprising that comedy was desirable in 1933, at a time of national economic depression, when all branches of the arts, both in Britain and the States, seemed to be largely devoted to alleviating (or distracting attention from) the misery of the Depression rather than to any serious analysis of its results. What is significant here is the example provided of the perceived polarity between farcical comedy and gloomy serious drama; Armstrong seems to have recognised no middle ground, seeing comedy and seriousness as mutually exclusive in a modern play.

Competition to the Playhouse in the years 1911-1940 was varied; the theatres that had existed before the War continued to provide a home for touring companies for at least two decades, and to produce the sort of entertainment they had been associated with - mainly musical comedy. As far as more serious theatre was concerned, there existed little competition. Small production societies had occasionally noteworthy successes, most notably the Sandon Studios Society for whom David Webster produced Evreinov's The Beautiful Despot and Toller's Masses and Man in December 1925, meeting with measured critical approval in Playgoer magazine.12 The university had a Dramatic Society that produced occasional European plays (such as Pirandello's Henry IV in February 1926) but apart from these small and short-
term productions there was little to rival the work of the Playhouse - nor to lighten the burden of providing 'serious' drama for Liverpool theatregoers.

Generally the Playhouse gained a reputation for reliable, unadventurous and solid productions; in Trewin's estimate it was 'less stern than Manchester, and it lacked the bright kingfisher-flash of Birmingham'. This was certainly true of its programming: while avoiding the fairly uniform Realism and the concentration of 'Northern plays' that marked the early years of the Gaiety, it could not afford to take such frequent risks in the inclusion of experimental work that Jackson allowed Birmingham. Its staple diet throughout the period was undoubtedly light comedy - a style that offers peculiarly little to the producer, designer or playgoer interested in new stagecraft. George Harris, who had been recruited to the Playhouse under Dean, was a designer of real flair and imagination, as he was to prove in his London work; his early work at Liverpool, however, showed little interest in a Continental influence. Of the designers who worked at the Playhouse during and after the War, the most distinguished was Zinkeisen, but again she had little opportunity to spread her wings under the Playfair management. The most interesting design work tended to come with Shakespearean revivals, for instance Armstrong's 1935 production of *Hamlet*, with settings and costumes by Marjorie Brooks and William Holford which, with their use of simple, functional steps and blocks, large installations such as rear windows, flagpoles and torches show the influence of contemporary American designers such as Lee Simonson, as well as the revived interest in methods of staging Shakespeare stirred up by the work of Poel, Barker, Bridges Adams and the Birmingham Repertory Company. At its best the Playhouse under Armstrong favoured a stark simplicity: Armstrong's 1933 *Macbeth* utilised gauze-like hangings for the heath and for the castle walls; John Fernald's production of *Alice In Wonderland* in 1935 used an illuminated backdrop and silhouetted cutouts (to suggest trees etc.) in a way reminiscent of the style associated with the American little theatre designers like Throckmorton. It is interesting to note
that the new staging ideas that did reach Liverpool in the twenties and thirties, seem to have come via America, just as the new drama produced there was mostly work by Glaspell, O'Neill and Rice.

BIRMINGHAM

The Birmingham Repertory Theatre, of all the Reps of the period, gathered a reputation for eclecticism and experiment, largely as a result of a liberal programming policy made possible by the munificence of its founder and 'angel' Barry Jackson. From the founding of the Pilgrim Players in 1907, to the opening of the Repertory Theatre in 1913 and through the twenties and thirties, Jackson poured money and enthusiasm into the work of the theatre to such an extent that it could ride over problems and failures that might have closed less fortunate establishments. That his continued support was necessary in a theatre that, in less than a decade of work, had established itself as one of the best English theatres, is a sad testimony to the lack of consistent public interest (let alone public funding) that might have made such private patronage unnecessary. Crises, although survived, were by no means avoided: in 1924, for instance, after two seasons that had seen one of the first modern-dress Shakespeares (Cymbeline 1923), the première of Shaw's massive and highly prestigious Back to Methuselah and the innovative and beautifully-designed Gas (both 1924), the theatre was forced to close due to the financial flop of Gas (which Jackson had been planning to produce for a long time and which had necessitated ingenious production and design work on the part of his chief designer Paul Shelving) and Jackson took Back To Methuselah to London, leaving Birmingham with no guarantee of his returning or the theatre re-opening. With the prestige of a London success, and with the guarantees from various civic societies of increased support, the theatre duly reopened. It is ironic that a theatre that was opening up the field of provincial drama needed the cachet of a London success such as Back To Methuselah, or the earlier transfer of Drinkwater's Abraham Lincoln in 1919 and Boughton's The Immortal Hour to gain attention and ensure survival.
The Repertory Theatre grew out of a small group of friends, including Jackson and Drinkwater, who started performing plays such as *The Interlude Of Youth* and *Two Gentlemen Of Verona* in mission halls and houses in the Birmingham area. Calling themselves the Pilgrim Players, their production style was appropriately sparse and anti-decorative, and their repertoire consisted largely of Renaissance and pre-Renaissance works in the first few years, with more modern authors (such as Shaw, Yeats, Hankin and Jackson himself) being produced as the company became more established around 1910. By the time of their last season (1911-12) the Pilgrim Players had played not only in and around Birmingham but also at Stratford, the Royal Court in London, and the Liverpool Rep. Production work was shared by Jackson (who designed most of the settings) and other members such as Drinkwater and Besant Rice. By 1912 they were calling themselves the Birmingham Repertory Company; a site was obtained in Station Street in the April to open as the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in February 1913. The first season presented 22 plays over 19 weeks, including the opening *Twelfth Night*, *Everyman* (continuing the Pilgrims' taste for medieval religious drama) and Maeterlinck's *Death Of Tintagiles*. The second season presented 33 plays in 42 weeks, including more Maeterlinck and even a piece by Strindberg - whose work was rarely seen in pre-war Britain - *The Outlaw*. Although the War broke out in the summer recess, Jackson persevered and was rewarded with improved houses in a third season that included two Ibsens (*The Wild Duck* and *The Master Builder*) alongside work by Galsworthy and Shakespeare. Between 1915 and 1919 the Rep continued at a similar pace, with most of the productions in the directorial hands of Drinkwater, and designed and produced by Jackson. Among the notable presentations were Masefield's *The Faithful* in Japanese settings (1915); a Shakespeare season in both 1916 and 1919 using Jackson's simple and adaptable design which first appeared in the 1916 *Twelfth Night*:

A set of three concave steps stretched across the stage from side to side, and rising from the top of them were eight slender columns, four on each side, supporting a slightly arched roof.19
The fifth season (1916-17) included a fortnight of Russian plays - short pieces by Griboyedov, Tolstoy, Evreinov and Chekhov - as well as Yeats' *The Hour Glass*. The seasons from 1917 to 1919 tended more towards Realism - Ibsen's *Pillars Of Society* in 1919 was one of the few foreign plays of interest - and culminated in the success of *Abraham Lincoln* and the subsequent departure of Drinkwater.

From 1919 till the crisis of 1924, the Rep presented a typically catholic repertoire, featuring the design work of Paul Shelving who, since his first assignment of *Arms And The Man* in 1920, had been responsible for contributing perhaps the most recognisable and striking feature of Birmingham's work. He always favoured a painterly style - incongruous, perhaps, with the trend towards 3-D plastic constructions initiated by Appia - and did much to lift the Rep's productions above the uniform taste for unimaginative Realism that was the standard style in, for instance, Liverpool. His first major success was with the designs for Jensen's *The Witch* in 1920, using cutouts and a painted backdrop as well as his more characteristic painted buildings; perhaps his best in this period were the designs for *Gas*. Of all the presentations of expressionistic drama in the Reps of the period, the most outstanding must surely be Birmingham's *Gas*, for it not only introduced to Britain one of the greatest of the expressionist plays, but also presented the play in a thoroughly consistent manner, with full-scale staging and a large cast. Later productions of Kaiser's work, for instance the celebrated Gate production of *From Morn To Midnight* in 1925, while popularising the style and structure of expressionist dramaturgy, very rarely presented a production style at all akin to the lavish treatment afforded such plays in the better-equipped German theatres. The popular British idea of expressionist drama as stark and dour arises largely from the fact that most of the early productions had to eschew the big dramatic effects so beloved of German producers (and, in many cases, integral to the play) in favour of a small-scale production that necessarily focussed attention on the occasionally laboured rhetorical framework of the dramatist's argument. In the instance of Peter Go-
frey's From Morn To Midnight this could be a positive asset - stripped of the big effects of the bicycle race, the crucifixion and other apocalyptic moments, the play's dialectic strength emerged clear and strong; one imagines, however, that other expressionist plays produced in Britain in the period would have lacked power and depth when divested of the important mechanical effects.20 The Jackson-Shelving Gas, however, seems to have pulled out all the stops to recreate Kaiser's escalating apocalyptic prediction.21 Calling largely on his talents as a painter and arranger of stage space, Shelving produced a series of beautiful designs, openly imitative of the German taste for jaggedness and distortion, mostly in black, white and grey, which, in their combination of cluttered disorder and an almost cartoon-like precision and sharp, neat line, perfectly expressed Kaiser's mixture of fiery, irrational rhetoric and a tight, relentless sense of intellectual progress and inevitability. It was typical of Shelving's best work at this period, and represented the noblest efforts of Jackson to provide for the imaginative, advanced drama a worthy platform in the British provincial theatre. 'It was a wonderful production in every way, and it fell absolutely flat.'22 records Bache Matthews, the Rep's first historian.

After Gas, and the hiatus of 1924, Jackson occasionally repeated experiments with expressionist drama, but never stepped so markedly into the front line as he did with that play. Expressionistic plays to surface in Birmingham over the next 20 years were: Andreyev's He Who Gets Slapped (1926); The Adding Machine (1927); Easter (1929); From Morn To Midnight (1930); Frank's Twelve Thousand, Capek's The Macropoulos Secret and RUR and Glaspell's Inheritors in 1931; The Moon In The Yellow River in 1933; and The Ascent Of F.6 in 1938. Occasional productions of Ibsen, and the growing popularity of O'Neill (Anna Christie in 1928; Ah Wilderness in 1940) showed the new stagecraft filtering into the repertoire by indirect routes. It is undeniable that Jackson was the most daring of the Rep producers insofar as experiments with Expressionism are concerned; indeed he is at least as important as Gray, Godfrey and the Group in bringing
Expressionism to the attention of British theatregoers. Yet, despite his high profile in this area, it would be wrong to say that Jackson really espoused the new drama in any wholehearted way. While his interest in the theatre was undoubtedly artistic rather than commercial, he did not persevere in using the Birmingham stage for the presentation of a truly challenging repertoire. His interest in Expressionism would seem to stem from a desire to house in his theatre a little of the best of everything; and while Gas was undeniably a bold and provocative choice of play, the remainder of the expressionistic productions followed the predictable pattern of Rice, Capek and Andereyev, with only very occasional airings of echt German Expressionism. It seems that Jackson took his lead from what other theatres or critics had deemed worthwhile; not a bad starting point, but not conducive to a truly experimental body of work. Most of Birmingham's Expressionism was of the second-hand type, in which the style was a useful device, rather than the result of an original conception. A rather uncharitable assessment of Jackson's approach to his theatre comes from John Elsom, worth quoting at length for his caustic summing-up of a period of unfulfilled promise:

Sir Barry Jackson was a sensible man - but a little stuffy perhaps and too saturated with the standards of Eng. Lit. ... He aimed to produce a mixture of plays, 'each good of their kind', a careful balance of ancient and modern, spiced with flavours from abroad, from the saucy French, the wise Greeks and the impassive Chinese. Looking back at the programmes of the Birmingham Rep, one is startled by the omissions. Sir Barry Jackson was a contemporary of Piscator and Brecht, of Jarry and Artaud, of the Dadaists, Surrealists and Expressionists, none of whom found a formal place in his theatre and had little influence on it either. His idea of an experimental play was The Ascent of F.6 by Auden and Isherwood, that masterpiece of pretentiousness, with its mock Freudian ideology ... No-one said 'Shit' in his theatre, unless he was medieval ... He showed ... little concern for the social or political issues believing that Art rose above ephemeral considerations ... The English theatre in the inter-war period badly needed someone else to balance his broad tastes and liberal-conservative approach with something more abrasive, egocentric and revolutionary. He made a respectable theatre more so - and steered it away from the uncomfortable turmoils abroad.23

While Elsom is unfair in singling Jackson out for special criticism, when he included more of the drama of modern political and social turmoil in his repertoire than most producers, and was bound by the difficulty of finding an
audience willing to pay for such drama, it is important to recognise the essential truth of his assertion that Jackson, by submerging the experimental in the established programme, emasculated it and presented it simply as an academic curiosity.

SHEFFIELD

Other than the two major Reps, at Liverpool and Birmingham, there were several theatres in the period that presented a significant amount of expressionist work, or whose programming and style contribute significantly to a consideration of the influence of Expressionism on the Reps. Of the later Reps, the one which contributed most to the body of expressionist work seen in Britain was the Sheffield Repertory Theatre. Between its foundation (in 1923) and 1939 the Sheffield Rep produced nearly all the expressionist plays that entered the British repertoire, including an early British ToiTer production (The Machine Wreckers in 1925). Of course, these experimental productions were submerged in the usual diet of light comedy and, as the thirties progressed, American imports, but it is nonetheless important that a theatre that lacked the private subsidy enjoyed by Birmingham managed to produce one or two experimental plays per year until its forced closure at the outbreak of the Second World War.

The Sheffield Repertory Theatre grew from a dramatic society founded at the St Philip's settlement in 1919, which had chosen Tolstoy's Where Love Is, God Is for its first production. During that year a new resident in the settlement, Herbert M. Prentice, and his wife Marion and a few others, decided to produce a play, this decision resulting in two performances in November 1919 of Galsworthy's The Silver Box, by then an established rep play. Occasional productions of similar work continued until, in 1920, the nucleus of the group adopted the name 'Sheffield Repertory Company', and announced their 1920-21 season, comprising plays by Chesterton, Galsworthy, Dickens, Ibsen, Robinson, Shakespeare, Shaw and Whitworth. Meeting with reasonable success, the company organised a second season, affiliated themselves to the British Drama League and desperately strug-
gled to make ends meet. New premises were rented in South Street in 1924, and the company became independent of the settlement, using its income to hire the schoolroom that was to be the first permanent home of the Sheffield Repertory Company. Between June 1924 and May 1928 the company continued under Prentice, producing anything that would possibly find an audience and pay the rent; it was during this period that *The Machine Wreckers* was performed, as well as *Inheritors*, a couple of Ibsen plays (*A Doll's House* and *Hedda Gabler*, both in 1927), *The Adding Machine* (1928) and Maeterlinck's *Monna Vanna* (1924); the general nature of the once-weekly productions was the predictable Realism and light comedy, much Shaw and Milne, no Shakespeare. Prentice left the Sheffield Rep to pursue his career at the Cambridge Festival Theatre, and the company moved to new premises in Townhead Street, under the production control of Maxwell Wray, in September 1928. A series of short-term producers worked with the Rep over the next ten years, and at the end of each season closure through financial failure seemed a real danger; and yet each season until 1935 included a couple of risky plays that were certainly not going to ensure the Rep's continued existence. Producers such as Wray, Arnold Reynor, Neil Porter and Jan Bussel stayed for one or two seasons, trying to create a home for the new drama, until in 1935 a new board of directors was formed with the stated intention of making money. A new programming policy was inaugurated, whereby plays were chosen in groups of four: two comedies, one 'drama', and one experimental/highbrow play. However, reviewing the production lists from 1935 until the War one can see that the nearest Sheffield came to serious experimentation were two Johnston plays (*Moon In The Yellow River* in June 1936 and *Storm Song* December 1937) and Toller's *Draw The Fires!* (October 1935, preceded by a lecture by the author on the night before the opening) — which was far from being expressionist in any true sense. The experiment worked; by 1938 the theatre was financially secure, but was forced to close when war was declared. After a sojourn in Southport the company returned to re-open the Townhead St. theatre in November 1939, but the
audiences had lost the repertory habit and the theatre closed until 1945.

With its turbulent history, and its lack of any one long-term producer, Sheffield Rep serves as a mirror of the vogues, fads and influences that held sway over the British provincial theatre. Each successive producer (there were ten between the departure of Prentice in 1928 and his return for the re-opening in 1945) used the Rep as an experiment, testing the water for the acceptance of serious drama in the industrial cities. Many of the producers had come from other Reps (such as Robert Lees from Hull) or moved on to others (like Wray, who left to work in Birmingham), establishing a degree of continuity between the experience of the network of Rep theatres but leaving Sheffield, and the other small Reps who only had one working producer at any time, without much hope of developing a house style over a long period, or of assessing in detail, by trial and error, the preferences and cultural needs of local audiences. It is not surprising that with this divergence of efforts no significant design trends became apparent at Sheffield. What little pictorial evidence there is suggests that the dominant mode was shoestring Realism or, in the case of the experiments with Expressionism, based on existing designs with little originality. No designer stayed long enough with the company to make a real mark, unlike the long association of Shelving with the Birmingham Rep, or the shorter but equally distinguished career of Ruth Keating at Croydon, or the many distinguished designers whose work appeared at the Playhouse. The Sheffield Rep gives an early example of an attitude that developed towards repertory theatres generally: that it was a training ground for artists who would learn their basic skills there, then go to London or one of the bigger Reps to participate in the business of 'real' theatre. The surprising frequency of experiments with expressionist drama is perhaps due to two main factors: firstly, the lack of continuity in producers which meant that the lessons of previous seasons had more or less to be learnt anew with each appointment; and secondly a sense of devil-may-care experimentation, related
to the status of the theatre and the constant threat of imminent closure. Very little remains of commentary on the work of the Rep; its wavering fortunes have been sparsely recorded. But as a representative of provincial theatres during the period, it can be seen as typical.

CROYDON
The concentration of Rep theatres was in the large cities of the North, cut off from, and less overshadowed by, the London theatre, with enormous urban populations from which to draw audiences. In the South there existed a number of small Reps, especially in the South-West (such as Citizen House, Bath, the Plymouth Rep and the Bristol Little Theatre) whose work tends to be largely overlooked in deference to the work of the bigger Northern theatres. Yet there was much of interest done in these less prominent venues: as an example of the Southern reps, the Croydon Repertory Theatre serves well as it presented a fairly standard repertoire yet shows the extent to which some of the ideas of the new stagecraft had permeated the British theatrical scene by the thirties, particularly in stage design. One advantage enjoyed by the Croydon Rep was the relative affluence of its catchment area; also it could draw on the support of suburbs-dwellers whose theatre-going habit was already established by their proximity to the capital.

The Croydon Repertory Theatre, working at the old Greyhound Theatre, was not established until 1932, by which stage many of the battles of the Northern reps had been lost and won. An early venture using the same name had survived two seasons before the First World War at the Grand Theatre under the supervision of the playwright Keble Howard. The usual pattern of preliminary meetings and lectures was followed, with the obligatory address by the seemingly ubiquitous Harley Granville-Barker, whose role as midwife to the birth of the British Rep theatre cannot be overestimated. These two seasons presented to Croydon ten plays in all, an unspectacular mix of work by Boucicault, Shaw, Wilde and some English writers. Interrupted by the War, it was an attempt at Southern provincial rep that might have borne
early fruit: Howard records that he actually made a profit on the second season.

Thereafter Croydon was without its own Repertory theatre until the new company under the production lead of Henry Cass, took over the Greyhound in 1932. Almost immediately a central team was put together with a remarkable pedigree, emphasising the large amount of talent that was working in the provincial circuit at that time: Cass had come from acting with Edith Craig, Philip Ben Greet and Basil Dean and from producing at the Royal Theatre, Huddersfield; his scenic designer, Ruth Keating, had taught at the Central School of Arts and Crafts and then worked as a designer and painter at the Cambridge Festival Theatre, the old Vic and the Sadlers Wells. For the first three seasons this producer-designer team took control of the company, presenting a body of work which, while not too surprising in the choice of plays, nevertheless displayed a quality in production values and design far ahead of some of its larger Northern rivals. Presenting a play a week, the schedules must have been impossibly tight, and one can see that Keating used basic sets with slightly different dressings when this would serve. Among the 39 different plays that comprised the first season, there were the predictable number by Barrie, Milne, Coward, Drinkwater, Bennett, Wilde, Shaw, Vane, Galsworthy and Pinero (and one Shakespeare - Hamlet) - by the early thirties the Repertory repertoire was well established, and it is with some surprise that one notices that Croydon did not produce Hobson's Choice in its first season. There were, however, a handful of less predictable choices: Ibsen's John Gabriel Borkman in the first season, for instance, and O'Neill's Anna Christie, recently made popular by the Garbo film; also there was Heijermans' The Rising Sun, a throwback to the 'grim Realism' of turn-of-the-century German drama; an early piece by Thornton Wilder (Love And How To Cure It) and Martine by Bernard. None of these is particularly outstanding, and there was nothing overtly expressionist (with the exception of the production of John Gabriel Borkman, discussed below) but it is significant that such a varied programme could draw sufficient audience interest to ensure
survival into a second season. This ran from 1933 to 1934 and contained, among the more predictable fare, another Ibsen (A Doll's House), The Seagull, As You Like It and Frank's Twelve Thousand - again, not a season of exceptional risk-taking, but demonstrating a determined effort to present a catholic repertoire guided by standards of excellence rather than baser financial motives. In the second season two Croydon productions had transferred to the Westminster Theatre, taking advantage of the physical proximity to advertise its role as a tributary to the London stage. The Westminster connection also yielded an early visit from the nascent Group Theatre, who, in summer 1933, presented one of their first programmes in Croydon, consisting of Lancelot Of Denmark, a full dance programme including the dance of death from Fulgens And Lucrece, traditional and modern songs and an epilogue by W.H.Auden.

It was not, however, merely by association and choice of plays that the work of the Croydon Rep deserves attention. The existing reviews of their productions stress frequently the high standard of the design work, and photographic records of Keating's work suggest that she had absorbed not only some of the principles that were put into practice at the Cambridge Festival Theatre, but had also studied in some detail both painting and design in Europe. Her Shakespeare designs especially seem to have drawn on a fairly direct German influence - for instance the 1935 King Lear which used steps and shadows projected onto a plain backdrop in a way heavily reminiscent of the famous Jessner Richard III, while the Hamlet from the first season testifies to her acquaintance with Gray's work. Her modern settings were elegant and sparse, reminiscent again of some trends in American design, particularly of the work of Simonson, such as her Twelve Thousand design with its use of free-standing window frames and silhouettes. In examining the photographs one begins to recognise basic sets and furniture, testifying to the need for quick construction of stage sets. The most outstanding design of which records exist is for the production of John Gabriel Borkman in the first season; the set for Act II shows an attempt to create a design which,
while not departing entirely from a functional realism, expresses themes and moods in the play in a direct visual language. Against a dark ground stand four long pillars, two vertical and two at angles across them, suggesting a collapsed building or ruined classical columns. In front of these is Borkman's attic room, furnished with a piano, a small chair and a large, high-backed chair like a throne. All these pieces are constructed entirely in right angles and decorated with small stars. The only other item is a classical-looking bust on a simple angular plinth. It captures perfectly the air of decaying grandeur called for in the play, while the unreal, dreamy quality created by the unrealistic elements suggests the disordered perception of Borkman, whose room it is.

After the third season, which included King Lear, Ghosts, Moon In The Yellow River and Everyman (designed by Gerald Pringle) Keating resigned from the theatre and her post was taken for two seasons by Pringle, who continued the Croydon tradition of excellence in desing. Everyman created a medieval church interior using deliberately crudely-painted canvas flats and basic functional rostra. His design for The Rivals in the fourth season used a semicircle of pillars in front of a cyclorama, utilising silhouette effects again, while The Policeman's Whistle created a kind of toytown village scene, mostly painted, reminiscent of some of Shelving's work e.g. Gammer Gurton's Needle, The Insect Play in the fifth season (1936) used masks and stylised scenery in a predictable but nonetheless effective and elegant way. Cass had been replaced in 1935 by Michael Barry, but Pringle stayed on, developing a technique that embraced many different design styles characterised by simplicity and attractive line. Interest in stage design in Croydon seems to have been wide - the programmes from this period, as well as the house magazine Rep, included a fair amount of photographs (quite rare in programmes of the period) as well as articles on stage design, a series of which ran in the fourth season's programmes. At the outbreak of war Pringle left, and thenceforth design was handled by the stage staff, with an obvious
loss of flair and quality.

In its unspectacular way, the Croydon Rep serves as a yardstick for the absorption of new approaches to stage design in much the same way as a theatre like the Sheffield Rep can be seen to be representative of the attempts to find for the advanced drama a home in Britain. As far as the repertoire went, the nearest Croydon came to Expressionism in this period was Twelve Thousand, Moon In The Yellow River and Insect Play - there is not even the popular The Adding Machine or R.U.R., let alone any German Expressionism. However, from the records of Keating and Pringle's design work, it is evident that a kind of Expressionism was being presented in a significant percentage of the sets; an attempt was certainly being made to experiment with as broad a spectrum of styles as possible. While other theatres presented more spectacular manifestations of the expressionist manner (like Birmingham's Gas and the work at the Cambridge Festival), and some had periods when certain productions brought together exciting plays and originality of design, there are few that show the persistent interest in translating Expressionism into an English idiom that were witnessed in Croydon from 1932 to 1939.

III: THE PROVINCIAL CIRCUIT - REORGANISATION AND TRANSFORMATION

In 1911 repertory theatres were theatres of the left wing, theatres of rebellion. By inference they attacked and deplored the work of the existing theatres of the towns in which their ardent advocates created them. By 1934 the repertory theatres were in many cases the last outposts of the legitimate theatre in the provinces.

Grace Wyndham Goldie.

In the late twenties and early thirties, Martin Harvey, Fred Terry and Julia Neilsen, all performers and managers in the style of the 'romantic' actor-managers who had flourished before the First World War, were touring an ever-decreasing provincial circuit, presenting plays that were standards for their companies. Their persistent, albeit decreased, popularity makes clear that the changes apparent
in some more conspicuous theatrical arenas were by no means universal; there still existed right up till the Second World War a considerable audience for the romantic, histrionic style despite the fashion for the clipped, cynical, comic style of Coward and Maugham, the move away from older concepts of drama and performance by the advocates of the theatrical avant-garde, and the growing popularity of the cinema with its close-up Realism. The venues that supported the lingering touring tradition were largely in towns unblessed by their own repertory company and therefore overlooked by contemporary commentators whose critical horizons did not extend beyond the concept of the London success and the tributary role of the reps to that system. By the late thirties, the Terry-style companies had died out; Donald Wolfit continued to tour his Shakespeare company, and the provincial houses continued to play host to transfers of West End successes with 'second' casts or to musicals trying out for London runs that, as often as not, they never achieved, but by and large the touring tradition was superceded by the tradition of provincial Rep, especially in the North. The provincial theatre was casting about for a new wave of realistic writers (much as it had done for the last two decades) that were not really to emerge until after the War. Since the First World War and the establishment of major repertory theatres in Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham, the mutual influence and the mutual antipathy between the West End and the provinces had done much to define the development of theatrical tastes and the creative climate of British drama.

Perhaps the chief impetus behind the formation of the provincial reps was the widespread sense of dissatisfaction with the available dramatic fare, rather than the positive desire to produce a certain sort of drama in a specific cultural context. The reaction against the lack of good theatre in the provinces that had inspired Miss Horniman, Basil Dean and Barry Jackson to use their considerable talents and influence in the three major cities to benefit from the first Reps was certainly felt by interested parties.
in less conspicuous or prestigious towns, and indeed the example of the early Reps galvanised many into action. Writing of the year before the foundation of the Northampton Repertory Theatre, Aubrey Dyas records:

Drama lay in the doldrums in Northampton in the fateful year of 1926. A similar plight affected the majority of other towns and cities in England at that time. The theatre was at a low ebb, enfeebled, stale and moribund. Third-rate touring companies were the chief purveyors of dramatic entertainment.

It is significant that this refers to a time some fifteen years after the Rep movement had really started to gain attention; the mid-twenties often seem to be a period of intensive theatrical activity, and yet, to an observer like Dyas who stresses the importance of regional theatre, the outlook in the mid-twenties was bleak. The ambitions that fired the founders of the later Reps seem significantly different from those of their immediate predecessors, the stress moving more and more onto the concept of regionalism - a belief that every community needed access to a theatre that reflected that community's tastes and served its cultural needs. The evangelical desire to revive the serious drama was less and less referred to as theatres began to face not only the lessons learnt from the programming problems of other Reps but also, perhaps more significantly, the threat of the cinema in drawing away audiences. But still the problem of what exactly should be performed on the stage of these theatres remained. The so-called Manchester School of Houghton and Brighouse had seemed to point the way to what sort of relationship should exist between local theatres and local writers, but their lead had only been followed by writers who had a brief vogue as dialect dramatists, using regional flavour to render more interesting the tired plots of the pre-war theatre. With the resistance to any overtly political content, it became increasingly apparent that a native drama that reflected local opinions and issues could only do so in an anodyne manner that was, if anything, patronising to local theatregoers. Inevitably the Reps had recourse to established successes, or experimental mater-
ial that represented the tastes of an educated minority. After one year of production at the Northampton Repertory Theatre, during which time 28 plays had been performed, Dyas summarised the criticisms they had received as follows:

They alleged that (1) the management catered for a minority and not for the majority; (2) there were too many popular plays and not enough 'far removed from the common rut'; (3) there should be more 'straightforward' plays; (4) there were too few melodramas; and (5) the plays presented ought to be 'works of a simpler type which could be followed by all members of the audience'.

If a management could pursue any policy at all, it would obviously have to be one dictated by a group of involved people, sensitive to the flow of public response but informed about non-commercial criteria of dramatic criticism. Without subsidy and patronage, it is almost impossible for such a management to exist. Often the voices that had called loudest for the establishment of a local Repertory Theatre were the first to criticise apparent mistakes in programming and commercial failures; the existence of the theatre was often seen as more important than the ideas expressed therein. We shall see this conflict in more detail in the consideration of critical approaches below; it is certainly one the Reps all faced.

From their origins as theatres of the artistic left-wing, the Reps became inevitably absorbed into the mainstream of commercial concerns against which some of their advocates had stood so defiantly. It is important to remember that, to a great extent, the role of the Reps was not so much a reaction against the commercial touring system, or an alternative to it, but rather a refinement of it. Certainly the public's attitudes towards what should be provided by the Reps was not enormously different from what they might have wanted from a touring or stock company; in the case of each there were always those who wanted the 'magic' of theatre, and those who wanted a more serious drama, above all else. Certainly many of the producers defined their role as antagonistic towards the old theatres, and as Goldie points out there existed, even if only by inference, a criti-
cism of the existing dramatic fare by those who set up new theatres whose organisation was not geared to fit the London-based touring productions. But by the Second World War it was apparent that the Reps had become, almost by default, the nearest there was to a theatrical establishment in Britain, having proved that the whole concept of artistic rebellion is just as much part of the commodity theatre as anything else. Perhaps the situation never sank to the depths perpetrated by what Borsa called 'restaurateur-managers' - pure businessmen who simply dished up the same basic menu spiced with the novelty of the day - but it could certainly be argued that the Reps that consistently made a profit (or at least stayed out of the red) were those which realised that resistance to the dictates of the commodity theatre was in many ways absurd. This realisation was often the cause of a crisis of aims in the Reps, expressed by Goldie when recording the decline in experiment in Liverpool from about 1918:

The repertory theatre, after all, had not been formed to provide Liverpool with the chance of seeing Raffles and Beauty And The Barge and Mr Wittington’s Wild Oats. And if these were the only plays that would keep it open, then wouldn’t it be better to close it? It was all very well, in theory, to put on popular plays in order to pay for experiment. But when the accumulated profits of three years devoted largely to popular plays were swept away in one year of very mild experiment, the practice scarcely seemed justified.

The question of what was expected from a repertory theatre became pressing. In the early days of the Reps, there had been an assumption that they would produce 'repertory plays': the work of Shaw, Barker, Galsworthy, Houghton, Masefield and Barrie. But when the theatrical avant-garde, such as it was in Britain, ceased to be centred on these experiments in Realism, and looked elsewhere for its models, the Reps had to choose between continuing to explore the somewhat earnest trend of Realism, and developing a style more in keeping with the new ideas from abroad. Put simply, it was a choice between maintaining the essence of the original ideals of Rep(i.e. producing new, perhaps left-wing material) and sticking to the original manifestations of those ideals.
(i.e. Realism). The response to this choice in the Reps covered the whole spectrum; many theatres tried, in single seasons, to run the gamut from native Realism to 'exotics' and classics in an attempt to please everyone at least some of the time. The diversity that existed within what was broadly known as Repertory Theatre was enormous:

A repertory may be anything from an art theatre, all Schwabe lamps and cubist settings, to a remote little provincial theatre temporarily housing a tired travelling repertory company.

(Cecil Chisholm)

For the purposes of this discussion these two extremes can be set aside; the 'art theatre' (and Chisholm was presumably referring to ventures such as the Cambridge Festival Theatre and the Leeds Art Theatre) will be discussed separately, and the touring venues seem rather to belong to a moribund tradition that was in a sense replaced by the repertory system.

To define 'what is Repertory', then, is a problem that was discussed from the Gaiety onwards. The theatres under discussion here, despite their many differences, all seem to share certain similarities of aim, organisation and experience that include them in the Repertory movement. Of these, there are some fundamentals that should be mentioned here: the policy of presenting a limited number of consecutive performances of one play, rather than the 'repertoire' system of juggling a few productions over one or more seasons; an attempt to apply artistic standards to every branch of the production rather than focussing on one element to the exclusion of all else; a general tendency away from 'starring'; a catholic choice of plays; a permanent or semi-permanent company of actors, producers, directors, designers, stage-managers and technicians over at least one season; an endeavour to provide for the community a staple theatrical fare that was not simply reliant on the reproduction of West End successes but which strove towards a measure of regional autonomy; and a financial predicament which, without substantial patronage or subsidy, made the existence of the theatre
reliant on the goodwill of shareholders and theatregoers. There are, of course, exceptions to all these criteria - like the considerable advantage that the Birmingham Rep had in the seemingly endless liberality of Barry Jackson - but the similarities are greater. Yet the problem of overall artistic aim remained. It seemed always to be an issue of extremes:

... a repertory theatre, in my judgement, does not exist to exploit farcical comedies (except in small doses) nor on the other hand, does it exist to provide its audiences, largely at other people's expense, with obscure plays by foreign authors (except again in small doses).

The reasoning that could produce this kind of comment seems self-defeating, and yet this represents a prevalent vein of criticism. There was a persistent hankering after a style of drama that could never be defined: something that was not one of the sharp, cynical comedies that seemed so facile in comparison with the earlier 'intellectual' court-style drama; something that did not force on the audience the highly suspect combination of 'obscure' and 'foreign'; something that, without being in any way harsh, judgemental, satirical or political, would express the concerns of the age in the way that the Elizabethan and Restoration writers had seemed with such ease to speak for their eras. Perhaps Shaw came nearer realising this than any other writer, and the onus on him became enormous; but by the thirties it was apparent that he was one of a kind, and not the leader of a new golden age of British dramatic writing. The various influential elements that shaped dramatic criticism during the first forty years of this century were diverse, and yet, rather than producing distinct tendencies within the repertory theatres, they tended to perpetuate the complicated attitudes that demanded a combination of the serious/artistic with the popular/entertaining.

From the 1880s until the War, the strongest force in the theatre was the actor-manager. Theatre criticism at that time concentrates largely on performances and on the extent to which these companies had created a successful
theatrical illusion. But by 1905, when the Court seasons under Vedrenne and Barker were well underway, the spotlight moved away from the stars and onto the plays, and particularly their authors. Perhaps this reflected a desire to bring literary credibility back to the theatre after a long period during which Robertson, Gilbert, Pinero, Wilde and Jones were the most conspicuous torch-bearers of a drama that could survive in print; it was certainly a response to the growing influence of Ibsen. By the early to mid-twenties the attention was increasingly on the concept of theatre as a total work of art, and this led to a shift of emphasis from author to designer. The influences here are obvious: the Ballets Russes, Craig, Copeau, Appia, Reinhardt, Meyerhold and the Expressionist designers being foremost. Then in the thirties the centre of attention shifted again, this time to the role of the producer/director (the usage of the terms being less defined, more interchangeable than today). With the coming to prominence of autocratic and artistically ambitious producers such as Dean, Komisarjevsky and Guthrie the stress was now not on the acting, nor the writing, nor the physical appearance, but on the interpretation of the play. Classical revivals increased and ultimately this led back to an emphasis on the role of the actor, as a need arose for dependable star actors who could carry off the interpretations of Shakespeare and other classics that were re-entering the repertoire. Essentially the Reps flourished when the star system was in abeyance, when the stress was on writing or design, for in these fields their contribution could be as great as anything achieved in London. When the stress was on the producer as interpreter, and therefore back on the actor, it was really the concept of the 'major London production' that swayed critical interest. 9 Ironically, it was the example of the Reps that had acted as a significant catalyst to these perceived shifts of emphasis. Certainly their challenge to the London-based star system, and the persistent demands for a reawakened native dramatic/literary tradition, had done much to move public interest towards authors, while of course providing
a greatly expanded arena in which the work of new playwrights could be heard and seen. The increased attention to the work of designers also found a focus in the work of some of the Reps - if there were few individual designers of note to emerge from them, there was considerable interest in the breadth of interpretative possibilities that a fresh approach to design opened up. The work of Jackson and Sheldon at Birmingham, George Harris at Liverpool, Gardner-Davies at Coventry and Ruth Keating at Croydon was perhaps not as immediately challenging as that of Gray and Paston at the Cambridge Festival Theatre, but its importance in turning the attention of theatregoers towards design was more pervasive. Similarly the increased stress laid on the role of the producer could be seen as having its roots in the Rep, for not only did figures such as Dean and Playfair gain essential experience from their autocratic positions in provincial Repertory, but also because it was in the founding of the Reps and the accompanying idealism that many of the ideas that inspired the new breed of producers became familiar:

The producer (in the twenties) became an important, almost a portentous figure. You were likely to hear the voices of the instructed in full spate in a celebrated passage in which Gordon Craig declared that 'neither acting, &c'. (J.C.Trewin)¹⁰

Of course, the hierarchy within the theatres was a matter of as much debate as the question of programming. Craig had articulated most forcibly the argument for the overall supremacy of the producer as early as 1910 but there were advocates as adamant for the superiority of the other contributing elements. This particular disagreement was used time and again by critics and commentators either to attack work which they disliked, or to defend the English theatre against attacks from within or without. Answering the accusation that the English theatre was, in the mid-twenties, bereft of any significant contribution to the European and American advances in technology and design, St John Ervine fell back on the expedient of claiming the irrelevance of
any such concern:

... in the theatre the dramatist is supreme, and ... the art of the theatre is made by a hierarchy of whom the artists and the electricians are the subordinates. If my assertion is sound, then we are entitled to feel proud of the English theatre.]

The changes in the English theatrical scene were profoundly influenced by the influx of ideas through the Reps, and simply by the increased amount of attempted serious theatre that naturally accelerated the coming to public awareness of new directions. With the inevitable move towards the centre of the theatrical scene, and the necessary abandonment of the avant-garde/left wing stance brought about by the death of the old circuit and the rise of the cinema, the Repertory theatres by the early thirties faced more pressingly than ever the unresolved question of what they should be producing and what their role was in preserving the academic criteria of the art theatre that at one time had seemed the sine qua non of their existence. Goldie saw the larger role of the Reps in positive terms:

Repertory theatres, among other influences, had raised the standard of public taste which would not now accept crudities which had still been tolerated in 1911.12

This is undeniably true, but it could be argued that 'raised the standard' could easily be replaced by 'changed the habits'. The 'crudities' of the old touring system were no longer fashionable, but it is debatable whether the increase in so-called serious drama and the abandonment of any really widespread interest in the experimental, was actually an improvement. The resistance to change in the British theatre had swallowed up the apparent interest in new forms that had burgeoned in the twenties and early thirties, and with the ever-greater rivalry between theatre and cinema the viability of bringing an academic interest in the artistic potential of uncommon styles was decreasing.

It is perhaps misleading to concentrate on the part
played by an artistic tendency. Expressionism, in the early history of the Reps, for the attitudes that embraced this style were somewhat dilettante, and tended to brandish Expressionism as a challenge to a conservative theatre rather than exploring its real potential. However, the influence, direct or otherwise, of the numerous expressionistic productions to see the light of day during that period was considerable if only because it was taken up as a distinct point of reference by both its champions and its opponents. Being one of the most extreme artistic movements, and one of the most intense theatrical styles, Expressionism could not help but find at best a cautious acceptance in the British theatre; but it is simply because it is an extreme that it cast up so many responses both favourable and otherwise that illuminate the ideas current in British theatre between the Wars. The movement of the Reps from the left-wing to the centre/right of the theatrical scene can be seen more or less in terms of their response to the challenge of Expressionism and the wider concerns that went hand-in-hand with the style of the aesthetic, sociological and political standards of theatre.

IV: EXPRESSIONISM - INSPIRATION AND INFLUENCE

The impetus behind the earliest endeavours in Repertory in Britain was from the example of the independent theatres in Germany and France that had been established as the platforms of the Realist movement. The Independent Theatre and the Stage Society had addressed their endeavours to a small section of theatregoers who longed for the vitality of the intellectual European theatre. The importance of these organisations in introducing to Britain much of the new drama, and in exemplifying the theatrical spirit not wholly bound by commercial considerations, cannot be over-emphasised. The eclecticism of the programming of the Stage Society seems startling when one considers the lonely highlights of many of the later Reps. Even though it served only a tiny proportion of the public, whose tastes were sophistic-
ated and who were eager to sample experiment for its own sake, the Stage Society avoided providing only one main style of drama, but drew its selections from all that was most interesting in new European theatre. The first season contained work by Shaw, Sydney Oliver and William Sharp from Britain, and Maeterlinck, Hauptmann and Ibsen from the Continent. This balance was largely maintained throughout its history, and there is no doubt that many of the plays that later became repertory standards (such as the works of Hankin, Shaw and Maugham, and even of foreign authors such as Hauptmann, Gorky, Tolstoy, Gogol and Ibsen) found their way into the repertoire through a first airing by the Stage Society. The extent to which this type of programming stood out from that of other organisations was apparent from the beginning:

If it had only served to present interesting and intellectual spectacles to its thousand and odd members, it would thereby alone have accomplished a meritorious work; but the Stage Society can boast of having rendered real services to English Dramatic Art ... some of the plays produced for the first time by the Society were subsequently put on stage by actor-managers and others, who would never have risked this step but for the experiment of the Stage Society, and the favourable verdict of the critics.

This was the type of 'new theatre' that appealed to entrepreneurs such as Miss Horniman and Barry Jackson—a theatre aware of the greater world drama, catering for an educated audience and managing, simply by the high quality of the material presented, to find favour with both critics and public. Of course, it was not an ideal that would translate well into the commercial arena: the acceptance by commercial managements of proven successes from the Stage Society seemed a good omen for the acceptance by provincial audiences of new material served up first hand by enterprising producers, but this was not to be the case. The Stage Society could afford to keep its programme unleavened by the inclusion of lightweight material because of the elitist 'club' nature of its audience; the Reps, having to draw audiences from smaller and less educated communities, and also finding the responsibility of providing basic entertainment had
passed from the despised touring companies to them, were disappointed if they had ambitions to emulate the career of the Stage Society.

As great an influence on the early aims of the Reps were the famous Court seasons (1904-07) under the Barker-Vedrenne management. As the launching-pad for the career of Shaw these seasons have passed into theatrical legend, but of equal importance is the fact that they presented three seasons of mostly new work largely by British writers with a definite bias towards Realism and an obvious interest in the 'new' theatre, in terms of content if not form, as well as revolutionising attitudes towards the production of the classics. Although not as innovative in programming or organisation as the Stage Society, (the Vedrenne-Barker team was essentially an extension of the existing actor-manager tradition) the Court seasons, and the subsequent seasons by Vedrenne and Barker at the Savoy (September 1907) and the Haymarket (Summer 1908) enlarged the repertoire of British theatre, established the reputation of many new playwrights, and gave the impression that the twentieth century British theatre was a force to be reckoned with. The Reps steamed ahead largely on this conviction, and it was through organisations such as the British Drama League and the Repertory Theatre Association (both run by alumni of the Court circle and the Stage Society) that the regional theatre was fostered and its thinking defined. The immediate pre-War decade became the 'great period' to later commentators - a period of great promise and some achievement that would have borne great fruit had it not been for the hiatus of 1914-18. The conservative critic Frank Vernon gave a definition of this attitude:

The Admirable Crichton in 1903 made that year as notable in the annals of the theatre as The School For Scandal made the year 1777; but The School For Scandal was a lonely peak and Crichton was a towering height among other heights, and there was hardly a year until the great period sung its appropriately named swansong Hobson's Choice (1916), and was engulfed in the rising tide of the colonial war-time theatre, which was not rubricated by the title of even one outstanding play. 3

The War certainly checked this current in British theatre.
and there were many commentators who, like Vernon, never ceased to mourn its passing.\textsuperscript{4} The theatre during the War turned increasingly to the popular, light-hearted, fast turnover fare epitomised by the phenomenally successful \textit{Chu Chin Chow},\textsuperscript{5} so despised by those who demanded a weightier intellectual drama. The development of new theatres went on unabated however; and by the end of the War the Reps were looking not only to the 'great period' for inspiration and material, but also to more modern trends emerging from the Continent, experienced at first hand by some who had served in Europe. The devastating impact that the War had had on the German theatre, politicising many of the writers and producers and highlighting the redundancy of old, stale forms that could not express the traumatic new experiences gained in the trenches, was not felt in England to anything like the same degree. Possibly because the social system in Britain did not collapse in the way the German Empire had; possibly because of the British victory and the reinforcement of national self-esteem; possibly because of the inveterate, and now increasing, suspicion and hatred of all things Teutonic; whatever the reasons, there was not in Britain the fertile soil for new means of expression that existed in Germany. So although Britain did not generate much in the way of a new theatrical idiom, there was a genuine interest in the new Continental forms and, in many circles, a willingness to experiment with them. The same interest was felt in the States, where the advent of the expressionist influence coincided with the emergence of the native serious theatre; its greater acceptance in the States was to a large extent accounted for by the absence of tradition that, in Britain, was such an opponent to change. This is not to say that the British scene was unaffected by the War; responses to the effects of the War were numerous, and in some cases the results were excellent. In O'Casey's \textit{The Silver Tassie} something of the humanist rage of Hasenclever and Toller found a rare expression in English language drama; more traditional responses came in Sherriff's \textit{Journey's End} and its many imitators; and even on a less specific level, for example in Maugham's work such as \textit{Home And Beauty}
and For Services Rendered, the treatment of the War was generally serious and sincere. But in terms of forcing artists and intellectuals to find new forms and to reassess the process of artistic creation, the effect was less profound. The generation that was to build the Reps had, for the most part, had some direct experience of the War, just as their European and American brothers and sisters had; but whereas to the Germans the experience of futility had been so traumatic, and to the Americans the War had provided the first substantial exposure to the modern trends in European cultures, to the British the effect was less radical. Certainly the Victorian/Edwardian standards of duty to the Empire in both public and private life had been questioned and to some extent rejected (although it was not until the Second World War and the loss of the Empire that a really widespread awareness of this change became apparent), and one need only look at the poetry of Owen, Sassoon, Rosenberg and Edward Thomas to realise that an emotional reaction against the perverse concepts of duty and citizenship that had fostered jingoism at the beginning of the War had taken place. The partial absorption of Expressionism into the British theatrical idiom after the War was largely stylistic; hostile to the manifestation of German modernism, the theatre protected itself most effectively against the ideas of the movement by a code of censorship that made the presentation of anything dealing directly with politics, sexuality, or anything likely to cause offence to some concept of 'normal' morality impossible. Attempts to introduce a more 'adult' subject matter onto the stage were effectively baulked for several more decades; the role of censorship in blocking the acceptance of Expressionism is important, although it would be difficult to assess to what extent, given the moral and artistic climate in Britain during the period, there would have been a more positive embracing of the style if greater freedom had been available.

The producers of the twenties were looking to foreign influences, then, not so much because they sought kindred spirits as almost by default; finding no new native movement it was evidently time to turn elsewhere for inspiration. The 'New Theatre' after the War was no longer the Realism of the so-called great period, but rather the experimental
developments in stagecraft and play construction from the Continent, particularly Germany. To some critics, the idea of turning to defeated Germany for inspiration was absurd. Enraged by the exclusion from *Continental Stagecraft* of any substantial consideration of the British theatre, Ervine commented:

But what a commentary it is on the state of the American theatre that in this time of Europe’s sickness and disaster, American critics should still be running about the continent looking for models and inspiration. Ervine was fundamentally out of sympathy with the expressionist style, but this remark goes beyond aesthetic disagreement or difference in taste; it attempts to deny the cultural worth of the artistic products of a society aware of its own disintegration. It is partly, perhaps, due to this turning away from the unpleasant, extreme side of life, and its exclusion from the British theatre that rendered a spiritual acceptance of Expressionism unlikely. That the subject of the expressionist/continental influence became such a talking point was largely due to an awareness of the paucity of native stimulus in the early twenties, and a realisation that, even if the British theatre was resistant to the fundamental tenets of European developments, it needed some kind of fresh impetus to lead it out of the doldrums of the post-War, post-‘great’ period and to encourage more modern responses. J.T. Grein, who must have been aware of the effects of introducing alien material onto the British stage, praised Basil Dean’s enterprise at the St Martin’s Theatre in introducing the ‘Play-Box’ series of afternoon subscription performances of some European plays in 1923, seeing it as a continuation of the expansive programming of pre-War independents:

As usual when one proffers the egg of Columbus to our theatres, it is passed aside until ‘several years have elapsed’, and some young man like Basil Dean, less conservative than the rest, thinks that it is worthwhile casting an eye across the Dover straits instead of basking in the stagnant comfort of insularity.

Dean, at this time, was daring or foolhardy enough to present
Capek's *RUR* at the St Martin's - even meeting with some success! 10

Another major reason for the resistance to the expressionist movement was that the public was unable to identify any star writers associated with it. No British writers of great calibre 'made' the movement; there was no expressionist Shaw or Coward or Yeats. Whatever the shifts in critical emphasis, the figures for whom the greatest reverence was reserved were always the playwrights. The aspects of Expressionism that did find sympathetic interpretation in Britain were those that were not firmly connected to the writer's art: design, relationship of theatre to society and the concept of the 'total work of art'. Many British writers used the expressionist style as a device - Priestley, Coward, Auden and Isherwood, Spender - but few of these persisted in following up the more extreme styles of their Continental models. Also in the States, those writers who had produced early work that bore the expressionist stamp, such as O'Neill, Reis, and Lawson, turned with varying speed towards other styles. Even in Germany, the vitality of the style seemed sapped by the time Toller wrote *Hoppla, Wir Leben!* 11. It was not something that could flourish without the strange mixture of fervent idealism and disillusionment that prevailed in the immediate post-War period. However, in both the USA and Britain, Expressionism had served as a challenge to accepted concepts of theatre, and had introduced many new ideas about what could/should be expressed and how; ideas that had, in Britain, become stagnant during the great period of Edwardian theatre and its aftermath. Without the authoritative voices of writers championing the style in Britain, it was left to sympathisers such as Dean, Jackson and C.F. Smith to try and introduce new ideas through their choice of material and production style. The oracular utterances of Craig were always a formidable factor, but he was too easy to resist because of his bizarre, elitist penchants, and because he largely failed to put theory into practice in any convincing way. It was too easy to ridicule the whole expressionist style: it has always, like any extreme, laid itself unfortunately open to parody.
Again, Ervine is a useful touchstone for the conservative
distaste for Expressionism:

... mankind is not interested for long in formalities and abstractions, but
in useful and well-marked individualities ... What are the works which have
survived in the affections for the longest time and been most widely read?
Precisely those works in which some human figure is most clearly revealed
in its human and individual shape. Don Quixote, Hamlet, Falstaff, Tom Jones,
Uncle Toby, Mr Pickwick, Sam Weller - a thousand figures such as these live
on because their authors took pains to make them look like ordinary men.12

Precisely this desire to cultivate drama that was near to
the novel in its approach to character and situation had
ensured the success of such essentially wordy, prosaic drama
as had characterised the Court seasons. It is hardly surpri­
sing that the methods of Toller, who depicted and defined
character largely through the rhetoric of emotion and glimpses of the subconscious, or Kaiser, whose approach was inhu­
man only insofar as it encompassed an awareness of the victim­
isation of the individual by the technological herd, failed
to find sympathy with this kind of blinkered mentality.
That drama could approach the task of expression through
non-literary methods was one of the simplest and most potent
challenges that Expressionism offered to the British theatre.
The serious non-literary theatre was nothing new in
Britain though. In the late nineteenth century the produc­
tion style of Irving and Tree, the experiments in the pictor­
ial-musical style of Hubert von Herkomer, and the archaeo­
logical approach of E.W. Godwin, had all stressed the value
of visual spectacle above verbal meaning.13 It could be argued
that the actor-manager system itself was essentially anti­
literary, as it presented without pretence a scale of values
upon which the literary quality of a piece was not uppermost.
The challenge to the literary theatre was in some senses
a backlash, a desire for a return to the more immediate
qualities of spectacle theatre. But where the expressionist
tendency differed significantly from a simpler concept of
visually impressive theatre was in its absorption of the
insistence on serious content fostered by Realism. One
of the great bugbears of the realists was the untruthfulness
of theatre; they despised the way in which uncomfortable
realities were skated over, the audience's attention distracted by great swaths of spectacle and sentimentality. Even those who clamoured for the abandonment of Realism had no desire to re-introduce the insincerity of the older style:

When the Ibsen lightning flashed through the Northern mists, penetrating the folds of tradition that were stifling the Drama, a healthy realist reaction to the prevailing sentimentality set in.

(Charles F. Smith) ^4

The quintessence of Expressionism in all fields of art was the striving through new forms towards truth, or a more insistent rendering of the individual's perception freed from the distracting niceties of traditional form. As had been seen with the non-acceptance of the political and social ideas of the German writers in Britain, it is again the case that this fundamental quality of Expressionism did not gain currency in the British theatre. The style was certainly used as a means of expressing opinions and perceptions that were not aligned to the views of the establishment, and in some exceptional cases there was a truly subjective approach (Act II of The Silver Tassie being the most thorough); beyond that there was little that indicated anything of the antagonism and sincerity that is so obvious in German expressionist drama. In the admittedly expressionist-influenced designs of Shelving, Keating and Gray, and in the frequent British productions of expressionistic plays, it seems that 'style, not sincerity' was the most interesting aspect. Seldom can an account be found of a production in which an obvious surface of expressionistic style goes together with a thoroughly credible extension of the style into acting or content. ^5 For many, it seems that the stress on the non-verbal elements in Expressionism was enough; the style became debased as a throwback to the Romantic spectacle, or simply as a convenient method of indicating neurosis or fantasy.

The interpretation of Expressionism varied widely in the British theatre: some commentators stressed style above meaning; others saw the ideas it could express as of paramount importance, the visual aspects being a means to an
end. There were few authoritative voices who had witnessed the German productions at first hand. Unlike their American contemporaries, many of whom had enthusiastically travelled the Continent absorbing a vast number of productions (witness the number of American accounts of the Fehling Masse-Mensch) the opinions of the greater number of British commentators were informed by second-hand experience, hearsay, the material presented at the Theatre Exhibitions, distaste for old forms, or distaste for anything modern or teutonic. The naivety about foreign theatre apparent in some contemporary writers is disarming: Cecil Chisholm, surveying the career of the Leeds Eyebrow Club, listed in their repertoire *From Morn To Midnight, Salomé, Miss Julie* 'and other exotics', presumably seeing these three enormously different plays through an 'exotic' haze because they were all written by foreigners - or worse. Certainly knowledge of the background of Expressionism, and of its products, was not widespread; what knowledge there was came through secondary sources (magazines such as Drama and The Mask) rather than first-hand experience. The importance of Expressionism in Britain was as much as a focus for argument, and a theoretical but ill-defined threat to established theatre practice, as for any of its practical applications. That 'expressionist' was used as a label for just about any aspect of modern theatre is witnessed by this confused and ill-informed harangue from Vernon:

The failing of 'expressionism' is its realism; in pretending to get away from realism it achieves it to a far higher degree than any designedly realistic play. The amateur theatre can't 'realise' a country-house interior; it can do better; it can suggest, and it can leave something to the imagination of the audience. 'Expressionism' is fellow with the kinema in refusing to trust to an audience's imagination; *RUR* showed everything and hinted at nothing, and the new cry about psychological plays which explore the inside of man's mind and display his thoughts is reduced to absurdity by the red and childish whirl of *The Adding Machine*, produced by the New York Theatre Guild. The amateurs must stand for sanity because they are not equipped for scenic extravagances.

It is an interesting complaint, worth some examination. It is true that Expressionism aimed for greater 'truth' and 'reality' by its probing into the subjective and psy-
chological: it did not rely on implication and subtle innu­endo in the way that Ibsen and Chekhov had. But to confuse this desire for a different and more forceful reality with a bludgeoning 'realism' is a deliberate obfuscation of the issue. Vernon holds up suggestion and imagination as the key qualities lacking in Expressionism - presumably having made no effort to understand the work of Toller or Strindberg. The plays that he chooses as examples of this crassness are plays which had attracted recent critical attention, and while both have undeniable expressionist characteristics, neither is a reasonable representative of the fundamental principles. RUR is very much a fantasy along Wellsian lines, using the trappings of Expressionism to achieve something of the deliberately crude allegory of science fiction. The Adding Machine, arguably the closest America ever got to a thoroughly expressionist play in surface style, is conceived in a comic spirit (perhaps this escaped Vernon) and at times attains a very stimulating form of self-parody.

A desire that the theatre should pursue the 'sanity' of the amateurs, avoiding the pitfalls of scenic extravagance, is laudable in principle, but to use this as a stick with which to beat Expressionism is unjustified in that it not only ignores the fact that much of the early German Expressionism had itself been an attempt to pare down theatrical production to an essential minimum, but also denies the theatre the valid exploration of visual elements as expressive forms.

Whatever the word Expressionism conjured up to individuals, it was always obvious that it necessarily involved a degree of experimentation, of introducing alien forms onto the British stage, of risk-taking. It is possible to identify the main areas in which experimentation along new lines was perceived. Firstly, it necessitated an alignment with the modern foreign theatre, and an interest in the stylistic possibilities of the new drama:

Expressionism! Not new in the sense of absolute novelty, for there is no new thing under the sun, but in the sense of an advance upon all that has gone before. 'This, whether we like it or not, is the drama of the future' says Allardyce Nicoll in his British Drama, and it is such men as Pirandello, Bottomley, Toller and those of the new Russian school with Evreinov at their
head, who have the seeds of the renascent movement in their pens.\textsuperscript{20}

This rather indiscriminate taste for anything 'advanced' and foreign (what has elsewhere been called 'exotic') brought with it a taste for the Gesamtkunstwerk which had been an important factor in the development of Expressionism, especially through the example of Reinhardt. The resultant mêlée of effects came to be seen as a hallmark of Expressionism:

... the expressionistic continental drama of the twenties, employing all the resources of the theatre - ballet, music, lighting, masks and projections of character outside time and place - at full pitch.\textsuperscript{21}

Alongside these rather general tendencies came more specific differences in the writing style and structure of the plays themselves. Although the Stationendrama method bore some fruit in Britain (for example in The Dog Beneath The Skin) and was the most stimulating structural method of the German expressionists, inherited from medieval drama, pageant and history plays, Shakespeare, Büchner, Strindberg and most directly Wedekind, it was characteristically not the aims and methods behind this style, with its jerky narrative and sudden, violent action, but rather its surface 'difficulties' and 'oddities' that garnered most attention. Ervine wrote off Gas as consisting 'of explosions, stinks, and formalised figures carefully divested of any suggestion of human character'\textsuperscript{22} while completely ignoring the progression in the play through dialectic means from a detailed examination of personality to an ultimate apocalyptic eradication thereof. Another feature of Expressionism that was more tacitly understood by its adherents and opponents was its alignment with left-wing politics. It was not until the thirties that any avowedly socialist theatre groups were to make an impact in Britain; the overt political content of the pioneering plays of Expressionism (such as Masse-Mensch and Die Maschinenstürmer, both of which were seen in Britain) was little discussed, relegated to a lesser importance than the stylistic novelty of the plays; the more implicit, humanistic socialism of Kaiser was generally
ignored. Even those who did most to gain a foothold for Expressionism in Britain fought shy of commitment to its political aims. Of more interest were the sociological implications of the performance of such drama in Britain, as it seemed to go hand in hand with the growth of small regional dramatic societies and the increasing significance of popular, working class culture. Goldie, speaking of the amateur movement in the thirties, commented:

> When working men's groups produce such plays as Kaiser's *Gas* with its passionate protest against the sacrifice of the lives of the masses to machinery and O'Neill's *Hairy Ape* with its stoker hero, something very interesting indeed is occurring. Here is no mere copying of the fashionable theatre, but instead something very like an expression in dramatic form of their own lives and their own emotions.

The role that an awareness of expressionist drama played in the demographic changes in theatre audiences will be discussed below; suffice to say here that its socio-political significance was seen generally in theatrical terms (i.e. who was producing what, and for whom?) rather than in absolute terms of left-wing political 'message'. Perhaps the most pervasive notion of what Expressionism was came from a popularised idea of the style of stage design. In the present day the general picture of expressionist theatre is derived from a hybrid of *Metropolis*, *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*, Munch, perhaps Jessner and Strohbach, Piscator and Meyerhold. There is little reason to believe that the widespread image of what Expressionism was bringing to the theatre was any different in the twenties; robots, anguish, futuristic settings, violence, blatant symbolism, idealistic politics, 'explosions and stinks', ecstasy, distortion, white faces, black eye sockets. From what visual evidence remains of British and American productions of expressionist drama around that time, we can assume that, in some cases, this stylistic cliché was reproduced in a somewhat unnecessary and dilettante manner, but in more serious productions (such as Birmingham's *Gas* and the Gate's *From Morn To Midnight*) there was an attempt to set the plays in a style dictated by an original interpretation rather than by the adoption of an abstracted manner. Yet, however it may have striven otherwise, any production that was given the label
'expressionist/ic' was liable to be praised or damned for all manner of qualities of scant connection to the piece, simply because of the popularity of a blinkered concept of the style and the inevitable 'love it or loathe it' attitudes that were generated by that simplistic view.

British taste certainly never embraced Expressionism. Even a production as impressive as Birmingham's Gas was disliked by the public and had a comparatively short run. Trewin recalled that the production had 'scared Birmingham out of its wits'; it seems more likely that its failure was for less laudable and desirable reasons. The audience that the Rep had inherited from the old circuit would always avoid anything too serious and controversial, while the new serious repertorists would always prefer a more easily digestible diet of Shaw peppered with the occasional Ibsen or Shakespeare. In the histories of four major reps which had, at some point, managements who were genuinely interested in Expressionism, the record of overtly expressionist productions is poor. Birmingham produced Gas in 1923, The Adding Machine in 1927, From Morn To Midnight in 1930, RUR in 1931 and The Ascent Of F.6 in 1938; Liverpool produced nearly nothing of a recognisably expressionist nature - Hannele in its second season had been so unpopular that it was only in the 25-26 season with Glaspell's Inheritors that anything akin to the style had an airing; The Adding Machine made an appearance in 1930. Northampton produced RUR (1923), The Adding Machine somewhat belatedly in 1936, and The Insect Play (1938); and Sheffield had the inevitable The Adding Machine (1928) and RUR (1931) as well as The Machine Wreckers (1925), From Morn To Midnight (1929), Draw The Fires! (1935) and The Insect Play (1937). Occasional airings cropped up in other reps and independent producing groups, but were few, and far between. Accounts of all of these enterprising productions repeat the same story: occasional, brief popularity, general apathy and financial loss. Expressionism was simply not a paying proposition.

To try and fit the occasional experiment into an otherwise safe repertoire was the only solution, but even such a conservative programme seemed always to raise gales of argument...
from either side. The question of whether or not the theatre exists to amuse or to inspire and educate became, to many, focussed on the seeming impossibility of gaining for expressionist drama a receptive and enthusiastic response in Britain.

V: REPERTORY THEATRE - CONTEXT AND PROGRAMMING

No-one who sets out to compile a history of the English theatre in the past thirty years can escape from the fact that if the Repertory theatres had not existed, the records in that time would have been nearly barren.

St John Ervine. 1924

The extent to which the Reps could afford to view themselves as outposts of the artistic left was diminished by a growing tendency in the twenties and thirties to view their role as being mainly tributary to the London stage; those who, at the opening of the Gaiety, had eagerly hailed the new Northern school of repertory writing, would continue to await the emergence of a steady stream of work from the provinces that would indicate to London managements the direction in which public favour tended, providing transfers of proven successes for nervous West End entrepreneurs. It is true that many of the writers who were to find success in the theatre of the period had cut their teeth in the early Reps, such as Houghton, Monkhouse, Brighouse and McEvoy at the Gaiety, Jeans at Liverpool and Drinkwater at the Birmingham Rep, but as the Reps continued with the familiar pattern of financial struggle, programming problems and attempts at artistic and regional autonomy, it became apparent that they were not to serve as forcing grounds for new talent in the way that the small American groups did. The roles were in reality reversed; the flow was more out of London into the provinces than vice versa. The problem that remained was crucial to the Reps: should the producers seek to cultivate a recognisable 'house style', based on the demonstrated tastes of its audience but guided by an informed few, creaming off the most suitable material and creating new material in that style; or should the Reps exist to provide for the inhabitants of the cities a cross-section of what was being seen in theatres elsewhere (mainly
London)? Both courses necessitated a degree of personal control, but while the former suggests an active approach to programming and a marked degree of regional autonomy, the latter is essentially passive in its following of the leads of other theatres irrespective of their congruity, socially and culturally, with the theatre in question. The major factor affecting this decision was inevitably money; it was only a theatre with the freedom of some independence from short-term reliance on audience financing that could pursue a house style. Most of the Reps were forced into a basically passive acceptance of their dependence on the laws of supply and demand, and most sought in some way to combine what was mainly a programme of reliable successes with the occasional experiment when finances allowed. As the thirties wore on, the idea that the Reps would act as muses to the London theatre was less frequently voiced; in purely artistic terms they could never be so, for they had neither money nor press pull, nor could they gain attention with the smaller scale of 'fringe' production that is acceptable today. The area in which the Reps continued to challenge the London-based attitudes towards theatre was around the question of what function or purpose dramatic entertainment served within a community where its availability was fairly constant, without the prestige and publicity surrounding a star or a London production. The question of programming can, in retrospect, be seen less in the aesthetic/literary terms of many contemporary commentators, but more in terms of the degree to which any play fulfills a cultural need within the context in which it is given. It is surprising, even with an awareness of the changing trends in the assessment of popular culture, that so few of the writers of the period concerned with the position of the Reps considered the demographic differences between, say, Sheffield, Liverpool, Dublin and London as noteworthy factors in debating the question of what the Reps should produce.

The position of the expressionist influence here is contradictory. While it is safe to say that its first airings in this country were the result more of an academic,
or at least non-populist and non-profit-making interest, the continued occasional exclusion of expressionist work in repertory programmes well into the forties suggests that the style was reaching a small but significant percentage of provincial audiences who continued to demand serious artistic experiment as part of the theatrical diet. It is simply a question of interpretation whether this feature be seen as another aspect of the general supply-and-demand concept that dictated that most of the programme be sub-Shavian comedy, or whether the less popular productions were the ambitious experiment to which many early repertorists had aspired. Aubrey Dyas, contemplating the future of the Northampton Rep in 1948, still saw the programming problem in these idealistic terms:

A criticism that has been levelled against the Repertory Theatre is that lately it has been content to be merely of local significance. If that allegation is true, it must be faced and faced squarely and boldly, for that way ultimately lies stagnation and deterioration. A repertory theatre worth its salt must not be afraid to experiment and to carry on courageous and ambitious work. Acting on that principle, the Repertory leapt into the vanguard of the repertory movement. It acknowledges that, whilst producing the best plays of the commercial theatre in a worthy manner, it should be a well-spring of dramatic idealism.²

This separation of the experimental and the commercial is diagnostic of an attitude that prevailed in the early days of Rep; an attitude which continued to see money making as a necessary evil and which was held largely by those whose ideas of what rep should be producing in an ideal world was the Russian- and German-influenced experiments that had flourished in the twenties. The extent to which the terms 'experimental' and 'expressionist' overlap varies, but in most cases it is significant that contemporary commentators used them interchangeably and avoided definitions. The reps were jostling for a place in the field; each considered that they should not be 'merely of local significance', and they sought to prove that they were addressing themselves to a wider audience by emphasising their persistent courage in experiment. Yet why should the inclusion of such material not be seen simply as part of the theatre's local significance? While achieving a great deal in the decentralising
of attitudes towards theatre and dramatic criticism, characters like Dyas and others who shared this view continued to belittle the idea of regional autonomy as being insufficient in itself to justify a rep in terms of world theatre. While many producers and playgoers may have measured their theatres against the Volksbühnen of Germany in the twenties, or the radical stages of America in the thirties, and found the native offerings lacking, it was seldom considered whether the British reps might not still be fulfilling the needs of the cultures just as effectively as their admittedly more exciting foreign counterparts.

Of the repertory theatres under consideration here, it is difficult to pinpoint any one and say that it pursued a recognisable house style in its programming, acting or production style. Some were more associated with Realism (Liverpool), others showed a marked preference for Romantic comedy (for instance Harrogate) and others pursued a course that included as much as was possible in the way of experimental drama, insured against massive losses by a staple diet of more popular forms (Sheffield). Birmingham Rep perhaps came closest to some unity of style, largely due to the long-term involvement of Barry Jackson and Paul Shelley and the greater freedom of programming that arose from their financial advantages. But with the many changes of management that most of the reps underwent, it is hard to identify definite trends or policies except in the short term. The general tendency was towards presenting a cross-section of all styles that had been popular in London that season, leavened with a little risk-taking:

... each season ... there are produced some of those pieces which the London theatres seldom risk and which would never, in all probability, be seen in the city but for the existence of the Repertory Theatre, yet much of the theatre's work consists of selecting the best of the London drama and representing it in Liverpool for the benefit of the Liverpool public. (Goldie)

The primary problem of programming can be seen to resolve itself into the two main areas of financing and public demand. That there existed only a small audience for overtly expressionist drama in England in undeniable, and the attempt to
educate a wider public into an appreciation of the style was a will-o'-the-wisp that expired long before the Second World War. But the belief that the Reps should continue to produce occasional plays in this style, not only to serve a small but vocal section of the audience but also to retain 'artistic idealism', persisted throughout the period. With the constant jostling for a place in the limelight of world theatre (a concept fostered by the boom in theatrical periodicals after the Great War) came an unwillingness to surrender to the baseline of local demand; thus the challenge of confronting the question of what function the reps served within their individual context was avoided. The idealists who, in many cases, had comprised the playgoers' societies or repertory clubs that had given the initial impetus to the formation of the reps had forged unbreakable links between the idea of a local repertory and the idea of the world theatre. It would be sad and misguided, obviously, to deny to the work of the reps any significance beyond the merely local, but it seems a fair criticism that many of the attitudes that informed the programming policy of the reps, and which created the dilemma discussed here, had confused the initial aims of the Reps with a greater, but secondary, ambition. Without this dilemma, perhaps the record of the reps in producing the exciting, intriguingly incongruous expressionist productions that peppered the period would have been barren; but perhaps there would have emerged something far closer in spirit to the original expressionist impulse, which was at its best closely related to the immediate social and political factors that prevailed at its genesis.

Surrender to the dictates of the box-office was the bête noir of many commentators and critics of the period, whose literary-historical approach to theatre could furnish myriad examples of commercially neglected geniuses whose worth had only been appreciated by the non-profit-making few, who had then rocketed them to their well-deserved recognition - failure and obscurity being only worthwhile when crowned with ultimate acclaim and financial success. It is not surprising that this idolatry of the writer flourished
in a period of such change and confusion; many saw talent and genius as abstract touchstones that would always shine through in any circumstances. The relationship between the writer and the theatre, or between the producer choosing a play and the audience watching it, is not definable in simple terms of quality; Bentley insisted, quite appropriately, on the concept of 'commodity' in his review of the so-called boom period of the twenties and thirties:

The relation of art to commodity is seldom simple ... particularly in the theatre, art has seldom or never flourished in absolute independence of commodity. Indeed, it is well known that dramatic art has most often had to exist in the commodity theatre or not at all.

An obvious statement, perhaps - Western theatre has never seen a truly non-commodity theatre along the line of the Eastern religious drama - but one that is far rarer than the utterances of the pro-Art lobby, such as Herbert Prentice:

My one religion is beauty, and the theatre should be the home of a drama that has for its mission the cult of the beautiful and the love of beauty. I would have people go to the theatre not only to be amused but to be inspired, to learn, and, above all, to derive lasting satisfaction.

Presumably Prentice made this extraordinary oration (on his appointment as producer at the Nottingham Repertory Theatre) in a mood of optimistic idealism; his practical experience would have made him at most capable of paying only lip service to the cult of beauty. Every so often the most hard-bitten producers, whose illusions of the theatre as an aesthetic palace and well-spring of lasting inspiration and satisfaction must surely have been tempered by experience with a degree of scepticism, tended to come out with token re-affirmations of their belief in aesthetic independence; here is another such statement from Barry Jackson:

So long as our theatres are organised to show a handsome profit, in other words, to depend on the taste of the masses, they will sink further and further from the ideal.

Dubious not only in its pertinence to the running of the
rep theatres, but also in its apparent distaste for the 'masses', this was a view which seemed to exist alongside an artistic sensibility that embraced the ideal of democracy. It is not uncommon for those involved in art to combine a theoretical acceptance of the love of mankind with a practical contempt for its unglamorous reality. The producers and directors, in their statements of intent, are not to be looked to for objective analyses of the finance-versus-art dilemma. It was a problem that permeated theatrical criticism on all levels. Somerset Maugham, it is well known, flaunted his commercial success in the face of the beauty-cult critics, secure in the knowledge that his artistic reputation did not rest on any laurels they might bestow. Frank Vernon quoted Professor Lyon Phelps who had singled Maugham out for special criticism:

"An astonishingly successful dramatist like Somerset Maugham, for example, has had no influence at all; modern dramatic history would be the same if he had never written a play. In art it is always quality, not quantity, that counts." True, but a quantity of successful plays which may be less than art count very much in the important matter of keeping the theatres open. Ignoring the quite groundless dismissal of Maugham's dramatic output, it is sufficient to note that the introduction of 'Art' into theatrical criticism once again heralds the onslaught of elitist illogic. Vernon's riposte, while sadly failing to clear Maugham's good name, at least highlights the transparent flaw in Professor Phelps's view of dramatic history, the continuity of which is far more dependent on money, and less on art, that might appear. Maugham was an outstanding theatrical craftsman, and, it might be argued on the strength of plays like The Circle, an artist of quality whose inspiration was from direct, native sources and whose form was tailored to the optimum communication in the theatre of the day; his work did much to provide the reps (and the West End) with reliable successes that had good parts for actors and which suited the mood of the times. Without this sort of material, dramatic history might have been more satisfactory to some, but it would certainly not have been the same.
Whatever the criteria used to judge the quality of work produced by the reps, we are left with the question of what factors drew audiences into the theatres and to what extent those factors could be manipulated by producers. In the case of the early reps, especially those in the large cities, it is inevitable that the very existence of a theatre was a major factor in attracting audiences; in the history of the reps as far as the late twenties there was no major competition from the cinema; the old circuits were dwindling and the other urban theatres were concentrating largely on imported productions. By the thirties, a decade in which many new reps opened and in which the existing ones faced the problem of continuing after the first flush of novelty had expired, more competition existed, and years of experience had made the earlier idealism inadequate. The reps, theatres of the cult of beauty, had to square with the commodity theatre to survive - something they had done all along, albeit unwillingly. Reappraisals of the role of the reps came thick and fast in the thirties, one of the liveliest coming in a debate that enlivened the pages of The Liverpoolian in 1932:

If the Playhouse is to venture to do more interesting plays, it must choose ones that are known fairly well, if only by name, to at least a section of community, and then go out and work for its audience.

(David Webster)

Webster went on to suggest far greater reference to community needs than had ever been made by the reps, for example in presenting Shakespeare for schoolchildren preparing for exams; plays that would be guaranteed to attract local literary societies; religious plays that would be certain to gain attention in the city of Liverpool. Although these suggestions do not seem to have been taken up in Liverpool at least under the reign of William Armstrong, they represent and early conception of the community-based approach that had developed in the last three decades, whereby most reps at least have a T.I.E. unit. At last some alternative was being voiced to the old 'popular or experimental' choice: the concept of a repertory theatre that was proud, rather
than humiliated, to go to the community for its direction was emerging. It was a voice that was not widely heard until the Second World War, and during the thirties the programming debate ran along familiar elitist lines. William Armstrong in the twenties had defended the Playhouse against charges of abandoning an eclectic choice of plays with the assertion that he would rather perform Barrie to full houses for five weeks than produce:

... some unknown new play written by some epileptic, and play it to a theatre of half-empty benches under the 'intelligent patronage' of ... cranks.¹¹

This insistence on polarising styles of drama, of ridiculing non-existent excesses, characterises both sides in this long-running and generally fantastic debate. If the sentiments expressed in this tirade by Armstrong represent a genuine reason why the Playhouse produced so little expressionistic material in the time of his producership, it is a sad appraisal of his abilities as a servant of the community which, although many of its members would indeed have preferred to see Barrie, must nonetheless have included a significant percentage who would have welcomed the chance to judge some of the new drama for itself rather than accept Armstrong's hysterical condemnation. J.C. Trewin records in The Theatre Since 1900 that 'more plays from abroad reached London in the 1930s than at any time during the half century'¹² the percentage was still small, but significant. If this is true of London then it assumes an interest in and appetite for the less conventionally acceptable theatrical forms of European and American theatre throughout the country. This trend was reflected in the reps insofar as they imported and imitated London successes; but rarely was a positive initiative taken to choose new foreign plays that seemed to have something to offer the local audience. The writing from new British authors to reach the reps was relatively untouched by foreign influences; Irish writers, Johnston and O'Casey, had occasional airings, but there never developed a British 'school' of Expressionism or anything remotely akin.
The area in which the influence of Expressionism made itself most strongly felt was that of stage design. Perhaps because Expressionism in all its manifestations uses the visual as a primary approach; perhaps because British scenic design needed the new ideas in the way that design and acting and writing in the States had needed that catalyst; whatever the reasons, there developed a line of design notably different from the 3-D Realism that, by the twenties, was replacing the 2-D Realism of the Edwardian theatre. It was different in conception from the traditional idea of set-as-background; many of the younger British designers adopted the freedom and fluidity of expressionist staging techniques, and, modified according to budget, developed a not-unrealistic, and yet decidedly not realist, style of setting in much the same way that R.E. Jones, Lee Simonson and other American designers had. Among those who explored the potential of the new stagecraft, there were two distinct tendencies - those whose work sought above all simplicity, and those who wished to use new stage resources in new ways, to experiment with the expressive possibilities of design. A greater attention was paid to the work of designers from the First World War onwards, with the growing awareness of famous foreign designers and producers such as Reinhardt and his team, Bel Geddes and Appia, and later of the expressionist designers and their American disciples. One of the first results of this new 'attention of design was a desire to get away from the cluttered, claustrophobic qualities of realistic settings; to remove the detailed trappings, allowing the attention to settle on the play's action and meaning without obstructions. This distaste for obtrusive scenery was voiced by John Drinkwater in 1908 shortly after the Pilgrim Players had started their spartan productions:

Scenery is always inadequate, generally grossly so ... if scenery is to be used it should be accurate and as true to nature as possible, but ... it is not necessary at all ... it is in many ways undesirable. As costumes, on the other hand, are necessary, let them be such as will blend with the play and be pleasing to our sense of colour and beauty.14

The return to basics was necessitated not only by a somewhat puritanical belief in the inadequacy of scenery; presumably
this fledgling group did not have access to anything other than a stripped-down style. But it was a tendency that has parallels in the early productions of Robert Edmond Jones, and was certainly in practice in the French theatre in work of designers like Pitoeff and Copeau, and was partly akin to the thinking that embraced the blatant anti-illusionist theories of Constructivism. The early B.R.T. productions, many of which were designed by Jackson, pursued this policy of restraint, preferring functional arrangements of steps and columns to elaborate illusionist scenery. The anti-decorative line found a place in the heart of the conservative critics - Vernon stated in 1924 that "Decoration" impedes words and diminishes actors yet in this context it is seen as an ideal against which to condemn the other direction of the new stagecraft which marshalled the resources of the stage to its ends. In truth, both directions were united originally in their anti-Realism and can both be seen, for instance, in the post-First World War German theatre as styles explored by the expressionist producers. There are few examples of designers who explored fully the more spectacular potentials of post-War design - most English theatres were too small and ill-equipped to emulate the work of Reinhardt - and those who did tended either to ape the expressionist style or to be reliant on painterly rather than plastic techniques.

The extent to which advances were made in scenic design in the reps is dependent on the initial policy of programming. While it is true that in several cases the designers seemed to work quite independently, producing beautiful and innovative work for fairly unadventurous pieces (and flourishing particularly in the sphere of classic revivals, especially Shakespeare), there were so few reps that saw themselves as fulfilling any kind of experimental role that the design work tended almost to divorce itself from other elements of the play. Trewin recorded that:

More and more, throughout the thirties, we began to look in a programme for the name of a designer. It could be more profitable at times than a search for the name of the author.
Although smaller producing organisations like the Leeds Art Theatre had fostered scenic design as an integral part of their programme, and although the larger reps produced some outstanding design work, it was rare to find an awareness of design as part of the overall artistic scheme. It remained part of the larger problem that faced the reps of identifying the context in which they wished their work to be viewed. Succeeding wholly neither in the 'world theatre' arena (a wholehearted devotion to the Art of the Theatre) nor in the regional area (theatre serving the people) most of the reps worked and ill-defined ground in between, never shaking off their subservience to the London scene and its extraordinary canons of taste, and seldom finding a formula which would maintain a level of artistic achievement while filling the seats. The occasional efforts of designers to impose a distinctive style on a season is symptomatic of sporadic attempts of the reps to swing their audiences towards an appreciation of a certain style of drama; but then there was always the staple diet of Shaw, the conception of whose plays is essentially anti-design insofar as he dictated Realism in most of his stage directions.\textsuperscript{17} It is perhaps futile to look for 'significant' design work in theatres whose perceived function was the reproduction of a cross-section of what was best from the London stage. Yet the paradox always remains that in the cautious programming of most of the reps there should emerge some surprisingly fresh, experimental work that might, with a more sincere approach to the desires of the entire community, have developed into a distinctive British contribution to European stagework.

The distinctions that were made in the period between the popular and the artistic theatres lined up roughly as follows: the popular theatre strove primarily after financial effectiveness, extending this pragmatism into the type of material it presented which expressed satisfaction with the status quo, was dominated by reason and thereby sought to please the greatest number, sacrificing all other qualities to that of immediate/momentary theatrical effectiveness;
the artistic theatre reversed the priorities and placed
the presentation first and the audience second, working
on the assumption that quality would eventually educate
the tastes of the public and would bring to the provincial
stage the same spirit that had created some of the recognised
highpoints of modern theatre. A general view prevailed
that a real success, a real masterpiece, existed somewhere
on the borderline between the two - effective as popular
theatre but unassailable in its artistic integrity and qual-
ity. In the context of the repertory theatres, which had
been avowedly created to serve communities that had no access
to the 'serious' theatre, this polarity could only have
a detrimental effect, because, while the craving after and
artistic ideal is perfectly laudable, the notion that the
pragmatic 'popular' approach should preclude integrity is
damaging in that it cuts off many avenues of exploration,
especially in the area of the community's relationship to
its theatre, that could fruitfully have been explored in
the period. A major factor that must have entrenched this
dilemma was the inherited idea that the serious theatre
remained the province of the upper levels of society, as
it certainly had been in London since polite society returned
to the theatres in the 1860s. There may have been enough
numbers of this class in London to maintain a good few thea-
tres; in the provinces the appeal had to be more democratic
simply because of the smaller catchment area involved.
The attempt to appeal to 'the majority' meant that no assum-
ptions of shared beliefs were safe - the audiences for the
reps in the thirties comprised more of a demographic cross-
section than did London audiences, who had more choice of
dramatic fare and could choose their entertainment according
to their sympathies. For the reps remained the task of
creating a truly popular, democratic theatre that had not
been confronted in England for many centuries. Criticism
tended to come from journals which expressed the views of
the upper echelons of the audience, yet the box office remai-
ned a reliable index of the efficacy of any programming
policy. Finding a realistic view of the context within
which they were operating was a problem that faced the reps
from the very first; by the mid-thirties, with economic depression, wages strikes and the growing threat of the cinema (with its more democratic appeal) the need for answers was more pressing than ever, as one theatre after another faced the danger of imminent closure.

VI: CRITICAL AND PUBLIC RESPONSES

The repertory movement has now been in progress a good number of years, and the dream of 'a new school of British drama' is as far off as ever. The only country where the movement has produced dramatists is Ireland - even our own Shaw is Irish - and that is simply because the Abbey Theatre movement was part of an intense national upheaval. This is, actually, the essential condition of every artistic effluence. Like everything else, drama is a matter of politics - creative art has its roots deep down in the human spirit - it has an elemental side to it - and to think that we can evoke the creative spirit by academic methods is to misunderstand both studentship and art.

J.S. Dean, 1924

The inter-war period saw a significant change in the style of dramatic criticism. Whereas reviews in the Edwardian period tended to focus their attention on the story of a play and the performance of the actors in interpreting a role, post-war criticism became more deliberately analytical. With the continental influences that were recognised in the twenties, and especially with the vogue for Expressionism, the critics found themselves facing a dilemma. Should drama critics, as (unappointed) leaders of public opinion, foster the experimental spirit that brought these pioneering but awkward works into the British theatre, or should they rather encourage a conservative programming that perceived as its ultimate criterion the lowest common denominator of box-office popularity? The extent to which the press backed either approach was crucial to the decision on the producers' part of what line to pursue, for the newspapers and periodicals were often the nearest they had to a public platform on matters of programming policy. Critics who favoured the 'creative' approach, encouraging experiment and keeping the art of the theatre unsullied by any considerations of finance or popularity, welcomed the expressionist style (in theory) and certainly welcomed the development of a house style that would gain for the theatre in question
a place on the map of world theatre. Those who saw the reps as stages for the presentation of the purely popular had recourse to claiming to be upholding the British theatrical tradition, and encouraged in audiences a taste for the kind of drama proven to be popular in London. One seldom finds in the criticism of the reps much concern with the idea of special community needs; even in those who most avidly sought a people's theatre there was a reluctance to admit that the taste of the people might run counter to a preconceived idea (along Volksbuhne lines) of what a British popular provincial theatre should produce. The American writer George Jean Nathan had claimed for dramatic criticism an absolute independence:

Dramatic criticism is, or should be, concerned solely with dramatic art even at the expense of bankrupting every theatre in the country.²

And indeed a line of criticism that sought to establish some inviolable canons of artistic excellence would have been at least refreshing amongst the contradictory arguments of British criticism in the twenties and thirties. But what the Nathan line ignores is the influential role that dramatic criticism can have in effecting gradual improvement in standards, and of course in establishing the sine qua non of dramatic art - an audience to play to.

The recognisable voices of British dramatic criticism lined up approximately into two distinct teams - the Highbrow and the Lowbrow - with the usual disagreement over the relationship of theatre to art and commodity. Both stances, while convincing in the abstract sense, were quite inadequate to evaluate the rapid changes that took place in so fluid a society as Britain between the wars, in which the habits of audiences were altered enormously, not least by the growth of the cinema. A disjunction between the critics and the audiences is apparent in both cases: it seems that the tendency in the press, whether pro- or anti-academic, always implicitly assumed some position of superior knowledge and taste to that of its readers. Typical of the highbrow stance are the utterances of Barry Jackson, a man who could literally
afford to hold the box office in contempt. Introducing a review of the first ten years of the B.R.T., Jackson displayed his scorn for the less well-educated:

... we are curiously sympathetic to intellectual ignorance. The farm or factory hand who asked (were such a question believable) if the fences on the Derby course were as big as those of the Grand National would be driven to live in Tibet or some faraway country, for ridicule would certainly drive him from his own. On the other hand, the lady who inquires if the Shaw cycle Methuselah is a music hall turn is enlightened with the utmost tact and respect ... The fact is that no mass of people will ever take the initiative in raising its aesthetic standard, but rather the reverse.

It could be argued that Jackson is in fact unafraid of laughing at the ignorance of the working class but is embarrassed by displays thereof in the middle class: his intended point is that a knowledge of 'intellectual' subjects, including theatre, should be as much a part of British life as the horses. Again he resorts to a condemnation of 'the masses' as anti-art, opposed in essence to the spirit of theatre.

It was easier to sound convincing as a lowbrow, for at least the critics had the weapon of sarcasm at their disposal. J.C. Trewin epitomised the humorous lowbrow stance in his pithy dismissal of the Gate Theatre Studio as:

The Gate, the little studio on Villiers Street, Strand, which had been a skittle alley and where first Peter Godfrey, and later Norman Marshall, played their own form of intellectual skittles for some years.

Expressionism particularly was easy to mock. Interestingly, the stance of the lowbrow critics tended to be as superior as that of the highbrows: their general attitude was that this 'experimental' material was too silly to merit their attention, and was the outpourings of persons who, by forcing their abstract ideas on the theatre, proved their real ignorance of what the theatre existed to achieve. This pandering to the anti-intellectual bias that is undoubtedly a persistent feature of British philistinism inevitably found its mouthpiece in St John Ervine. A regular speaker at repertory theatre members' nights in the thirties, Ervine was fond of advising 'if any earnest student of the drama comes within half a mile of your theatre, shoot him. The public will
thank you'. Quite why the public was expected to find Ervine's superior utterances preferable to those of any other is uncertain, but it was not by chance that he chose to brand the opponent as 'earnest'. Nothing was more unpalatable to theatregoers in the thirties than earnestness. Reviewing the state of the theatre a decade later, Bentley perceived the trend of 'anti-academicism' throughout Europe and America, and decried it roundly:

... the scholars and critics of the theatre - or at least a high proportion of them - have sold themselves to the managers. The academicians are determined to be unacademic. So much the worse for them. If it is academic to see plays in the context of thinking, feeling and doing rather than in the context of footlights and box offices, then there is much to be said for academicism.

In having recourse to the box office or to the abstract criteria of 'academic' criticism as the ultimate touchstone of their judgement, the critics of the period found themselves in a no-man's land in which both attitudes shared similar confusions, and could, for instance, happily brand the trend for musical comedy as boorish and condemn the expressionist style as earnest or rarefied, without suggesting any alternative to these extremes, or offering any criteria by which to judge the vast amount of drama that occupied the middle ground and which provided much of the programme of the reps. Although speculation is generally a fruitless pursuit, it is interesting in this context to conjecture on the probable response of some of the cited critics to the Brecht/Weill collaborations, had any of them been given a prominent airing in Britain during the thirties.

The same question that perplexed managers and producers confounded the critics: did the theatre have as its primary aim simply the entertainment of as many people as possible and the taking of their money? Or should it aim to educate the tastes of its audience - or even educate them in matters not solely connected with the theatre? There was a yearning for dramas of substance that did not confront the audience with ideas or forms unpalatable to their usual tastes yet which stimulated and challenged them and encouraged them to exercise their intellectual and emotional faculties within
an acceptable range. Had Shaw been unflaggingly prolific and immortal (and it seemed through the period that maybe he was) there would have been many producers and critics who could not have been happier. The trends that developed in the thirties towards light comedy pleased none of the critics. Trewin said:

There were too many jam-jar plays in which the familiar minnows of light comedy flitted and wriggled, pretending to be goldfish and hoping that we should take the author's word.  

- summing up the discontent with a school of writing that had nevertheless proved popular, and was certainly in some cases presenting to theatregoers highly palatable examples of superb dramatic structure. To those who felt that the real work of the reps lay in creating an audience for a more serious type of drama than the glittering chaff of the West End, the national popularity of light comedy was counter to the scheme of things. 'Repertorists' hailed each transfer from the provinces to London as further proof of the genuine importance of the reps in advancing British theatrical art (their rallying-cry was Drinkwater's Abraham Lincoln) yet dismissed the reverse flow in whatever terms (high- or lowbrow) suited the occasion. The argument was always as much between London and the provinces as between any wider concepts of dramatic criticism; but on the role of the theatres there was never agreement. Frank Vernon perhaps came closer than most in identifying one of the main trends of disagreement as:

... the quarrel ... between people who wanted representations (they can be any kind of representation from melodrama to expressionism) of life in the theatre and people who regarded the theatre as a place in which to get away from life.  

Increasingly over the next decade the cinema would draw away the people who wished to 'get away from life', leaving those who were either incurable theatregoers, or still looking for representations of life, to search for something substantial but not earnest. With this ever-growing vacuum, it is not surprising that enterprising producers should
look to many sources of possible material, and this is an important factor in explaining the British vogue for Expressionism that occurred in the late twenties and early thirties; it was not only a prominent and challenging European form, but also a possible path for progressive directors who wished to represent life in the theatre without necessarily sugaring the pill with the facile morals of melodrama or the distracting glamour of light comedy.

It was upon Expressionism that the unanimous wrath and contempt of the conservative press was unleashed. Dissatisfied with the indecisiveness of British products, it was reassuring for many to anathematize German Expressionism as something too awful for the British theatre at however low an ebb. First to be attacked was the serious, sometimes dark (interpreted as 'gloomy') nature of much expressionist drama. 'Before a man can become an Expressionist he must first become a neurotic' clucked Ervine\(^1\) in response to, of all things, Kaiser's Gas. Less vehemently, but as often criticised, were the anti-literary methods of some Expressionism, using plastic elements as an expressive medium as well as words: 'The ear beats the eye in the theatre proper ... why do people go to the theatre? They go to hear speakers in acting plays'\(^12\) claimed Vernon, no doubt to the chagrin of many a scenic artist. There was also the suspicion that all the spectacle and novelty of Expressionism masked something quite unacceptable:

> What is wrong with Expressionism is that it has messages. It is a way round to didacticism via fantasy and allegory, and didacticism is the devil.

(Vernon)\(^13\)

Not only might it contain messages; there was a feeling that it might conceal something even worse. Writing of Johnston's The Old Lady Says No!, which he thought 'inexpressibly expressionistic', Trewin said: 'some of the satirical passages cast a shower of sparks: the rest is an esoteric address to initiates'.\(^14\) The familiar voice of anti-academicism of course, but with the added element of the distrust of the difficult and obscure as something sinister and (by implication) foreign. One of the most prevalent reasons
for the ill-considered dismissal of Expressionism was the fact that its roots were so firmly in Germany - just as Realism, especially in the novel, was tainted by its French roots, and was therefore bound to be pornographic. All things German were, for many, bound to be aridly intellectual, humourless, obscure, morbid and pessimistic. Having perhaps glanced at a few expressionist paintings, or having read the rather turgid early translations of Toller and Kaiser, the critics set about expressionist drama for qualities that, to a less germanophobic judge, it did not possess. During the First World War the distaste for all things German was understandable: Liverpool Repertory Theatre had faced considerable criticism for its 'plunge into Continental morbidity' in staging Hauptmann's Hannele and Lonely Lives (and, significantly, it produced nothing remotely teutonic or expressionist until 1925-26). By the thirties, the genius of realist writers like Hauptmann and Sudermann was recognised and to a great extent tolerated, but still there existed a bias against the newer, more radical German theatre. Writing in 1934, a time when there was a higher awareness of the new German theatre in Britain than at any other, Cecil Chisholm, casting about for suitable foreign material for the reps, concluded that:

At any other time within living memory the German dramatists would have provided our richest foreign field. One thinks of the pre-war years in which Hauptmann, Sudermann, Wedekind and Schnitzler were writing their great naturalistic plays.

No mention of Expressionism, not even a dismissal! That Chisholm could accept Wedekind (by 1934 a recognised, and of course dead, genius) and yet fail altogether to mention Toller, Kaiser, Hasenclever, Werfel, von Unruh or any of the writers who had made an impact in Germany (and by this time quite recognisably in the USA and even in Britain) indicates that the spirit which dismissed Hauptmann in 1913 lived on in the mid thirties in Chisholm himself - and others. The distaste for German art was, if anything, heightened after the War due to the tendency in that country to produce work which confronted the results of the War, portraying
a shattered, lost world with no faith in the self-righteous morals that had propelled it into the War - and which persisted in Britain, bolstered by the fact of victory. Britain's response to the War was, as has already been noted, retarded by the apparently intact survival of its social and political system; therefore the display in Expressionism of fragmentation, disorder and magnified hopes and fears was an unwelcome manifestation of factors that were to erupt, albeit less extremely, in Britain throughout the inter-war period. In a review of The Machine Wreckers in 1923, J.T. Grein summed up these reasons for the further dislike of German drama:

(Germany) has lost faith in itself, in the world, in the future, in life. The drift of its literature is despair, unless it be revenge ... To revel in the slough of despond may by the sad pleasure of the few, but the world wants something different to carry on. Such plays may have an ephemeral value as curiosities - as a manifestation of the mental state of Germany today - but they are merely typical of a passing phase. Grein, who had done much to promote the early London productions of that other celebrated theatrical depressive, Ibsen, found the expressionist drama unacceptable on the same grounds that many had decried Ghosts - because it was a seemingly negative, pessimistic, angst-ridden teutonic dirge. That so astute a critic as Grein should have a marked blind-spot about Expressionism is ample proof of the weight of prejudice that surrounded the career of German theatre at the hands of critics between the wars.

What progressive and accepting criticism there was of Expressionism in Britain tended to adopt it as a cause célèbre rather than concentrating on the merits of the play. Agate's famous review of From Morn To Midnight concentrated most of its praises on the enterprise of the Gate Theatre, and indeed he disliked the play itself as he later made clear when it transferred. Those who championed Expressionism, such as Charles F. Smith, did so most often as a way of opposing the conventions of Realism and to forge a link with the artistic and political left wing. It would be wrong to dismiss British dramatic criticism in the period as wholly hostile to experimentation along expressionist
lines, although it is certainly true that on the whole the press did the theatre a disservice in misrepresenting Expressionism to its readers and in perpetuating jingoistic, unreasoned dismissals of so much European theatre. Where the press served positively to encourage and enhance the struggles of the Reps to balance profitability with self-respect was in the sheer amount of attention that provincial newspapers paid to the doings of the theatres, stimulating debate which, if not always fairly or even competently conducted, at least provided a catalyst for much soul-searching and resultant development in the theatre. Regional papers such as the Manchester Guardian created a provincial self-awareness, giving to the Reps a degree of autonomy which allowed them to see success or failure in their own terms rather than those dictated by London. Critics who praised the endeavour of the Reps often regarded the genesis of a serious provincial theatre as a challenge to the self-satisfaction of London theatre, presumably regarding it as a healthy competition that might stimulate some kind of theatrical renaissance in the capital. To some extent the work of the Old Vic in the forties was a result of the increased interest in Shakespeare production and dramaturgy that had been stimulated by the work of the Reps (particularly in this instance the B.R.T.’s early modern-dress Shakespeare) and their determination to take theatre to the people was certainly an attempt to reconcile some of the questions concerning the democratic appeal of serious theatre that had been raised in the record of the Reps. For many, the fact that the Reps struggled on against the odds, seemingly creating drama 'out of nothing for its own sake', was enough. The efforts of the provincial theatres not only to provide functional entertainment for a local public but also to find an audience for new/serious drama, was often regarded as closer to the true spirit of theatre than the artificial conditions that prevailed in London. The idea of a theatre struggling to survive, staffed often by amateurs whose only reward for their labour was the satisfaction of creating drama, with an eclectic and adventurous programme, was appealing to critics who saw a lack of such noble enterprise in London.
J.T. Grein singled out the Leeds Art Theatre for special praise, and his enthusiasm inspired him to exclaim:

Three cheers for Leeds! And wake up, London! For in the Great City there is nothing like the Art Theatre of Leeds ...  

What Grein saw in the Art Theatre was an approach to a 'People's Theatre' - the spontaneous creation of a serious theatre by and for lovers of the drama from all walks of life. He saw no such manifestation in London. In fact the Leeds Art Theatre was the creation of a small group of interested individuals much like the Gate; the people's theatre in the terms Grein saw it had largely not appeared in London before the Second World War; the theatre remained largely the preserve of middle-class audiences and capitalist management.

Again the separation of ideas and the inconsistency of judgement arises between the perceived need for theatres and the canons of taste that dictated the programme. Critics in the period were agreed on one point, that there should be more theatres producing serious drama and that audiences should be drawn from as wide a social range as possible. This was the extent of the agreement. Criticism, as has been noted, made a habit of advocating (in abstract terms) the necessity of serious drama, then finding endless faults with any presentation that deviated from the individual's expectations, and nearly always failing to suggest improvements or alternatives: destructive, rather than constructive, criticism. Of course it is to be expected that there should be wide disagreement concerning art, especially with so public a form as theatre, and the suggestion that one line should be adhered to has been proven to be an inhibiting rather than a facilitating factor to theatre artists. But in the dramatic criticism of the period, of which a fairly representative selection appears above (certainly representative of the more prolific and recognisable/influential voices), what emerges is a universal confusion of ideas and ideals; an inconsistency regarding the evaluation of dramatic art; a vein of elitism and snobbery that, when
applied to the theatre, renders balanced criticism impossible; and above all a failure to understand or confront the issues that, in retrospect, seem to have been of prime importance in the twenties and thirties with the development of provincial theatre and the competition of the cinema. The privileged position of the critic as an individual representing his subjective opinion as possessing authority to a wide public can be seen as a hangover from the school of late Victorian Art criticism that would cite Pater as its mentor. For an art form that contradicts the imposition of subjective, authoritative values and, essentially, renders inappropriate the assumption of the 'intellectual aristocracy' approach, these critical canons were inadequate. This crisis in criticism is indicative of the relative speed with which the theatrical scene in Britain was changing between the wars; old habits of criticism adapted less rapidly, with the result, as has been seen, of the application of incongruous criteria to the subject. It was obviously easy for critics to ignore the even more rapid and radical changes in the European theatre, and to a great extent an awareness of this coloured their view of the more conservative British theatre. A fear of 'invasion' by alien artistic forms was perhaps a result of the War, but can also be seen as symptomatic of the irreconcilable conflict between uncompromising theatrical modernism and a critical tradition that had its roots in the ideals of imperial, Victorian Britain and which applied to the (ideally) democratic art of the theatre a value system that could never lead to positive and informative criticism.

While tracing the main lines of critical response is fairly easy, a consideration of the attitudes and feelings of the audience towards the drama seen in the Reps enters into a grey, uncharted area. Few reliable accounts exist beyond personal memoirs, incidental mentions and selected correspondence, and the occasional secondary sources such as the descriptions of the audiences by the critics:

It is useless ... to complain of the dramatists and the managers when the persons at fault are the playgoers themselves. (Ervine) 24
hardly a useful tangent to follow. Playgoers who contributed to the organs of the theatre such as Drama or the regional theatre magazines tended to fall into the same traps of subjectivity and autocracy that beset the professional critics. What one can gather from the accounts of individual Reps gives the impression that audiences on the whole combined maddening fickleness with unbreachable conservatism; the idea of nurturing an identifiable and educated taste among theatregoers was soon abandoned. It has been suggested above that there existed within any sizeable community an audience for most types of drama, and that a programming policy that made reference to the size and economic situation of each of these potential audience arenas may well have discovered a more reliable indicator of probable success than the usual juggling of West End values and box-office 'certs'. This is not to say that there would have emerged a radically different approach to the choice of material; simple that the Reps may have been in a position to diversify their material without constantly facing the threat of failure and closure.

In the early days of Rep before the War there had existed the belief that the establishment of provincial theatres would act as a magnet to draw from each community some kind of intellectual clique: the sort of people who had patronised the Independent Theatre and the Stage Society. The societies and committees who had pushed for the foundation of the Reps often consisted of professional people, even, largely, those whose education or metier had made them conversant with the best of world literature. These groups sought to provide theatres for like-minded audiences; they were soon seen to be misguided in supposing the existence of a significant percentage of the population who shared their tastes. The question arose very early of to, and for, whom were the Reps speaking? Had there really existed the much-sought intellectual aristocracy, it seems inevitable that their contribution to the success of the Reps would have been minimal as one imagines that elitism is a necessary factor for membership of this class. As long as a contradic-
tion was perceived between 'good' and 'popular' drama, the fantasy of the ideal audience would persist in the minds of critics and producers. It is fair to assume that a Rep audience in, say, Sheffield, comprised a wider demographic spread than the audience of a London theatre run on repertory lines such as the St Martin's under Basil Dean's management. With this undeniable difference, a re-adjusted value system was necessary but often absent.

The non-appearance of a provincial audience that made immediate demands for an advanced experimental drama was certainly seen as justifying the abandonment of a forward-looking policy in many of the Reps, and it is difficult to argue with Goldie's assessment regarding Liverpool:

In Liverpool there is no subsidy and there is no ready made, specialised audience. And the population is not large enough to supply a group which would support the 'advanced' drama in a theatre of the medium size of the Playhouse.\[\text{55}\]

Even the theatres that did have the advantage of a subsidy (like Birmingham) or a ready-made specialised audience (Cambridge Festival Theatre, Gate) could seldom announce a programme that included more than a small number of overtly 'advanced' plays; there was without doubt a reflection in the tastes of audiences of the prejudice against Expressionism (and especially German drama) that is so clearly demonstrated in contemporary criticism. Whether the habits of audiences were substantially influenced by the opinions of journalists, or whether Britain in the twenties and thirties, was, for broader social reasons, no fertile ground for a real acceptance of Expressionism, is uncertain; while it is unwise to underestimate the influence of the press in shaping audience habits, it seems that there were more fundamental reasons why the 'advanced drama' never gained more than a temporary, fashionable foothold in this country. Had there been the consideration of local factors, the taking of drama to the community rather than the passive expectancy of many managements, it is possible that the confrontational, dialectic, imaginative aspects of the style might have found a positive response amongst the working classes in the way it had in
Germany, where the awareness of the political role of theatre was much higher. In England the cliché 'Art and Politics don't mix' held as much of a grip in the twenties as it does today. There was, however, a glimmering awareness that social and political trends would inevitably bring the theatre into confrontation with the cultural needs of the working classes. Quite apart from the fact that the provincial theatres were obliged to appeal to a wider cross-section of the community than London theatres, there was an obvious shift in the focus of dramatic writing in the early years of the century. The revival of interest in dramatic writing in the 1890s had centred on the work of Wilde, Pinero, Jones, Esmond and Gilbert, whose territory was largely the drawing rooms of the haute bourgeoisie and aristocracy, or a satirical fantasy world which could choose not to include elements of Realism. At the turn of the century and up until the Great War, the growing awareness of Ibsen in Britain, and the work of writers such as Shaw, Barrie, Barker and Galsworthy, was shifting the focus onto the middle class and introducing an awareness of their relationship with the working class. Writers such as Synge and Masefield carried the transition one stage further by creating tragedy out of the lives of those who were part of the rural working class. The process of catching up with the sociological changes of the Victorian period (when the theatre made little attempt to give a realistic representation of modern life) was slow, even to the degree that there lingered on a sense that life as seen in the theatre had little connection with life as lived outside it. The concentration in much of the post-war German drama on the working class was largely a result of the breakdown of a rigid class system - brought about by defeat in the War and also by the intensive contact between the classes in the trenches, and the growing awareness of Marxist thought which was such an important influence on the major Expressionist writers. In England such a confrontation was of less urgency than in Germany - certainly Marxism was not a major feature in the post-war English theatre, and the overtly left-wing drama of the Group and
Unity was criticised most bitterly for its association with revolutionary politics. That drama could be a catalyst to any sort of social change, except in the humanitarian way that the novels of Dickens had been, was anathema to most of the artists in the British theatre. The 'problem play' that had tried to face up to important issues in a largely upper class milieu was no longer adequate in a post-war world. Vernon ascribed its demise to:

... the facts, the social and political influence which made inevitable the revolt against the play well made as to shape, but empty as to democratic significance. 26

Yet the attempt to replace the pre-war problem play (pioneering indeed in its day) with a drama that confronted modern problems met with a more effective obstruction, namely the prejudice of critics and public alike against material that, in both form and content, challenged basic assumptions about art and society and their inter-relationship.

There was, throughout the period of transition from the resurgence of literary drama in the nineties through to the Second World War, a body of opinion amongst scholars and critics of the theatre that basically held the audience per se in contempt and despaired of raising the standards of art while any such endeavour was at the mercy of the philistine hordes. While it is true that the theatrical climate in Britain was unfavourable to some of the more interesting developments in European theatre (and this seems as much the fault of the critics, writers and managers as of the playgoers), the assertion that the public at large posed some kind of threat to the development of an artistically sound drama is absurd. Yet Ervine could lay the blame for the lack of good theatre on the playgoers: the feelings of a producer like Jackson towards the 'masses' have been quoted above. Other commentators were no less sweepingly patronising:

... they (the English audience) took what was set before them with ingenuous good temper, they laughed when they were expected to laugh, cried when they were expected to cry. But of criticism, preference, selection, not a trace. (Arthur Symons) 27
To berate English audiences for a lack of critical awareness can often be interpreted as an expression of disappointment in the refusal of the public to express preferences along the lines of those felt by the writer. The old disassociation between concepts of good and popular theatre remains unaltered.

With such a solid face set against the genuine acceptance of Expressionism in Britain amongst both critics and public, it might seem that the further pursuit of the expressionist influence in the British provincial theatre would be fruitless, or would at best yield only isolated examples, the result of individual interests in the style rather than the fruit of a wider absorption of the influence. However, even apart from the undeniable influence of Continental Expressionism in changing attitudes towards and awareness of the theatre and its organisation and context, there is a significant amount of work produced in the Reps that testifies to at least a partial absorption of Expressionism into the British theatrical language, and which certainly demonstrates that an awareness of the extremes of the style served as a springboard to the development of a modified native style, and therefore served as an important bridge between the Edwardian theatre and post-Second World War developments. Inevitably the shift of focus from the rarefied problems of the rich to the more urgent complaint of the deprived would have come about as the result of social and political changes far more pressing in their influence than Expressionism; however it can be argued that the German style provided for artists and critics a crucial yardstick against which to measure native drama at a time when great changes in attitude towards theatre were evolving.

VII : THE EFFECT OF EXPRESSIONISM ON THE REPS

It has been suggested that the influence of Expressionism served as a springboard for the Reps towards a type of theatre quite different from the realistic problem-plays and comedies that had formed the original idea of the repertory play.
If so, then towards what did it provide the impetus? Certainly if there was an appreciable influence it must have been in indirect ways, for there emerged no substantial amounts of work distinctly in the expressionist style, and certainly very few writers worked in that manner; those who did used it for specific purposes and tended afterwards to go back to Realism rather than pursue the further development of non-realist styles. The commonest attitude towards theatrical Expressionism by the mid thirties (by which time any vogue for the style was dying) is summed up by Aubrey Dyas:

As an art form it has undoubtedly achieved a measure of influence on the development of the drama, and, therefore, deserves an occasional place in the theatre of ideas.¹

- hardly an attitude which would accept that Expressionism had anything to offer the British public except as an oddity, an example of Teutonic eccentricity, and even then only for those interested in the 'theatre of ideas'. But in reality the extent to which Expressionism permeated the British theatrical consciousness is far greater. At the advent of the First World War, the early Reps had been producing a large amount of 'realist' drama of the Masefield variety, which challenged London theatre by its seriousness, its relevance to local issues and its decentralising influence. With the hiatus of the War, during which time many of the early repertorists died, and which had such a far-reaching effect on the artists' perception of their environment, the realistic movements as such petered out: 'the war ... caught Repertory and overwhelmed it with its job half done'² claimed Vernon. Into the vacuum caused by the War, when the sense of purpose that had created the early Reps was at least partially lost, came the assertive new styles rampant on the Continent. Even if Expressionism received but a half-hearted showing in this country, the British theatre could not choose but to measure its achievements against the advances of the European theatre. In America the comparison was made; American theatre was deemed spineless and inane; Continental forms were adopted until
from them there grew something like a native style of expression in the work of O'Neill, Odets, Lawson, Rice and later writers. In Britain, a longer theatrical tradition made the comparison more problematical if not quite unthinkable. Certainly the blatant importation of German styles was unacceptable - even in America there were large difficulties in this area. That many producers and critics became defensive in their distaste for any continental style has been made apparent. Yet even this negative reaction indicates that an awareness, however non-specific, of Expressionism had permeated the British theatrical scene at least by the mid twenties.

Perhaps the main area in which Expressionism influenced the Reps was in the vague but pervasive way in which it served as a reference point and ideal (or the opposite) to artists and critics. Much of the criticism of the period concerns itself with the question of whether a new production belongs with one of the many 'Isms' that had cropped up after the War to perplex the advocates of Realism (Expressionism, Futurism and Constructivism being the unholy trinity). It has been seen that in arguments over the contents of Rep programmes, the extremes of the range of choice were generally seen to be light comedy and Expressionism. However much we may now disagree with the popular conception in the twenties and thirties of Expressionism as an unrelentingly serious, heavy style, its importance at the time lay largely in that it seemed to be the epitome of the serious artistic drama - that for which, to many, the theatre existed.

The second most notable area of influence was in the more tangible field of stage design. Specific examples of the work of individual designers have been given above, but it is worth considering here the degree to which the idea of an expressive/expressionistic use of scenic elements gained acceptance in Britain through the absorption of some of the work of continental designers, especially the more obviously experimental designers of German Expressionism. Ervine, with reliable bluntness, dismissed German stage design as 'crude experiments in production, most of which derive from experiments made years ago by Mr. Craig' - and
it was against this kind of unreasoning distaste that any introduction of expressionist elements would have to struggle. One of the more persistent hangovers from the realist theatre was that a setting existed solely as a backdrop for the action, providing a plausible environment within which the words of the drama expressed meaning; in these terms the use of non-realistic elements as expressive tools was inappropriate. Even when expressionist design was not criticised for being non-realistic, it could always be dismissed by lowbrow critics as being, simply, unpractical:

In Germany Expressionism gave rise to an attempt to make scenery interpret not so much the mood of the play - for good scenery has always done that - but the obsessions of the principle character. Something of the same kind was popular for a time in America, but as a general system of staging it is too static to be very satisfactory. (James Laver)

Failing to take into account the great freedom of action that the single 'expressive' set gives to director and actor (the critic had perhaps not considered great examples such as the eminently functional set for Jessner's Richard III made famous in Britain and America by Continental Stagecraft), this viewpoint also ignores the far older tradition in English theatre of the single set that dates back at least as far as the Renaissance. It is characteristic of the prejudice against German art that the stress should be laid on the term 'obsession' - giving once more the image of the neurotic, psychologically twisted gloominess of Expressionism. In fact the expressionist designers tended not to concentrate on obsessions except insofar as they represented dominant modes in the play (such as the money-obsessed designs by Grosz for Methusaleim); the approach was far more through a consideration of the structure of the play especially in terms of power relationships; much of the most striking expressionist design contains the split levels and powerful verticals that are used to emphasise dominance and submission, often in political terms. Perhaps it was these issues, not the impracticability of the static set, that critics found unsatisfactory.

Even more oppressive and inappropriate was a vein of
criticism that denied to the theatre the opportunity to experiment in the field of visual art at all. Vernon made his position quite clear:

The theatre is not the place for experiments in advanced decorative art ... any manner of decoration which goes beyond those theories of art to which the public has grown accustomed by practice in the picture galleries is to be discouraged in the theatre.5

And yet one of the most popular styles of pre-War theatre had been the late Victorian/Edwardian spectacle theatre, in which elements of many styles of decorative art were mingled effectively in a way that was devoid of theoretical background and would certainly have met with incredulity and derision in the picture galleries. The desire to keep anything overtly modern out of the theatre was akin to the refusal of critics to accept the work of T.S. Eliot as poetry, simply because it did not profess to measure itself by Georgian standards.

If there existed a type of drama that sought to address itself to man as an individual, transcending barriers of race, caste and class, it presupposed the existence of a theatre independent of private patronage, co-operative between organisations, created by and for an interested community in terms both local and national. It was towards this ideal that the Reps aspired, without reversing the formula and considering that such a theatre presupposed the existence and acceptance of the ideal drama. For some it was indeed a wish that a theatre existed in this country that would provide for Expressionism the platform it deserved. While the Great War could certainly be seen as having interrupted the realist movement, it was into this uncertain and disintegrated, post-war provincial theatre that ideas were poured from Germany and, later, America. There was real interest after the War in the new theatre and the new stagecraft; thus much is evident from the amount of debate and the number of condemnations and dismissals it inspired. Although it was rare for this interest to lead to the establishment of a self-organised group producing a quantity of experimental work, the fact that it provoked debate within already-existing
groups, and that the value of Expressionism continued to be a live issue during the period when most of the post-war Reps were established, suggests that there was a high level of awareness of the form and that most theatre artists would need to define themselves at least partly in terms of their response to Expressionism.

The more visible manifestations of the expressionist influence seem not to bear out the extent of the interest in the style; indeed they are often so dilettante and isolated as to appear to be little more than faddish dabblings with an exotic style. Too often in the plays of the twenties and thirties, and to a great extent in the revues of the period, a debased version of Expressionism was used as a theatrical shorthand or a novelty style. In some cases a genuine interest in exploring the areas that German Expressionism had opened up resulted in the choice of a quasi-expressionist style - the obvious British examples being the Group Theatre plays of Auden, Isherwood, MacNeice and Spender, and the deliberately expressionistic Johnson Over Jordan of J.B. Priestley. Even in these isolated cases it seemed that the primary interest was in the structural possibilities of Expressionism, especially the Stationendrama technique, and the opportunity to go for the 'total theatre' effect, using all the resources of dance, speech, mime, masks, projections and narrative to create an intense, new style of theatre. Even the avowedly left wing plays of Auden and Isherwood lacked the fervent idealism of the German writers, and Johnson Over Jordan is largely concerned with the fantasy aspects of death and the afterlife; the interest was always more in a cynical, satirical appraisal of life, or an exploration of fantasy styles, than anything else. Spender's The Trial Of A Judge is the nearest thing to an English play that is comparable to the work of Toller and Kaiser, but pales immediately beside its apparent model, Masse-Mensch. Of the Irish writers who had used expressionist techniques, only O'Casey and Johnston persisted in experimentation with the style in a way that combined a serious original idea with an uncompromising execution (such as A Bride For The Unicorn of 1933 and The Star Turns Red of
1940). In terms of its literary influence, Expressionism played a far less obvious role in British drama than it had in America, and in both countries its effects were undoubtedly lesser than those of Ibsen and the realist revolution of the late nineteenth century. A distinction should be drawn between influence and fashion; certainly Expressionism enjoyed fashionable status on both sides of the Atlantic for a time, but the degree to which that interest extended into a deeper absorption of the style is variable. A comparable situation arose with the growing familiarity in Britain and America with the works of Brecht after the Second World War; in that case, the complexity of Brecht's conception of Epic drama added to the surviving anti-German prejudice, and it could be argued that while the surface style of Brechtian drama again enjoyed a vogue, the methods and ideologies behind it were not absorbed in a way that obviously influenced contemporary writers and artists to adopt similar methods. Where Ibsen had the advantage in permeating theatrical styles in the UK and the USA was in his far more direct intellectual approach; the form of his plays was unobtrusive and was designed to give clear access to his ideas. In the case of Expressionism, in which the dramatic form of a play is at least as important a means of communication as the verbal content, the style was less immediately satisfying and understandably less readily embraced.

The direction which had been initiated by the responses to Realism in the theatre was towards a greater seriousness in drama, a yearning for the artistically praiseworthy and the intellectually and emotionally stimulating (within limits of social acceptability) presented in a form that made it accessible to as wide a cross-section of the public as possible - a serious popular theatre. These criteria might well have been filled in Germany by Expressionism; certainly its appeal was deliberately democratic and its conception serious; yet in England these very qualities rendered the style unacceptable. The confrontational nature of expressionist 'arguments', the attempts in formal experiment to bring subliminal issues to the fore, and the heavy political content - all qualities that made it the ideal serious popular theatre
were unpleasant medicine to the British theatregoers of the twenties and thirties. Even the more light-hearted manifestations of the form, be they comic, or simply using some of the more appealing elements of Expressionism, failed to find acceptance in the theatrical mainstream. The direction towards which that mainstream tended by the thirties was the 'rediscovery' of the British classical tradition; the return to standards of excellence that had greater reference to the past glories of the British theatre than to the concept of the advancing world stage. J.C. Trewin claimed that 'the real achievements of the decade (thirties) were in its classic revivals' and summed up an attitude towards theatre that had persisted to the present day:

The best nights in the theatre are those when somebody, as Olivier and Gielgud can do, knits the sweep and authority of an old school with the developed artistic sensibility of a new.

What progress had been made through the British theatre's contact with the expressionist style was, indeed, a 'developed artistic sensibility' — even if this sensibility was far from being along comparable lines, it had at least been forged and honed by the self-questioning that arose in the theatre as a result of an awareness of German Expressionism. In the terms of the Reps, the influence had come at a time when crucial questions were being asked about the relationship between the art of the theatre and its audience. The paradoxes that arose are perhaps best epitomised by the opinions of Barry Jackson concerning the tastes of the masses, certainly this was a paradox that was present to a degree in the German theatre itself. That Jackson, who had done much to introduce Continental theatre to the Birmingham public, and through them to Britain, could maintain a stance so contemptuous of his audience's tastes, indicated a confusion of aims and ideals so pervasive that it is easy to take for granted, so enmeshed was it in the theatrical practice of the day. A belief in the inviolability of British municipal philistinism made many commentators despair of ever achieving a serious popular theatre:
Dramatic sensibility has never been cultivated in this country ... The average English or Scottish town is perfectly willing to levy a penny rate for a public library ... but the idea that one penny in the £1 rate should be levied in the interests of a civic theatre dare barely be suggested. It is regarded as sheer profligacy. (Chisholm)

The dream of a publicly funded theatre was far from realisation in the mid thirties; in that area Britain fell far behind Germany and even America. Philistinism, or resistance to change, or insensitivity, were easy charges to lay at the door of the British public when it did not follow the desired leads; more generally, there was a suspicion among some commentators that the British public did not deserve good theatre. The Italian writer Mario Borsa voiced this prejudice in 1908:

> Now, is the English public of the present day such as would regard with favour a refined, intellectual, artistic stage ... a stage which would aspire to some higher office than that of a distraction and a pastime, and would aim at providing the powerful and complex aesthetic pleasures of a work of art? 

A fine rhetorical flourish that doubtless brought unanimous cries of 'No!' from like-minded readers. The misguideness of criticising the tastes of the 'public at large' for the paucity of good theatre is obvious; not only because the 'English public' exists as an entity only in the minds of those who choose to set themselves apart from the audience, but also because of the fact that, by and large, theatre is of its nature a public art form. Those who set themselves up as leaders of public taste proved themselves by that stance to be the least fit for such a role, such as Ervine:

> The public refuses to be improved at its own expense, and will only agree to be improved, when it agrees at all, after some one has spent his life or his fortune in the effort.

The idea that the Reps were providing a community service by educating audiences into an appreciation of serious drama is problematic; it seems more likely that the audience for serious drama always existed (in a wide social spectrum) and that it was the theatres who needed to be educated by the habits of audiences as to what the best form of serious
theatre might be. In these terms the concept of 'improving' the public is quite redundant. The position of the 'connoisseur' of dramatic art can often more usefully be seen as that of a journalistic hack creating lively copy by raising the irrelevant but eternally attention-grabbing cry of 'Philistine!'.

Of importance when tracing the career of Expressionism in British theatre is some consideration of the political climate of the period. It is perhaps surprising that, in a country that experienced a general strike in 1926, had a burgeoning labour movement and suffered the privations of the Depression in the thirties, the socialist concepts that inspired much expressionist drama did not find readier acceptance. Although it might be argued that the evidence for the reception of Expressionism in England is based largely on the response of a markedly Tory press, and that theatre managements (let alone censors) were no more likely to welcome Socialism onto their stages, it seems important that Expressionism did not gain the kind of grass roots acceptance in the provincial theatre that might have made it, at least on the level of ideas, a force to be reckoned with, and a more substantial challenge to its reactionary critics. Here the problem of the form of expressionist drama becomes crucial. It was undoubtedly the blatant modernism and innovation of the style that hampered its progress in Britain, yet attempts to express similarly left-wing ideas in a more conventional form would have been obsolete for, as has been mentioned, the form of Expressionism was an organic part of its message. The Independent Labour Party had formed an Arts Guild in 1925, embracing drama, music and visual art groups within the party; its manifesto on theatre saw an interest in the form among party members as symptomatic of the 'whole Socialist demand for a fuller life'.

There was, however, little in the way of left-wing drama that would be of use to such a group if the Germanic material was discounted. The style that inspired later groups such as Unity was closer to Piscator's quasi-documentary methods than to the aesthetics of Expressionism. If a socialist approach to theatre demanded expression of a 'fuller life'
then the expressionist concentration on exploring the subconscious and subliminal forces, as well as its interest in political and social factors, made that style theoretically perfect for a left wing group. However, the surface style was too strange, too intense and too assertively German to make this appeal; the preconceptions of Expressionism, fostered by its friends and enemies alike, and by its coverage in contemporary publications, made an acceptance of its deeper concerns and issues to all practical purposes impossible, even in the areas where it might have made most impact. For opponents of the left wing, the political content of Expressionism was one more major weapon to use against it:

... the sociological value of the drama is based on its freedom from bias of any sort, other than that imposed by the limitations of the individual mind. The drama is essentially spiritual, whilst politics, of its nature, is materialistic.

... the dramatic artist, if he is to be of any social value, must be true to his own vision, unhampered by political or other considerations.12

In just such a way as the Victorian theatre before Gilbert and Wilde was judged as a barren time because it lacked obvious literary highpoints, so it is easy to see in the apparent failure of the British theatre to respond to the challenge of Expressionism with a great artistic, literary renaissance of the art in modernist terms, an evaluation of the theatrical history of that period which would choose as its tag Bentley's great sentence: 'The theater at present fulfills only one precondition of renascence: it is dead'.13

Since the days of the Court there had been those who looked for another saviour to revive the Lazarus of British theatre; any apparent new movement would be seized on as 'the future of theatre', only to be reviled when its resuscitatory effects were not immediate. Where the expressionist influence failed to get a grip on the English theatre was not only in the mutual antipathy between a foreign theatrical style and a conservative critical attitude, but also in the fact that there did not emerge high-profile personalities, especially writers, who could be readily identified with Expressionism. Further than this, what large personalities there were in the British theatre of the time showed themselves either
hostile to the style or hostile to an attitude towards the public status of theatre that would accept Expressionism. The Reps found themselves by the thirties to '... have no great body of drama of rebellion to stage and no obvious group of rising dramatists to champion' (Goldie) - and without a sense of a movement, of some unity of direction and of a leftist aesthetic, the Reps had to fall back on what was available in British writing or what was deemed acceptable from abroad. The reluctance of producers, critics and audiences to welcome the work of new authors, especially if they had links with modernist styles, made the range of choice even narrower. Critical attitudes towards theatre often confused criteria more suitable in the consideration of novels with an approach that would take into account the position of the theatre vis-à-vis its public and its influence. Finding themselves without an obvious direction dictated by public need, and with no feeling of solidarity, the Reps faced a problem that must be raised when popular art attempts to adjust to a period of intense social transition. The British theatre, unlike the German and American, was passive and reactionary, rather than aggressive and creative, in its response to new conditions and ideas emergent after the War. The criteria that applied to the basic concept of popular theatre - its subjugation of aesthetic qualities of balance and subtlety to pragmatic considerations of effectiveness - applied equally in all countries, not only to the idea of popular theatre but also in a sense to the Art theatre, where it could be assumed in much the same way that the audience would have certain prejudices, preferences and tastes, which rendered a wholly balanced approach unnecessary or even undesirable. The British theatre, while seemingly seeking to please all of the people all of the time, displayed not a democratic concern but rather a failure to know its audience. Factors such as regional concerns, differences in the demographic make-up of the theatregoing public, attitudes towards political, religious or moral issues, could all have identified the 'tastes' of any regular audience, and have led to an awareness that any regular audience is bound to be a 'specialised' audience. This
is, admittedly, a 'chicken-and-egg' situation, for to build a regular audience one first has to know, or guess accurately, their tastes. But from the evidence presented it would seem that there was little interest in such an approach. More common was an attitude which perceived a constant state of battle between producers and public.

In considering the genesis of a serious popular theatre in Britain in the mid twenties, Drinkwater wrote:

'Literature without drama is useless in the theatre; drama without literature may achieve some life there, but it is a life that has hardly an interest for people who have taken the trouble to become familiar with the significant art of the world.'

Leaving aside Drinkwater's overlooking of the fact that the vast majority of British people, certainly in the twenties, never had the opportunity let alone the time or inclination to become familiar with the significant art of the world, his comment is valuable in that its balancing of the dramatic and literary constituents of theatre acknowledges the supremacy in terms of effect of the simply dramatic. The general tendency of English theatrical criticism is to dismiss as irrelevant that which is not blessed by literary distinction. Expressionism makes its appeal on both levels equally - that is intrinsic to the style and any divorce between the two would represent a departure from it. Had an easy separation been possible in this case, the acceptance of Expressionism in Britain may have been wider, but all too often the style made the ideas unacceptable; or the serious ideas, the 'literary' qualities, prevented wide access to the great dramatic power of Expressionism. In America the response was warmer because the theatre there needed an influx not only of a new artistic approach but also of a serious subject matter for drama; perhaps the American theatregoers were less hidebound than their British counterparts. In Britain, while it can be seen that the non-acceptance of Expressionism was symptomatic of an ailing theatrical tradition (decadent and resistant to change) it is still true that there was not the basic need for the style that had created it in Germany and encouraged its importation to America. Yet there remained in Britain an unfulfilled need for a serious
popular theatre. The popularity of the cinema was proof of a great appetite for entertainment, and it could be argued that the younger art form 'read' its audience more accurately than the theatre, hampered by high ideals and self-importance, could do at the time. If reconciliation was to be effected between those seeming poles, 'serious' and 'popular', the Reps provided a platform for debate and a model of the problems to be encountered. The continued success of theatres such as the B.R.T. and the Liverpool Playhouse suggest a reconciliation could be, or had been, reached; if so it was through the persistent efforts of a growing number of provincial theatre artists between the Wars that the grounds for such an agreement were established.
This appendix covers most of the prominent Repertory theatres working during the post-1910 period, and gives details where appropriate of important productions as well as information concerning managements, producers, venues and the like. Some of the organisations listed here, while not strictly repertory theatres, are mentioned above and compare usefully with other entries.

BATH - Citizen House Players
Established 1915 to entertain soldiers stationed in the area, many of its early productions were mystery plays or similar; Everyman was its major success in 1929, and it continued to work throughout the period, visiting the Everyman in Hampstead in 1938.

BRISTOL - The Little Theatre and the Rapier Players
An early attempt at repertory in Bristol - the Playgoers' Repertory Company at the Theatre Royal in 1914 - was cut short by the outbreak of War. Its founder, Muriel Pratt, addressed the Rotary Club in 1921, resulting in the conversion of the lesser hall of the Great Colston Hall into the Little Theatre. The secretary of the Rotary Club, A.E. Stanley Hill, became the theatre's director, and Ralph Hutton and Alfred Brooks were engaged as producers. The Little Theatre was opened by Sir Arthur Wing Pinero on 17th December 1923, and by 1932 had produced some 400 plays, the most successful of which are recorded as Dane's Granite, Back To Methuselah and a modern dress Merchant Of Venice. Brooks and Hutton remained with the company until its closure in 1932. Rep continued at the Little Theatre with the foundation in 1935 of the Rapier Players, who continued to work in Bristol until 1963. Although they started off with a repertoire that included Chekhov (his first showing in the city), the establishment of the Bristol Old Vic in 1946 forced them to present a more reliably commercial repertoire, as they survived without subsidy and were not equipped for
the production of expensive or multi-set plays. Neither the Little Theatre nor the Rapier Players showed or acknowledged any expressionist influence.

BIRMINGHAM^4- The Birmingham Repertory Theatre

The Birmingham Rep had its origins in the foundation in 1907 of the Pilgrim Players, working mainly at the Edgbaston Assembly Rooms but touring around the area and further afield. A magazine, The Scallop Shell was produced. In 1913 Jackson opened the newly-acquired theatre in Station Street, the first purpose-built repertory theatre in the country, architect S.N. Cooke. Drinkwater acted as general manager, Bache Matthews as business manager, Jackson as director. The theatre remained open during the War, and by the early thirties the production team of H.K. Ayliff and A.E. Filmer, and designer Paul Shelving, had joined the theatre. The theatre closed temporarily in 1924 after the failure of Gas and consistently poor audiences over the last two seasons; a committee formed by the Birmingham Civic Society managed to ensure that a sufficient subscription was gathered to persuade Jackson back to the theatre, which re-opened in September 1924. For the next decade the theatre continued under the direction of Jackson, until once more in 1934 Jackson announced his retirement from the Rep, exhausted by the constant struggle for solvency and artistic credibility. Once again the Civic Society stepped in and sold shares in the Rep, but Jackson turned over all the shares, property and assets of what had previously been a private concern to a local Trust, thus creating the first Civic Theatre, run by a board of trustees from the University, the City Council, the Rotary Club, the Playgoers' Society and the Civic Society. The theatre remained open until the outbreak of the Second World War, when it closed for two years until Jackson took over on behalf of the Trust in 1941.

The Malvern Festival had been inaugurated in 1929 by Jackson with his private capital; he remained associated with it until 1937, and it continued for only two more years until the War forced it to close. In the city of Birmingham there appear to have been only two rep rivals to the Rep
itself: the Raynor Repertory Company at the Alexandra Theatre, formed in 1927; and the Crescent Theatre Players, who in both 1934 and 1937 produced Masses And Man.

Key productions in the Birmingham Rep's history:
1913: Everyman; The Death Of Tintagiles
1914: The Outlaw; The Wild Duck
1915: The Master Builder
1916: The Faithful; Shakespeare season including Twelfth Night; Russian plays including Evreinov's The Merry Death; Yeats' The Hour Glass; X=0
1918: Abraham Lincoln
1919: Shakespeare Season; The Knight Of The Burning Pestle directed by Playfair
1920: The Witch; Hedda Gabler; The Immortal Hour
1922: Ghosts
1923: Cymbeline in modern dress; Back To Methuselah; Gas
1925: Rosmersholm
1926: He Who Gets Slapped
1927: The Adding Machine
1928: Anna Christie
1929: Easter
1930: From Morning Till Midnight; Little Eyolf
1931: Twelve Thousand; The Macropoulos Secret; Inheritors; RUR
1932: Street Scene
1933: The Moon In The Yellow River
1938: The Ascent Of F.6
1940: Winterset
1942: Ah Wilderness

BRADFORD - Civic Playhouse
Founded as an extension to the activities of the Leeds Civic (see below) in 1932, the Bradford company at first worked in the Jowett Hall until its destruction by fire in 1935; thereafter a new theatre was built on the site which opened in 1937. The principle behind the civic's choice of plays was to provide material which would not be seen in the area otherwise - 'unusual but not necessarily "highbrow"'.
anding productions up to 1935 included The Cherry Orchard, The Adding Machine, The Theatre Of The Soul, Noah, and Hedda Gabler, all under the general direction of G.W. Webster. In 1939 they staged Toller's last play Pastor Hall - one of only two productions of that play in the period.8

CROYDON - The Croydon Repertory Theatre 9

The first repertory venture in Croydon was undertaken by the playwright Keble Howard for two seasons, 1913 and 1914, at the Grand Theatre. A preliminary meeting was addressed by Sir George Alexander and Harley Granville Barker, resulting in the production of a first season of six plays and another of four. The War terminated the project. In 1932 a new repertory company was formed by J. Baxter Somerville (managing director) and Henry Cass (producer) at the Greyhound Theatre. Cass had come from producing at the Theatre Royal, Huddersfield; Somerville later became the manager of the Westminster Theatre, thus providing for Croydon productions a repertory venue in the West End. Also in the company was the designer Ruth Keating, an alumnus of the Cambridge Festival, the Old Vic and Sadlers Wells, and the actor Alan Webb, who had worked with Fagan at Oxford, had spent three years at the Liverpool Playhouse and had recently worked with Komisarjevsky in Grand Hotel. The Cass regime lasted until the 4th season when he was replaced by Michael Barry; Keating left in the 3rd season when design work was taken over by Gerald Pringle, who remained with the Rep until the outbreak of the Second World War, as did Barry, who was replaced in the 39-40 season by Edmund Bailey.

Croydon Rep's programmes are among the more elegant and informative rep programmes of the period. Featuring a Keating logo on every cover, they not only give information about that week's production, but also include photographs, information from other Reps, series of articles about topics such as stage design, and, for instance, a serialised piece by Ernst Toller entitled 'A Free People's Theatre In Germany And An Idea For England' which appeared in some of the programmes for the fifth season and urged the effective nationalisation of the provincial theatres. A magazine, Rep, was
also published by the theatre, amplifying and enlarging on issues covered in the programmes and offering not only a regional view, but also articles in world theatre somewhat in the style of Drama. The Rep often received visits from other companies during the summer recess; the Group Theatre in July 1933, and the Oxford University Repertory Company after the 34-35 season being typical.

Interesting productions include:

32-33: John Gabriel Borkman; The Rising Sun; Hamlet; Anna Christie; Cradle Song; Love And How To Cure It; Martine

33-34: The Seagull; The Circle; Twelve Thousand; A Doll’s House; As You Like It

34-35: King Lear; The Moon In The Yellow River; Playboy Of The Western World; Ghosts; Everyman; The Green Bay Tree (Oxford University Rep.)

35-36: The Merchant Of Venice in modern dress; Catiline

36-37: The Insect Play; Noah (Obey)

37-38: Mourning Becomes Electra

HARROGATE - The White Rose Players

The White Rose Players, a repertory company working at the Harrogate Opera House, opened in 1933 with Dear Brutus, and continued working throughout the period (and are still working now). Their repertoire was undistinguished by much in the way of experimentation; what ventures were made into expressionistic territory were accepted standards of the rep movement: RUR in 1933; Lady Precious Stream in 1936 and Ah Wilderness in 1937. The director was Marie Blanche, and among the distinguished actors who worked there was Charles Laughton.

HULL - The Little Theatre

In 1923 Arthur R. Whatmore produced Highwaymen Love for Hull Amateur Operatic Society, and, encouraged by its success, he rented the town’s lecture hall to produce a four week experimental repertory season. Taking full responsibility for the financing and organisation, Whatmore’s efforts resulted in a successful season that opened on 13th September
1924 and included triple bills of short plays by Milne, Passers By and The Mollusc. At the end of the season a committee was formed and subscriptions taken out; the lecture hall was fitted with an apron stage and a lighting system. The 1925 season included John Gabriel Borkman alongside work by Chapin and Ervine: the third season comprised plays by Schnitzler, Barrie, Milne, Chapin, Heijermans, Maugham and Shaw; the season lasted 27 weeks, each play being given a nine-night run. The 500-seat theatre was again refitted in 1929, and the following season included Easter, The Man With A Load Of Mischief and The Second Man; The Silver Cord and A Doll's House in 30-31; the two warhorses of repertory Expressionism, The Adding Machine and RUR were both produced at the Little Theatre, in 1926 and 1931 respectively. In 1932 Michael Macowen, from the Gate Theatre Studio, became producer (moving to the Westminster in 1937).

LEEDS - Repertory Season at the Theatre Royal; The Industrial Theatre; Leeds Art Theatre; Leeds Civic Playhouse; The Eyebrow Club

The first outing for repertory theatre in Leeds was a single season in the Theatre Royal in 1913 under the direction of Algernon Grieg and Milton Rosmer; this was interrupted by the War and was not recommenced. From 1920 to 1924 the industrialist W.B. Dow ran the Industrial Theatre, an amateur group for his employees which grew out of lectures on drama and regular playgoing organised by Dow after the War; a hall was fitted up for use as a little theatre, and the venture continued until 1924 when Dow was no longer able to fund it. In 1922 the Leeds Art Theatre, which preferred to bill itself as the Leeds Art Theatre, was founded as a semi-professional organisation by Lascelles Abercrombie and Laurie Ramsden, with Charles F. Smith as its first director and one of the financial guarantors. Working on a subscription basis and producing its work at a variety of venues around the city, the theatre attracted national attention as a producer of high quality drama; its first season contained a cosmopolitan selection of world drama and this policy
was continued throughout the Art Theatre's subsequent career. Smith, however, withdrew from the organisation in 1925 because he found that the subscription system, which perforce attracted the support of the monied classes, was creating a situation in which the house might theoretically be full, all the seats sold in advance, but the auditorium in fact remained empty because the patrons wished only to see light comedy, and stayed away or sent their servants to see the show. To bring theatre closer to the people of Leeds, he founded the Leeds Civic Playhouse, with an amateur company but professional directors such as J.R. Gregson, Nugent Monck and Edith Craig. A collection was taken after each performance - the only regular income, apart from a grant from the Carnegie Trust which was awarded after the second season. The Albert Hall, which seated over 1,000, was acquired as a Civic Theatre, but outside productions were still given, for example, at Kirkstall Abbey, on the steps of Leeds Town Hall and in local churches. Guest producers included Komisarjevsky, A.E. Filmer and Norman Marshall. The Civic continued to work in this way for eight years, until in 1933 Smith, who apart from running the Civic also had a manufacturing business, was forced to withdraw from theatrical activities because of the vicissitudes of the Depression. The remains of the Civic company re-assembled as the Seagull Players at the Little Theatre, but this was not a successful venture and finally folded altogether in 1936. The Eyebrow Club effectively took over from the Civic; it was founded as a bohemian resort in 1933, with a constitution and a closed membership, and, under the direction of Ronald Giffen, its drama group produced a large number of expressionistic plays on the club's tiny stage.

Significant productions in Leeds:

Leeds Art Theatre
22-23: Interior (Maeterlinck); The Stronger; Reading And Writing (Quintero); The Last Visit (Sudermann); The Proposal
23-24: The Great World Theatre; Beyond Human Power (Bjornson); King Lear's Wife (Bottomley); In The Zone; John Gabriel Borkman
Leeds Civic Playhouse
25-26: Oedipus Rex; The Adding Machine; Everyman (directed by Edith Craig and presented on the town hall steps); Atsmori (Noh)
26-27: The Dybbuk (produced by Edith Craig); Danton
Uncertain date: The Father; Peer Gynt; The Cenci
The Eyebrow Club
Before October 1934: Miracle At Verdun; From Morning Till Midnight; Miss Julie; Salome
1934: Plans to produce Hinkemann abandoned

LIVERPOOL - Liverpool Repertory Playhouse; Sandon Studios Society

The Liverpool Repertory Theatre, Williamson Square (formerly the Star Theatre) opened its first production November 11th 1911, following trial seasons by Alfred Kelly at Kelly’s Theatre and the Royal Court. The first season, under the direction of Basil Dean, succeeded in presenting to Liverpool a catholic cross-section of world drama, including the notorious production of Hannele (which featured among the children early appearances by Noel Coward and Gertie Lawrence) which aroused disapproval amongst theatregoers. After Dean’s departure in 1913 the theatre concentrated on native drama, and never again in the period did it achieve anything like the breadths of programming of the first two seasons. Between 1913 and 1922 the theatre struggled to stay open and employed a number of short-stay producers, among them Ronald Jeans, Bridges Adams and Nigel Playfair, until the appointment in 1922 of William Armstrong, who remained at the helm until 1939. Competition to the Playhouse (as it became known in 1917) was limited; the theatres that had existed before it continued in some cases to produce music hall, pantomime and melodrama, and the Royal Court re-opened in 1938, but as far as serious drama was concerned the only alternative to the Playhouse was the amateur societies. The Sandon Studios Society, under the direction of David Webster, produced occasionally at the Blue Coat Galleries; the University had a dramatic society that also made some impact on the
local scene.

Significant productions in Liverpool:
Liverpool Repertory Theatre:
11-12: Pillars Of Society
12-13: Lonely Lives; Hannele
13-14: An Enemy Of The People
14-15: The Wild Duck
16-17: Everyman
The Liverpool Playhouse:
23-24: Bound East For Cardiff
24-25: Suppressed Desires (Glaspell)
25-26: Inheritors
26-27: Trifles; Gold (O'Neill)
29-30: Diff'rent; A Woman's Honour (Glaspell)
30-31: Alison's House; Chee Chee
31-32: See Naples And Die; The House Into Which We Are Born (Copeau)
The Sandon Studios Society:
1923: King Lear's Wife; The Insect Play
1924: Where The Cross Is Made; The Proposal; The Merry Death
1925: The Theatre Of The Soul; Masses And Man; The Beautiful Despot
University Dramatic Society:
1926: Henry IV (Pirandello)
Productions by David Webster at the David Lewis Theatre:
1927: Masses And Man
Uncertain date: Street Scene; The Beggar's Opera; Murder In The Cathedral; Macbeth

MANCHESTER - Manchester Repertory Theatre; The Unnamed Society
The Gaiety Theatre, which opened in 1908, established Manchester as the first focus of the British Repertory movement, and it remained so until the outbreak of the First World War. It is recorded throughout this chapter how the Gaiety provided an impetus for the founding of many provincial Reps; of these, only those in Liverpool and Birmingham survived the War. Manchester itself was without a repertory theatre until the late founding of the Manchester Rep;
it did not, however, continue Manchester's tradition of experiment, and seems to have contributed nothing sufficiently noteworthy to be included here. Of more interest was the work of the Unnamed Society. Established in 1915 by Fred Sladen-Smith, and continuing to work throughout the period, the Unnamed is unique among the small producing societies not only for its consistency and longevity but also for an exceptionally large number of experimental works. Having worked in various halls that could accommodate theatrical performance, the Unnamed finally got their own theatre in 1923 in Salford, at that time one of the less desirable districts of Manchester. They toured a lot during the period, visiting London in 1922, and built up a strong link with the Drama League, whose Geoffrey Whitworth became their president in 1935. Sladen-Smith produced a large amount of the society's presentations, which included, alongside his own compositions, an eclectic choice of British and foreign plays. Design work at the Unnamed was characterised by a highly imaginative and decorative use of the tiny stage; painted curtains were frequently employed, as were cutouts and simple painted flats, giving the stage a revue-type feeling. Among the designers who worked for the society were Margaret Nichols and Eric Newton, both of whom shared Sladen-Smith's taste for simplicity and colour.

The Unnamed repertoire included:
1927: The Hairy Ape
1928: Uncle Vanya; Aucussin And Nicolette (Bax)
1930: Wonderful Zoo (Sladen-Smith)
1932: Roar China (Tretyakov)
1934: Orphée; Haunted Houses (Whitworth)
1935: The Tempest

NEWCASTLE - The People's Theatre
The People's Theatre in Newcastle began as an amateur dramatic society taking its name from The Clarion, the first English socialist newspaper. In 1921 the Clarion Players split into two faction, The Players, who continued to pursue left-wing ideologies, and The People's Theatre, who, while dropping the overt espousal of socialist aims, continued to produce
drama of interest to left-wing audiences, notably *Masses And Man* in 1926. The People's Theatre acquired its own premises in 1921, and in 1928 moved to a converted church, seating 300, where it continued to produce throughout the period, staging classics ancient and modern as the staple of its repertoire.

NORTHAMPTON - The Northampton Repertory Theatre

The genesis of the Northampton Rep follows a familiar pattern. Without its own theatre company in the mid twenties, Northampton played host to Carter-Slaughter's Elephant Theatre Repertory Company (London based) who presented in April 1926 a season of repertory plays, such as *Caste* and *Bulldog Drummond*, at the Opera House. Articles in the local press, such as the Northants Independent, praised the success of this venture and cited the success of reps in Bath, Bristol and Birmingham, urging Northampton to take note and do likewise. A local Repertory Theatre and Playgoers' Society was formed in June 1926, a lease was taken on the Opera House, and conversion work began. Max Jerome, from the Bristol Little Theatre, was appointed as producer; his experience with the Benson company and as general manager of the Liverpool Repertory Theatre in 1917 might have suggested that Northampton was doomed to a diet of unimaginative Realism, a fear unallayed by the choice of Pinero's *His House In Order* as the opening production in January 1927. However, in the first two seasons the Rep managed to include *RUR* and *Anna Christie* in their programme. Their productions met with varying degrees of success and approval, but the survival of a new repertory theatre was no mean achievement in itself. At the beginning of 1928 Jerome resigned, and Herbert M. Prentice, founder of the Sheffield Rep and fresh from working at the Cambridge Festival Theatre, was appointed as the new producer, with Osborne Robertson replacing Charles Maynard as the scenic designer. However, financial failures forced the temporary closure of the the Rep in March 1929, while the company accepted an invitation to present a season at the Theatre Royal in Bath. Return to the home base was possible by August 1929, and in the next two seasons a loyal following was established. Prentice left the theatre in
June 1932, after producing 203 plays there and suffering from a breakdown in 1931 as a result. He left for Birmingham, and was replaced by Robert Young, another ex-Bensonian and ex-MP, in July 1932. Morale was higher under the new management, and this is reflected in a more adventurous selection of plays around this time, including the Rep's first Shakespeare production (Twelfth Night) in February 1933. Young remained with the Rep until June 1935, when his position was taken by Bladon Peake, who had worked with Monck at the Maddermarket and had co-founded the Crescent Theatre in Birmingham. Under his direction the Rep produced The Adding Machine and The Macropoulos Secret. Peake resigned in 1938, to be replaced by William Sherwood; Osborne Robertson remained in charge of all design work, producing some of his most imaginative work when facing the challenge of The Insect Play in 1938. The Rep's fortunes wavered in the War; after a period of closure in the summer of 1939, it produced a programme consisting more and more of light comedy and revivals to tempt the dwindling audiences into the theatre. Sherwood was replaced by William Brookfield in September 1940, who produced mostly comedies over the next year to tap the potential audience of evacuees from London. The nearest the Rep came to interesting serious theatre during the War was with two Ibsen revivals, Hedda Gabler and Ghosts.

Significant productions:
1928: RUR; Anna Christie
1933: See Naples And Die; Magda
1934: A Doll's House
1936: The Adding Machine; The Macropoulos Secret
1937: Ah Wilderness
1938: Jew Süss; The Insect Play
1943: Hedda Gabler
1944: Ghosts
1945: Winterset
NORWICH - The Maddermarket Theatre

The Norwich Players were the brainchild of Nugent Monck, whose record as a producer in the provinces is unparalleled, and whose influence on British theatre has been frequently recorded. Monck founded the Players in 1911, and for the three years prior to the War they produced plays in Norwich and elsewhere (London in 1913) - fourteen plays were produced in this period, mostly reflecting Monck's abiding interest in early English theatre. After the War Monck reformed the Players and opened at the Music House in Norwich, widening his repertoire beyond the Renaissance, and looking for a premises which could be converted for his purposes. This was found in the shape of a building in the Maddermarket, which had once been a Roman Catholic chapel, a warehouse and a Salvation Army hall. In consultation with William Poel, Monck converted the chapel into a simple Elizabethan-style playhouse, modelled as far as possible on the conjectured layout of the Globe Theatre. The Maddermarket Theatre opened on 26th September 1921 with a performance of As You Like It and a speech by W.B. Yeats. Although Monck's preferences were for Shakespearean and pre-Shakespearean drama, he tried to make his theatre a home for all types of play. The first modern European theatre to be shown there was Ibsen and Chekhov in 1925 and 1926; by 1929 Pirandello and Frank had been presented, and in 1931 his most extreme experiment, From Morn To Midnight, was executed - unsuited to Monck's style, the production was burdened with sentimentality and, in Norman Marshall's words, emerged 'sad, gentle and pointless'. The major contribution of Monck at the Maddermarket was not in the field of eclectic experimentation with new forms but with the constant refinement of excellence in a field that, by its simplicity and awareness of traditional theatrical techniques, showed up the emptiness and noise of much of the contemporary work in other theatres.

OXFORD - The Oxford Playhouse

Opening in 1923, the Oxford Playhouse was another example of the interest of one individual providing a city with a standard of theatrical excellence that it would otherwise
have lacked, had productions been left in the hands of more commercially-minded managements. From 1923 till 1930, J.B. Fagan battled with financial problems, lack of municipal and public support and impossible schedules to give Oxford, which, as a University city one might have expected would have a reasonable audience for serious entertainment, a selection of classics presented in a style that embraced some ideas of new staging, acted by a company of stellar distinction. Fagan himself had a remarkable pedigree - from 1895 he had worked with Benson, played two seasons under Tree at Her Majesty's, managed the Court Theatre from 1919, and was a successful playwright, scoring several hits on the British stage such as *And So To Bed* and *The Improper Duchess*. It is his work at Oxford, however, that made the most notable contribution, for it provided for other theatres an example of consistent quality and a house policy that, under Fagan's management, never wavered from the pursuit of all-round excellence.

The Playhouse was a converted big game museum in the Woodstock Road, with a large apron stage and an inner stage area at rear with a curtain, on Elizabethan lines. The original company assembled by Fagan included many who were later to reach the heights of the profession: Tyrone Guthrie, James Whale, Alan Napier and Richard Goolden, who were later joined by John Gielgud, Flora Robson, Raymond Massey, Glen Byam Shaw and Robert Morley. Among the remarkable productions staged by Fagan at the Playhouse were several classics of the European theatre, only then gaining recognition in Britain, such as *The Cherry Orchard*, *The Lady From The Sea*, *John Gabriel Borkman*, *The Stronger*, *The Spook Sonata*, *Easter*, *The Thunderstorm*, *The Mask And The Face* and *He Who Gets Slapped* - comparing the frequency of Fagan's productions of European classics one is reminded of the paucity of any comparable consistency in other theatres, especially the London theatres. Needless to say Fagan's adventurous policy did not find the support it needed. The theatre was run on subscription lines, and far from gaining a regular following with his productions, Fagan had to fight for audiences every inch of the way. When he left the Playhouse in 1930 it was proof of the unwillingness to compromise with the banal tastes of his audience. He went to work for a short
while with Gray at the Festival before his death in 1933. The Playhouse, after a stint as a miniature golf course, re-opened in 1930 under the management of Sir Philip Ben Greet and later Stanford Holme, but their unadventurous programmes proved no more popular than Fagan’s work. The Playhouse staggered on producing undistinguished plays until 1938, when repertory in Oxford moved to the new Playhouse in Beaumont Street.

PLYMOUTH - The Repertory Theatre

One of the earliest reps to continue producing throughout the period, the Plymouth Repertory Theatre, founded in 1915 by George S. King, was self-supporting and operated 52 weeks per year. In the early twenties it was the only rep working consistently in the South of England. The theatre was a converted hall which was fitted with a proscenium stage in 1927, when the company was taken over by G.B. Copping. Their most notable productions between 1915 and 1930 were recorded in Theatre World as Macbeth, The Importance Of Being Earnest and Ghosts. Among the most notable alumni of the Plymouth Rep were Peter Godfrey and Molly Verness, who went on to open the Gate Theatre Salon. The theatre, located in Princess Street, closed in 1935 after the production of some 800 plays, and the company was not rehoused until after the War.

SHEFFIELD - The Sheffield Repertory Theatre

In 1919 the St Philip’s Settlement, a temperance organisation, formed a drama society which, later in the year, was taken in hand by Herbert and Marion Prentice, residents of the settlement. Seasons continued throughout 1920 and 1921 until the company, which had by now taken the name The Sheffield Repertory Company, hired a schoolroom in South Street and became independent of the settlement. Prentice remained with them until 1928, producing one play a week, including some remarkable dips into modern European theatre, most notably The Machine Wreckers. For ten years the Rep had a series of producers, some of whom continued Prentice’s policy of experimentation, until in 1935 a new board of
directors decided finally on a money-making policy which excluded risky experiments from the programme. The company shifted to a new conversion in Townhead Street in 1928 where it remained until its closure in 1940. Prentice returned to the theatre in 1945 when it re-opened, presenting fort­nightly rep, and remained with them on a freelance basis. In 1953 the company moved to the Library Theatre while the Playhouse was refurbished; it re-opened in 1954. Throughout its long and patchy history the Sheffield Rep never achieved any consistent house style - the desertion of Prentice put paid to any development in one particular direction that might have evolved. However, despite these problems and a general lack of interest in new staging techniques, the Rep produced a number of important plays, some of them premi­ères.

Significant productions:
1924: Monna Vanna
1925: The Machine Wreckers (first production after the Stage Society in 1923)
1927: Hedda Gabler
1928: Inheritors; The Adding Machine
1929: From Morn To Midnight
1930: Ghosts
1931: RUR
1933: The Father
1935: Draw The Fires!
1936: The Moon In The Yellow River
1937: Storm Song; The Insect Play; Ah Wilderness
1939: You Can't Take It With You
CHAPTER THREE: 'OTHER' THEATRES

While the British repertory theatres were undergoing a period of uneasy self-evaluation in which Expressionism played such an important part, there were other groups which, isolated from the mainstream of the theatre and sometimes rejoicing either in club status or private funding, made more overt responses to the challenge of the German innovations. Of these, the two most important that I wish to discuss here are the Cambridge Festival Theatre and the Gate Theatre Studio, for they both showed a consistent interest not only in the ideas of the new staging methods but also in the specific models of German Expressionism, both actually staging some of the works of the German authors. Other groups, or seasons, or occasional productions, will also be mentioned here in what can be little more than a 'round-up' of significant work done in the period. It is not my intention to make a distinction between these theatres and productions and 'legitimate' or commercial theatres in the way that Norman Marshall does in The Other Theatre, one of the first surveys of British theatre to pay attention to the work of such groups; classifications of this nature are of little help considering the enormous variety of work done within the small theatres of the time and the great extent to which 'crossover' took place between the 'straight' and the 'experimental' theatre, Marshall himself being a fine example. Although it is true that the work of such groups is apart from the mainstream insofar as it sought to explore areas that were quite obviously not being covered by the majority of theatres (often going into the realms of modernism) their place can be more usefully considered as being on the spectrum of a contemporary perception of the theatre. It has already been seen that the reps ran the gamut of available theatrical styles from Coward to Kaiser, and that it was considered important that they should present a wide variety; and although at the beginning of the Rep movement there was a hope that the new provincial theatre would be essentially an 'art theatre', these aspirations were of decreasing interest as the century progressed. Theatrical fashion
in the twenties and thirties was opposed to any widespread interest in experiment, hence the temptation to isolate those theatres that did go obviously against the grain and regard them as comprising the British avant-garde; in practice their work can more usefully be considered as part of a universal process of searching for a style that would satisfy a complex set of tastes and demands that were being imposed on the theatre in the period.

The prevailing direction in the London theatre was towards the type of realistic-but-glossy production for which Basil Dean was justly renowned; and although he came to represent to some opponents (especially Gray\textsuperscript{2}) the epitome of a mindless application of Realism to the stage, his style had its roots in an attempt to create an aesthetically harmonious representation of setting rather than the cumbersome combinations of flats and props that had prevailed in Edwardian Realism. Dean's work in Liverpool saw the beginnings of this direction, and his designer and long-time collaborator George Harris was capable of creating stage pictures of remarkable subtlety and beauty. If Dean and Harris were regarded as the Aunt Sallies of 'new stagecraft' it was because their advances away from the Edwardian theatre had been imitated and absorbed enough to seem hackneyed. While an extreme stylist like Gray sought to put his anti-illusionist theories into practice as a form of protest against what he saw as the besetting sin of Realism, there were many others who, in less spectacular ways, were working towards a reconsideration of all branches of theatrical presentation, and it is misleading to allow only to the more obvious insurgents the task of finding new approaches to the art. The expressionist influence creates a seeming division between those who did, and those who did not, manifest it in their work, but to use it as a touchstone for worthy endeavour is to oversimplify the issue. Often the presentation of a piece in an expressionistic staging style did not go hand-in-hand with any interest in the ideas or literary style of the movement; similarly, as has been seen in the discussion of the work of the reps, an interest in the plays of expressionist writers was not always backed up by an exploration of new methods of staging. In the
examination of some of the theatres which registered a response to Expressionism that follows, it will be seen that this was often simply in the way the venture was defined: many producers who, while showing nothing on their stages that could really be called expressionist, nevertheless identified their endeavours with those of the European, American and British theatres who were working in the field. The concept of the 'little' theatre was moulded largely by the influence of Expressionism, and although it was in America that the Little Theatre movement led on to the establishment of major new producing bodies, there was also in Britain a number of ventures seen as comprising a movement who attempted to provide a home for new forms of drama denied it by established professional groups. Also the awareness of the extremes of Expressionism, and its connection with ideas of changing the social function of theatre, extended what was essentially an artistic issue into an argument about the relationship between drama and the community. In much of the debate that was stimulated by this process, Expressionism was used as an accusation or an accolade with varying degrees of relevance. What is important, as has been seen already, is that an awareness of the style was shaping people's thinking about the theatre even if it was not entering wholeheartedly into their theatrical experience.

The work of what has been labelled as the 'other' theatre in the period provides a fascinating amount of detective work for the present-day researcher. Names crop up in connection with a number of different ventures time and again, and critical voices change their tone depending on factors that seem to have more to do with individual opinions of where a particular production sat in the pro-or-anti-Expressionism debate than with the qualities of the piece. The subjectivity of many critics and commentators on this issue makes retrospective evaluation of individual works very difficult, but provides much material for a consideration of the extent to which Expressionism had shaped people's perceptions during this period (although I would not claim that this critical subjectivity was the result of some adoption of expressionist literary techniques). From this per-
plexing range of work and opinionating. I intend to examine some aspects of the Gate Theatre Studio and the Cambridge Festival Theatre, insofar as their careers as the leading expressionist venues illuminate this issue. I will not offer an extensive evaluation of their work in terms of its success or otherwise as theatrical Expressionism, my interest here being primarily in the effect that the perception of that style, and of these theatres' work as corresponding to it, affected their careers. Also I will attempt to bring together some information on the work of more theatres that were perceived at the time as being part of the development of the new theatre, some of which showed an interest in Expressionism, while others are significant for their exploration of other avenues. This can only provide an indication of a field that would merit further research outside the scope of the influence of Expressionism; their importance here is as contributors to a process of developing ideas about how theatres should operate and what they should present that was to a great degree inaugurated by an awareness of Expressionism.

The two major groups to be examined here offer an example of several important differences within the work of the experimental theatres in Britain in the period. While the Gate was a club, small in size and with a limited technical and financial resource, the precursor of what we call 'fringe' theatre today, the Festival was a public theatre (and hence liable to censorship) with a large auditorium converted from an old Regency theatre, and had equipped itself with the best available technical resources, most importantly a cyclorama and a Schwabe-Hasait lighting system. While the Gate's limited resources tended to push acting and meaning, the word, into the forefront, with the Festival the focus was deliberately on the production style, highlighted by Gray's constant exploration of alternatives to Realism and his development of an easily-identifiable staging system based on his use of screens and podia. While the Gate presented a type of theatre that revealed its strengths by paring away the trappings of elaborate production, and adopted a workerly approach to its art (enhanced by the relatively
Spartan nature of its premises), the Festival pushed the concept of the collaborative nature of dramatic art, stressing the contribution of stage manager, choreographer, scenic and lighting designers, costume designer, musicians and actors, all presided over by the genius loci. Gray himself, who could have stepped out of the pages of Craig’s *On The Art Of The Theatre*. That both theatres tend to be mentioned in the same breath is not due to their similarities of production style, for they were few, but generally because they stand out so obviously as different from the bulk of British theatre, having more claim to being regarded as ‘art theatres’ than nearly any other group in the period (also, of course, there was a certain amount of collaboration between the two, as Godfrey produced frequently at the Festival). Both were looked to by the reps and by the more established managements as pointing the way towards developments in the theatre along recognisably modernist lines, and this prompted as many to scorn as to praise. Even though neither succeeded in establishing itself in the long term as a centre for continued experimentation, the contribution made by the Gate and the Festival to the British theatre was crucial because they were among the few theatres that offered an example of uncompromising endeavours to push the theatre towards a form of Expressionism, assisted by the fact that both Godfrey and Gray were articulate, relished the controversy that their work caused in the theatrical establishment and set many of their ideas on record in the press and in their own writings.

Surprisingly, there is no definitive history of the Gate, and what visual material remains is dispersed in several collections. Norman Marshall’s account in *The Other Theatre* while providing much useful information, is too biased by his own involvement with the theatre after Godfrey had left to provide an authoritative assessment of the Gate’s achievements. A certain amount can be gleaned from the pages of contemporary publications and histories, and the Gate tends to merit at least a footnote in most accounts of the theatre of the twenties and thirties that have appeared in more recent times. Perhaps because the final demise
of the Gate came at a time when the nation's attention was more engrossed in the War prevented any retrospective evaluation of its work from being undertaken at a time when the memory was still fresh in the minds of workers and audiences; perhaps because by the time of its closure in 1940 its productions had become less experimental than in the days when Godfrey produced there; whatever the reasons, the Gate has, to date, not been accorded the honour of an in-depth critical assessment of its work. What makes the story of the Gate exceptional is that its formation and the way its work was conducted had very little precedent in the British theatre; it thus provided a model for many of the little theatre groups that were to follow. Peter Godfrey had come from the Plymouth Repertory Theatre, where he had gained some knowledge of expressionist theatre (although to the best of my knowledge no Expressionism had been attempted there by the time Godfrey left in 1925 - it is to be assumed that Godfrey's acquaintance with Expressionism was the result of personal interest). His move to London with his wife Molly Verness coincided with an interest in establishing a small theatre for the production of plays that were in tune with Godfrey's well-informed tastes, and after saving up enough money for the rent, they took a lease on the top floor of a premises in Floral Street to put into practice the 'fantastic idea' of running a small venue (which does not seem so far-fetched now as it did to Marshall, writing in the fifties). The club status of the Gate was necessitated by Godfrey's inability to obtain a licence from the London County Council for such a premises - their record on assisting small theatres was bad, as witnessed by the obstructions they created when Gray and Fagan tried to establish a joint venture in London. Casts were assembled from the ranks of professional actors who were presumably willing to put up with the minute or non-existent salary just for the chance of acting in the sort of material, and in the intimate conditions, that the Gate allowed. The new venture, the first club theatre in London to give nightly performances of short runs, as opposed to the other clubs which were mostly Sunday societies, opened its doors on 30th October.
1925 with a production of Susan Glaspell's *Bernice*, and up until Godfrey's retirement from the Gate in 1934 continued to produce a programme of experimental drama that, in retrospect, is outstandingly adventurous: more so when compared with the slim pickings of Expressionism in the Reps where one vaguely expressionistic production in a season is remarkable.

The *House Into Which We Are Born*, *The Dance Of Death*, *From Morn To Midnight*, *Hedda Gabler*, *Hinkemann*, *The Theatre Of The Soul and Race With The Shadow* in the first season, as well as sixteen other plays; the next season saw a further 18 plays, including *The Lower Depths*, *Dr. Knock*, *The Adding Machine* and *Erdgeist*. After the move to Villiers Street in 1927 and a period of enforced closure, the Gate re-opened as the Gate Theatre Studio (it had been a Salon before) with Simon Cantillon's *Maya*, and a season that included *The Hairy Ape* and *Orphée*. In the fourth season the Gate presented its second Toller production, *Hoppla*, which was attended by the author in March 1929; in the next three seasons before Godfrey left the Gate there were productions of Lenormand's *Easter Of Dreams* and Bernard's *Martine*. Such a dazzling and daring choice of programming could not be pursued without public interest generating sufficient money to keep the theatre open, and after Agate's renowned panegyric of the Gate in reviewing *From Morn To Midnight* it became a well-attended venue, constantly provoking comment and interest among theatregoers and critics. No-one made any money out of the Gate while Godfrey was in charge, and financial disaster was always on the horizon, but that he should have managed to produce seven seasons which, not only by their choice of plays but also by the symbolic location of the Studio so strategically in the middle of London, literally a stone's throw from Charing Cross, threw down the gauntlet to the rest of the London theatres is one of the most impressive achievements of the period. That such a venture should ultimately fold without evolving into something more lasting and of more permanent influence can perhaps best be explained by the factors that contributed to its success, such as it was. Before Agate's review of *From
Morn To Midnight, the Gate had attracted only a few interested parties to its out-of-the-way premises in Floral Street; the number of people who were sufficiently interested in Expressionism to make the effort of finding the place and then sitting through a full-length play in conditions considerably less comfortable than was normal in theatres of the period was not high enough to ensure a steady income for the Gate's box-office. Although it generated a certain amount of interest in the press due to the novelty of its size and organisation, there was nothing like the pre-publicity that went with the opening of the Festival, for instance. A combination of two main factors converted what could have been a short-term elitist venue into something that could be guaranteed a reasonable level of public and critical awareness. The first of these is that it was lucky enough to have fashionable status bestowed upon it due mainly to the largesse of Agate in deploying his considerable influence in guiding public taste. His case for the Gate is interesting and worth examining:

Breathes there a serious playgoer with soul so dead that he will neglect to support a theatre of such aim and achievement as I have outlined? I refuse to think so. If I may add a further recommendation, it is that people who intend to be interested should be interested now; it is no use bringing the tube of oxygen after the patient is dead. What is wanted is practical sympathy now and not the beau geste when it is too late.5

Taken in the context of the time, Agate's sentiments made a crucial appeal to a British public (particularly those who regularly read dramatic criticism and could therefore be assumed to have a reasonably educated interest in theatre) who had been made increasingly aware in the preceding few years of the lack in Britain - and especially in London - of a theatre that could in any way be ranked alongside the serious experimental art theatres on the Continent and, by this time, in the States. The nomenclature 'serious playgoer' is revealing: one meets time and again the call for a serious theatre, something that had standards of artistic excellence above the common run of entertainment. Presumably with the repeated cries for seriousness there had
arisen a desire in the theatregoing public to experience such art; and when it was pointed out to them that they could not only do so right in the middle of theatreland, but also be seen to be contributing to the establishment and fostering of a serious art theatre, the sudden focus of interest on the Gate was not surprising. The fact that what they would be seeing at the Gate was Expressionism was not really stressed in Agate's review, and it is reasonable to assume that a large number of people who gave vocal and financial support to the Gate did so in spite of sharing the common distaste for Expressionism (as did Agate). What mattered was that it was serious drama, and the fact that it was in a tiny loft in Floral Street with no curtains and primitive seating conditions perhaps added to the initial chic of the place. It is sometimes tempting, and this is a case in point, to ascribe part of the vogue for Expressionism to a combination of intellectual snobbery and cultural slumming; to be seen to be going to see something that had a reputation for obscurity, and was likely to be performed in somewhat uncomfortable surroundings, surrounded the playgoer with an aura of good taste and serious dramatic interest that rose above such trifles as entertainment and physical comfort. Whatever the motives, the influx of audiences (and, more importantly, subscribers) that came after Agate's review enabled Godfrey to carry on with his programming policy without fear of immediate closure, at least for a time.

The second factor that cultivated the success of the Gate was its club status and the resultant freedom from the strictures of censorship. This may have drawn some audiences into going to the Gate in the hope of seeing something slightly salacious - certainly Godfrey produced a number of plays such as Erdgeist, Maya, Desire Under The Elms and Salome that would have had a difficult passage past the Lord Chamberlain, as well as many others that had something of a 'reputation' such as those by Ibsen, Cocteau and Bernard, all of whom had about them an aura of being shocking to the sensibilities of the twenties - but of more importance is that the Gate was allowed a far freer hand.
in its programming policy without the restrictions imposed by censorship and could thus pursue plays that would indeed build up a house style, rather than having constantly to cast about for something presentable but not wholly without substance in the way that many of the Reps did. The existence of the Gate theatre, unlike almost any other theatre working at the time, reveals much about the state of British drama in the inter-war period. Wide success evaded the venture during the time of Peter Godfrey's management, and yet the Gate attracted a huge amount of press and was constantly cited as a reference point in any of the debates about drama that were followed. One explanation for this paradox may lie in the whole mass of contradictions and confusions of ambition and practice that surrounded the idea of the Art theatre, which, to many, the Gate epitomised. Just as many of the Reps found that their existence was applauded by critics and commentators while their work often met with indifference, so the Gate was often held up as a beacon of serious theatre in London, and cited by many as an implicit criticism of the commercial London stage, yet found that its openly experimental programming met with luke-warm responses and poor houses. Perhaps the fact that the Gate deliberately courted the experimental/expressionist tag, while leading to its gaining fashionable status, was also the kiss of death in box-office terms. Just as the critics of the Reps never ceased to complain if programming seemed unadventurous and commercially-oriented, then poured scorn on attempts at introducing experimental material onto the stage, so the Gate found itself in the position of being lauded for what it was doing in theory, but criticised or ignored when it came to actual support of its productions. When Godfrey resigned from the Gate in 1934, he announced to his co-workers:

I started the theatre in Floral Street with the object of giving London a chance of seeing the amazing experiments that were being made in the theatre all over central Europe and in America just after the war. I achieved my object ...  

What he had faced in reality was not simply the task of
presenting the new expressionist drama, but also a constant process of struggling to raise money and public and critical interest, and having constantly to justify the existence of his theatre to a theatrical establishment which was at best indifferent to the style that Godfrey presented. One of the fullest and most articulate of his statements of intent came in an interview in *Drama* magazine in December 1928, just before the production of *Hoppla*:

I look upon the Gate theatre ... as a laboratory of ideas. We are experimental; we experiment with Expressionism, with constructivism, with the combination of film and drama ... Some of our experiments may seem extraordinary, but they are worthwhile because valuable results to the theatre may come out of them. The trouble is that the English theatre is lacking enterprise. It is twenty-five years behind the times. So many dramatists, uninfluenced by contemporary movements abroad or in America, are still writing imitations of Shaw, of Galsworthy, of Henry Arthur Jones ... It is different in the States. There the theatre is alive ... We are going to do several American plays, but there are no suitable English ones which give us scope for experiment.7

It would be difficult to argue with much of Godfrey's criticism of the British theatre, but at the time such sentiments were blasphemous, especially the suggestion that American playwriting was better and more advanced than English. The Gate was an easy target for satirical criticism;8 the other more persistent vein of criticism of any such venture was that it was earnest and highbrow, a claim which Godfrey himself was well aware of and attempted to answer in the same interview:

There are a large number of people in London who think that we are highbrows. We are not. Highbrow is a horrid, frigid word and only too often denotes people who adopt supercilious poses. We are enthusiasts ... We want the theatre as theatre, and plays written for players.

While it is undoubtedly true that Godfrey and his colleagues at the Gate were motivated by a love of the type of theatre they were producing, it became increasingly obvious during the nine years of his involvement with the venture that their programming was flying in the face of the general direction of public taste. True, there would always be a small audience for the experiments that were staged at the Gate, but the hope that the availability of such drama
in London would exert an influence over other, more mainstream managements, leading them by example towards a more exciting and serious approach, soon proved barren. Yet the infuriating paradox of theoretical support and actual indifference dogged the Gate all through the period of Godfrey's management. One can see this mixed attitude in the journals of the period, for instance Drama which, while occasionally giving space to Peter Godfrey and publicising some of the Gate's work, very rarely carried reviews of their productions other than a brief mention, and did not make a point of regularly supporting the theatre. The same applied to the Festival, which would have been far more ignored (as it was out of London) had it not been for Terence Gray's gift for creating controversy (and hence publicity) whenever he got an opportunity to commit his statements to print. A brief review of Drama's record on the Gate will give some idea of the wavering support they lent to the theatre. The first mention of the Gate was in the January 1926 issue, presumably available in December of the previous year but even so some two months after the Gate had opened its doors with Bernice on the 30th October. A small feature was carried providing this basic information:

'The Gate Theatre Salon', 26 Floral Street, Garrick Street, Covent Garden W.C. is producing a wonderfully interesting series of plays, acted by professional players. An odd, intimate venture, but full of life, and deserving support. Readers are advised to send for particulars. They will find no advertisements of the Salon in the press.

In the next issue there appeared a review of From Morn To Midnight, the first real suggestion given to Drama's readership of the kind of 'wonderfully interesting' material they might see at the Gate. Perhaps it is simply coincidence that the first review of a Gate production was of the play that had already made the theatre's name thanks to Agate's good offices; while it was the theatre's first real success, there had been productions of work by Copeau and Strindberg before this, whose appearance on the London stage should have elicited some attention from commentators with a real interest in the 'new' drama. The review described the play
as 'Ashley Dukes's translation of Kaiser's expressionist drama' and praised the Gate's achievement in comparison with the Stage Society's production of the same play a few years previously (at the Lyric in 1923); thereafter there is no attention to the Gate until over a year later when, in the March 1927 issue, it was stated: 'We deplore the passing of the Gate Theatre Salon, a spirited venture which did much good work'. Fortunately it was too early for obituaries, as the Gate re-appeared at its new premises in Villiers Street in November 1927 in fine style with Simon Cantillon's Maya; however, the premature report of the Gate's demise is a perfect example of what Agate had meant by 'the beau geste when it is too late'. During the next four seasons (1927 - 1931) when the Gate produced much of its most significant work, the coverage in Drama was patchy to say the least. The interview with Godfrey quoted above was the biggest article devoted to the theatre at any time during the first phase of its work; other than that, there were mentions of productions in the round-up of the London scene; occasional laurels, such as C.B. Purdom's statement in 1932 (just before Godfrey was to move to Cambridge for the unsuccessful collaboration with Gray) that 'Mr Peter Godfrey's theatre is one of the brightest spots in London's theatrical life' and little else. Only two photographs of Gate productions were reproduced in Drama during the period - of Ten Nights In A Bar Room, Godfrey's own version of Victorian melodrama, and of Max Mohr's Rampa, which accompanied the interview with Peter Godfrey. When Godfrey resigned from the Gate in 1934, Drama did not even record the fact.

The work of the Gate Theatre subsequent to the departure of Godfrey saw some interesting innovations and premières, such as the development of the Gate Theatre Revues and productions of plays such as Victoria Regina and Of Mice And Men, but it did not pursue anything like the same policy of overt experimentation along expressionist lines. Norman Marshall, who took over in 1934, seemed not to have had a taste for Germanic drama despite the fact that his first presentation boded well (Toller's Miracle In America); the most interesting work he did at the Gate was the revues.
biographical plays such as *Victoria Regina* and *The Trial Of Oscar Wilde*, and the presentation of American plays such as *Tobacco Road*. Only one other vaguely expressionist piece was attempted, namely Toller's *No More Peace* in June 1936 (with Toller's wife, Christiane Grauthof, in the cast), and that was perhaps the result more of the author's popularity than of any real interest in expressionist techniques, which even Toller had largely abandoned by this time. The importance of the theatre rests on the period when it was a platform for the experimental productions of Peter Godfrey, who gave to the London public more opportunities to see and judge Expressionism for itself than almost any other producer, and yet whose efforts were persistently rewarded with disdain and indifference. A problem arises in trying to assess the place of such a venture in the context of its contemporary theatrical scene. While it is tempting, and to some degree justifiable, to regard the Gate as a beacon of artistic excellence, producing interesting and consistently challenging new work in spite of financial and other practical difficulties, it is nonetheless hard to ignore the fact that the general current of theatrical practice and public taste ran counter to what Godfrey tried to produce. Although his choice of plays is impressive, it smacks somewhat of an attempt to foist onto the British public something they did not really want. This is why it is important to see the career of the Gate in the context of the other theatres of the time who made similar, if less persistent, attempts to find a place for Expressionism; in the case of theatres such as the Birmingham and Sheffield reps, where fairly frequent attempts to present Expressionism were made, it was harshly obvious that this practice was justifiable only insofar as it satisfied the ambitions of a few practitioners and a very small section of the audience, for such experiments were always paid for by the profits made from more popular productions. The Birmingham Rep produced quite a few expressionist plays, but the comparison is awkward because of the financial predicament of that theatre; Sheffield, with its record of about half a dozen genuinely expressionistic productions in the period 1925
to 1937, is more representative of the extent that a theatre could go in balancing art and commerce. The Gate, of course, was a club and thus created for itself far greater freedom in its choice of material, but this exceptional circumstance is so rare as to suggest that it was not leading the way towards a new style of theatre for that time. Other theatrical clubs that existed in the period, such as the Eyebrow Club and the Unnamed Society, ran along similar lines to the Gate, not producing such an aggressive programme but free, nonetheless, to stage what most suited the tastes of their respective directors; however, such ventures were very rare, took their model mostly from the Gate, and met with the same fate. I will be presenting some other examples of little theatre groups that tried to join in what seemed to be a significant new direction in theatre management and artistic presentation, and it will be seen with many of them that they were presenting something for which there was a very limited demand at the time. The Gate Theatre Studio was undoubtedly the most important of these small, 'alternative' theatres, and can reasonably claim to have been ahead of its time in organisation and programming; but its exciting and exceptional example must be regarded in the light of its reception and its place in the wider theatrical scene; it was producing material for which there was at best a theoretical demand only, and was not the result of an attempt to bring the programming practice and theatrical style of the London stage into closer contact with the demands of audiences. It was essentially an 'Art Theatre', and that term implies not only the pursuit of artistic standards independent from commercial demands, but also the fact that it was catering for a coterie, or perhaps more accurately for the tastes of the people who were running it. It is undoubtedly in such ventures that new directions for the theatre are suggested, and the Gate is important in just the terms that Godfrey claimed for it, providing a potentially useful laboratory from which useful results may emerge; but it is important to remember that the experiments carried out at the Gate were dictated by the tastes of an individual, not an audience.
Another theatrical venture that was the result of one man's determination to find a stage for his particular taste in drama was the Festival Theatre, Cambridge, which was popularly seen as the platform for the eccentricities of its founder and director, Terence Gray. Not a club like the Gate, the Festival had one significant advantage—in that it could base its programming policy on the fact that its audience comprised largely students and teachers at the University, more acquainted with the history of drama and probably more aware of contemporary developments. That this was by no means a sure-fire recipe for success was evinced by the career of J.B. Fagan's Oxford Playhouse, which survived from 1923 to 1929 before Fagan's withdrawal and its temporary closure—the end of its career as a significant 'serious' theatre. The Festival housed the work of Gray and his guest producers from November 1926 until June 1933, and although nearly seven years is longer than many such ventures lasted, it is sad to note that this relative longevity was due largely to Gray's determination and ability to draw attention to himself and his theatre. When he resigned in 1933, he left no successor in Cambridge. The flourishing of the Gate Theatre Studio and the Cambridge Festival Theatre could be said to mark the period in which Expressionism had any real effect in the British theatre—a period of just over eight years.

Terence Gray never did anything to make things easy for the Festival, and much of the criticism and the general opinion of the theatre was the result of his highly audible public pronouncements. Outstanding in its choice of plays and particularly in its production style, the Festival was always seen as being the expression of the tastes and ideas of one man, and the extent to which it was praised or damned depended largely on the responses made to Gray's provocative utterances. Looking at the records of the Festival's work, both in the form of playlists, critical accounts and visual material (of which, for once, there is fortunately a great deal) one could be surprised by the fact that its career is not more widely regarded as an important contribution to pre-War theatre, and more so by the fact that these start-
ingly original productions did not influence other producers more obviously, or lead to a more permanent place in the theatrical establishment. The reasons for this are complex, and once again one is obliged to look at the context in which the Festival was working, and to examine the responses made by contemporary writers to the avowedly expressionist manner that was in use in the theatre. In his attempts to win over the critics or to persuade opponents, Gray made as many enemies as he did friends, and although his broadsides against the theatrical establishment seem laudable in retrospect, they were hardly tactical for a producer who needed all the backing he could get. Gray was an irascible and eccentric man: not artistically eccentric, as his detractors would have it, but insofar as he expressed his attitudes towards theatrical art and in his single-minded pursuit of an ideal. No other producer in the period went as far as Gray in the full-scale abandonment of Realism and the attempt to produce in a style which, while informed by the principles of expressionist staging and recognisably indebted to the ideas of the pioneers in that field, was not simply a reproduction of a novel manner, but was an original and truly expressive manifestation of a fresh conception of theatre.

If Peter Godfrey can be seen as challenging the theatrical establishment by his seeming infiltration of its home territory, Terence Gray should be regarded as making the challenge in more explicit, articulate verbal terms. His work at the Festival was, of course, more important than the controversies that he stirred up in the press, but it would be difficult to say which did more to shape the critical and public responses to the Festival. The pages of Drama between 1928 and 1931 are full of statements by Gray and counter-statements by the victims of his vitriol; obviously the editors realised that he was always good copy. In all of these debates, the king-pin of the participants attitudes, apart from personal axe-grinding, is almost exclusively the issue of whether or not experiment along overtly expressionist lines is acceptable or worthwhile in the theatre. Gray conducted two full-scale battles in the pages
of Drama; the first was a personal match between him and Basil Dean, and the second was Gray contra mundum, or at least the supporters of the British Drama League, whom he had criticised. These two debates are representative of the type of controversy that Gray apparently delighted in, and are worth a little attention here for the light they shed on the attitudes held by Gray and his opponents towards the relationship between the British theatre and Expressionism.

The Gray-versus-Dean argument ran over four issues of Drama, from November 1928 until February 1929, and was initiated by a comment made by Dean criticising the Festival for presenting an obscure programme based on 'private munificence'. It was an unprovoked and largely unfounded attack: although Gray had invested a great deal of his private money in founding the theatre, it was almost entirely reliant on box-office for its maintenance. Gray's reply refuted this assertion and waved the red flag by stating that whatever profits were made by single productions at the Festival went into the theatre, and not into 'some financier's pocket'. Thenceforth the argument became predictably bitter, but in the process of the opposition between the two men there emerged some crucial points to the understanding of the perceptions of the 'art' theatre at the time. Dean replied to Gray in January 1929:

The reluctance of Art theatres to produce original work, and their preference for experiments in forms of presentation, is a serious one. It has remained a general criticism of such enterprises since the days when I was a junior member of the first of the English Art Theatres, although I honestly believe, by the light of subsequent events, the criticism was less justified in the earlier instance than in any subsequent one. I repeat what I said in my review, that 'an individual Art Theatre that seeks to matter in the life of the community should occupy itself primarily with the discovery of new talents of authorship, with the fostering of genuine acting ability'.

The debate had shifted its grounds from the particulars of the funding of theatrical experiment to the wider and far more emotive issue of the purpose of theatre. By setting up a comparison between the Festival and the Gaiety ('the first of the English Art Theatres'), and by stressing the importance of writing and acting, Dean had hit upon the
points most guaranteed to provoke Gray, who despised Realism ('nineteenth century hocus-pocus and bamboozle'\textsuperscript{15}) and whose interpretation of the relative importance of writing, acting and staging were very different from Dean's. The style of acting and writing fostered by the Gaiety was opposed in essence to the style that embraced the expressionist influence, and by introducing this comparison, Dean had identified one of the crucial points of distinction between the dominant trends of dramatic criticism. Gray had the last word in this particular skirmish, but it was a debate that continued and remained unresolved in dramatic criticism in general - this much is clear from the predicament of many of the provincial reps of the period. His dislike for the sort of theatre favoured by Dean could hardly have been made more explicit: admitting that he could not risk too many new plays because of a dearth of new English drama that he thought worthwhile, Gray added:

\begin{quote}
The fostering of talents of authorship by producing inferior plays is a suicidal policy which must kill the art theatre in its present stage of insecurity.
\end{quote}

The wide gap between these two influential producers' opinions of what the theatre should be doing is symptomatic of the confusion of aims and the absence of common criteria characteristic of the period, and encountered so frequently in this examination of the British response to Expressionism.

The second, and even more acrimonious, of Gray's battles in\textit{ Drama} was sparked off by his disagreement with the British Drama League's support for plans for a National Theatre, a subject very close to Geoffrey Whitworth's heart. Gray sent his resignation from the League in a letter printed in the October 1930 issue,\textsuperscript{16} for he felt that the National Theatre as envisaged by Whitworth and Barker, both of whom had been appealing for its institution in the magazine's pages, would be a dull, unadventurous edifice offering no home to the sort of experimental drama that he felt was the most important direction to be pursued. An editorial reply to the letter in the same number took exception to Gray's call for a more 'progressive' policy, and asked 'What
is "progressive"? Will Mr Grey (sic) enlighten us?'. It was an invitation that Gray was uncharacteristically slow to take up, but he was finally stung into response by a particularly rude reply in verse to his criticism of the Drama League that appeared in the November 1930 number of the magazine, by 'A.D.D.L.'

What is the matter with Terence Gray?
Has the Cambridge Festival threatened to pay
Or has Gordon Bottomeley written a play?
What is the matter with Terence Gray?

What is the matter with Terence Gray?
Has Cochran persuaded Craig to stay?
Can the National Theatre be on its way?
What is the matter with Terence Gray?

This creation (to the tune of 'Rice Pudding' by A.A. Milne) was hardly a serious contribution to an important issue, but it is characteristic of a persistent tendency to make mock of those who identified themselves with experimental/expressionist styles. In the next issue further reproaches were poured on Gray's head for daring to criticise the Drama League and the National Theatre plans, from contributors such as Michael E. Reilly and (perhaps surprisingly) Michael Macowan of the Gate, who stated that the cause of the 'new theatre'

... is better served by attempting to evolve new forms out of our present material, than by rushing towards extreme experiments which will alienate the ordinary man from the theatre and leave us open to attacks from the Old School.

The correspondence came to its climax in the issue of January 1931, when Gray let fly with one of his most refreshingly violent diatribes:

I did not reply to your challenge for a more explicit statement of the League's misdoings because I have no wish to be rude to the Drama League. If its members are satisfied with holding the mirror up to the entertainment trade and ignoring the art of the Theatre, if they elect to concern themselves almost exclusively with what used to be known as 'amateur theatricals', it is scarcely any business of mine. I offered an incentive to other things, and that seemed to me to be enough. But since you publish nice little poems about me, I suppose I had better offer to reply ... The British Drama League appears to
try to keep up the pretence that the modern art of the theatre is a phrase which has no objective reality. 20

In pursuing this line of criticism Gray was moved to describe the proposed National Theatre as 'a veritable sarcophagus' and to call professional dramatic critics 'prosecutors'. A small editorial rider at the bottom of the letter weekly stated 'this correspondence is now closed', 21 but for at least two more months the pages of Drama were peppered with digs at Gray, whose attack on what were fast becoming the sacred cows of the League, namely amateur societies and the National Theatre, had stirred up a hornet's nest. This exceptionally bitter correspondence pinpoints a major controversy in the theatre of the period, which runs closely along the lines of whether or not a policy of deliberate experimentation (which form many was synonymous with Expressionism) could be tolerated in British theatre. Those who felt that it was important to experiment with the new techniques offered by Expressionism were by implication opposed to the direction pursued by the B.D.L. and other bodies. The line that led to the National Theatre could perhaps reasonably be drawn from the Court seasons in 1904-07, through the career of the Gaiety Theatre between 1907 and 1914, the establishment of the British Drama League in 1919 and the progressive affiliation of most of the country's small professional and amateur companies to it throughout the period, and the efforts of the group comprising Herbert Tree, Arthur Bouchier, George Bernard Shaw, William Archer and Harley Granville-Barker, and of the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre Committee under the guidance first of Israel Gollancz and later Whitworth himself. That the foundation of a National Theatre did not take place until long after the Second World War was due more to the opposition of the various governments to the municipal endowment of the scheme than to the division of opinion within the theatrical world, for most of the respected names of British theatre lined up visibly behind the National banner. But there was, nonetheless, an opposite school of thought of which Gray could be seen as representative, although it is perhaps unfair to lay on his shoulders
the burden of being its figurehead. The school of criticism and writing that supported the plans for a National Theatre, and the line of work on which they drew, were all associated with Realism in the theatre, or at least with a style of writing and production that displayed no obvious interest in, and bore no visible debt to, Expressionism. Those who did bring into Britain what little overtly expressionist work was to be seen during the period were regarded quite definitely as being outside this mainstream, and, by implication, their work (and thus Expressionism) was denied a place in the 'exemplary' theatre. While the work of Gray garnered critical interest in other countries, where he was seen as continuing a line of development from Craig, Copeau and Bel Geddes, in Britain he remained a black sheep, outside the theatrical establishment that still perceived Realism and English theatrical tradition as its roots. Unsurprisingly one of the most perceptive analyses of Gray's work came in the American periodical, Theatre Arts, where, in the November 1931 number, Alistair Cooke reviewed the work of the Festival and its mentor thus:

(Gray) is probably the only theatrical director in England who protests continuously, and on principle, against the accomplishment of the West End at its best. 22

This kind of measured evaluation was rarely accorded Gray, and it was particularly perceptive of Cooke to insist on seeing the necessity of someone playing antagonist to the mainstream theatrical establishment.

So much for Gray's relationship with his contemporaries; what remains is his work, and it is on this as much as on his overall contribution to the progress of various important issues that attention should be focussed. The playlists that cover the career of the Festival are as impressive as the record of the Gate - perhaps more so when one considers that the Festival was liable to censorship. The plays presented could almost be regarded as a catalogue of what was considered 'advanced' drama in the period, with the eclectic mixture of plays from all cultures and all periods, from Ancient Greece to twentieth century Germany. Opening
with The Oresteia on 22nd November 1926, the first season included work by Bottomley, Maeterlinck, Lord Dunsany, Strindberg, Yeats, Sladen-Smith, Rice, the Capeks and Gray himself, as well as dance pieces by the resident choreographer, Gray's cousin Ninette de Valois, visits from the Oxford Players with Uncle Vanya, and a production of scenes from Twelfth Night in the original Elizabethan pronunciation. No-one could have had any doubts that this was an experimental theatre, and in the next two seasons (from October 1927 until June 1929, when Gray 'retired' from the theatre for the first time) the Festival produced a repertoire that was regarded as a blueprint for the serious advanced drama: the celebrated production of Oedipus Tyrannus, From Morn To Midnight, The Emperor Jones, Adam The Creator, The Spook Sonata (produced by Fagan's company again), The Hairy Ape, Hoppla!, Beggar On Horseback, Strindberg's Intoxication, Twelve Thousand, Masses And Man, and a whole range of plays from virtually every period, especially Greek (Sophocles, Aristophanes and Aeschylus) and the Renaissance (Richard III, As You Like It, Romeo And Juliet as well as works by Beaumont and Fletcher and Thomas Dekker). In the remaining four seasons, Gray's involvement with the Festival was sporadic, as it became clear that his championing of anti-realist experimental productions styles and an unorthodox choice of plays was leading him into an increasingly embattled position. The work done by Anmer Hall (1929-30) and Norman Marshall (1932) during their temporary residencies at the Festival toned down the act considerably: Hall, certainly, met with improved houses with a season that included far less in the way of advanced drama, Guthrie's production of The Machine Wreckers in January 1930 being the most identifiable. Gray's later seasons included work by the Capeks, Strindberg, O'Neill, Kaiser, Lenormand and Glaspell, as well as more of the pioneering Greek and Shakespeare productions, but the fire seemed to be dying, and at the end of a season in which the most 'advanced' production had been a revival of The Emperor Jones, Gray resigned and the Festival ceased to be.

This choice of plays alone would have made the Festival
of outstanding importance, but it was the manner in which
they were produced that raised most eyebrows at the time,
and which constitutes Gray's most obvious contribution to
the British theatrical scene. With the exception of the
Birmingham Rep's work such as Gas, the Festival's productions
were the only example of a consistent attempt in one theatre
to match an advanced choice of material with a design policy
that determinedly extended the implications of the new writing
into staging terms. Other theatres that pursued adventurous
programming policies, like the Gate and some of the reps,
failed to realise a production style that matched the ele­
ments of literary Expressionism in the work; often this
was due to limited resources rather than a deliberate policy
of design style. At the Festival, British theatregoers
saw the nearest they would ever get to full-blown Expression­
ism in the period. From the basic structure of the stage
and auditorium (converted according to Gray's plans) down
to the details of costuming and props (or lack thereof)
every element of the Festival Theatre accorded to Gray's
overall conception of what an advanced, artistic theatre
should be. The staging methods, adapted by designers such
as Doria Paston and Hedley Briggs, were mostly based on
Gray's preferred system of screens and permanent or semi­
permanent podia; even if a designer tried to introduce some­
thing less abstract onto the Festival stage, he was always
limited by the stage itself, which, of course, was without
the hated proscenium arch, and which would not lend itself
to anything approximating to a box set. The best design
work at the Festival made use of the openness of the stage,
stressing the artificiality of the structures and making
the most of the opportunity it gave to create large, sweeping
structures with a definite overall shape and sense of rhythm
in the combination of verticals and horizontals. The ease
with which entrances and exits could be effected, from steps
and the front and back of the stage, was particularly condu­
cive to work with large casts. Gray was one of the few Eng­
lish directors of the period who approximated in any way
to the massenregie that was such a distinctive feature of
contemporary German theatre. He was often criticised for
the unevenness of his productions (and he always took the blame, whether the individual play was actually produced by him or not) especially in the area of acting, which he was accused of subordinating to the set. While it is possible to believe that this may sometimes have been the case, there is also reason to suspect that this presents an unfair picture of the Festival's work in general. Certainly the acting style would have been new and unfamiliar - Gray was one of the first directors to have a full-time movement director and choreographer in the English theatre - and it is likely that the sets, by their very nature, would have drawn the attention away from the less startlingly experimental features; however, when one looks at the names of the actors who appeared at the Festival, and at the producers who worked under Gray's direction, and when one considers the extent to which Gray gained a reputation as a perfectionist, it seems likely that these cavils against the acting were founded in a failure to comprehend the overall style on its own terms, or, sadly, in journalistic bias.

Visual records of the Festival's work present one with a huge array of inventive design schemes for all sorts of drama, of which perhaps the most outstanding feature is the consistently high quality and the always-recognisable Festival style. The staging methods imposed by Gray seem to have been equally adaptable to expressionist plays, Renaissance and Greek dramas, and revivals from other periods, such as the Restoration. While contemporaries would have expected something strange and new in the staging of a modern piece, the application of new techniques to the classics was, in the British theatre, quite innovatory. For Gray, whose approach to all drama was essentially non-literary, the idea of staging any play without attempting to interpret it visually as well as verbally was absurd, and he made this quite clear in pronouncements throughout the career of the Festival:

There is no theatre in England fit for the production of anything but drawing-room comedy and kindred forms of entertainment which demand merely a brightly illuminated platform on which is constructed a flimsy representation of a modern interior. No English theatre has the necessary architectural form, let alone the mechanical appliances necessary for the performance of any
kind of serious drama save a purely elocutionary treatment of a purely literary play.25

Under attack for his methods of staging Shakespeare, Gray outlined his principles quite clearly in terms that echo many of the dominant trends in staging and acting in this century:

Fundamentally Shakespeare’s characters are always conscious of the audience, they never pretend to be anywhere but on a stage, they welcome and use, rather than seek to deny, the theatre which is their life. All this I have sought to restore. My actors do not pretend, are not attempting the impossible task, insulting to your intelligence, of persuading you that they are in Bayard’s Castle, Pomfret or the Tower of London. They are, as they were in Shakespeare’s day, frankly on, in or beside a structure which stands as symbol for Bayard’s Castle, Pomfret or the Tower of London.26

Although this echoes in some senses the interest in returning to original Elizabethan styles of production that had been explored by William Poel, Barker, and Nugent Monck before and during this period, Gray extended this approach into the realms of more overt symbolism, using structures which he felt emphasised or explained relationships in a more subtle and revealing way than realistic scenic detail could. Many of the strands of thought that were becoming known in Britain from European theoreticians and practitioners were epitomised in the Festival’s productions, especially their Greek and Renaissance plays: one hears and sees echoes of Appia, Jessner, Reinhardt and Craig, as well as interesting adumbrations of Brecht, especially regarding the attitude of the actors. Perhaps the area in which the Festival excelled was the integration of lighting into its design work; reports of many of the productions stress the way in which the static set could undergo infinite and startling transformations when the full lighting plot was used. Harold Ridge, Gray’s partner in founding the Festival and the author of *Stage Lighting For Little Theatres*, designed the lighting system for the theatre, and it is impressive to see what subtlety of effect he achieved with the relatively unsophisticated equipment available to him in the twenties. Combining the use of coloured spots and washes with the screens so beloved of Gray, and the ease with which the set could
be turned, allowed Ridge to ring the changes on what seemed a permanent set in a way that must have seemed totally unlike contemporary ideas of how the classics should be staged. It is in this use of the emotive, non-literary qualities of light, colour, shape, space, relative levels and groupings that the work of the Festival can be most truly seen as expressionist. While the choice of plays did indeed include a fair range of the new drama, it seems that Gray’s interest in expressionist dramaturgy was subordinate to his awareness of the opportunities it gave him to present a visually challenging style of theatre; he used all the styles available to him to further his search for a truly ‘artistic’ theatre, and in this sense he is one of the very few British theatre artists who could reasonably lay claim to having contributed original examples of a progressive staging technique to the European theatre.27

Of all the experimental theatres working in Britain during the period, the Gate Theatre Studio and the Festival Theatre did most to accomplish an effective challenge to the practices of the theatrical establishment. Their heyday, from 1926 to 1934, exactly covers the period when Expressionism had its highest profile in the British scene, largely due to the work of these two venues, and in their very different but complementary fortunes one can read the whole range of responses that the style provoked in contemporary commentators. While the repertory theatres attempted to introduce onto their stages a little of the best of everything, or saw the fruition of occasional attempts to develop an original interpretative design style, it was at the Gate and the Festival that consistent policies of experimentation were applied, both theatres having been established with the deliberate purpose of providing a platform for an individual, experimental approach towards theatrical art. The only other venture that is comparable in any real way is the Dublin Gate Theatre, which was the result of an attempt to challenge the style of the Abbey and which, in the more receptive climate of the Irish theatre, became an accepted and successful venue, providing for many of the most important new theatrical talents their first stage. The Dublin
Drama League, precursor of the Dublin Gate, had existed originally to present on the Abbey stage the new foreign drama which, in 1918, had no place in a theatre concerned largely with the fostering of the Irish cultural drama. During the ten years of its existence the League gave to Dublin audiences work by the ancient Greeks, Pirandello, O'Neill, Lenormand, Sierra, Toller, Andreyev and Cocteau - many of the familiar names on the 'advanced' roster. Out of the League developed a separate group calling itself the New Players.

... who had actually staged Ireland's first expressionist productions in the drawing rooms of private houses with the aid of a complicated set of curtains, wires, cardboard boxes, and sheets of beaver board worthy of Heath Robinson, and who had also the distinction of opening ... (the) Peacock Theatre in November 1927 with a performance of Georg Kaiser's From Morn To Midnight.

In 1928 the Peacock, a hundred-seater venue at the rear of the Abbey, became the home of the newly-formed group, the brainchild of Hilton Edwards and Micheál Mac Liammóir, that was to become the Dublin Gate Theatre Company Ltd, taking the name deliberately from the London Gate, where Edwards had for a while been working. Early productions by the company drew casts from the League, the New Players and other Dublin groups, and among the plays presented at the Peacock between October 1928 and July 1929 were some of the major works of the expressionist movement as well as other key works of modern drama: Peer Gynt, the opening production; The Hairy Ape; Anna Christie; Salomé; The Adding Machine; RUR; and the première of The Old Lady Says No!, the first play by Denis Johnston to appear in Dublin and one of the Gate's most justly famous productions. Also during this period Johnston had produced, in March 1929 on the Abbey stage with a Drama League cast, Hoppla! - using the pseudonym E.W. Tocher - almost coinciding with the two other productions of the play to be seen in 1929, at the London Gate (February - March) and at the Festival (same).

In December 1929, thanks to the efforts of a fund-raising committee, the company was registered and a lease taken on part of the Rotunda for conversion into a theatre. This opened (unfinished and unheated) in February 1930 with Faust
and struggled financially until the necessary offer of backing came at the end of the year from Lord Longford, after which the company began to run more smoothly, recruiting new members such as Orson Welles, who worked with the Gate for five months in 1931. Between opening at the new theatre and early 1936, when Edwards and Mac Liammóir gave up the exclusive running of the theatre to share with Longford Productions, a list of plays was presented including Gas, Simoom, and Ten Nights In A Bar Room in the third season (29-30); Where The Cross Is Made in the fourth; Jew Süss in the fifth; A Bride For The Unicorn in the sixth and Storm Song in the seventh (33-34). Like the London Gate and the Festival, this experimental programming went hand-in-hand with an innovative approach to design, of which perhaps the most famous example is the shadow-and-silhouette method used for The Old Lady Says No!. Hilton Edwards made quite clear the alignment of the Gate with the advances in European staging:

We wanted a first-hand knowledge of the new methods of presentation discovered by the Continental Experimental theatres. We wanted ourselves to discover new forms. We wanted to revive, or at least take advantage of, and learn from the best of discarded old traditions. And, not least, we wanted to put at the disposal of our audiences all the riches of the theatre ... A theatre limited only by the limits of the imagination. 50

Although I do not intend to offer any analysis of the work of the Dublin Gate, it is important to note that the Irish theatre, although far more productive at this date of interesting new dramatists than the British, was also shaped by the influence of the foreign ideas of writing and staging, specifically Expressionism, that were making themselves felt so widely. Both Johnston and O'Casey were decisively affected by expressionist dramaturgy, and Johnston particularly made public his debt to the German writers, not least by his championing of the work of Toller, both in production, and in collaboration with the playwright on the adaptation of Die Blinde Gottin as Blind Man's Buff, premiered at the Abbey on Boxing Day 1926. The Irish theatre responded very differently to Expressionism from the English theatre, acknowledging its use of the style more openly and showing
a definite literary response as well as an absorption of some of the works of the German writers and of expressionist staging techniques. British writers in the period seem to have seen little congruence between their theatre and what was being done in Dublin, and although this is to be explained to some extent by the parochialism of many of the critics of the time, it points to the essential separate-ness of developments in Ireland where, while the same influences were felt, the situation and the responses provoked were very different.

Of the other 'Other' theatres I wish to mention in this chapter, most are in London or its suburbs. Many can be seen as results of the inspiration offered to aspiring producers and actors by the groups discussed above; others, working before or during the time that the Gate and the Festival were open, provide a wider context for the consideration of the work of those theatres. Just as many of the reps discussed above illuminate the consideration of the influence of Expressionism by their seemingly resolute refusal to acknowledge the style, so some of these small London groups had little or no debt to the German theatre, either continuing to plough the furrow of Realism or to lead off in other directions that were an important part of the development of the theatre in the later thirties and during and after the Second World War. Of the many groups working in London at the time, there is none marked by a consistent policy of experimentation, at least not on a level comparable with that of the Gate. The existence of these small groups is of more importance in a consideration of how ideas about the organisation of theatre were changing as the concept of the 'little' theatre, so bound up with the realist avant-garde in Europe at the turn of the century and the expressionist avant-garde in Britain and America in the twenties, gained acceptance. These companies and venues can be divided up roughly into three groups: firstly, those who produced autonomously at their own venues; secondly, those who did not have their own theatre but produced under a group name at different theatres; and lastly, houses that had a reputation for presenting the work of small or experimental compan-
ies while not necessarily having any overall policy in that direction. This will not be a comprehensive survey of these groups, and the lack of information on many of them makes little more than a mention of their existence possible, but hopefully this indication of the breadth of dramatic activity in the non-profit-making sector will add an important dimension to the acceptance of Expressionism in this country.

The first group, consisting of companies (not necessarily permanent) that worked at their own theatres, is the biggest and contains the best-known names. Not all of these were professional, and not all of them had permanent leases on their venues or lasted more than one or two seasons, but generally they represent the more high-profile ventures that emerged outside the West End in this period. Those I wish to draw attention to here are mostly well-known ventures such as the Everyman, the Embassy, the Westminster, The Lyric, the Mercury, the Open Air, the Players’ and the Questors, as well as a few smaller groups that were working at the same time, such as the Faculty, the Neighbourhood, Playroom 6, the Torch Theatre and the Tavistock Rep. The first of the big theatres to open was the Lyric, which Nigel Playfair bought in 1918 and which he directed until 1932. Although he had no real interest in Expressionism, and seems to have been uninterested in the new staging techniques, Playfair is important in this context because he represents an aspect of theatrical developments in this period that was regarded as presenting a viable avenue for British drama at a time when such examples were badly needed. Basically, Playfair favoured a repertoire of classic revivals and modern Realism, but stated thus this underestimates the enterprising spirit that he brought to his work at the Lyric. At a time when many of the plays now regarded as key works of the English stage were relegated to the study, Playfair steadily re-introduced to the repertoire such plays as The Beggar’s Opera, The Way Of The World, The Beaux’ Stratagem, Marriage à la Mode, She Stoops To Conquer and The Critic. Perhaps his work with eighteenth century drama is most remarkable as it had been out of fashion (and unperformed) during the
Victorian period, but Playfair excelled in other areas too: his Shakespeare productions, and his steady championing of the work of contemporary writers such as Milne and Ervine. Although his work may not now seem very exciting, and certainly ran counter to the trend of Expressionism, his contribution to re-establishing the stage as a place for serious entertainment, and in enlarging the classic repertoire and saving many plays from untimely neglect, is important, and part of an overall process of the re-assessment of the theatre of which the expressionist influence was one aspect.

Recalling the post-War theatre in the March 1936 issue of Theatre Arts, Ashley Dukes identified 'the only sign of new dramatic effort in the regular London theatre was the dingy little Everyman in Hampstead', \(^{31}\) and apart from Playfair's work at the Lyric, and the endeavours of Sunday societies such as the Phoenix Players (founded as an offshoot of the Stage Society in 1919) this is largely true. The boom period for the little/art theatres did not begin until about 1924, and between the end of the War and this time there was very little to challenge the West End in practical terms. The Stage Society and its imitators were producing occasionally for small audiences, deliberately setting themselves apart from the regular theatres: the Lyric was producing full-time, but its repertoire contained little to earn it the tag 'new', except insofar as the idea of the type of revivals Playfair was doing, and his overall production style, were new. The Everyman was opened by Norman MacDermott, a Liverpool businessman, in September 1920 with Bena-vente's Bonds Of Interest, and it stayed open as a theatre until January 1926, after which time it was converted into a club cinema, which is still running at the time of writing. The main contribution of the Everyman to the theatre of the first half of the twenties was its presentation of modern European drama, although it did provide for a number of notable transfers, such as At Mrs Beam's (Munro) and Outward Bound (Vane), both of which became repertory favourites throughout the period; the Everyman also gave Coward his first success with The Vortex in 1924. In the five years of MacDermott's management of the Everyman he produced Shaw
and Ibsen seasons, the first performances in England of plays by Pirandello (Henry IV), Bjornsen (Beyond Human Power), Chiarelli (The Mask And The Face), and O'Neill (The Long Voyage Home); when the theatre was taken over for a short while in 1925-26 by Malcolm Morley, the same policy was pursued, with more Ibsen, Strindberg's The Father, and the first Bernard plays to be seen in Britain. The Springtime Of Others and Invitation To A Voyage. The Everyman perhaps had more in common in its programming and design work (mostly by MacDermott himself) with the provincial reps than with the Gate or the Festival, and was seen by contemporary critics as such: the critic in Drama January 1922 remarked on 'the splendid effort that is being made at Hampstead to develop a permanent repertory theatre' and, like many of the reps, it paid scant attention to Expressionism, but in the context of what else was being done in London in the period 1920 to 1925, it is the nearest there was to a modern theatre, in the sense that it took an active interest in presenting new drama rather than just picking off the successes of other, bolder managements. The fact that this small and poorly-equipped theatre provided West End managements with so many successful transfers, and presented so many premières and new translations, makes the Everyman's place in the history of the period important; its contribution to the repertoire of the English stage both between the Wars and since could in fact be seen as greater than that of the Gate or the Festival, for it certainly showed a better sense of what was acceptable to the general public than they, while maintaining impressively high standards of programming and an adventurous policy in both its organisational and artistic aspects.

In the period between the opening of the Everyman in 1920 and the foundation of the Gate in 1925, only one other producing venture working mainly in one theatre emerged, in the work done by Philip Ridgeway and Theodore Komisarjevsky at the Barnes Theatre. For once reversing the usual order of theatre-to-cinema conversion, Ridgeway took over a cinema in 1925, supervised the reconstruction of the interior, and appointed Komisarjevsky as producer. Although the period of their tenancy of the Barnes Theatre was short (only one
season, in which Komisarjevsky designed and directed Ivanov, Uncle Vanya, The Three Sisters, The Cherry Orchard, Andreyev's Katerina and Gogol's The Government Inspector) the impact was immediate and enormous, prompting one writer to comment that their work 'has made Barnes-stormers of us all'. Although devoted largely to the work of one writer - and it was the Chekhov productions that attracted critical notice - and a naturalist writer at that, the Barnes season was another example of the establishment of a more serious and less parochial attitude towards the British stage that was essential to the background of the British response to Expressionism. Komisarjevsky continued to create work that challenged the contemporary standards of production with his second collaboration with Ridgeway at the Fortune Theatre in 1929 (where they presented The Seagull and Three Sisters), and in his subsequent theatrical work in Britain which, apart from Escape Me Never (a vehicle for Elizabeth Bergner) and his Stratford Macbeth with aluminium sets (both 1933), The Merry Wives Of Windsor in 1935 and King Lear in 1936, gained little success for him and failed to have anything like the same effect on the contemporary stage as his Chekhov productions of 1925-26 and 1929. Komisarjevsky went to the States in 1936 until his death in 1954; however, his example to the British stage was long remembered, not simply because he was the first producer to introduce Russian Naturalism to Britain in a style at all comparable with that developed in Moscow, but also because of his attempts to establish himself as a producer of serious drama of both literary and design quality that would turn the attention of critics and public away from the stylish, glittering Realism and comedy that dominated the West End stage. An interesting coda to Komisarjevsky's career in England, lent irony by the fact that the Barnes venue was a cinema both before and after he and Ridgeway worked there, is that his most concrete contribution to the cultural life of this city were his designs for the early big luxury 'atmospheric' picture palaces, of which the first and most spectacular was the Granada in Tooting, designed by Komisarjevsky in the thirties along the lines of the Alhambra Palace, and
now converted to a bingo hall.

By the mid twenties an awareness of an alternative sort of theatre was gaining a hold. With the establishment of high-profile ventures the Gate and the Festival in 1925 and 1926, commentators on the theatrical scene started to chart the growth and career of the art theatre movement, such as it was, and to create the kind of perspective that groups these theatres together, sometimes irrespective of their real similarities. When the Gate Theatre Salon closed its doors, Drama was moved to deplore its passing as we have already seen, adding that it left only one successor, Playroom 6, to which was added another, the Interlude Theatre Guild, in a similar round-up a few months later (July 1927). Playroom 6 was the precursor of the Players' Theatre, and should be discussed in the context of that group's genesis, while the Interlude will be considered among other 'itinerant' groups. What is significant here is the evidence this grouping gives of a change in the perception of the alternative theatre after the establishment of the Gate and the Festival - the writers who identified Playroom 6 and Interlude as being the only other 'little' theatres in London, not mentioning any of the Sunday societies, or the try-out theatres, suggest that the direction in which the serious alternative theatre was going was towards the style of production epitomised by the Gate Theatre Salon. The repertoire of ventures such as the Lyric, the Everyman (which, admittedly, had closed by the time these remarks were made) and Barnes (demi-sed also) was, by 1927, less regarded as the stuff of which the new theatre was to be made. Whether they agreed with them or liked their work or not, many writers began to see the overtly expressionist productions of the Gate and the Festival and characteristic examples of modern theatre, thus accepting that a distinct move had been made away from the first wave of modern theatre (Ibsen- and Maeterlinck-centred) towards the second wave of Expressionism. The Embassy, which opened in September 1928, about ten minutes walk from the Everyman in Swiss Cottage, although it had a permanent producer for a period of two years (1930-32) in the person of Alec Rea, and presented programmes that
consisted largely of the type of plays being done in the provincial repertories and contained the odd play that was regarded as faintly expressionistic (for example The Macropoulos Secret), was never regarded in the same league as the new breed of theatres, and indeed its career under the Rea management and subsequently was undistinguished by any more experimentation than the average rep. Under the management of Ronald Adams (1932-39) the Embassy produced many plays that transferred to the West End, including the Flora Robson-Paul Robeson production of All God's Chillun Got Wings in 1933, and gave occasional airings to slightly unusual choices such as Strindberg's Pariah (also 1933), but mainly it was realistic comedy, thrillers and biographies: the Embassy's influence on West End managements arose largely from its good fortune in being situated so close to the centre of town and therefore more likely to attract the attention of agents whose horizons extended very little further. This policy continued after the War under the management of Anthony Hawtrey, who used the Embassy more deliberately as a West End try-out; in 1957 it was taken over by the Central School of Speech and Drama.

Yet another direction was pursued by the Players' Theatre, established in premises in New Compton Street in November 1929. From January 1927, the first floor of these premises had been known as Playroom 6 (the address was 6 New Compton Street), an outfit run by Reginald Price who, in the two-and-a-half years of its existence had produced plays such as Büchner's Leonce And Lena (around February 1927), Sladen-Smith's Simeon Stylites in the following summer and Little Eyolf in the autumn - all plays that identify it with the little theatre 'movement' as it was coming to be perceived. In November of 1929 the club moved downstairs to the ground floor and changed its name to The Players' Theatre, under the producership of John Fernald (later to go on to Unity, the Arts, the Liverpool Playhouse and, in 1955, to succeed to the principal's chair at RADA). For five years the club remained in New Compton Street but very little can be traced concerning its activities, until it moved to King Street in April 1934 and closed shortly thereafter. In December 1936 the Players entered the next phase of its existence under the management of Peter Ridgeway who re-opened it
as a venue for Victorian cabarets known as Ridgeway's Late Joys. On Ridgeway's death in 1938, Leonard Sachs took over the Players' and supervised yet another move, this time to Albemarle Street in 1940, where the same style of entertainment was provided. The history of the Players' from its genesis as a small club for the production of 'advanced' drama, through a period when it served as a launching-pad for a latterly-famous director (as did many of these ventures) to a home for yet another fashionable theatrical style displays not only the wide range of interpretations open to the phrase 'little theatre', but also the inter-connections that existed between apparently separate styles and the exponents thereof.

One of the few groups to establish itself at this time that has survived is the Questors Theatre in Ealing, formed in 1929 and still producing, as amateurs, today. The society, whose producer was Robert Atkins, converted a disused chapel in Mattock Lane, Ealing, into a theatre in 1933, and opened in the October with a production of Shirland Quin's expressionistic drama Dragon's Teeth, produced by Alfred Emmet, which gained the attention of the Drama critic for its dream scenes and strange costumes. Questors continued to work throughout the period, gaining a reputation as one of the more adventurous amateur societies, and, after the War, under the leadership of Emmet, a new 350-seater theatre was built, finally opening completely in 1964. Few groups were as fortunate in avoiding the blows of fashion and poverty as the Questors, but one which was, although under many different guises, is the venture started by Anmer Hall in Palace Street, known as the Westminster Theatre. Fresh from his four terms at the Festival, Hall obtained another disused chapel for conversion, and opened the Westminster on 7th October 1931 with Bridie's The Anatomist. From then until 1938 the theatre was under the overall direction of Hall, but was not only used for his productions but also played host to a number of guests such as Baxter Somerville's fortnightly rep in the Autumn of 1934 (when plays like The Moon In The Yellow River and Children In Uniform were produced) and the Dublin Gate (for example a season including
The Old Lady Says No! in 1935). Hall's own presentations comprised selections from many different sources such as Pirandello, Barrie, the Quinteros, Granville-Barker and O'Neill, while his directors included such men as Tyrone Guthrie (his first work in London) and Michael Macowan, who had been working at the Gate Theatre Studio and later went on to the Old Vic, Stratford, and the headship of LAMDA. Other companies whose work appeared at the theatre were the Croydon Rep during the period of J. Baxter Somerville's management of both theatres, and the Group Theatre between 1935 and 1937. In 1938, Hall quitted the Westminster, leaving Michael Macowan, who had been the house director since 1937, to work there as producer during the tenancy of the London Mask Theatre, the venture undertaken by J.B. Priestley and Ronald Jeans which lasted until the War, during which time a wide sample of plays were produced, starting with a modern-dress Troilus And Cressida, and continuing with works such as Marco Millions, Major Barbara, Desire Under The Elms, Abraham Lincoln, and of course plays by Priestley: Dangerous Corner, Music At Night and Cornelius. A repertoire that would have been impressive in a local rep, maybe, but unadventurous for what set out to be 'a permanent theatre with a policy, character and company of its own'. Perhaps the theatre of the period that most deserved that description was the Mercury, where the policy of the theatre was genuinely executed in its production work and which provided an original impetus to the British theatre towards new developments in native drama. Ashley Dukes and his wife Marie Rambert had started the Ballet Club Theatre in Notting Hill in 1931, and for the next two years Dukes was planning to open some kind of dramatic venture. In the April 1933 number of Drama he announced that he was going to start a project called the Nameless Theatre, where no information would be given about anyone in the play or what the play was about or who it was by until a week after the play had opened. Although this idea fortunately never materialised, the thinking behind it is quite revealing. Apart from the presumed nod to Toller in 'Nameless', and the similarity to the ideas of total artistic autonomy/anonymity that had been espoused
by expressionists such as Rubiner, it shows that Dukes was intending to establish something in London that would set its face against the star system and the literary approach of many critics, offering a deliberate challenge in the way Gray had seven years earlier. When the venue was granted its public theatre licence in 1933 and Dukes opened dramatic productions under the Mercury banner, he provided something far more valuable than an imitation of expressionist gimmicks. The home given to the new English verse poets by the Mercury, and to other ventures such as the Group, has made the Mercury important in giving the lead in a new direction of drama, which, although poetic, drew little visible inspiration from twenties Expressionism and leads too far beyond the period to be included in this study.

Of the other theatre groups to work in established venues during the period, there are few which shed much light on the discussion of the expressionist influence. The Open Air, Sidney Carroll's Regents Park venue, opened in 1933, gave summer productions of Shakespearean drama from thence-forth, attracting the collaboration of some notable artists such as John Drinkwater, who acted in the first season's The Tempest, with costumes by Paul Shelving. Very little 'little' theatres opened and closed throughout the period, attracting scant attention and difficult to chronicle; of these the more interesting-sounding are the Faculty Theatre which opened on top of a building somewhere in Piccadilly in 1930 with productions of Miss Julie, Conrad's One Day More and Rosmersholm; the Cosmopolitan Theatre, another of J.T. Grein's ventures that, in 1935 (after Grein's death, and six years after he founded the group) was producing Hasenclever's Ehen Werden In Himmel Geschlossen at the Arts Theatre under the management of Gerald M. Cooper; Cooper moved on to the Torch Theatre in 1939, an enterprise founded by Gerik Schelderup in 1938 in Knightsbridge, who produced five plays before leaving, including When We Dead Wake; and the Tavistock Rep, another attempt at a London repertory theatre that opened in 1931 along the lines of the St Pancras People's Theatre. These organisations are of less importance to this discussion, although interesting in themselves,
than the groups discussed at greater length herein because they did not produce the combination of a deliberately experimental repertoire and production style with a recognisable attitude that embraced the fundamental tenets of Expressionism. The larger or longer-lived ventures, namely the Lyric, the Everyman, the Embassy, the Westminster and the Players' all provide illuminating contrasts to the work of the Gate and the Festival but it would be mistaken to make no fundamental distinction between the artistic beliefs and aims that were behind all these theatres; each attempted to lead, by example, towards a style of theatre that seemed more satisfying than the run-of-the-mill fare of the West End theatres, and it is here that they are to some extent similar; but the directions in which they sought to lead differed widely.

There were, as well as these more permanent organisations, a number of groups who produced work at theatres which they had no lease on, as guests of other managements and at the try-out theatres that were available in the period. Names that crop up in the records of the time are myriad - I have already mentioned the Interlude Theatre Guild and the Cosmopolitan, and should add to that list the 300 Club founded by Mrs Geoffrey Whitworth in 1924. These small itinerant groups produced some interesting work in their own right, but of most importance here is their addition to an overall picture of the perceived growth of a movement that was associated in the minds of theatregoers of the period with the concept of new drama, whether they did in fact produce much that could reasonably be said to have any claim to pushing forward the frontiers. There was not a shortage of houses offering a temporary home to new work - between 1922 and 1927 four major theatres opened that operated as try-out or transfer theatres, namely the Regent in 1922, a converted music hall which played host to, for instance, the Gate's production of *From Morn To Midnight* which transferred there after its opening in Floral Street, with Claude Rains in the part of the Cashier; the Q at Kew Bridge, opened in 1924 and run by Beatrice Lewisohn, one of the first expressly 'try-out' theatres; the Little Theatre
in 1925 which provided a venue in the Adelphi for producers such as Frank Vernon and Maurice Browne, and was regarded as specialising in 'unusual plays for short runs'; and the Arts Theatre Club in 1927, whose president was Bronson Albery, and which was used as a temporary base by Grein's Cosmopolitan group, as well as by companies assembled by the club's management and a huge number of other societies and management. Perhaps it is surprising that with all this activity, and with the large number of stages in London purporting to lend themselves to the production of experimental or non-commercial drama, that less recognisably expressionist work was seen in the period. Of all the groups mentioned in this review of the theatres that contributed to the British response to Expressionism, only the Gate Theatre Studio produced anything of great importance in London in the period - elsewhere the response was more muted and less identifiable, having more to do with attitude and self-image than with an active pursuit of the style.

It is difficult to know how far to criticise or analyse the groups and theatres mentioned in this chapter on terms dependent on how far they registered a positive response to Expressionism, for there were very few whose members made any recorded comment on the matter, let alone supported or emulated the modern German developments. 'Expressionism' itself was a vague term of reference and definition even in the hands of its British adherents. The unwieldy lumping-together of ventures and venues that seem in some way to shed more light on the perception of the 'art' theatre than the commercial West End managements is unavoidable, but it is worth re-stressing that any sense of there being a 'movement' as such is probably an imposition by commentators rather than a true reflection of any contemporary consciousness thereof. The directions in which the British theatre was moving at this time were diverse and mixed; it would be wrong to try and pin onto individual work any too-rigid label. The Gate and the Festival lend themselves to categorisation because in both cases their 'leaders' were happy to identify themselves with the modern movement and quite specifically with Expressionism; in the case of those groups
who did not have such articulate and audible mouthpieces
the classification process is much harder and of strictly
limited usefulness. The main point to make here is that
the British theatre was characterised more than anything
else by its diversity and confusion; this is symptomatic
of a period when massive re-evaluations were being undertaken
in all areas of society, not just the arts, and which is
reflected in the chaotic quality of many of the products
of that time. The mixture of ambition, self-importance,
genuine artistry and innovation, backbiting and axe-grinding
that one encounters in the theatrical work and criticism
of the period is as much a response to this more general
confusion and search for certainty as it is an actual re-
sponse to an artistic movement and style: the way in which
people in the theatre reacted to Expressionism says much
about their response to a whole range of issues, focussed
on something that to many represented an extreme, or an
escape, or a threat.
In the continental theatre the suppression of realism, the grasping at abstraction, the return to an emphasis on the stage as stage (as against the realists careful disguise of the stage as such), the utilization of linear and spatial relationships rather than depicted background, intensification of emotion by every means belonging to the physical theatre even to the point of distortion of the outward aspects of life - all this is a narrowing in to Expressionism, to an intensified emotional expressiveness through the formal qualities of the theatre.

Sheldon Cheney, 1928

I: INTRODUCTION

The extent to which European models served as the starting-point for the emergence of the modern American theatre is a point which I do not intend to labour in this chapter. In the three main areas of writing, stage design, and the organisation of, and attitudes towards, the theatre, the influence is obvious and sufficiently well documented elsewhere to need no further amplification here. Although the role of Expressionism in this process is, as ever, problematic and hard to pin down, there are far more examples in the American theatre of a positive response to the style and a growth from it than in the British scene. So, while it is unnecessary to present material here in an attempt to 'prove' or record the existence of an influence, it will be seen in this consideration of the progress of the American theatre in the period that the part played by Expressionism and its (temporary) adherents indicates a way of re-evaluating the idea of artistic influence in the theatre beyond the basic acknowledgement of stylistic similarities or the adoption of ideas and approaches. The way in which the American theatre used Expressionism as a catalyst to more 'first hand' methods of expression, absorbing some of its basic methods along the way but rejecting as many, bears witness not only to the much-acknowledged sharing by artists in the twenties of a zeitgeist, which pushed many of the younger generation towards the explosive and satirical characteristics of Expressionism, but also to the way in which abstract concepts of what constitutes a serious artistic theatre (and debates about the necessity thereof) became focussed on a theatrical idiom that had been imported into the American theatre for reasons that were not simply the
result of a shared awareness. The exposure to European art experienced by those who served in the War, and the growing currency of new critical approaches to the theatre, led many to call for the kind of drama that they had come to think America needed—and yet the resolution of the expressionist vogue into the more popular and, in practice, enduring styles of realistic drama that superceded it suggest that the importance of Expressionism was not so much for its actual and peculiar artistic qualities, as for what it came to represent to a generation of practitioners. Of all the fields in which the style yielded a recognisable response, it has already been seen that stage design often proved to be the most fruitful outside Germany, and this is true of the American theatre. It is my intention in this chapter to look at the extent to which a response by the designers to what they had observed and learnt of German models served as a springboard for wider developments within the native theatre, and to consider the ways in which design sometimes ran parallel to literary trends in American drama, either leading or following. The complex relationship between the writer and the designer became crucial to the direction taken by the theatre in the States towards the end of the period, and indeed it is due to the collaboration between the verbal and the visual that the American theatre began to gain some artistic prestige.

Approaching stage design from this point of view, as part of a jigsaw of innovation and response characteristic of the American theatre in the period, involves the danger of ignoring the work in 'pure' design terms and laying too much stress on the superstructure of ideas and influence that may be seen to have been imposed on it. However, it is important to remember that it was precisely in terms of its concurrence with European Expressionism that much of the new theatrical work of the post-War period was seen, both by its critics and by the artists themselves; it seems from a study of contemporary sources that there was a high degree of consciousness of bringing into the American theatre a style that had already been proven on the Continent as a challenge to the uninspiring glossy-realistic style that
dominated before and during the War. Therefore the work under consideration here will not be extensively discussed in technical or aesthetic terms, but rather in terms of its effect on broader approaches and attitudes towards theatre. The role of the designers as spearheads of a new movement in theatre, rather than as graphic or technical artists in their own right, better fits the overall intention of describing the relationship that developed in Britain and America between existing native ideas about theatre, always proveable by the box office, and the new expressionist ideas that challenged the status quo and offered routes away from it. Thus, while this may fall some way short of what might be desired in a chapter dealing primarily with stage design, it will hopefully give some indication of the way in which that branch of the art was perceived in a particularly interesting theatrical scene, and will provide some material for a consideration of the cross-currents of interdependence between the different elements that make up a single production. The dramatic literature that was produced in this period will be considered in its relationship to scene design and other developments in the organisation of the theatre; while the work of writers like O'Neill and Rice is fairly well known, and while other dramatists such as Lawson, Dos Passos and Glaspell who 'dabbled' with Expressionism are still read, it needs to be stressed that the development of their drama was intimately linked with the design possibilities available to them—most obviously in the case of O'Neill. While there will be no full analysis of O'Neill's work, I hope that his frequent contribution to developments described in this chapter will provide a sidelight on his work that may take him out of a literary context and place him and other writers in the environment of the working theatre to which many of them more truly belong.

It is typical of all the theatrical environments in which Expressionism had some influence that the artists therein tended to disclaim any debt to the Germanic style. This is most true of the American scene, where even O'Neill could disclaim the influence, and where Lawson could describe
his play *Processional* as 'vaudeville'; yet no country made such an obvious response to the style, nor, perhaps, did any country have such a need for the breath of inspiration that Expressionism offered.

The fact that the Drama League can recommend at the present time, as worthy of the attention of its members, only three plays running in New York City (of which two are by foreign authors, while two productions are by English or part-English companies) is an incisive comment upon the present condition of American drama ... a higher standard can be reached only as the outcome of experiment and initiative ... hard work and perseverance, coupled with ability and the absence of purely commercial considerations, may result in the birth and healthy growth of an artistic theatre in this country.³

When, in the late teens and early twenties, an awareness of the style and conception of a new wave of theatrical experiment was felt in the States, its adherents sought to establish a type of theatre that was almost an antithesis to the popular Broadway fare. Although the attentions of pioneers such as Cheney, Cook, Macgowan, Jones and Moeller were directed as much towards the content and origin of the drama, the assault that they actually launched on the low standards of the commercial theatre found its most effective weapon in stage design. An artistically credible American drama, in the work of writers such as O'Neill, Rice, Lawson, Green and Howard, began to emerge in the early twenties and indeed enjoyed some success even on Broadway in that early time, but in the period from about 1915 to 1935 that will be considered here the aspect of the work being done by the growing number of art theatres that infiltrated commercial theatre and did most to change the overall face of American theatre was stage design.

In 1913 Robert Edmond Jones left his job as an assistant designer at the Manhattan Opera House, where his costume designs had occasionally been used but where he had never had the opportunity to set a complete show, and travelled to Florence, thence to Berlin where he was attached to Reinhardt's Deutschestheater as a student of the designers Ernst Stern and Emil Orlik. By the time war broke out and Jones was forced to return to America, he had absorbed enough of the methods and attitudes of the Reinhardt theatre to
convince him that he was capable of bringing his talents into use in America more completely and effectively than before. His first major professional engagement on his return was with the New York Stage Society, for whose production of Anatole France's The Man Who Married A Dumb Wife, under the direction of the visiting Harley Granville-Barker, he designed sets and costumes. Theatre Arts recorded this as 'the first airing of the new stagecraft on Broadway'.

In 1915 Arthur Hopkins engaged Jones to design The Devil's Garden at the Plymouth Theatre, and thus began a partnership that lasted, on and off, for the next fifteen years. For Hopkins, Jones executed some of his best-known designs, including Richard III (1920), Macbeth (1921), Anna Christie (1921), Hamlet (1922), and Machinal (1928). During the period Jones also worked extensively at the Metropolitan Opera (where he designed Til Eulenspiegel for Nijinsky in 1916) and the American Opera (Gounod's Faust in 1927) as well as having one-man shows of his work (for example at the Bourgeois Galleries in 1920), and publishing a number of articles and designs. Running parallel to this highly successful career in the commercial theatre, however, was Jones's involvement with the independent groups, especially the Provincetown Players and the Greenwich Village/Experimental Theatre Incorporated venture (with O'Neill and Kenneth Macgowan). In 1914 Jones had designed Dunsany's The Glittering Gate for the group that was just about to become the Washington Square Players (the performance took place in the back room of a bookshop on Washington Square), and for their first season at the Bandbox Theatre he designed for Maeterlinck's Interior (1915). His association with the Provincetown Players began with their move to New York in 1916, and he designed many of their best-known productions such as The Hairy Ape and The Spook Sonata (both co-designed with Cleon Throckmorton, in 1922 and 1923 respectively), Beyond by Hasenclever in 1925, Desire Under The Elms in 1924 and The Great God Brown in 1926. His experience as one of the three controllers of Experimental Theatre Incorporated (E.T.I.) led him to direct a number of pieces, for instance The Emperor Jones in 1923 and SS Glencairn in 1924.
In Jones's career up to the late twenties one can see the extent to which a designer of his abilities could ignore the boundaries between 'commercial' and 'art' theatres, thus paving the way for a closer merging of those once irreconcilably opposed poles. Jones, although he is rightly regarded as the leading light in this movement, was by no means the only designer to effect this transition - Lee Simonson, Donald Oenslanger, Cleon Throckmorton, Jo Mielziner and Mordecai Gorelik had all, by the early thirties, done work both on and off Broadway. Their lead was followed by many other and lesser designers until, by about 1933, the whole idea of a 'new' stagecraft was irrelevant - methods once hailed as revolutionary such as the plastic or simplified set, the abolition or adaptation of the painted backdrop, and the use of atmospheric lighting had been fully accepted in almost all the theatres in New York. The revolution in stage design was fast, smooth and bloodless. Yet, for all the apparent ease with which the American theatre accepted these new methods and novel styles, there grew up around the development of the new style a debate concerning the familiar notion of the serious art theatre that remained unresolved. While Expressionism provided a useful and necessary starting point for theatrical artists, the ideas that had stimulated the original development of the style were rebuffed just as soundly in the States as they were in England, with the important exception of the American theatre of political protest which, it will be seen in the next chapter, grew out of an interest in the methods of Expressionism and Constructivism current at the time. America had gained a body of serious, native dramatic literature and a thriving new school of design from its contact with Expressionism, and had learnt to explore in the realm of the off-Broadway theatres topics directly related to political and social realities, but essentially attitudes remained as solidly conservative and commercial as ever. The successive abandonment by its former champions of Expressionism meant that, at the outbreak of the Second World War, it seemed as if the American theatre had taken all it needed from the Germanic influence and could sail ahead thenceforth
under its own steam. However, it is not simply a case of a method being tried and used and then abandoned. The American theatre, and its consciousness of itself, remained forever defined by criteria that had grown out of its contact with Expressionism, and even in productions that seemed to have little or nothing in common with the style (for example, comedies of the Sherwood variety, or spectacular musicals) there is traceable some element of the expressionist influence, sometimes in design or conception, and often in the way in which ideas are presented.

Many of the major figures in American theatre in the twenties had been exposed, directly or indirectly, to the work and ideas of Continental writers, producers and designers. O'Neill certainly knew the works of Strindberg, Wedekind and Kaiser; Lawson had spent some time during and after the War in Paris and had become acquainted with the work of Wedekind, Toller, Hasenclever, Meyerhold and Cocteau; Jones, Macgowan and Simonson had all been in Berlin in the early twenties (for Jones, of course, it was a return visit) and had witnessed expressionist productions such as Jessner's Richard III and Fehling's Masse-Mensch. Inevitably all were aware of the pronouncements of Craig on the art of the theatre, and would certainly have seen some reproductions of Appia's designs, if not actually read his books. The names of these and other figures were the touchstones of the new movement, and they were central to the thinking of many of the American designers. For all his bombast and bluff, there is no denying that Craig's influence was among the most strongly felt in the American theatre at the time. The extent to which his ideas seem valid or otherwise now is irrelevant to his crucial role as an animateur of the modern theatre. Simply by popularising the phrase 'the new art of the theatre' Craig stirred ambitions in theatres across Europe and America. The extent to which his influence was felt in the States is well summed-up by Rollo Peters, writing in 1918:

My quarrel is with Craig. He came, imperious, into a decaying theatre ... Uttering his revolt, he outlined a beautiful, vague ideal; he laid the foundations of a potential art; he invented a phrase, but did not finish it ... it remains a phrase. 5
In terms of his actual influence on the practice of stage design, Craig's position is less definable. Undoubtedly his belief in theatre not as presentation but as revelation, and his desire to create essence out of elements, rhythm out of behaviour, and symbols out of objects contributed to a theatrical ideal in the work of new designers, but his example as a designer contributed far less.

Of more importance in practical terms was the influence of designers Joseph Urban and Norman Bel Geddes who, while slightly pre-dating the group with whom I am chiefly concerned, were still working in the period and had provided a number of important examples to the new generation. Urban was influential mainly in his use of colour; Bel Geddes in his use of 'architectural' settings. As a painter in the theatre, the Viennese Urban was quite extraordinary, using a system that he developed in tandem with advances in lighting and the greater subtlety of colour effect that this allowed. His characteristic method, used frequently in his designs for the Boston and Metropolitan Operas, was the pointilliste method which could effectively change the entire appearance of a set by projecting a different-coloured light onto a surface painted with many small dots of different hues, some of which would disappear and some of which would look darker depending on the colour of the available light. Bel Geddes was an architect, using huge structures reminiscent of many architectural styles ancient and modern, and in his examples of the application of permanent sets he can be seen as being more in keeping with the contemporary trends in design than was Urban. Working with Reinhardt he had designed the extraordinary set for the American production of The Miracle in 1923, and throughout the period he provided ideas and inspiration for the designers working in the little theatres, for example with his designs for a projected production of The Divine Comedy in Madison Square Gardens, pictures of which appeared in Theatre Arts in 1930. The work of neither of these pioneers will be fully examined in this chapter, mainly because their involvement with the little theatre movement was slight, if any, and because their status in the American theatre merits a discussion of greater detail than is appropriate here. However, it is important to remember that while designers such as Jones
and Simonson were attracting attention as the forefront of the new stagecraft. Urban and Bel Geddes were doing work that was, in its way, far more adventurous than theirs, although it was not directly connected with the new drama that was being written, except in a few isolated instances.

The stylistic influences that were felt elsewhere in the theatrical world had their repercussions in America also. As well as the obvious examples of Craig, Appia, Reinhardt, the expressionist designers and the constructivists, there were many other developments all of which were known in the States, and many of which were drawn on as possible directions by the young designers. Of these, the trend towards the use of architectural settings, suggested by theoreticians, influenced by the revived interest in Elizabethan staging methods (used by Poel in England and Max Krüger in Germany) and the use of large monumental structures and scenic 'units' by Appia and Jessner, was perhaps one of the most important. Bel Geddes developed it further than any of his American contemporaries, but attempts at the development of the permanent expressive setting can be seen in the work of designers such as Mielziner, Jones and Farrer. The moveable architectural settings used by Fuchs at the Munich Künstlertheater, with its shallow stage and cyclorama, attempted to present the necessary degree of scenic illusion while maintaining the least possible distance between actor and audience, using pylons to replace wings, and doors in the side width of the proscenium to facilitate ease and speed of performance. This deliberate diminution of stage resources to a basic 'relief' stage was symptomatic of a desire to clear away from the theatre all the unnecessary additions that stood in the way of a direct expression; parallels can be seen in the Vieux Colombier and the Würfelbuhne. While this simplification of the stage was not truly an aspect of German Expressionism, which tended even at its simplest to aim for grandiose effects, it can be seen as part of a widely-felt need to find the essential truth in dramatic production rather than simply presenting diverting illusion. It is in this aspect that Expressionism and all the new stagecraft can be seen as
a continuation of some of the ideas that had inspired the realist theatre: both were, in their way, anti-illusionist; yet Realism had sought to uncover truth by presenting unadorned reality, while Expressionism sought the essences beneath the concealing veneer of the seen. In addition to these major approaches, there were many diverse but interesting influences, and of those I should mention: the innovations of Adolf Linnebach, whose use of experimental lighting schemes, (for instance in his production of Hasenclever's Jenseits) and whose development of the back-projector that bears his name were employed in America; the film directed by Robert Wiene and designed by Sturm artists, which for many came to epitomise expressionist design, The Cabinet Of Doctor Caligari; and the production style of the Jewish Habima Theatre whose visit to New York in 1926 suggested a new intensity of performance that had an impact in all fields of American theatre.

Meeting the challenges offered by continental designers and theorists spurred their transatlantic counterparts on to evolve a respectable native style that catered for the American theatre in the way the European designers had reflected the new approach to the theatre emerging there. But it was not only the emulation of foreign models that helped shape American design work. With the growth of a repertoire of modern American plays that departed radically from standard dramatic fare, those who undertook to produce such plays obviously needed to set them in a manner suitable to their demands. The extent to which the new playwrights of the twenties and thirties were influenced by German expressionist drama is difficult to assess, as will be seen in this and other chapters, but it is sufficient to say that major writers such as O'Neill, Rice, Glaspell and Lawson had absorbed enough of the expressionist devices to demonstrate a version of them in their own writing. O'Neill, in The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape displays a similarity in his choice of structure to Kaiser's Von Morgens bis Mitternachts; Rice in The Adding Machine seems to have a similar stylistic model in mind, as well as taking some of the more familiar subject matter of German expressionist plays and
gently satirising it, for instance the murder of his mother by Shrdlu, which echoes so many parent-killings in earlier plays in a bathetic way: Lawson's Roger Bloomer reads like an Americanised Der Bettler, while Glaspell's early play The Verge uses expressionistic dream devices reminiscent of Kaiser, Toller and Strindberg, to portray a psychotic state of mind. The growing interest in dream states and subliminal consciousness was inherited directly from Strindberg, Wedekind and the expressionists, and one can see in the use of masks in The Great God Brown and Days Without End a reflection of some of the interests and devices of these writers. The immediate necessity of translating the nature of this new writing into plastic terms was as influential a factor in determining the progress of American scene design as any direct foreign influence, and will be studied in a little more detail in the examination of individual designers and their work below.

II: THE AMERICAN ART THEATRE AND ITS DESIGNERS

Before the First World War, the theatre in New York lacked any sense of contributing to, or being part of, an artistic tradition. Of the shows that dominated Broadway the only ones that, stylistically at least, escaped from the general banality were those productions of David Belasco and Charles Frohman, whose pursuit of technical excellence in the imitation of nature on stage had led to some striking sets. This concern with Realism, however, was a principle that not only rode roughshod over any suspicion of artistic subtlety but which also established a prevalent attitude of what was the theatrical norm - so any deviation from photographic Realism was automatically regarded with some suspicion. Lee Simonson, writing in Theatre Arts in 1917 commented:

... the art of stage scenery has no tradition. It is the one craft which has remained wholly untouched by any trace of aesthetic taste. While successive publics assimilated Beardsley, Whistler, Degas and Renoir, audiences, whether at Bowery melodramas or at the Metropolitan Opera House, witnessed scenery invariably painted like the panoramic landscapes of the English Academy in the year 1852. So today a designer has only to transfer to the stage an adaptation of Beardsley's massing of black and white, the tinted monochromes of a Whistler nocturne, the elements of a Japanese print, a poster, or even an architectural water-color, and he is greeted with ripples of applause by astonished audiences who view him as a daring innovator. Every innovation
in stage-craft we have witnessed in America is based upon the aesthetic discoveries of twenty years ago. 8

With this paucity of inventiveness in American theatre in the fields of both writing and production, it was inevitable that young intellectuals of the day who cherished any interest in the art would turn to Europe for their inspiration. In the Universities a generation which was to shape the development of drama in the twenties was exposed to the latest ideas of stagecraft by mentors such as Professor George Pierce Baker. A list of the alumni of his English 47 class at Harvard reads like a 'who's who' of American theatre, and, although his instruction in the practicalities of design may not have been extensive, he doubtless instilled in his students a serious critical and artistic attitude towards theatre which was largely absent from the show-business managers. Further stirred by the work of designers such as Bel Geddes and Urban, and by visits to New York of the Reinhardt company, the Ballets Russes, the influential Armory Exhibition of modern art in 1913 and the International Theatre Exhibition of 1926, the younger generation of writers, producers, designers and actors were ready to make their assault on the New York stage.

The independent art theatre in America did not start with the founding of the Washington Square Players in 1915. As early as 1890, the writer and producer James A. Hearne, an admirer of the realistic drama then emerging in Europe, had established an independent production unit in Boston to mount a three-week run of his own play Margaret Flemming, which had been deemed unsuitable by commercial managements. In 1905 Julius Hopp founded the New York Progressive Stage Society for the presentation of 'radical plays', modelling the organisation on his knowledge of contemporary German theatre. 9 In 1908 the first Chicago Little Theatre was established, and by 1911 was followed by the Boston Toy Theatre, the Detroit Arts and Crafts Theatre, the Wisconsin Players and others. The organisation of audiences keen to see a new, artistic theatre led to the formation of the Drama League of America in 1910. The Princess Players in New
York, directed by Holbrook Blinn, were producing one-act plays at the Princess Theatre one year before the first work by the W.S.P. So it can be seen that the endeavours of those groups which are usually regarded as the pioneers of the art theatre, namely the Neighborhood, the W.S.P., and Provincetown, were in fact part of a more widespread movement that spread across the States. That the presence of those three groups was more widely felt than their precursors' was due largely to their better organisation and their good fortune in attracting the co-operation of several successful and influential workers.

The little theatres offered to the new generation of designers the perfect opportunity to make a complete break with the lavish Realism of the Frohman/Belasco school. The W.S.P., operating at the tiny Bandbox Theatre when it issued its manifesto, spoke with pride of its ability:

... to afford an opportunity for actors, producers, scenic and costume designers to experiment with a stage of extremely simple resources ... it being the idea of the Players that elaborate settings are unnecessary to bring out the essential qualities of a good play.¹⁰

This concentration of means, and belief in the actual injuriousness of gratuitously elaborate sets, was a hallmark of much of the early design work in the little theatres. Jones himself tended at this period towards a simplicity of line (see his The Man Who Married A Dumb Wife) and the style was continued in the art theatres - often of course the prime motivation for this penchant was lack of money rather than spartan tastes. Two little theatres in the mid-West were among the first to establish a notably new theatrical style. At the Chicago Little Theatre (organised by Maurice Browne in 1912) the scenic director C. Raymond Johnson provided a series of elegant and serviceable sets for a varied repertoire. Among his earliest work were the designs for Cloyd Head's Grotesques, a production which attracted a considerable amount of critical attention for its Beardsley-esque economy of line and its inventiveness within the tiny space at the Chicago venue. Johnson's later work generally comprised a stable background with dynamic lighting, a style
well suited to Browne's productions of classical pieces such as Euripides Medea and The Trojan Women. The Medea design consisted of a huge double door, the top of which extended beyond the visible height of the stage area, creating an illusion of greater size. This structure was painted black, against which the highly-coloured costumes of the actors stood out in sharp relief. Johnson spoke of his principles as a designer thus:

I think of progress on the stage, and I see the scene as a simple orderly massing, principally projected by light. Light to me offers the greatest possibilities of all the means on the stage.  

The similarity between these ideas and the ideals of Appia and Craig is clear. Johnson's use of light in Medea was elaborated when the production came to New York in 1915 - the lighting for the acting area used brightness and shadow to follow the mood of the action, while a coloured wash on the cyclorama, revealed when the doors were open, supposedly reflected the mood of Medea. Contemporary accounts suggest that the symbolism of this was difficult to follow but pleasant to watch; however, we should note that Johnson's designs here tallied closely with the ideal of a unity between visual and poetic elements.

At the Detroit Arts and Crafts Theatre, designer Samuel Hume was working in a similarly restricted space with very little money, and yet in the theatre's first season (1913-14) he designed 19 plays with 20 different scenes in all. The means by which this was achieved was Hume's development of a system of permanent but adaptable units, the re-arrangement of which gave variety and scope to different productions while maintaining an overall house style of simplicity and solidity. Using a basic set of four pylons, three stair units, four flats, masking screens and hangings, with the occasional introduction of an arch or window unit, all backed by a plaster wall, Hume's designs are remarkable for their variety, and worked well for the type of drama preferred by the Arts and Crafts Theatre, which often called for a setting suggestive of the architecture of hot countries.
in old times. With his use of the pointilliste system to provide brightness and variety of colour, Hume's work at the Arts and Crafts bears similarities to the early work of Simonson. Among the designers that worked at the Provincetown Playhouse, the Neighborhood Playhouse, the Washington Square Players and later the Theatre Guild are many of the foremost artists in the field. Rather than looking at the separate theatres and their contribution to the field of design I would like to examine the work of a few of the outstanding designers in an attempt to see how their work contributed to the overall progression of the new movement in American theatre in the twenties and thirties and to trace to some extent how they absorbed and modified ideas of stage design that became popular during the period from foreign and native sources. The role of the independent theatres can be more profitably discussed in the context of their contribution to the changes in theatrical management and audience attitudes and the service they provided to the new dramatists emerging in the period.

As has been mentioned above, the single figure who can reasonably lay claim to the title of the doyen of American scene designers, both in his own time and in the eyes of later commentators, is Robert Edmond Jones. His contribution to the growth of theatrical art was crucial, and stemmed largely from his assimilation of new technical and aesthetic developments and a strong practical sense of what would work within a given environment. The wide range of venues for which he designed, from the small and impoverished theatres to the well-equipped and lavish Opera houses, is proof of his adaptability; and yet in all his designs there is a characteristic and unmistakeable style. The hallmark of Jones' work was the translation of his graphic and decorative flair into plastic contructions that could combine an elegant unity of appearance with a disciplined concentration on using visual means to express some poetic quality in the piece. Jones' drawings, which comprise much of the visual record we have of his work, are characterised by a pleasing solidity of blocked areas, a certain simplicity and avoidance of clutter and a restricted but always effective
use of purely decorative elements. A short discussion of a variety of his work should help to establish some of the outstanding features of Jones' design and perhaps point to some of the influences that he had absorbed during his career.

Of Jones' early work I have chosen to discuss two examples, that represent to some extent the poles between which his style moved. The Man Who Married A Dumb Wife, produced by the Stage Society in 1914 at the Wallacks Theatre is characteristic of Jones' tendency towards stylish simplicity and provides a good example of his attempts even in his early work to follow as the major influence on his designs the internal qualities of the play itself, rather than any rigid taste that, in other theatres, tended to obtrude on the work in hand to an overwhelming extent. In the Dumb Wife designs Jones provided an elegant arrangement of oblong structures and drapes, mixing functional requirements with a strong but restrained decorative element. The repeated pattern of stacked oblongs and squares, and the overall colour scheme of black and gold on a light grey ground combined to produce a set that was not only beautiful in itself but which also served as a functional representation of the qualities of the production. The costumes, also designed by Jones, with their elegant sweeping lines and rather severe cut and angles, successfully extended the stylization of the set to embrace the human figures within it. This trend in Jones' work towards simplicity and solidity can be seen in many of his subsequent designs, such as the Hopkins production of Hamlet, The Devil's Garden, Desire Under The Elms, Green Pastures, parts of Beyond and The Great God Brown and Machinal and in some of Jones' collaborative work with Cleon Throckmorton for example The Spook Sonata.

The 1921 production of Macbeth by Arthur Hopkins represents the other major tendency in Jones' work, towards an overtly expressionistic use of theatrical resources. Just as Dumb Wife had been seen as the first airing of new stagecraft on Broadway, so Jones' Macbeth designs are widely regarded as the first fully expressionist work to reach a wide American audience. Although contemporary critics
saw the production as a whole as lacking in unity, there were few commentators who failed to recognise the brilliance and significance of Jones' contribution. Drawing considerably on his observation of foreign expressionist designers Jones made full use of new lighting devices, abandoned all conventional concepts of how to stage Shakespeare and strove to use all the resources at his disposal to symbolise the violent warring elements in the play. The three huge masks that were suspended above the acting area, representing the persistent presence of the supernatural, are a good example of the extent to which Jones had abandoned even stylized realism in his attempt to create a production inspired entirely by a poetic interpretation of his material. The plastic constructions used on stage fulfilled a role far more symbolic than functional - the stairs down which Lady Macbeth appeared during the sleepwalking scene were extremely twisted and distorted and projected her into an area dominated by huge leaning screens shaped like gothic arches, the representational value of which was minimal but which provided a striking reflection of the secrecy and madness demonstrated in the scene. Similarly the use of light stressed its expressive possibilities rather than its simple function as stage illumination - this of course was by no means an innovation on Jones' part but he carried the trend to limits as yet unexplored in American theatre.

The production of Macbeth won for Jones many accolades; the only persistent note of adverse criticism was that the actors failed to match their performances to the excellence of their surroundings. Jones was perhaps rather out of touch with the acting style of the Hopkins-Barrymore team, but the blame lies more with Barrymore for missing a great opportunity than with Jones for being over ambitious. The more spectacular side of Jones' work, epitomised by Macbeth, is reflected in many of his productions for large and small venues alike. In early work such as Til Eulenspiegel for Nijinsky and the Russian Ballet at the Metropolitan Opera House and Caliban At The Yellow Sands one can see his flair for the spectacular and decorative elements that were of
such importance to him; in later work, notably the designs for Hopkins such as *Macbeth*, *Machinal* and *Richard III* and his work for the Experimental Theatre Incorporated, both on his own and in collaboration with Throckmorton, Jones tended to mix his love of dramatic spectacle with the characteristic tendency towards simplicity and economy discussed above. Although Jones was always less explosive a designer than, say, Throckmorton, his devotion to the realisation of design as an expressive art was always fundamental to his work and in his achievement one can perhaps see the most successful marriage of exuberant experimentation and functional economy attained by any contemporary designer. Jones described his attitude to theatre thus: 'Romance and glamour have always seemed to me to be the very foundation of the theatre ... ' and sought to restore to the theatre of his time its "ancient mystery and ancient awe". A more concrete description of his method is furnished by Simonson:

(Jones) searched for unremittingly in every script and sought in every one of his productions ... the elan vital, the rhythmic throb of life ... His constant endeavour was to discover the inner rhythm of a play, and then to embody it in the fluctuating emphasis of lighting, in the costuming of the actors, and in the relation of the spaces they moved in to the total composition of his setting ... Realism remained the besetting sin.

Obviously the extent to which Jones succeeded early in his career in spanning a wide range of styles and venues has made him appear to be the figurehead of the new American stagecraft. Indeed, many of his contemporaries in the field have acknowledged his leadership and the decisive contribution made by his work. This is not to say, however, that the work of other designers merely followed where Jones had led - many, through their extensive work with single important venues, companies and productions, achieved as much as Jones as regards popularising the new types of design and making the concept of the art theatre accessible to a large, paying audience. Foremost among Jones' contemporaries in this respect, and equal to him in the volume and variety of his work, is Lee Simonson. His career as a set designer began with productions for the Washington Square Players, was
interrupted by the War and subsequent visits to Germany, and continued in 1919 with the Theatre Guild, of which he was a permanent member of the board of directors. Simonson's work as a whole is more elaborate and expansive than Jones': he dealt at times with the grandiose (Roar China!) and the decoratively exotic (Marco Millions). His prime consideration in his work was the creation of an atmosphere, to achieve which he could adapt any number of styles from a very Stern-like set for Goat Song to his designs for his own production of Man And The Masses which were based closely on his memory of the Fehling/Strohbach production he had seen in Berlin. In this respect he was more flexible than Jones, yet his work lacks in some ways the pleasing sense of overall style and conceptual unity that stamped all of Jones' designs.

Simonson came to the stage as a painter, and his early work for the W.S.P. was strong on colour but, partly no doubt through economic necessity, tended to make minimal use of the third dimension: indeed, his first design for W.S.P., Andreyev's Love Of One's Neighbour in 1915, used only two pieces of three-dimensional scenery. H.K. Moderwell, writing in Theatre Arts in 1917, described Simonson's work for W.S.P. as being characterised by 'a highly personal grotesquerie of design'.\(^{17}\) In the same issue Simonson himself defined his attitude towards designing thus:

> The importance of scenery is the importance of a background. Without its appropriate background nothing can be wholly sensed or completely experienced ... Perhaps because I am a decorator by instinct, nothing exists for me independently of its setting.\(^{18}\)

The change that had occurred in Simonson's work and attitude after the War was due largely to his exposure to the work of German designers, and his awareness that there was emerging a type of drama that offered a new scope to him as a designer. In 1917 he had bewailed the absence of any drama 'vigorou...
It seemed to me the greatest piece of stagecraft I had ever seen and gave me a fresh insight into how profoundly interpretative and how imaginative a producer can become, how much he can heighten the impact and the significance of a play by what one might call his orchestration of human form. We have cried here in America for the simplification of staging, for the suppression of scenery, for some methods of producing which would give the human being, the actor, a new importance. If we still miss it, it is because when we have attempted to suppress scenery, we have not had a plastic stage to take its place.

Fully aware now of the expressive importance of the plastic set, Simonson returned to the Theatre Guild and began to produce a style of setting that, while striving to embrace the fluidity and imagination of the expressionist style, never lost contact with the dictates of the type of play he was designing for, nor the type of audience to which it would be shown. By June 1924 Simonson spoke of his conception of scenic art thus:

Scenic art, which is the creation of plastic forms and spaces that are an integral part of the acting of any play and project its meaning, approximating to the notions of Appia expressed in L'Oeuvre D'Art Vivant (1921) and his work with Dalcroze.

Interestingly, Simonson's artistry as a designer found its fullest expression in his work on plays that themselves bore stylistic similarities to the type of work that had inspired him in Germany. Of his work for the Guild, the designs that stand out as being the most original and stylish were those he created for the several expressionist plays undertaken by the company. In these instances, Simonson seemed to feel able to give free rein to his inventiveness and flair, whereas in other pieces, for example much of his work for O'Neill, notably Marco Millions and Dynamo, his imagination seemed to be secondary to his fulfilment of the functional or stylistic dictates of the text. The sets Simonson designed for From Morn To Midnight in 1922, although of extreme simplicity, demonstrated his ability to pare down to essential elements his conception of the scene and to present those elements in a way that would render them striking and extraordinary despite their simplic-
ity. His 1924 production of *Man and the Masses*, although based closely on the lines of the Berlin production, showed clearly the way in which Simonson could adapt the extreme experimentalism of his German influence to provide a picture more in tune with the tastes of the Guild audiences while still presenting them with something that would expand their appreciation of new techniques. The *Masses* sets employed the large, steep step constructions devised by Strohbach, but Simonson decreased the overall stage size, using only a small rear space upon which to project the shadows and shapes that had been so vast in the Berlin production. His groupings were altogether closer and neater than the vast crowds used by Fehling to create a less visually extreme presentation. Simonson's *Man and the Masses* was not a popular success largely because, as director, he had failed to develop a suitable acting style - employing Guild actors unused to the German Expressionist acting style, Simonson had not attempted to modify the way the actors played along the same lines that he had modified the visual side of the piece.\(^{22}\) Despite this flaw (and Simonson was by no means the only director to adopt a foreign style without due consideration of the problems of transplanting it into a different environment) *Man and the Masses* is worth our regard as a determined effort by a successful American designer to create in his homeland a piece that had been of such wide influence in the development of Expressionist theatre.

Compared to the sets for *From Morn To Midnight* and *Man and the Masses*, and other designs for expressionistic pieces such as *Goat Song* (1926) and *Miracle at Verdun* (1931), there is much of Simonson's work that seems rather pedestrian. His designs for Andreyev's *He Who Gets Slapped* (1922), although to some extent innovative in the use of split-level staging to dispense with the need for scene changes, tended towards an unobtrusive and utilitarian realism that failed to match the vitality of the play. Similarly his designs for O'Neill plays, although admirable insofar as they met the sometimes seemingly impossible dictates of the playwright's stage directions, seem pale and lacking in style compared
with Jones's realisations of equally difficult problems in his work for O'Neill. The two main sets for Dynamo, for instance, simply presented the major features of the scenes as laid out on the printed page: the skeleton houses for the first half of the play were too flimsy and simply functional to lend anything to the vicious feuding going on within them; the interior of the hydro-electric power-plant in the second half was too realistic, and did not meet with Reuben's conception of the plant as a temple and the dynamo as a primitive fetish. Compared with Jones's realisation of the house in Desire Under The Elms or his felicitous mixture of realistic and fantastic elements in The Great God Brown, Simonson's achievement with O'Neill's drama is uninspired.

Primarily, Simonson was a craftsman of the theatre; lacking to some extent the vitality of Jones in his design work, he created in his work with the Guild a largely successful marriage of the best of the foreign influences and ideas with his own strong awareness of what an American audience wanted to see in its theatres. He was not to any great extent an innovator, but his role in popularising the new stagecraft and in bringing about the great increase in theatrical styles and devices available to American producers was crucial. As a company that always tried to balance deliberate experimentation with the presentation of the best in popular, high quality professional theatre, the Guild was the perfect environment for Simonson, in which he could exercise his talents as an artist and practitioner of his own ideas and those of the other influential figures in the theatre.

Indeed, the Guild attracted many other artists whose achievements in furthering the bounds of scenic design have been considerable. Jo Mielziner, who had worked as an apprentice with Jones, came to the Guild in 1923 and designed for them a string of sets mixing his acute eye for detail with a talent for organising stage space and a sense of the emotive effect of visual presentation. Most of Mielziner's best-known work at the Guild was with realistic material, but the degree to which new ideas of the essential ex-
pressive qualities of stage scenery had permeated the consciousness of the American theatre can be gauged from his tendency to supplement a basically realistic set with an element of strangeness and glamour perfectly suited to the types of plays he designed for. Just as Simonson seemed to produce his best work when dealing with a certain type of play, Mielziner responded most creatively to poetic drama, a style that became increasingly popular in the thirties with the work of Maxwell Anderson, for whom Mielziner designed many sets. Typical of Mielziner's best work was his set for Anderson's Winterset (1935). Originally conceived by the author as taking place in front of an unrelievedly grim cityscape in Brooklyn, the set as constructed by Mielziner included a break in the back wall through which a vast span of the Brooklyn Bridge was visible, stretching fore and aft beyond the sight of the audience. It was Mielziner's conception that this sight should suggest an element of light and hope that he recognised in the play, and indeed in Anderson's revision of the text for publication in a collected edition of his work the opening stage direction stresses the inclusion of the bridge as the dominant feature of the setting. Later work with Anderson showed Mielziner's imaginative approach even more clearly: his designs for Anderson's fantasy High Tor (1937) comprised a highly stylised representation of a mountain peak, with silhouette trees and blocked steps, and curious elements of stark Realism such as the giant hoist shovel that hangs over the scene at points throughout the play. This bizarre mixture was perfectly in tune with the dream-like quality of High Tor, and shows Mielziner's versatility at its best.

Mielziner was, by the mid thirties, one of the busiest designers on Broadway, and it must be said that there is a large percentage of his work that now appears mundane and uninspired. However, like Simonson, his effective introduction of a more creative approach to scene design marks Mielziner as an important contributor to the field. Indeed, some attention to his work is useful not only insofar as it yields evidence of the influence of the ideas and designs already mentioned, but also because his career, so long
and so productive, offers an example of the norm of stage design on the professional Broadway stage from the twenties through to the fifties.

Cleon Throckmorton, who has been mentioned above in connection with his collaboration with Jones, was of all the American designers the one who showed the strongest expressionist influence. In his work for Provincetown and E.T.I., both with and without Jones, Throckmorton shows a persistent interest in creating a setting that directly embodies a dominant quality in any given scene. It was presumably this tendency to explore the possibilities of distortion and blatant symbolism that attracted Jones and made their collaboration so fruitful. Their co-operation on the sets for The Spook Sonata and The Hairy Ape produced a highly successful form of expressionist setting, in which Jones's penchant for clarity and elegance was well matched by Throckmorton's delight in the bizarre and mysterious. Of Throckmorton's solo work, there is much in which this ability to create a sense of eerieness and unease lent enormous power to his designs, for instance his realisation of the strange tower in Susan Glaspell's The Verge (Provincetown 1921), the collapsible bridge for Em Jo Basshe's Adam Solitaire (Provincetown 1925), and the shrinking interiors and ghostly streets for O'Neill's All God's Chillun Got Wings (E.T.I. 1924). Yet perhaps the designs with which Throckmorton made the most impact, and certainly his most influential, were those he did for Provincetown's 1920 production of O'Neill's pioneering expressionist play The Emperor Jones.

O'Neill himself was evidently much influenced by what he knew of German expressionist drama, especially the structural methods of Georg Kaiser, as well as being an avowed admirer of Strindberg. In The Emperor Jones he created a play that demanded a manner of presentation quite different from the harsh earthiness of his earlier work. Throckmorton's sets provided the perfect blend of simplicity and strangeness to enable the play to accumulate pace and tension in performance. Making full use of the plaster cyclorama that O'Neill had insisted was built in to the new Provincetown Theatre when it moved up to new premises in Macdougal Street in
1918. Throckmorton's realisation of the jungle scenes that make up the bulk of the play was an exercise in chiaroscuro suggestiveness. Much of the play was done in silhouette, using the darkness of the forest and the presence of the spirits summoned up by Jones's frenzied imagination to add to the sense of magic and unreality. In scene 7, for instance, when Jones experiences the atavistic vision of the Witch Doctor and the Crocodile God, Throckmorton opened the back drop to reveal a brightly lit cyclorama with a crude silhouette at its base suggestive of waves. Against this ground the dancing Witch Doctor, whose dress was similar to the by-now nearly-naked Jones's, appeared as if framed or projected onto a screen, while Jones himself grovelled in fear downstage, lit by a weak spot from the right wing. By this and similar devices Throckmorton could point the contrast between the reality of the forest (suggested by hanging cloths and irregularly-shaped pillars) and the surreality of Jones's visions, while using the physical changes undergone by Jones and the deepening darkness of the forest to express what must have been a disturbing sense of confusion and insanity.

Another designer who used this technique of deliberately breaking up the stage picture to provide continuity and speed in performance was Woodman Thompson. Like Throckmorton, Thompson tended throughout his career towards a deliberately avant-garde manner. His first major Broadway success was the 1924 production of Kaufman and Connelly's Beggar On Horseback; adapted from Paul Apel's play Hans Sonnenstößer's Höllenfahrt, their treatment was basically a slick, fast comedy that used expressionistic dream devices that were, even as early as 1924, coming to be popular on Broadway. For this production Thompson created a variety of sets that caught the mood of light-hearted satire, employing elements that are almost a parody of the German expressionist style, such as the Stock Exchange scene dominated by two huge dollar signs, and the weird costumes which included a full military band in bridal regalia, and several women in ankle-length veils. The previous year Thompson had been involved in the production of another piece of American Expressionism,
this time with a more serious intent, namely the première by the Equity Players of John Howard Lawson's *Roger Bloomer* at the East 48th Street Theatre. Lawson's play was an attempt to translate the style and content of a certain type of expressionist drama into an American idiom; his models for *Roger Bloomer* seem primarily to have been the lyrical, ego-centred dramas of Sorge and Hasenclever. Like those models, *Roger Bloomer* veers between grotesque Realism and extreme parody, basing its format entirely on the mood and perceptions of the central character, a typical figure of the frustrated son of a thick-skinned bourgeois family who embarks on an odyssey of discovery through a seemingly mad world. Lawson specified in a note to the published edition of *Roger Bloomer* that 'elaboration or expensiveness would hurt the play', and indeed the practical limitations of working in so small a venue and trying to show a broad social and geographical sweep necessitated a very simplified staging. Thompson's solution to the problem was effective, and in many ways similar to the staging methods used by agitprop companies in the thirties. He divided the stage into three separate areas picked out by tightly focussed spotlights, and in each of these areas a primitive suggestion of any of the given locations could be set up, using free-standing flats. For the first act, which takes place in the Bloomer's hometown of Excelsior, Iowa, the three areas represented at stage right the family sitting room, at stage left Roger's bedroom, and in the centre an area where Roger appeared alone either in the street or the garden. At some points the whole stage area was used together, for instance for the row of offices in Act II, the various scenes in Eugene's club, and the New York City scenes, for which Thompson created a crude backdrop of leaning skyscrapers. Many of the interior scenes were created with two-dimensional paintings on hardboard flats; none of the scenery was permanent.

Unlike Mielziner and Throckmorton, Thompson's career was not marked by a full-scale acceptance into commercial theatre. Our interest in his work rests largely on early productions like *Roger Bloomer* and *Beggar On Horseback*, both highly influential shows which established certain
vogues in the design world. Of the vast number of professional designers working in the twenties and thirties, there were many who made occasional forays into expressionistic forms of staging inspired by figures such as Jones, Throckmorton and Thompson, but whose work as a whole, unlike that of Mielziner, shows very little absorption of the potentials of experimental design other than as a distinct style for a certain type of production. Designers such as Mordecai Gorelik and Donald Oenslanger both made occasional use of expressionist devices - Oenslanger in his early work for the Neighborhood such as *Pinwheel*, Gorelik in work for the Guild such as *King Hunger* and *Processional* - but in the large part of their work they tended towards a type of Realism uninformed by the principles espoused by Jones and Mielziner. Similarly, designers of large-scale musical shows such as Albert Johnson adopted to some extent a surface reminiscent of the work of expressionist designers, but used such elements in a decorative way only. At the other end of the spectrum there is a large number of designers who worked consistently with the little theatres but who, like Thompson, failed to carry their success and originality there into commercial theatre. Many of these, such as Aline Bernstein, designer at the Neighborhood, or Sointu Syrjala, who started his career with the review by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union *Pins And Needles*, created some remarkable and original work in the little theatres and even enjoyed some success in the professional sphere, but, unlike the designers discussed at more length above, did not demonstrate a consistent attention to the new ideas of stagecraft, the spread of which is here under examination.

It is arguable that more was achieved, in the way of bringing into the American theatre a credible parallel to European developments, in the design field than in any other. The achievements of playwrights in the period, although including much that could reasonably be claimed as native Expressionism, on the whole steered away from any consistent exploration of new methods once they had cut their teeth on them. The work of O'Neill serves as a paradigm for the progress of the expressionist influence in America, and
his development as a writer reflects more than any other the way in which the German influence provided a starting point for the exploration of serious themes in American life. It would be unfair to say that without Expressionism O'Neill would not have achieved mature status as a dramatist, for his early work (notably the short plays of the sea) indicate that he was already a more serious and original playwright than most of his contemporaries; however, it is apparent that the opening-up of expressive possibilities offered by the example of Expressionism allowed O'Neill to extend his writing into areas that had hitherto remained unexplored in the American theatre. The Emperor Jones, the first real manifestation of the style in O'Neill's work, is so wholeheartedly expressionist both in its theme of stripping away surfaces to reveal the essential Mensch, and in its form of short, visionary scenes and impassioned monologues, that there is a suggestion that O'Neill was deliberately imitating a style rather than evolving it from the demands of his material. From the visual and written records that exist of the first production of the play it seems that the chief impact on the audience would have been non-verbal; the most striking feature of the play is the cumulative sense of primitivism and magic conveyed through the series of visions, with Jones's words providing a kind of background noise of fearful response in time with the accelerating beat of the tom-toms. It is undoubtedly true that O'Neill's development in this non-verbal direction was the result of his involvement with the practical work of the Provincetown Players; his writing before he became an active member of the group had been far more static and word-based, testifying to the fact that he had started writing for the theatre with little practical experience or knowledge. When he first got involved with Provincetown, they were still under the guiding leadership of George Cram Cook, whose taste for American Realism fostered O'Neill's early talent but gave little scope for the directions that were later to be taken towards a more visually experimental style of theatre. The move to the new theatre in 1918 at 133 Macdougal Street and the opening there of The Emperor
Jones, marked the beginning of the trend towards Expressionism that was to be a hallmark of the Provincetown Players' later work, and which was to prompt Cook's departure from the company in 1922. Up until the production of The Emperor Jones there had been nothing nearly as experimental produced by the group, with the exception of the plays of Alfred Kreymborg such as Lima Beans and Vote The New Moon; of O'Neill's early work, only Fog contained elements of the symbolism and spiritual mystery that were to come to the forefront later. Productions of Glaspell's The Verge, Louise Bryant's The Game, Maxwell Bodenheim's The Gentle Furniture Shop, Edna St Vincent Millay's Aria Da Capo and Cloyd Head's Grotesques all had elements of dream or fantasy or distortion that suggested an interest in new methods of staging and dramaturgy, but there was little here that could be called thoroughly expressionist, and all of these examples ran counter to the general trend of stark Realism. With the production of The Emperor Jones, which opened on 3rd November 1920, the disparate elements of a vague expressionist influence came into sharp focus. It was the first play to be seen in New York written by an American writer and produced by an American company that displayed obvious Expressionism in writing, design and acting. Followed in 1922 by The Hairy Ape, in which the similarities to Kaiser and Toller are even more obvious. The Emperor Jones marked the beginning of a collaboration of talents that was to produce some of the most significant expressionist work of the American stage. In the next four seasons produced by Provincetown, under various different permutations of managements and at some different venues, there appeared not only the expressionist plays of O'Neill but also work by Strindberg, Hasenclever and Em Jo Basshe.

The career of the Provincetown Players has been well documented in the histories of the American art theatre, and there is no need to record the different phases and managements that they went through. What is important is the persistent collaboration that occurred between the various branches of the theatrical art in their work. One is faced with a dilemma in trying to establish whether O'Neill's
writing inspired the designers he worked with or whether their ideas enabled him to experiment with his dramaturgy; from a study of his pre-Jones work it seems that he needed the catalyst of visual ideas to free his writing from the Realism that limited the scope of his drama, but it would be wrong to say that he had no conception of the possibilities of the stage in his own right, as the conception of a play such as *All God's Chillun Got Wings* (1924) proves. O'Neill, Kenneth Macgowan and Robert Edmond Jones took over the direction of the group in 1923, opening the new season under the banner 'Experimental Theatre Incorporated' with *The Spook Sonata*; the triumvirate went on to produce four more plays all with basically expressionist treatments: *Fashion* by Anna Cora Mowatt, Molière's *Georges Dandin*, a version of *The Ancient Mariner* arranged by O'Neill, and finally *All God's Chillun Got Wings*. This was the greatest concentration of a deliberately expressionist production style to be given by the group; future seasons included more in the way of comedy and realistic dramas. By the mid twenties O'Neill's career was taking off independently of the Group - *The Great God Brown* at the Greenwich Village Theatre in January 1926, *Marco Millions* and *Strange Interlude* at the Theatre Guild in 1928 and *Dynamo* there the following year, *Lazarus Laughed* in Pasadena in 1928 - and he was forging his own characteristic style that was moving away from overt Expressionism towards a more personal use of psychological symbolism that was to have its finest expression in the later plays, particularly in the posthumously-published *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. As O'Neill grew in stature as a playwright, his reliance on the experimental and perhaps slightly 'tricksy' sets that had been integral to his work from *The Emperor Jones* to *The Great God Brown* became less, but what remained was a constant awareness of the effectiveness of the expressive stage that became more and more refined in his mature work. The integration of all elements, verbal and visual, into an expressive whole in *Long Day's Journey Into Night* completes a process that had been initiated in the early expressionist works, of finding a way of presenting on stage the truths behind the
everyday. The different ways in which O'Neill set about solving this problem reflect not only a maturing in his own writing but also a process of sophistication that was reflected on the whole American theatrical scene. In this sense, O'Neill's early work was truly pioneering, as it saw the evolution of a theatrical idiom that was available for later writers such as Williams and Miller to build on. Of all the writers who produced work during the twenties that bore the expressionist stamp, O'Neill was the only one who extended the experimentalism that had originally inspired the style into his own later work; other dramatists such as Rice, Glaspell and Lawson who had, to varying extents, responded to the influence, dropped any obvious interest in structural and conceptual experiment very shortly after writing their recognisably expressionistic works.

O'Neill was fortunate in having more or less at his disposal the talents of some of the most innovative designers of the period, and in being in a position with the Provincetown Players of deciding on the policy that would be pursued. By the mid twenties he was recognised as an internationally successful writer, and this prestige left him free to pursue his own lights in a way not always available to other writers. By the time he was producing plays like *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931) and *Days Without End* (1934) for the Guild, his status in the American theatre was inviolable. Yet it seems doubtful whether he would have attained this pre-eminence without the extraordinary circumstances that prevailed at the time of his involvement with Provincetown. Attention was most definitely attracted to the expressionist plays of the twenties because of their novel appearance and unorthodox structure; it is inevitable that the kudos should ultimately be given to the author, as the American theatre was at that time eagerly seeking for literary credibility, which O'Neill, with his apparent knowledge of the latest European developments, seemed to lend it. But without the input into those productions of Throckmorton and Jones it seems unlikely that they would have garnered the same interest, nor would it have been easy for O'Neill to find another company willing to give serious consideration to
his ideas. Other productions of his work around the same time as *The Emperor Jones* suggest that O'Neill was well on his way to becoming a success as a realist writer with plays like the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Beyond The Horizon* (1920). It was courageous of him to move away from such a fertile field; native Realism had, potentially, a huge market. The dive into experimentation that marked his work from 1920 onwards shows how strong the interest was in new forms of staging, and one has to respect O'Neill and his collaborators for their persistent endeavours in presenting to the New York public examples of what could be achieved outside the boundaries of realistic writing and staging. The assessment of the importance of the influence of designers such as Throckmorton and Jones on the development of O'Neill's drama is difficult, but it is sufficient to say that the freedom their imagination allowed him was crucial to the absorption into his work of the full range of visual expressiveness that had been absent from earlier plays.

The relationship between the literary and the visual is elsewhere even more difficult to pin down. In the example of the New Playwrights Theatre the design innovations were again central both to the dramatists' development and to the way in which the public and critics perceived the works, yet out of all of the productions of this group none emerged that really seems to have evolved a style that progressed far beyond the deliberate imitation of a German or Russian original. In the work of some of the other art theatres, design played a less prominent role than it did at Provincetown; the work of Simonson at the Guild, for instance, does not show an overall policy of experimentation in the way that Jones and Throckmorton's Provincetown work does. However readily the commercial theatre accepted some of the ideas of the new generation of designers, there still exists in the development of the American theatre from the twenties onwards a paradoxical resistance to the attitudes that inspired the best of the American expressionist designers. Of greater importance than design in the minds of many of the new wave of producers such as Phillip Moeller and Maurice Browne was the establishment of an American literary tradition independent of any admitted continental influence. It is significant that the Guild only started to produce
O'Neill when he had become a recognised American success: up to that point, when he was experimenting with European forms, he was ignored by that management. The attempt to eradicate traces of the European influence, claiming for the American theatre a native cultural tradition, became common in the mid twenties. Lawson himself, who at the time of writing Roger Bloomer was obviously much inspired by German Expressionism, declared in the preface to his next play Processional:

> I have endeavoured to create a method which shall express the American scene in native idiom, a method as far removed from the older realism as from the facile mood of Expressionism. It is apparent that this new technique is essentially vaudevillesque in character ... My concern is with the theatre. But the blood and bones of a living stage must be the blood and bones of the actuality stirring around us.²⁶

Ironically, considering Lawson's proclaimed abandonment of the influence of Expressionism, Processional was immediately regarded as an expressionist play and garnered much criticism, favourable and otherwise, from that opinion. This curious mixture of American and European elements ran at the Guild for 95 performances, but was the last of Lawson's plays to be accepted there, and indeed the Guild staged only one more play that, with the exception of O'Neill's work for them, could reasonably be described as fully expressionist in its conception and execution, Werfel's Goat Song in 1926. By this time the need to import foreign material was being supplanted by the growth of a body of native work that suited the tastes of artists and audiences far more than the earlier European pieces. Apart from O'Neill and the writers of the New Playwrights Theatre, there were no dramatists who employed in any serious and consistent way the techniques embodied in the work of Toller, Werfel, Hasenclever or Kaiser, all of whom had plays performed in New York in the twenties.

Thus the situation arose where the American theatre had absorbed the visual style of a foreign movement without making any widespread or long-lasting response to the literary ideas that had inspired it. The writers who came to prominence on Broadway in the late twenties such as Sidney
Howard, Marc Connelly, Philip Barry and Paul Green created a style of drama that was for the most part realistic, dealing with social, moral and political problems embodied by well-defined characters. Even Elmer Rice, who, in *The Adding Machine*, provided perhaps the best American expressionist play, turned away from the style towards Naturalism in *Street Scene*, and to successful, well-constructed observation pieces such as *See Naples And Die*. By the early-to-mid thirties the avant-garde of American drama was far removed from overt dalliance with Expressionism: writers like Sidney Kingsley and Clifford Odets, both of whom worked for the Group Theatre, were introducing a brand of reformist, realist theatre with strong left-wing sympathies. To this new trend several of the younger designers such as Gorelik, Throckmorton, Oenslanger and Aronson were attracted; Gorelik certainly produced his best work for the Group, for example the 1933 production of Kingsley's *Men In White*.

This paradox of the speedy, widespread absorption of expressionist staging techniques and the apparent rejection by all but a small handful of writers of the expressionist style of drama is perhaps explained by a consideration of the nature of show business in New York during the twenties and thirties. Having never had any tradition of an art theatre, or any appreciable amount of fringe-type work before, the writers, producers and designers of the period were keen to imitate any models available in an attempt to fill the gap that was so obvious in their theatres. Thus, when the Little Theatre movement, which had been gaining ground in Europe since the nineties, entered the consciousness of the American artists they latched on to many of the elements that characterised it, including its general opposition to the tastes of commercial producers. However, whereas in Europe the movement had been created by a genuine need to give a platform to a type of drama unacceptable in the big theatres, in America the need was more for any form of movement within the theatre regardless of its relationship to other traditions. The inspiring work of pioneers such as Antoine, or, more importantly, the theatrical innovations of Reinhardt, Jessner, Urban, Fehling and Stanislavsky,
seemed to many inseparable from the notion of an artistic theatre. The fact that the commercial playhouses in the first fifteen years of the century in New York were producing nothing of artistic interest was due not to the fact that they resisted new work, but due simply to the absence of any serious approach to the art of the theatre therein. The growth of organisations like the Guild and Provincetown, from small independent groups to large professional bodies, is an indication of how great the need was for a serious theatre in America. Once the impetus had been given to the associates of these organisations by the European models they had begun by aspiring towards, many of the talented artists within them developed to the extent that they could create a dramatic style more immediately related to the needs of their audience, rather than trying to educate theatrogoers into an appreciation of a theatrical style foreign to them. The growth of leftist drama in the thirties has more in common with the revolution in German theatre some twenty years previously, in that it was a direct response to a situation that affected artist and audience alike: the adoption of expressionistic devices in the early twenties was certainly an important stepping-stone for the American theatre and was to a great extent responsible for the establishment of a respectable theatrical tradition, but remained for the most part a cloak to cover the first faltering steps of the new movement. When, in the thirties, the Federal Theatre Project created the first radical fringe group in America, there was genuine opposition from the authorities just as there had been in Germany towards many of the expressionists; by this time the Guild, as the only flourishing survivor of the little theatre movement, was a cornerstone of the theatrical establishment.

By the late thirties the new styles and trends in stage design introduced by Jones, Simonson, Thompson, Throckmorton and their colleagues had been absorbed into the repertoire of all the major American theatres. The extremes of expressionistic and experimental design were reserved mostly for extravagant musical shows, as serious drama moved towards a type of poetised Realism on the one hand (Williams,
Miller) and bare simplicity on the other (Odets, Sinclair). However, the most important contribution made by the practitioners of the new stagecraft in the twenties and thirties was, paradoxically, not purely in the design field. Edmond Gagey, in his excellent history of American drama from the Great War to the late forties, Revolution In American Drama, considered the formation of the American theatre as owing to three great revolutionary drives: firstly, the change in manners and morals after the War; secondly, the artistic revolution; and thirdly the leftist revolution. The artistic revolution, that had affected the theatre most profoundly in the field of stage design, did more than any of the other two to make apparent to writers, designers, producers and audiences alike the potential of the theatre as a vehicle for a serious expression of a genuine artistic talent.

The greatest single dramatic talent to emerge from the twenties, Eugene O'Neill, conceived all of his post-1923 plays with a close attention to the expressive possibilities of their settings, and owed much of his early success with plays such as The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape to the alacrity with which his vision was made concrete by his designers. In this manner the way was paved for the emergence of the American playwright, whatever his tastes, and the fact that so few of the generation of dramatists used the expressionist techniques that had given them a foothold is indicative of a healthy response by those writers to the theatre that had been created for them.

In considering the response to Expressionism on both sides of the Atlantic, one is struck by the fact that American artists and audiences seem to have made a far more positive reaction to the style than their British counterparts. The emergence of O'Neill alone as a major writer marks the American theatre out as more receptive to the new ideas of writing and staging than the British, and when one considers the large number of 'crossovers' between the small theatres and the mainstream by both designers and producers who, at one time or another, had embraced the expressionist influence, one sees that a very different part was played in the States by Expressionism. It has been suggested else-
where that the American theatre was in more immediate need of an example of serious modern theatre, having no immediate tradition of its own to draw on; as a result of this lack of tradition there was less conservative opposition to the adoption of new styles. Yet it has been seen in this chapter that the absorption of Expressionism in the States was very selective. It was certainly used as a springboard to important developments in the attitudes towards theatre held in this century, and its example as a radical and politically committed theatrical style gave the impetus to the left-wing theatre of the thirties; many of the innovations in staging techniques derived from German work were taken up directly by American designers and, over the years, evolved into something approaching a native tradition of stage design. Yet of other basic traits of Expressionism little remained after the initial vogue had passed. The concentration on the relationship of the individual to his society became a central concern of American drama, but in hardly any instances was this universal subject approached through any of the channels that were essential to Expressionism. When Williams came onto the scene in the forties, the New York theatre saw an echo of imaginative self-examination through dream, memory and subjective interpretation such as had been seen in the twenties (in The Glass Menagerie) but the inspiration behind Williams's work was so far removed from the ideas that had surfaced in Expressionism as to make any comparison very superficial. Isolated examples of a full exploration of the style (some of Provincetown's work, the career of the New Playwrights Theatre, The Adding Machine and importations of European work) give the impression that the States might have provided a fertile ground for the reception of the style, yet in general terms America proved not to be wholly receptive to the basic tenants that were behind the development of the form in Germany. The emergence of the left wing theatre as a direct response to social and political conditions was independent from the expressionist influence; it is true that some of the styles adopted by the Federal Theatre Project, the Workers' Laboratory Theatre, Theatre Collective and Labor Stage, such as loosely-
constructed revue-type shows and 'Living Newspapers' were in part derived from the influence of expressionist dramaturgy and the style of certain post-expressionist designers such as Piscator, but on the whole these groups were drawing on styles and traditions that were not really expressionist. Yet it is probably true that without the example of the expressionists before them, many of these groups, and many of the other developments in American theatre towards a serious native drama, would have been without a basis upon which to build. Once the American theatre started to produce work that was, essentially, a drama of protest, the brief popularity that was enjoyed by Expressionism had passed, but it could not be forgotten that the model for all forms of modern theatrical protest and social satire was the German expressionist theatre. Thus, while the influence was time and again denied, it was persistent in that any serious theatrical work would have to define itself in terms of where it stood in relationship to that style, and would take material from the discoveries and innovations of its artists.

The history of American scene design shows with pleasing clarity the extent to which theatre is a collaborative art, and stresses the danger of focussing on the literary qualities as being of supreme importance. Without the necessity of quoting Craig or any of his disciples in the American theatre of the period, it can be affirmed that the criticism of the art of the theatre needs to embrace a variety of factors if it is to rise above mere aesthetic doodling. Without access to such a variety of material as was available for the chapters on the British theatre, I can only present this aspect of the American theatre as an example of how the influence worked in broad terms. In the smaller provincial theatres there was some response to the style, as can be seen from the work of some of the early little theatres, and in the universities and interest in Expressionism led to the production of a number of the German works throughout the period; however, material on these productions and groups is largely unavailable in this country, and what information has been gathered is largely from secondary sources. Hope-
fully the illustrations will give some indication of the breadth of response to Expressionism: it could be argued that the development of stage design in the small American art theatres, groups such as Provincetown, the Neighborhood, the (early) Guild and its predecessor the Washington Square Players, was the most exciting reaction to the influence of German Expressionism in the period; and, although it did not to any great extent go hand-in-hand with a similarly positive response in dramatic writing, its permeation of American theatre in the period and beyond is one of the most satisfying examples of the wide repercussions of the expressionists' innovations.
The condition of the theatre depends on the society for which it is produced: society must be changed if we want a living theatre. The theatre should suggest those changes.

Rupert Doone, 1935

I: INTRODUCTION

The ten years preceding the outbreak of the Second World War were characterised in the experimental theatre by two often conflicting directions: firstly, there was the desire of producers and playwrights to utilise the new theatrical techniques that had been observed in the German expressionist theatre and in the work of producers such as Piscator, Copeau and Meyerhold; and secondly, there was the obvious need for the avant-garde theatre to respond to a new set of social and political factors which had emerged in the aftermath of the Great War and the restive period of the twenties, revealing huge rifts in a society that had appeared to be troubled by only relatively minor and localised problems. The association between the political left and the theatre's artistic left has always been problematical, and it was during this period that many of the points of contact, as well as the major discrepancies, came to the fore. In this chapter I will examine the work of two groups who seem to embody many of the contradictions inherent in the attempt to fuse artistic and political leftist ideologies, namely the New Playwrights Theatre and the London-based Group Theatre. Both of these organisations present examples of the hybrid ideals and practices that existed in much of the theatre of the period; both were basically the preserve of educated 'intellectual' artists whose involvement with the causes they espoused was through sympathy rather than experience; neither, despite their many proclamations to the contrary, could in any real sense be called 'Workers' Theatres', but furnish in a sense a bridge between the artistic experiments directly inspired by Expressionism on both sides of the Atlantic and the new evaluations of theatre as a means of expressing the immediate demands of society. In this respect it seems to me that these two groups have much in common
with the German expressionist writers, producers and artists, especially in the way that they attempted to graft on to some fairly basic subject matter a superstructure of artistic theory and formal experimentation which attempted, with varying success, to make more forceful the expression of the subject matter.

In a sense, then, these two groups can be seen as a prelude to the workers' theatre that was emergent on both sides of the Atlantic (Unity, the New York Group, the Federal Theatre Project) and as an extension of the influence of Expressionism into areas not simply concerned with stylistic experimentation but using the style also to probe areas of concern that have much in common with the subjects dealt with by Toller and Kaiser in the immediate post-War period. It will be seen that there existed in the minds of the artists involved in these groups no clear distinction between the two wings of development, artistic and political, and it is characteristic of a period where there was so much confusion regarding the status of the theatre, the individual working within it and his relationship to other workers and nations, that many of the productions to be discussed here can be regarded as having misfired on terms both artistic and political. Sorting out the contrasts and discrepancies between intentions and results will form the bulk of this discussion. The work of those groups who can, perhaps, be seen as the ultimate heirs of the expressionist influence, those whose intentions were most directly political and who combined a committed left-wing stance with a style that had the directness and fluidity of a cabaret sketch, will be mentioned here only incidentally, for although it is with Unity and the Group that the first fruits of the expressionists' political stance were seen in Britain and the States, neither, except where indicated, can be seen to any great extent to demonstrate a specific interest in Expressionism except where it tallied with their political purpose.20

Both the New Playwrights Theatre, which flourished in New York from 1927 to 1929, and the Group Theatre, the first and most important phase of whose operations was completed
between 1932 and 1938, were regarded by their members and critics alike as being at the forefront of theatrical experiment in their respective countries. In retrospect their importance is mainly as groundbreakers, challenging expectations and pacing the way for more successful applications of their ideas by later groups. As the most obvious examples of groups which attempted to yoke the aesthetics of Expressionism to popular politics, they can also be seen to have proved finally that the application of a foreign idiom to a set of social and artistic circumstances essentially different to those that were its original setting could meet only with partial success. Significantly, very little that was achieved by the writers working in these groups has worn particularly well in ensuing decades; nor have any of these writers progressed from their involvement with these groups to achieve any great measure of success in the theatre; however, as precursors of a definitely left-wing theatre, and as accurate indicators of the intellectual movement within the theatre of the pre-War decade, their importance is secured.

Before embarking on a discussion of the work of the New Playwrights Theatre and the Group Theatre and the critical response to their achievement, it will be useful to look at the social conditions that prevailed during the period, and to try and identify the major influences on the theory and practice of these groups of artists. Both in America and Britain, the 1920s had been years of reasonable prosperity and a corresponding lack of widespread interest in politics. Despite isolated incidents such as the General Strike in England in 1926, and Attorney-General Palmer's campaign against 'Reds' in America in the early twenties, the general political climate had been apathetic, seemingly at an impasse. On both sides of the Atlantic there prevailed a desire to return to 'normality' after the huge disruption of the War, and the administration of Coolidge and then Hoover in the U.S.A., and the Baldwin and Macdonald governments in Britain, were characterised by a lack of strong leadership and a sense of diminished contact between government and electorate. Another common feature that contributed to the political
disillusionment of the period was the widespread belief that government was in the hands of racketeers. In America the prohibition of alcohol by the 18th Amendment in 1920 had certainly ushered in a period of officially-condoned crime, in which a bootlegger of the stature of Al Capone could have as much political power in Chicago as the corruptible mayor. In Britain there had been much speculation regarding the methods used by party leaders to procure support (especially the notorious 'sale of honours' by LLoyd George at the 1922 General Election), as well as a growing disillusionment among the working-class electorate regarding the efficacy and honesty of the Labour party; in the General Election of 1924 the Labour government had been defeated largely because of a suspicion fostered by the tabloid press that Macdonald's party had dealings with the Comintern, and towards the end of the decade the moderation and inefficacy of the second Labour government (leading to the coalition National Government of 1931) lost them much of their grassroots credibility as the party of socialist reform.

By the late twenties, the results of the apathy and disillusionment of the period were manifesting themselves. Both Britain and America had occupied themselves during these years of reasonable prosperity and political detachment with a succession of crazes and faddish intellectual pursuits (Jazz, Occult, mass spectator sports) that, among many other things, served to widen the generation gap that had been created by the wholesale massacres of the First World War. The social tensions that these pursuits sought to relieve were, on both sides of the Atlantic, throwing up extremes of political conviction among small but influential minorities (for example, the Ku Klux Klan in America, and the increasingly popular New Party headed by Sir Oswald Mosley in Britain) and creating a widespread polarisation of opinion over issues of race, immigration and Communism. One result of this situation, of importance to the subject of experimental theatre, was the feeling of alienation amongst the young, post-War generation of artists who felt a revulsion not only towards the values and figureheads of the society that
had led them into the Great War, but also towards the motiveless class-conscious mass mentality of their own contemporaries. Additional influences on the intellectual orientation of the artists and thinkers of the period came from the popularisation throughout the West of the ideas of Freud, the research of Havelock Ellis, the literary experiments of Joyce, Huxley, T.S. Eliot and Woolf, all of whom to some extent expressed a rejection of the pre-War tradition of humanism, and the increasing concern with the theories of relativity which, certainly in artistic terms, negated the possibility of security or absolute belief in any statement or series of observations. The theory of behaviourism propounded by John B. Watson, that man is basically a machine responding to external stimuli, held particular relevance to an age of fast change and long-term uncertainty. The combined effect of these strange and dissonant elements in the social scene of the twenties was probably of equal influence to the example of left-wing politics in shaping the attitudes that prevailed in the minds of the writers and producers I wish to study here.

II: THE NEW PLAYWRIGHTS THEATRE

In the introduction to an edition of his Three Plays published in 1934, John Dos Passos wrote the following review of the American theatre in the late twenties:

There's the Theatre Guild, the creation of the rich German-Jewish intellectual, an extraordinarily well-run organisation that specialises in warmed-over European productions, an interesting phenomenon because it expresses so exactly the mentality of the liberal educated wing of medium business and its wives and families ... then there is Eva Le Gallienne's Civic Repertory Theatre, attracting a similar but less wealthy public ... These two are the only American theatres that have any tradition or permanent organisation, the only two theatres that really exist in the German or Russian sense of the word Theatre.3

It was with this attitude that the group of writers and producers who comprised the New Playwrights Theatre joined forces to attempt the creation of a 'Theatre of the Left'. The five directors of the organisation had all had prior involvement with the avant-garde theatre of the twenties: John DosPassos, having experienced at first hand the European
experiments of Cocteau, Piscator and Meyerhold after the War, attempted his own versions of the type of drama he had recently seen, and had his first plays *The Garbage Man* (a.k.a. *The Moon Is A Gong*) produced at Harvard in 1925, and subsequently in New York; John Howard Lawson, who, like Dos Passos, had joined the ambulance corps in the War and remained in Europe afterwards, had enjoyed some success on the New York stage prior to the formation of the N.P.T. with his plays *Roger Bloomer* and *Processional*, both prime examples of American Expressionism; Mike Gold, the most politically committed member of the group, had worked for numerous left wing papers (including his own *New Masses*) during the twenties as as theatre critic, as well as being involved in the Workers' Laboratory Theatre; Francis Edwards Faragoh had, since his graduation in the early twenties, worked as a drama critic and as translator for the Guild (who produced his version of Molnar's *The Glass Slipper* in 1926); Em Jo Basshe had been involved with Provincetown since 1919 as a stagehand - and they produced his expressionistic drama *Adam Solitaire* in Macdougal Street in 1925, with designs by Throckmorton. The association of these five men during the years 1926 to 1929 was based almost entirely on a desire to create a platform for their own ideas of a new type of drama - one can see from the statements made by all five after the disintegration of the group, as well as the differences in their individual creations, that this was about as far as their purpose was unified. All shared a vague commitment to left-wing, or at least anti-capitalist, politics, and joined together in 1926 to proclaim the N.P.T.:

... a clearing house for ideas and a focus for social protest. It is the only theatre that can fulfill such a function. Most American artists consider themselves too important and aloof to be interested in the great currents of history that carry them along like straws. We must keep up this double work of innovation in method and ideas. There must be one playhouse which maintains a contact with those social forces which are the driving power of our times.4

This rather histrionic pronouncement (typical of the utterances of the N.P.T.'s major mouthpiece, John Lawson) introduces the crucial element of their work that was to be their most
interesting feature as well as their downfall, certainly in the opinion of contemporary critical circles: the 'double work of innovation in method and ideas' encapsulates the conflicting ambitions of the N.P.T. (as well as the Group) and was the main reason why they failed in their intention to attract a working-class audience to their theatre. Their innovations in method were based largely on experiments with the ideas behind Expressionism and Constructivism, and although the purpose was to find a form suitable to the expression of a new interpretation of social forces, it often transpired that the basic thinking behind the plays was overshadowed by the self-conscious use of experimental dramatic form and stage setting.

The repertoire of the New Playwrights Theatre consisted of some ten plays, performed in the period between Spring 1927 and Spring 1929, when Dos Passos and Lawson resigned from the theatre some six months before the collapse of the Stock Market. Of these plays, two were by Lawson, two by Basshe, two by Gold, one each by Dos Passos and Faragoh, one by Paul Sifton, and one by Upton Sinclair. Some of these plays have never been published, and others are unavailable in this country; of those available I will discuss in detail two which represent fairly well the type of work characteristic of the group, namely Lawson's Loudspeaker, their first production, and Dos Passos's Airways Inc., their last.

Lawson was the most prolific, the most voluble and the most criticised playwright of the New Playwrights Theatre. As spokesman for the group in most of its skirmishes with the press, he set himself up as its most conspicuous target, and his reputation as a writer of 'experimental' plays went everywhere before him. His first reasonably successful play, Roger Bloomer, had been performed by the Equity Players in March 1923, and its style (with similarities to Der Bettler), as well as the sparse, adaptable settings by Woodman Thompson, put Roger Bloomer in the forefront of the new American drama alongside The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape and The Adding Machine. Lawson's next performed work was the successful Processional, produced by the Guild at the Garrick Theatre in January 1925. The expressionistic manner was well in evidence, but Lawson himself, like O'Neill,
disclaimed any direct influence from Expressionism. In the preface to the published edition of the play, Lawson described his 'vaudevillesque' method as:

... a development, a moulding to my own uses, of the rich vitality of the two-a-day and the musical extravaganza ... The legitimate theatre seems without warmth or richness of method. It is only in the fields of vaudeville and revue that a native craftsmanship exists.  

This concern with a return to vaudeville methods and the colourful, gutsy vitality of the 'American Scene' is of great importance to a consideration of the work of the N.P.T.. Much was spoken of the 'new showmanship', a form which would express basic truths about modern life in terms that could be appreciated by all levels of society, and yet, as will be seen in the discussion of Loudspeaker, Lawson's desire to use formal innovation as a means for removing barriers resulted in a confusion of aims.

Processional, like much of the later N.P.T. repertoire, deals with events leading to and resulting from industrial action. Using a large cast and a great deal of jazz music, Lawson attempted in the play to communicate some of the humour, sympathy and inspiration that he found in his conception of the labour movement. In his next major play, Loudspeaker, his aim is satirical rather than celebratory. Premiered on 7th March 1927, Loudspeaker again uses a large cast and a lot of music; another feature that marked it out as 'experimental' in the critics' eyes was the set, designed by Mordecai Gorelik according to Lawson's specifications. Whereas the set for Processional (also by Gorelik) had consisted of a series of brightly-painted canvas backdrops with a minimum of three-dimensional items, the Loudspeaker set was a full-blown 'constructivist' set, with multiple levels, open framework and other, slightly whimsical, additions:

A constructed stage, assembled in a simple arrangement of a number of platforms and stairs, with articles of furniture suggesting the usage of various sections of the scene. The whole setting is permanent throughout. There are two practical slides, one right front beside the high platform, with landing place near the centre of stage, and one left shooting off stage.  

The extent to which this type of setting was necessary for a play which is essentially a domestic farce is questionable. Lawson hoped that it would allow 'a maximum of movement and farce action', but it is perhaps the freedom afforded to the writer by the set's flexibility that detracts from the play's purpose. Robert Benchley described the play as 'a combination of commercial musical comedy plot and Russian ga-ga scenery', and while this is an over-flippant dismissal of the piece, there is certainly no avoiding the suspicion that Lawson used the scenic method largely in order to imitate the work of Meyerhold.

The action of **Loudspeaker** is almost entirely farcical (in marked contrast to **Roger Bloomer** and **Processional**) and revolves around the upheavals in the family of Harry U. Collins, an all-American capitalist who is running for governor. There is a good deal of time taken up with comic swipes at contemporary fads, for instance Mrs Collins's obsession with the occult and her 'astral lover', cited as correspondent in a possible divorce case; the daughter's shallow interest in Freudian psychoanalysis that prompts her to exclaim to a shy suitor 'You haven't even got the nerve to ruin me!'; and the ins and outs of alcoholism during prohibition; but the main subject of the farce is the gap between the versions of stories dished up to a sentimental, sensation-hungry public, and the facts behind the stories. The press and politicians are two main progenitors of this 'bunk', and the events in the Collins household are used as illustrations of the extent to which fiction and truth are mutually influential. Although there is a great deal of the plot that is very funny and interesting, it is all secondary to the main event of the play when Collins, half drunk and goaded by the escalating madness that surrounds him, attempts to explain in a live radio broadcast the truth behind the accusations made against him, but instead lets slip his real feelings, for the only time in the play:

The newspapers are blah, the government is blah, you folks are fed on pap that wouldn't deceive an infant in diapers - I'm here to give it to you straight, are you listening, you gang out there? ... to hear me slobber on about honesty and good government! Suppose they tell you I'm a man of sinful life... well, most of you are... So am I! ... I'm too good to be governor, I get more satisfaction out of telling the American public to go to hell...
The result of this outburst, of course, is that the electorate is so titillated by 'straight talk' that Collins gains a landslide victory, and embarks on a career in which his honesty is just another political gimmick, another form of bunk.

The use of farce to express this quality of public life as Lawson saw it is effective, because it enables the writer to build up a large amount of detail which is necessary to show the process by which truth becomes distorted and grotesque. Also, by adopting a comic attitude, Lawson is able to expose the general stupidity without attacking the individual, with whom he maintains some sympathy, if only because Collins and his family and friends are victims just as much as the public they try to dupe. The play is by no means without moments of great insight into character and motivation, and the dissection of the Collins' marriage, for all its comic trappings, is subtle and poignant. Two examples will illustrate this very substantial strength in the play: the first from Act I, in which Collins is being grilled by the scandalmongering journalist.

JOHNNIE: Who paid for that sign up there across the park on Fifty-Ninth street, 'Harry U. Collins is a Good Man'?  
COLLINS: I gave that to my wife for a birthday present.  
JOHNNIE: Does she believe that 'Harry U. Collins is a Good Man'?  
COLLINS: I figured it would be reassuring for her to see it from the windows of the house.  

And from Act III, after Collins has temporarily left his wife and daughter:

MRS COLLINS: My poor child!  
CLARE: Well, mother, crying won't help it.  
MRS COLLINS: But to think you're an orphan now, practically, and I'm a prostituted widow!  
CLARE: You mean prostrated, mother.  
MRS COLLINS: Oh, what's the difference?  
CLARE: A prostitute is a poor woman who walks around looking for love.  
MRS COLLINS: (bursting into fresh tears) That's it!  

The mixture of the hard-boiled, debunking style and the extravagant, banal language of sentiment is typical of Lawson's comic dialogue, and is the feature that carries off
some of the more tedious plot manoeuvres. This use of exaggerated language as a deliberate method of exposing the foibles of the characters is similar to the work of Wilde and Orton, two other great 'debunkers', but here the similarity ends: where Wilde and Orton focussed their attack through well-constructed plots and the effective use of dramatic irony, and used their linguistic brilliance to some definite end, Lawson fails to carry through his attempts at satire because his plot is cumbersome and over-stuffed, and his effects, both verbal and visual, although enjoyable in themselves seem gratuitous. The ending of the play, when an Armenian Mystic, who has made numerous appearances throughout, sets up a séance in which the characters' futures are revealed, fails to wrap up the huge, diverse plot in any satisfactory was: where one is anticipating a neat, ironic dénouement (however improbable), Lawson gives only a broadening of the scope, a mad shifting of scene that shows the general mood of disillusionment but dilutes the source of the satire, leaving a general sense of confusion. In their excellent work on the New Playwrights, Knox and Stahl suggest that Loudspeaker's 'incoherence is organic to the playwright's purpose. It is purely imitative form', but this hardly tallies with the deliberate adoption of a farce method throughout which should impose a certain discipline on the structure.

Needless to say, critical reactions to Loudspeaker were confused, finding merit in some isolated aspects of the play and praising the efforts of writer and theatre, or attacking it on points usually related to its formal trappings and the publicity surrounding it rather than to any literary or dramatic qualities. The great barrage of theoretical attack and counter attack that surrounded all the N.P.T.'s productions tended always to avoid any objective appraisal of the plays as good or bad theatre, but harped endlessly about whether or not the organisation was 'proletarian', 'Bolshevik', or whatever, whether the plays were 'expressionist', 'vaudevillesque' and so on, whether the writers were simply dilettantes and whether they were taking unfair advantage of their generous patron Mr Otto Kahn.
The blame for this critical misdirection lies half with the critics, who could not approach anything without fussing over its relation to any 'isms' that might have crept over from the Continent, and who still tended to view much off-Broadway theatre with a sneering contempt; and half with the New Playwrights, whose frequent announcements of their status as an important theatre of the left begged comparison between their stated intentions and their achievements. Seeing themselves as prophets with foreknowledge of the imminent collapse of the precarious balance of the twenties, the New Playwrights regarded their theatre's role as crucial to the spread of 'socially constructive ideas'. Dos Passos said in 1931:

By socially constructive ideas I don't mean little bedtime readings from Marx and Engels; I mean the new myth that's got to be created to replace the imperialist prosperity myth if the new machinery of American life is to be gotten under social control. If the theatre isn't a transformer for the deep high-tension currents of history, then it's deader than cockfighting.

The idea that theatre could, in this way, build a new social/intellectual framework within the shell of the old, was of great importance to the New Playwrights' concept of a working theatre, that would not only revolutionize theatrical standards but would also create and educate a new intellectually aware audience at a time when such education seemed vital. Here their admiration for the Russian theatre, and especially Meyerhold, is evident - the idea of creating a new theatrical language to serve the revolution was understandably appealing. But however united they may have been in their dreams of what theatre could achieve, their methods differed greatly. Lawson, the most theatrically-conscious of the group and the only writer whose plays transcend the intellectually-motivated posturing that spoils much of the rest of the repertoire, pursued these aims by trying to create pure, popular entertainment that, while making its basic appeal through vaudeville devices of music, colour, big groups of people, noise and spectacle, would incorporate in its content the element of hard political and social comment that 'normal' entertainment would avoid.

*Loudapeaker* is a good example of this theory in action.
and shows up in many ways the failure of Lawson and the other writers to create the form of entertainment they required. While using many of the vaudeville elements to good effect, the play retains the overall structure of a commercial farce. Lawson failed to liberate his narrative method at the same time as he abandoned surface Realism, and thus he blunts the potential satire of his play and mars the audience's whole-hearted enjoyment. Compared to a play such as Odets's Waiting For Lefty, or an entertainment in the style of Joan Littlewood's Oh! What A Lovely War!, Loudspeaker seems like an unfortunate compromise, showing Lawson with one foot still firmly in the realistic conventions he seemed to have rejected (and to which he returned with his far more successful work for the Theatre Union, Marching Song, and with his ultimate departure to Hollywood to work as a scriptwriter for MGM.). Joseph Wood Krutch, in his introduction to the text of Loudspeaker, attempted to praise the play at the expense of its uncomprehending audience:

Bewildered by its reckless extravagance, they suspected some deep intention which they did not find and some of them at least went away resentful because they had not permitted themselves to laugh. Something of the sort is likely to be the case when an essentially serious man permits himself a holiday, but in the present instance the fault lay entirely with the audience, for though Loudspeaker, like every good burlesque, touches upon things which need only to be regarded from a different angle to become tragic, it is, nevertheless, persistent and consistent burlesque.

Commenting on the play's structure, Krutch adds:

... his plot is neither unified nor consistent, but marked instead by the phantasmagorical nightmarish confusion which, ever since Strindberg wrote the Dream Play, has seemed to many 'advanced' writers the best symbol of the elusive meaningfulness of our life ... the farcical element ... is almost of necessity present in all plays which attempt to represent life under the ambiguous aspect in which it presents itself to most of us.

The comparison with Dream Play is inaccurate - the methods differ widely. Lawson fails to free himself of the expectations imposed by conventional drama and his choice of style; no matter how far a defendant like Krutch castigates the audience, the fact remains that Lawson's farce is too deliberately pointed to be frankly enjoyable, and too self-consciously experimental to convey its ideas through the adopted
In Theatre Arts (May 1927) John Mason Brown made a fair judgement of the play's weaknesses:

The very form of the play, with its basic looseness, its helter-skelter methods, seems derivative, employed as a self-conscious symbol of revolt rather than a form created by necessity to hold Mr Lawson's ideas. It is not that the expressionistic scene sequence is not as good as any other dramaturgic idea. Obviously it is the only form for certain plays to take. But its very episodic quality, its very spinelessness taxes the dramatist's ability even more than the regulation three-act play, because, for success, it depends almost exclusively upon his powers of selection. And it is just in his selective sense that Mr Lawson seems to be weakest. 19

Some critics chose to dwell on the good points of the play as well as its faults, as in this appraisal from Jane Dransfield:

I like Loudspeaker because it is a unemotional fling of the intellect, the writing epigrammatic, staccato, nervous, a boisterous extravaganza, the meaningless of the whole comprising its meaning. It reveals Mr Lawson in an entirely new light, that of a detached satirist, employing, as did Molière, the broadest stage buffoonery of burlesque and farce to convey his criticism. In action and plot it is a conglomeration of everything under the sun from our modern stage and from our tabloids, acting itself as a 'loud speaker' which amplifies the jazziness of the times ... In it Mr Lawson turns the laugh, as it were, even upon himself, upon the very theatre 'isms', constructivism, expressionism, and so forth, of which he has hitherto been considered the serious exponent, but which here he uses to the limit of absurdity. 20

Such evaluations were, however, rare, and the concensus of critical opinion weighed heavily against Loudspeaker and the other play of the first N.P.T. season, Earth. Lawson's play certainly fell down on a good many points, but its importance lies not only in its attempt to harness new methods with an outright criticism of Coolidge's America, but also in the part it played in developing a critical approach towards a new type of drama. Although much of the adverse criticism the play received was the result of writers such as Robert Benchley and Alexander Woolcott sharpening their wits on a fairly easy target, it is apparent even from the selected reviews quoted here that the critics, just as much as Lawson and his colleagues, were groping towards a new conception of what the left-wing theatre could attempt and achieve. In many ways the problem was the con-
lict between personal belief and theory, which led to the apparently dilletante attitude of these writers who strove to use intellectual methods to achieve what was supposedly a non-intellectual, popular art.

Although he never stated his intentions as dogmatically as did Lawson, the plays of John Dos Passos are subject to the same confusion of aims and methods. Only one of his three plays was staged by the N.P.T., namely Airways Inc. in 1929, and again the major problems that arose were the result of failing to find a suitable form for the subject matter and a confusion as to what that subject matter really was. Dos Passos resigned from the movement partly because of arguments within the group as to how Airways Inc. should be staged. Without any information about the different sides in this argument, it is possible to speculate that Dos Passos and Lawson (who resigned with him) favoured a production style in the semi-realistic manner of Simonson's staging of Dynamo, while the others were still exploring more purist Constructivism. Dos Passos makes specific descriptions of the set he required:

The stage of the theatre has been stripped bare. There is no curtain. Two small houses have been built across the middle of the stage, small, one-family houses with porches such as you can find in the suburbs of any American city. The house to the left of the audience is finished... The house to the right of the audience is unfinished. There is a scaffolding across it for shingling the roof... Between the houses is a suggestion of empty lots.

The manner of the play is, surprisingly, quite naturalistic, and it needs the accumulation of visual detail to carry the sense of a world around the visible stage area that decisively influences the action - much like Elmer Rice's Street Scene in fact. Airways Inc. is obviously very different from Loudspeaker - it does not share the comic-expressionistic devices; its action and dialogue are, for the most part, accurate transcriptions from New York life; and its plot is evenly structured around a naturalistic observation rather than a satirical exposure. From a purely technical point of view, then, the play is fairly run-of-the-mill. What marks it out and makes it interesting in the context of the rest of the N.P.T.'s work is its attempt to portray a situation, albeit through fairly traditional methods, from a point of view that is radically different from the
ego-centred dramas of Expressionism and the basically conservative standpoint of current naturalistic fare. The whole play is informed by obvious left wing sympathies, and attempts to show its characters not as entirely self-responsible individuals nor as victims of a crazy system, but rather as component parts of a very complex machine.

The main weakness of Airways Inc. lies in Dos Passos' inability to avoid romanticising the situation. Although the mood of the play throughout is thoroughly depressing, the concentration on the strikers and the poor, ineffectual family work against the overall pattern of struggle that seems to have been Dos Passos' main point in writing the play. Set in a suburban development area known as Glenside Gardens, which backs onto the factory lots of the cotton mills, (where a strike has been going on for some months), the play deals with the misfortunes of the Turner family who live in the finished house seen on the stage. The elderly Dad bitterly complains throughout the first act that his children find him a burden; his friend the emigré Professor Raskolny speaks frequently of his disillusionment with the 'shining Socialist dream' of his European youth. Dad's offspring consist of: Claude, a dried-up, conservative office worker; Martha, the sensible, lonely and well-intentioned family drudge, who is in love with the strike-leader Walter Goldberg; Elmer, the successful member of the family who has just broken the altitude record in his aeroplane; and Edison, the youngest, an amoral and fairly undistinguished young suburban man. At the end of Act One Dad commits suicide in the adjacent house; in Act Two, with a strike meeting in full progress behind the houses, Walter is framed and arrested; Elmer, who has been persuaded by some capitalist villains to drop anti-strike leaflets, crashes his plane; the professor is clubbed over the head by a truncheon-happy policeman, and Martha declares her intention of leaving Glenside Gardens to become an active revolutionary. In Act Three Walter is electrocuted, the Professor is half-mad, Elmer is paralysed and dependent on drugs, Edison runs off to the city with two local girls, and Martha faces a
future of constant unhappiness and regret. Against this background of unrelieved misery a group of entrepreneurs attempt to exploit Elmer's success by setting up an organisation called American Airways Incorporated which is supposed to be a sure-fire get-rich-quick transport company that will cash in on the land-boom and stimulate some large-scale investment. The interests of these capitalists, led by one Davis, are threatened by the strike which is destroying confidence in the stock-market boom, and therefore they use Elmer's local fame to attempt to squash Goldberg's strikers.

It was obviously Dos Passos' intention to show the dire results that the conflicting interests of bosses and workers can have on a 'perfectly ordinary' family, and to assess the present in terms of a more easily-understood past (represented by the figures of Dad and the Professor). Yet, although Dos Passos was reaching towards an expression of the general malaise and moral confusion of the period, his use of his characters tends to over-particularise the focus. Thus there develop two conflicting directions in the play that weaken its impact: there is the domestic tragedy of the Turner family, especially the situation concerning Martha, who is in many ways the most sympathetic character; and there is the outward-looking, objective assessment of political and economic factors, 'those social forces which are the driving power of our times'. Both these elements get in each other's way: Martha's misfortunes are occasionally very distressing, especially in the last scene, but Dos Passos never develops her as anything more than a part of the whole, so she, and the rest of the family and even Walter, appear as people without individuality or depth of spirit, contributory elements in a situation rife with gloom. Had Dos Passos made his characters more obviously simple functions of his overall picture, and had avoided concentrating on their individual problems, we might have gathered from the play a more complete idea of his social criticism. Again, as in Loudspeaker, it is the constant pull away from simplicity and directness of purpose, the obsessive avoidance of theatrical conventions, that mars the play. An example
of this split purpose will make the point clearer: here, from the beginning of Act Two, Dos Passos attempts to bring together the domestic and the large-scale viewpoints:

(MARTHA, wearing an apron comes out on porch, puts on her glasses, adjusts radio.)
RADIO: You are now listening to the interdenominational services broadcast by the Federation Of Suburban Churches through WXDZ. The service this morning will be conducted by Reverend Thaddeus D. Barnescue of the Floral Avenue Episcopal Church.
CLAUDE: By golly it's late. They're starting to broadcast the church services. Aren't you hungry for your breakfast? Mart, I wouldn't wait breakfast any longer.
MARTHA: But Elmer said he really would come. You know he loves Sunday breakfast.
CLAUDE: Go ahead your own way. It's no use me trying to talk in this house.
RADIO: Let us pray, O Lord, we members of this great invisible audience gathered together each in our respective homes far from each other in actuality but brought near by the wonders of science as we hope to be brought near in thee to the wonders of the spiritual life.
PROFESSOR: In a million cities they walk to work and back from work, and the machines hum and whine and are silent and all the while the thought grows in them. In the hearts of a million men the thought grows, in the whirring of the machines.

CLAUDE: Look here, Mart ... Since Dad was taken I'm the head of the family, ain't I, cause I'm the oldest?
MARTHA: Well you're certainly the oldest, Claude.
CLAUDE: Now look here ... this damn sheeny Goldberg ...
RADIO: ... making a great united family united in worship, united in service, so that with joyful hearts ...
CLAUDE: It's got to stop.
MARTHA (turns off radio): What's the use of talking? You just won't understand. 23

Dos Passos's intentions in this scene are obvious - he is trying to use the radio to counterpoint not only the racist argument that is brewing but also the whole misery of the situation by the preacher's fatuous jollity. The result, however, is that the radio voice, and also the Professor's interposed speech are only annoying interruptions to the dialogue between Martha and Claude.

Like Lawson, Dos Passos has not abandoned a conventional type of plot (whatever its left-wing shading) but has refused to allow the story to speak for itself. The story of the Turners could be interesting and moving without all the extraneous sidelights and with more concentration on the characterisation and structure. If Dos Passos wanted to give a picture of the society in macrocosm, he should have
looked more closely at the expressionist models of Kaiser or Toller where Realism is abandoned, either in an overall picture of people as victims of monstrous social forces, or in favour of a symbolic use of characters. Dos Passos achieved in his novels (where the size of his canvas was so much larger) the formation of scattered information into an integrated whole, unhampered by the lack of dramatic formal imagination. Exactly the same problems beset his first play The Garbage Man. Although in this play the methods, or at least the surface style, are far closer to Expressionism of the From Morn To Midnight type, the basic core of the play is a very conventional story of a boy and girl who run away together, have problems, separate and reunite, against a big city background. The experimental trappings and the use of poetic language, rather than adding significance to the story, tend rather to plunge it into bathos.

In looking at Loudspeaker and Airways Inc. it becomes apparent that, at the time of the N.P.T., neither Lawson nor Dos Passos had found a satisfactory style or form for their dramatic writing. Their experimentation with various styles and forms was undertaken without the availability of any real substance to fill them. By the time Airways Inc. was performed, the press and the public, and to a large extent the New Playwrights themselves, had lost interest in the venture. When the crash came in 1929, and the Depression began to wreak havoc by 1930, the theatre responded to the social problems in a far more direct way, leaving aside the idea of 'innovation' per se and evolving the sparser, more realistic style that characterised the Group (under Hal Clurman) and the W.P.A. Federal Theatre (under Hallie Flanagan). It would be easy to dismiss the efforts of the N.P.T. as mere intellectual posturing, and although the tangible results of the venture were certainly flawed, it was an important bridge between two real revolutions in American theatre. In the late teens/early twenties, the influence of European Expressionism had heralded a new beginning for American theatre: the movement away from the stodgy, cluttered realism that characterised a fair part of the
serious drama of the pre-War years was undertaken by the new, independent groups and their designers who absorbed European ideas and introduced an important sense of aesthetic integration into stage design. The literary fruits of the period were perhaps of less far-reaching importance: O'Neill obviously emerged out of Provincetown, and a handful of other writers (Lawson among them) had their first successes in this early period, but generally it was a period of turmoil rather than consolidation: the clearing away of the redundant, and the learning of new forms. The rapidity with which many innovations in design were absorbed into the mainstream theatre was remarkable, and by the time the N.P.T. was opened, pioneering designers like Jones and Simonson were working widely in commercial theatre. This development in a sense pulled the rug out from under the feet of the theatrical avant-garde; those who still looked to the more revolutionary style of European and Russian theatre felt that America had not evolved its own equivalent but had simply gained a more* highbrow, middle-class theatre. Ironically, in looking for a theatre that would express the American scene in a direct way, these insurgents looked towards the foreign theatre for example and inspiration; but although they may have learnt something of the intellectual processes that motivated their mentors, they failed to follow the example of evolving new forms to suit their subjects, rather than vice-versa.

Why did this dependence on European examples last so long? We know that many of the dramatists and producers of the later twenties had had first-hand experience of the expressionists, Piscator and Meyerhold after the War, just as their older colleagues had seen the early expressionist productions and the work of Reinhardt before the War. Yet surely by 1927 it was obvious that the true American theatre could evolve only by abandoning the slavish imitation of foreign models, and finding its form and content in the endemic qualities of the American scene and its theatrical tradition - just what Lawson said he was going to do in the preface to Processional. It seems that the explanation of this phenomenon lies again in the comparative lack of
tradition in the American theatre. The partial acceptance of the expressionist manner, described in the previous manner, had exemplified the way in which a style could be adopted without necessarily bringing any real interest in the motivating ideas behind it; the case of Expressionism is one example of how the whole notion of avant-garde was treated in the States in the early years of the century. The New Playwrights felt it was necessary to couch their 'revolution' in avant-garde terms, and it so happened that the most available avant-garde style of the time was the expressionist/constructivist style manifest in their productions. It was also inevitable that so politically-motivated a group should look to Europe for its inspiration, for there flourished truly revolutionary theatres, directly espousing Marxist/Leninist ideals and creating new theatrical forms as their means of expression. Of course, one major difference was that those theatres were superbly technically equipped and massively subsidised, and were working in cultures that accepted their innovations as the continuation of a tradition of revolutionary theatre. The New Playwrights, crippled by financial and technical problems, had no real tradition to found their revolt upon, and the result was that much of their work seems to be a burst of frustrated anger against a situation that allowed their efforts no serious consideration. The earlier twenties had seen huge changes in the American theatre as regards presentation and the critical approach to a production, and yet, although attitudes were certainly relaxing as far as subject matter went, there were still wide gaps between the theatre and the people as far as a social, economic and political appraisal was concerned.

Perhaps the New Playwrights Theatre failed just as much through the unwillingness of the critics and public to listen to such harsh jeremiads as through any failing on their part. It was certainly characteristic of the late twenties that everyone tried to believe that things were going fine, right up till a few months before the crash. In a way the Depression was necessary to create an atmosphere in which criticism of the status quo would be heeded, because it
was more obvious that things were going wrong. Also, with the austerity of the thirties, the interest in European styles of production dropped considerably, and the degree to which German and Russian plays and methods were imported fell throughout the decade, partly because of the antipathy towards the new Hitler and Stalin regimes, but also because a new, more workable native style was emerging that produced not only a change in the way plays were staged but also a large number of consistently successful dramatists, such as Green, Kingsley, Sherwood and Anderson. Mordecai Gorelik, who did much of the design work for the New Playwrights, made an accurate summary of this period of change in which they played such a pivotal role:

The demise of the New Playwrights Theatre brought to a close that era in which the leadership of the workers' theatre lay in the hands of sympathetic intellectuals. From now on the impetus was to come from a new direction. It came originally from the amateur stages of foreign-language workers' groups in the United States. In 1929 there were in existence in this country many hundreds of dramatic clubs attached to foreign-born workers' organizations performing in German, Italian, Yiddish, Finnish, Russian, Ukrainian, Swedish, Lithuanian, Hungarian, Polish, and half a dozen other languages. The social dramas of the Naturalistic theatre were kept alive on their stages at a time when they had begun to be forgotten on Broadway. 24

III: THE GROUP THEATRE

In March 1932 Rupert Doone, a professional ballet dancer who had recently left the Ballets Russes, presented, with the assistance of a number of his colleagues from the Cambridge Festival Theatre where he was then training, a production of Vanburgh's The Provok'd Wife at the Everyman Theatre in Hampstead. This was the first work staged by Doone as an independent producer and marks the beginning of the stormy career of the Group Theatre. Having left the ballet world after the death of Diaghilev, Doone's ambition was to create a theatre in which he could pursue his ideal of a collaboration of the arts of poetry, dance, music and design. During the next six-and-a-half years Doone gathered around him some of the best practitioners of those arts: Auden, Isherwood, MacNeice and Spender wrote for the Group; Doone himself choreographed with dancers from Marie Rambert's company; Benjamin Britten and Herbert Murrill wrote music for him;
Robert Medley and John Piper designed the sets. At least two major new plays were performed each year from 1934 onwards, and the Group attracted much attention in critical circles as the British avant-garde theatre par excellence. Yet in 1938 when the Group disbanded there was a general sense that their usefulness was exhausted and that their formula of a total, poetic theatre was redundant. Reading the new plays that the Group staged in those years one is struck by a sense of inadequacy: the texts themselves seem too bound to the period, too tied up in the Group style, to suggest themselves for revival. Even The Dog Beneath The Skin and The Ascent Of F.6, the most successful of the Group plays, would be beset with difficulties for a producer today, so replete are they with a style that has ceased to be widely used in the modern theatre. In discussing the achievement of the Group Theatre it is necessary to consider the motives behind the evolution of a dramatic style that today seems so idiosyncratic, and, as was the case with the New Playwrights Theatre, to examine the many conflicts between intention and result, between statement and form.

The Group never set out with a coherent policy, and never committed itself to any definite political leaning in the way that the N.P.T. had. Neither Doone nor Medley, who formed the core of the Group, had any definite interest in politics; their sympathies were very much along the individualist/humanist lines that characterised the politics of Bloomsbury (both having been associated for some years with the Strachey/Woolf branch). Medley, in his autobiography Drawn From The Life, records the nature of his own political awareness thus:

One morning in the summer of 1932 after doing the usual shopping in Seymour Street open market I turned into the Home and Colonial Stores on Hampstead Road and found myself waiting behind a middle-aged man buying cracked eggs. I had never noticed anyone buying cracked eggs before, and the incident, though trivial, made a marked impression on me. Neither Das Kapital nor the Statesman And Athenaeum ... had taught me much about political economy ... The incident of the cracked eggs was a straw in the wind - and although we were preoccupied with our own affairs, gradually it came about that the bleak and uncertain realities of the thirties crept up on us, entering our consciousness and then our conscience.
Closer to their heart was the development of a certain type of theatre which would primarily provide a platform for the various aspects of performance and design that interested its members. With the later association with Auden and other writers of well-publicised left-wing sympathies, the Group naturally came to be regarded as a political theatre, but Medley denies any deliberate political stance in the original conception of the company:

In spite of its potential for propaganda, under Rupert's direction the Group Theatre put art first as a way of discovering truth, but it could not have existed without a degree of political and social awareness. For one thing it was impossible to ignore the tragic consequences of the slump - the poverty and the unemployment. The Group Theatre inevitably took on something of the left-wing colouring of its time, but its aims were always to produce plays and performances that were intrinsically interesting and well done.  

It was largely through the choice of material that the Group made any particular political statement, and so it is important to stress at this point the absence of any 'party line' in the minds of the founders of the company.

Even without any up-front political intentions, the Group was, from its outset, a deliberate attempt to break from the conventions of contemporary theatre. There exist a number of manifestoes printed around the time of the early performances which indicate the principal ambitions of the founders. These statements take exception to prevailing conditions in the theatre on five main points - the qualities they sought to achieve were: a unity of production (the communication between actor and audience); a unity of style, in which the actor's body and its surroundings all work towards one end; a relevance of subject matter to the conditions of the period; a dramatic language that would restore poetry as the most effective way of penetrating to the truth of a subject; and unity within a company that trained together and in which all contributors were of equal importance, embracing writers, actors, directors, designers, musicians and stage managers. (A selection of Group Theatre manifestoes can be found in the appendix to this chapter.) Of course, these were by no means new ideas, and the anonymous writer of the manifesto in the July 1934 number of Drama
allows that 'these ideas may sound very novel, except to students of theorists like Craig, Stanislavsky or Copeau'.

A letter by Doone to the Times Literary Supplement in January 1935 attempted to answer the assertion that the Group were 'disciples of the Compagnie des Quinze' (Michel St Denis's group which had played in London since 1932):

It is true that we share (in common with other theatres, such as the Moscow Arts Theatre and the Habima Players) certain basic ideas which have been expounded by theorists like Gordon Craig, Stanislavsky, Copeau and Granville-Barker. We believe, as they do, in the necessity of a permanent company trained together in a common style, and served by their own authors. But the tone and character of our work, so far as it has developed up to the present, is entirely unlike the lyrical mood of the Compagnie des Quinze.

The question of the European influence on the Group Theatre is problematical, and one that will be returned to in the discussion of particular plays below. What must be remembered is the fact that most of the original thinking which conceived the Group came from Doone; the presence of Auden as a publicist and controversialist was an early feature, but most of his pronouncements, such as 'I Want The Theatre To Be', were drafted from discussions with Doone and other Group members. When the Auden/Isherwood collaboration overshadowed everything else produced by the Group, the company became in many ways no more than a vehicle for those authors on which to try out their ideas of dramatic writing, and as a result much of the original spirit of the Group was clouded. Their last work with the Group, On The Frontier of 1938, although it gave Medley the chance to design maybe his best sets, was really not suited to the original ideal of a total, collaborative theatre, being altogether too verbose and laboured, lacking much scope for the mixed elements that had succeeded before, and playing too much with Auden and Isherwood's private view of European power politics to the detriment of any overall direction.

The split between the Doone and Auden camps was inherent from the outset, and indeed it was the friction between the two men that did more than any other factor to create the Group's best work. Both Doone and Auden were headstrong, clashing from their first meeting over matters both personal
and professional. Their backgrounds were totally different, and their European experiences (which had done so much to shape the tastes of the two men) were of differing natures. While Auden had spent many years in Berlin with Isherwood and Spender, Doone and Medley had lived mostly in the artistic demi-monde of Paris. Paris, in the twenties, was established as the cultural centre of the West, and artists from all over Europe and America gravitated towards it. Doone had originally gone there as a ballet student but stayed on, when not working, in the company of his one-time lover Cocteau, and later for many years with Medley. His experience there was obviously crucial in forming his idea of a synthesis of the arts, for he would have come into contact with leading examples of all the best in modern art, in an intellectual atmosphere that encouraged collaboration and mutual interest - the example of Cocteau, who fused poetry, painting and theatre in his work, being of obvious importance. The experience of Auden and Isherwood in Berlin was very different. They were among the first English artists to spend much time in the city, which, in the post-War decade, was decidedly unchic to the predominantly francophile taste of the Bloomsbury set. Their first visit there in 1929 was motivated more by a desire to explore the homosexual underworld of the city than by any artistic interest, and it was this element that prompted most of their return visits. The milieu of the bars and boarding houses of Berlin made a great impression on the pair, and it is likely that the German influence traced by many in their plays stems more from the atmosphere of the city during the period than from any great absorption of contemporary German theatre.

Thus, as was the case with the New Playwrights Theatre, much of the inspiration for the Group's literary and production style came from European sources. The use of these influences to create a theatre that would reflect the mood of contemporary England naturally caused many conflicts both within the Group and with the critics. Starting their work at a time when the English theatrical avant-garde was carried largely by the work of the Gate Theatre Studio and the Cambridge Festival Theatre, the Group was really the
first theatre to attempt to combine the example of the art theatre with a high social/political content. In simplistic terms, it was Doone who, with his Cambridge-Paris background, contributed mainly to the method of work and production, and Auden and Isherwood who provided the subject matter. Just as the N.P.T. had encountered problems by trying to express something about America in a foreign theatrical language, so the Group had difficulties in finding the balance between the sensitive theatrical awareness of the production team and the caustic, satirical, but mainly literary approach of the writers. Auden, Isherwood, Spender and MacNeice were far less interested in the theatre as a unified means of creative expression than in the experiment of putting the ideas they had developed in their literary work into the form of plays. Thus there arose many conflicts of interest: the commitment of the authors to the Group was to some extent superficial, whereas to Doone and his team the development of the theatre was the end and not the means. Medley summed up the problem thus:

Essentially the fatal flaw in the Auden-Isherwood collaboration with the Group Theatre lay in the failure of the authors to take the theatre seriously enough. The ethos underpinning Rupert’s conception of the Group Theatre was of creative co-operation between artists, performers and technicians - a co-operation based firmly upon an absolute respect for each other’s contributions. I recognize that for Wystan and Christopher it was a matter of priorities - they had other fish to fry, and their feelings towards the theatre were deeply ambiguous, at times destructively so.  

Whatever the disparities between the intentions of various members of the Group Theatre may have been, one can profitably discuss their work only in terms of their achievements. Doone needed the impetus of the writers’ work to activate his theatrical ideas just as much as they needed the platform he provided. The success of the non-original plays produced by the Group relied heavily on the contributions made by Medley and Britten (for instance Timon Of Athens, December 1935) - for although Doone exercised his considerable flair as a director and producer, he needed, by his own admission, a new style of drama upon which to flex his theatrical muscles. Of the original work presented by the Group, it will
be worth looking in a little detail at three, namely The Dance Of Death, The Dog Beneath The Skin and The Trial Of A Judge, for they show not only the problems that arose for the Group in marrying their technical experimentation with the desire to create a form of contemporary commentary, but also the complex way in which these pieces and other Group work reflect something of the continuing effect of the expressionist influence. Much has been written on the extent to which Auden and Isherwood and the others were influenced by the German theatre, and it seems unlikely that any of them had as much knowledge of Expressionism as did some of their American contemporaries, but it will be seen that the style that they adopted, and the sentiments expressed in their statements of intent, bear close similarities to ideas that had first become current in the UK through the awareness of Expressionism in the post-War period, which had done so much to define attitudes both artistic and critical towards the theatre in this period.

The Dance Of Death, written in Spring and Summer of 1933, was the direct result of a discussion between Auden, Doone and Medley the previous year. Doone had approached Auden to provide a piece for the company, then just beginning its first training period, partly because of the friendship between Auden and Medley, but largely because of his status as a prominent figure in the literary avant-garde, and his well-publicised distaste for all that was conventional and conservative. Both Doone and Auden recognised the need for a theatre that would not only challenge the middle-class niceties of the West End but also provide a means for them to express their own idiosyncratic artistic and personal views. Sharing an interest in the forms of medieval morality and mystery plays, as well as Doone's more immediate desire to incorporate dance and choral elements into the drama, they decided on a play based on the medieval idea of the dance of death. The play that Auden produced contained all the elements that Doone had prescribed, as well as providing important contemporary comment in its use of satire and charade. The constituent parts of The Dance Of Death were just what the Group needed, and both the subject matter and the publicity value of Auden's name seemed
to provide the perfect means of gaining immediate critical attention.

The structure of the play is loose, apparently using as many different forms as possible, united by the overall subject of a directionless, fragmenting society. There are five basic elements in *The Dance Of Death*: the Announcer, who acts as a commentator on the action as well as decisively influencing it by adopting various guises; the Chorus, who represent the abstract idea of society and are shown in a variety of symbolic situations; the Audience (or, rather, stooges therein) who voice the responses of the 'common man' to the way they are depicted on stage; the Dancer, who represents the forces that influence the people and is primarily identified with Death, amorally wreaking destruction on society; and a few hastily-sketched characters such as the theatre manager and the journalists Box and Cox, who are used to throw into relief some of the subtleties of the people's behaviour. In addition to these participants is the Orchestra, who, in keeping with the tone of the play, create various problems and provide occasional comments on the action. Auden throws all these elements together ingeniously by stressing the important assumed fiction that what is going on in the theatre is the spontaneous evolution of the interplay of all these forces combined. Many times in the course of the play the flow of the action is broken by some supposedly accidental event, or by the influence of the 'audience', or by the players suddenly stepping out of their role as chorus or whatever and making a complaint or comment on the way the show is going. In this way Auden as it were steps into the shadows as the overall controller and builds up the idea that the play is a real event, not just a rehearsed performance that cannot reach across the footlights. Using the device of making the audience imagine that they are witnessing an improvisation or a rehearsal of some sort, Auden comes close to achieving his ideal of a kind of collective theatrical experience:

Drama began as the cult of the whole community. Ideally there would be spectators, in practice every member of the audience should feel like an understudy.
The techniques used to stage the play emphasised this breakdown of the barriers between the audience and stage. The set for *The Dance Of Death* was minimal, consisting of a light-coloured backdrop and a set of steps, on which the Announcer sat, 'like an umpire at a tennis tournament'. Otherwise the acting area was bare, and when the production reached the Westminster Theatre in February 1934, Doone made full use of the apron stage further to blur the stage-auditorium boundaries. The reviewer in *Drama*, writing of the production of *The Dance Of Death* at the first Group Theatre season at the Westminster, praised these qualities of presentation:

> Now in having the good fortune to live at a time when poets write for the theatre, notice that it is the words, however outwardly commonplace, which set the actor alight. Self-conscious and over-clever production must now recede into the background, for it is no longer required to carry the play - as I have seen it sometimes successfully and legitimately do in *Gas* and other good plays in the Expressionistic mode.

Commenting on the use of the apron stage the writer added that it brought the 'audience for a time into a sense of delicious and almost alarming participation'. Even the unfavourable reviews granted that the staging of the play was effective, but needless to say there were many who took exception to the subject matter presented in the play. As usual, those who disliked Auden's satire and objected to the 'message' as they perceived it, tended to dismiss the whole venture as an impertinent and pretentious cobbling-together of various foreign notions by the rarefied persons of an intellectual clique. Ivor Brown in the *Observer* was particularly disapproving, and lashed out in superior, sarcastic tones:

> It is, I know, very difficult to think of anything new, and it is always embarrassing to be trumpeted as the Last Word. None the less, the Group Theatre might surely have arrived with some less tattered baggage than a creed of masks instead of faces, of acrobatics instead of acting, and of the 'Liquidation' of a decadent bourgeoisie by the Up-and-Coming Saints in Scarlet. All these ideas have been knocking about in the German and Muscovite theatre for years, and have been discredited because they are either dreary or just nonsensical ... Mr Auden does not seem to be watching life at all. He is just taking the reach-me-down Aunt Sallies of undergraduate Communism and knocking together a charade which would stir the titters of a Left Wing smoking concert.
It is typical of the critical response to the Auden and Isherwood plays produced by the Group that form and content were regarded separately. The reviewers, recognising a theatrical style of undoubted freshness, nevertheless were cautious at best of the tendentious political substance of much of the drama. Although this can be partially explained by the general conservatism of the major reviewing papers and magazines, it is important to recognise that this persistent criticism shows up an inherent fault in the conception of these plays. In the manifestoes of the Group it was declared that theatrical style and dramatic content were organically connected, the one generating the other, but in the case of many of the Group's productions in which the plays had obviously experimental form it is possible to see that the writers, while attempting to provide something that satisfied the requirements of the theatre, were nevertheless grafting their own concepts of what they wanted the plays to represent in a way that jars with the attempted theatricality of the production. The Dance Of Death, with its overt charade qualities, avoided this pitfall to a great extent, but even so the self-conscious and heavy-handed didacticism of much of the text sit at odds with the light touch displayed in the overall conception of the piece. In a less successful piece such as On The Frontier the authors' somewhat esoteric conception of European power-politics, combined with an original but somewhat clumsy idea for staging, made for top-heavy, lifeless theatre.

Auden's abandonment of narrative structure, his light-hearted conception of the play, and above all the central importance of the Dancer (Doone), whose performance lifted the play clear of some of the less felicitous moments, made The Dance Of Death an entertaining and generally successful theatrical event, judging by contemporary accounts. Reading it now it is perhaps easy to see that it consists to a certain extent of didacticism and hackneyed satirical criticisms dressed up in new theatrical drag, but this is to ignore the probability that the extraordinary combination of talents, reined by Doone's considerable abilities as a choreographer and director, would have given the whole piece a pace and
sparkle that it lacks on the page. There is also much humour in The Dance Of Death, mostly in the various parody scenes featuring the Chorus; for instance the pastiche of jazz songs, advertising slogans and 'back-to-the-land' sub-William Morris rural chic in the Chorus's speech about half way through the play, after the Dancer's epileptic fit:

Are you living in the city
Where the traffic won't stop;
Haggard and anxious
For life's a flop
   Why not stop?
Are you tired of parties
All that clever talk?
Oh boy, have you ever
Seen a sparrowhawk?
   Learn to walk ...
Revolutionary worker
I get what you mean
But what you're needing
's a revolution within
   So let's begin.

How happy are we
In our country colony
We play games
We call each other by our christian names
Sitting by streams
We have sweet dreams
You can take it as true
That Voltaire knew
We cultivate our gardens when we're feeling blue ...
Gosh it's all right
In our country colony. 37

The mood of these more light-hearted sections is very much like the type of topical, satirical revue still familiar today. Auden had seen plenty of cabaret in Berlin and was also certainly involved in undergraduate lampoons at Oxford; here the tone is used effectively to combine humorous satire with a more serious dramatic intent. By showing such jolly frivolity in the context of a dance of death, Auden makes a simple but effective point about his view of the jazz age. When he loses his lightness of touch the effectiveness of his satire falters, for example in the first part of the Alma Mater section when the combination of pidgin English (or direct translation from German) and Auden's rather portentous poetry hinder the flow of the piece. The Dance Of
Death is essentially a mixed-media piece, and it is when the stress on the word becomes obvious that it loses much of its theatricality. It seems at times that Auden, as an inexperienced theatre artist, was unwilling to rely on the abilities of silent gesture and dance to convey the appropriate tone, and used more overtly commentary pieces to underline what had already been expressed through other means. This does not often happen in the play, but when it does (for instance in the final duet between the Announcer and Chorus concerning the last will of the Dancer) one gets a feeling that Auden is simply firing off some superfluous fireworks. For the most part the play is a successful combination of literary and theatrical qualities. Auden's text is most effective when it provides a verse or song to heighten the action performed, for instance the opening chorus on the beach, the 'Country Colony' section, and the last part of the Alma Mater section with the chorus of thieves and prostitutes, just before the Dancer dies. As a whole, the production of The Dance Of Death seems to have been one of the Group's most successful, for in it the elements of stylistic unity and topical comment are well fused. The text is essentially the libretto with a few stage directions - combined with Doone's dancing, Murrill's music, Medley's costumes (with masks by Henry Moore) and the ensemble playing of the company, it must have been an impressive show.

With Auden's next theatrical venture, the collaboration with Isherwood on The Dog Beneath The Skin, the problems become more intrusive and the later work seems, on the whole, a more ambitious and interesting, but less successful, piece. In simple terms the play comprises two main elements: there is the narrative part concerning the search for the missing heir who turns out to be disguised as a dog; and there are the choric verses that come between the scenes and provide a sort of commentary on the action and point towards its wider interpretation. The story scenes, full of amusing parts (one could see them as sketches) fail to form any really coherent whole, losing themselves in an over-sized picaresque sweep of scenes; the interpretation of the story
told in these scenes tends to be obscured in the many layers of symbol and disguise that the authors heaped upon it.
The Chorus speeches, written by Auden, are verbose, obscure, and do little in theatrical terms to further the audience's appreciation of the action. Set to music, and sung rather than spoken, they provided musical interludes to the action, but nevertheless the words themselves are so extraordinarily grave, and the syntax so peculiar, that one cannot regard these as being simply euphonious lyrics. Even bearing in mind the fact that the period context may have rendered them of more obvious significance, it is difficult to believe that audiences would have gathered much from lyrics such as these:

Ostnia and Westland
Products of the peace which that old man provided
Of the sobriquet of Tiger senilely vain.
Do not content yourself with their identification,
Saying: This is the southern country with the shape of Cornwall
Or the Danube receives the effluence from this: or that must shiver in the Carpathian shadow.
Do not comfort yourself with the reflection: 'How very unEnglish'
If your follies are different, it is because you are richer;
Your clocks have completed fewer revolutions since the complacent years
When Corelli was the keeper of the Avon Swan
And the naughty life-force in the norfolk jacket
Was the rebel's only uncle.38

The message of warning to the audience not to distance themselves too far from their own environment is clear enough, but the allusions to characters and events are obscured by what seems to be too much reference to Auden and Isherwood's private mythology.

The genesis of the play gives some explanation of the strange structure of the final version. In Christopher And His Kind, Isherwood recalls the following exchanges between Auden and himself:

At the beginning of November, Auden sent Christopher the manuscript of a play called The Chase. He had developed it from an earlier play written by the two of them, The Enemies Of A Bishop. Auden asked for suggestions and Christopher was eager to make them, especially since The Chase was almost certainly going to be produced by Rupert Doone's Group Theatre. The Group Theatre had already produced Auden's The Dance Of Death in February of that year, with Doone himself in the leading role.

During the weeks that followed, Christopher's correspondence with Wystan about the play became a collaboration. Christopher outlined some new scenes and some revisions of existing scenes. A few he wrote himself, others he
The early version of the play, submitted to, but refused by, Doone, had been an attempt by Auden to re-work the pantomime format to his own ends, incorporating contemporary satire. The basic story was there with many additional sub-plots, including themes of industrial action and transvestism that complicated an already complex disguise plot. With Isherwood's collaboration many scenes were cut and others added, generally increasing the satirical content (largely prose) and diminishing the pantomime style. Drawing on what they had seen of German cabaret, the authors loosened the structure of the piece to form what Auden called a 'tour of contemporary societies with political overtones'; and while this mixed-up style is one of the most outstanding features of the play, it renders it as a whole difficult to grasp and lacking in any sense of real direction or incisiveness. Breon Mitchell, in his essay on the German influence on Auden and Isherwood's work, collates much evidence to suggest that neither writer was decisively influenced by Expressionism, having had little if any experience thereof; Auden had seen The Threepenny Opera in Berlin, a possible model for the format of the piece, but he seems to have absorbed little beyond the idea of a musical satire. The Berlin cabarets were an inspiration not only because they provided subject matter, for instance in the Nineveh Hotel scenes, but also for the example they provided of the short, satirical sketch. Berlin had also furnished the authors with a broad experience of the urban demi-monde which they took such pleasure in representing to their countrymen, as in the scene in the red light district of Ostnia.

It is one of the play's most obvious failings that it is in a sense overstuffed with ideas, the result of a collaboration in which the co-authors had not made a decision on the exact points they wished to stress in their joint venture. The variety of scenes and moods that The Dog Beneath The Skin presents is also perhaps its most attractive quality. Allowing for partisanship, it is probably true that, as Medley points out, 'the staged version was largely
successful because of Rupert’s choreographic skill in creating an effective stage picture.\textsuperscript{42} While as a whole the play seems jumpy and unstructured, there is contained within it a mood of freshness and inventiveness that makes it, despite its weaknesses and more turgid moments, constantly compelling. The staging allowed for speed and fluidity, essential for this format: again, a virtually bare stage was used with a light backdrop; whatever set was needed for any particular scene was represented by simple means, such as the ladders crowned with branches to represent the trees in Paradise Park in Act II. The use of masks and distinctive costumes, and Doone’s strict choreography of the players, brought out a unity and lightness of pace that is missing in reading the text, but which was integral to the original conception. Yet reviews point out certain jarring elements that cannot be wholly put down to critical distaste. A review in the *Times*, January 1936,\textsuperscript{43} sheds some light on problems that the play brought up:

One is made aware by the moral earnestness of the two commentators or ‘witnesses’ that Mr Auden and Mr Isherwood have propaganda up their sleeve, but let it be said at once that this has not prevented them from writing an entertaining revue.

Commenting on the ending of the play, the critic adds:

This stage of the proceedings is a trifle embarrassing, but how easily this form of embarrassment might have occupied the whole evening and how long an immunity there is to be thankful for! The ‘unity’ for which the authors ask is presumably a corporate state of the Left. Why, on their own spiritual principles, is it more desirable than the corporate state of the Right which they satirise is not explained; but those who, without being communists, reasonably share many of Mr Auden’s hatreds, need not fear, while enjoying the entertainment, that their liberties will be subverted by it.

The critic is in a sense damning the play with faint praise: The *Dog Beneath The Skin* certainly set out to be more than just ‘an entertaining revue’. The meditation on what the authors were looking towards in their advocacy of ‘a corporate state of the Left’ leads inevitably to a consideration of what the probable meaning of the allegory in the play is. If it is political, it is not primarily party political,
and in unravelling and interpreting the clues in the story one can begin to see why the expressionistic form held such an appeal for Auden and Isherwood.

It was a reasonable assumption to make that the authors were presenting a criticism of Western society in left wing terms. Both writers had made public their political sympathies and were both known for their distaste for bourgeois values. The Dance Of Death had included the scene with Karl Marx, and the whole organisation of the Group Theatre nodded towards Russian theatre and some of the aesthetic principles of the radical German and French theatres. Yet, reading The Dog Beneath The Skin it is difficult to find any trace of a positive belief in political solutions even of the most idealistic kind. Rather than offering political solutions, the play strips away veneers, gleefully displaying the bestial motivations beneath the patterns of polite behaviour - the dog beneath the skin. While much of this satire is directed against the mores of the ruling capitalist classes, there is little suggestion that anything better would come under a different political organisation. The main pleasure of the play is the exposure of the sordid reality behind elegant surfaces, as in Act I scene four, after the execution of the rebel prisoners, when the ladies of the Ostnian court survey the corpses:

1st LADY: How lovely they look:
   Like pictures in a children's book!
2nd LADY: Look at this one. He seems so calm,
   As if he were asleep with his head on his arm.
   He's the handsomest, don't you think, of the four?
   I'll put some blood on my hanky, a wee spot,
   So that he never shall be forgot.
3rd LADY: Oh Duchess, isn't he just a duck!
   His fiancée certainly had the luck.
   He can't have been more than nineteen, I should say.
   He must have been full of Vitamin A.44

The character of Alan Norman, the witless, artless innocent sent to look for Sir Francis Crewe, is never used to criticise the situations he gets into - his complete lack of response implies that his function in the play (like that of the hero in many pantomimes) is to get us from place to
place rather than to show any process of disillusionment or enlightenment as a result of his travels. Even when Francis emerges from the dogskin to deliver the only part of the play that contains an overt message, his tone is hardly that of the revolutionary:

I don't hate you any more. I see how you fit into the whole scheme. You are insignificant, but not in the way I used to imagine. You are units in an immense army: most of you will die without ever knowing what your leaders are really fighting for or even that you are fighting at all. Well, I am going to be a unit in the army of the other side: but the battlefield is so huge that it's practically certain you will never see me again. We are all of us completely unimportant. So it would be very silly to start quarrelling, wouldn't it? Goodbye.45

If there is no substantial political content in the play, then what is the point of all these scenes and all this satire? There is too much in The Dog Beneath The Skin and the contemporary accounts of its production to dismiss it as the exchange of private jokes between Auden and Isherwood, or even simply to see it as an entertaining parade of mildly titillating oddities. The choice of the charade/cabaret form, the expressionist overtones of disguise, satire, quest structure and mixing of different styles and media all suggest that the authors were seeking a type of theatrical presentation in which they could express attitudes that stemmed from an individualistic standpoint which dictated the character and content of their presentation.

Critics of the play in the thirties understandably did not delve too deeply into the interpretation of The Dog Beneath The Skin, content to leave it as a mildly left-wing entertainment. The insufficiency of this evaluation becomes glaringly apparent when one examines the reasons why the expressionistic/allegorical form was employed, and to what uses it was put. The clue to the interpretation of the play, and in fact to much of the work of the Group Theatre, lies in the fact that Auden and Isherwood, as well as Doone, Medley, Spender and Britten, were homosexual; not only that, but they had been led by their sexuality to dismiss the moral and social norms of the heterosexual world and to regard themselves as outsiders with different
views, different tastes and standards, and almost a private language. Without wishing to bring the personal details of the artists' lives too much to bear on the interpretation of their work, it seems in this case that the issue of homosexuality was so central to the products of the Group, and in particular to the Auden/Isherwood plays, that it should be taken into account as an important (and much overlooked) factor in the assessment of these productions. Indeed, without the long-term relationship between Doone and Medley, and the sense of kinship that existed between them and Auden and Isherwood, the Group Theatre would never have been. Here, incidentally, is another explanation of the eventual split between the writers and the Group: for while Doone and Medley were content to be discreet about their sexuality, and lived very much within the tolerant Bohemia of the Bloomsbury/Paris milieu, Auden and Isherwood saw themselves much more in an antagonistic role towards 'straight' society, and their experiences in Berlin, especially Isherwood's much-vaunted promiscuity, had developed in them a feeling of aggression and superiority that was manifested in their writing. The importance of Auden and Isherwood's sexuality to this discussion is intimately bound up with the question of their choice of forms, and sheds an interesting light on the usages of non-realistic styles.

Obviously, given the moral climate of the period, it would be unacceptable for writers to force the issue on the public; in any case, censorship was still clamping down very hard on the bare mention of the subject, let alone its serious discussion, and it was only with plays such as Mordaunt Shairp's The Green Bay Tree, in which the subject was presented as a psychological abnormality, that homosexuality had any theatrical airing at all. Both Auden and Isherwood had made fairly explicit references to the subject in their individual work, but in The Dog Beneath The Skin the only overt references come in a catalogue of degradation, such as the Cosy Corner bar in the red light scene. What neither author had done - and were not to do for many years to come - was to make a positive identification in unambiguous terms of where they stood in relation to this kind of
presentation. Yet looking closely at *The Dog Beneath The Skin* one can see that they were using disguise and allegory elements to allow themselves the freedom to present a specifically homosexual version of the ills of the world in a way that could be readily understood by the sympathetic who could read the signs, but which would not raise the hackles of the 'enemy'. The adoption of the forms and styles in the play was not the result of a particular interest in, or admiration for, the expressionist style, but rather the recognition that it allowed them to express their opinions about sexuality in the way that it had allowed earlier writers to express their feelings about more general political issues.

Perhaps the simplest way to illustrate this point is to look at the role of women in *The Dog Beneath The Skin*, for it is the attitude implied by the authors towards the relationships between the sexes that indicates most strongly their underlying message. In Act I scene four, when the presentation of Pressan Ambo is fairly idyllic, the villagers offer, as the ultimate prize for whoever finds Francis, the hand of Iris Crewe in marriage. When Alan is chosen, he unthinkingly accepts that Iris holds all hope of his future happiness, and expresses this in the deliberately twee, banal rhyme that is used to emphasise the limited awareness of the characters at this point:

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ALAN: Iris, give me a parting kiss
     In promise of our future bliss.
IRIS: Gladly, Alan, I give you this. (they embrace)
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Alan goes off on his travels, where he meets a variety of women, all of them caricatures of one sort or another: the Queen and the ladies at the Ostnian execution; the prostitutes and madames in the red light district; some female lunatics in the Westland asylum; cute lovers and obsessive hypochondriacs in Paradise Park; the nurses in the hospital; the cabaret girls at the Nineveh Hotel; and finally Miss Lou Vipond, the *femme fatale*. It will be noted that all these women take an essentially passive role in Alan's experience, and are all functions of the decadent society of
Ostnia and Westland. The only one who affects Alan in any way is Lou, and, as soon as she has been enticed to his room, she becomes a dummy, totally unresponsive to Alan's very conventional adoration. There are plenty of male figures encountered on the journey who are similarly repulsive, but they are essentially far more active, like Destructive Desmond, the Financier, the surgeon and the journalists. When Alan finally returns to Pressan with Francis, it is his rejection by Iris that causes him at last to pass some judgement on society by leaving it to join Francis's party. Here there is possibly the danger of stretching a point, but one can read in Alan's experience an allegory of the authors' own opting out of conventional heterosexual society due to the realisation of their own sexual differences. The role of the Dog is the key to this. He appears as soon as Alan is chosen in the first scene - Alan is marked out as an exceptional, almost sacrificial figure (none of the other seekers ever returned) but, as companion and protector in his travels he has the Dog, who may be seen to represent his own self-awareness, as yet dumb. The Dog warns him against the perils of Lou; also he is the only character who is faithful to Alan. When they return to Pressan, and Francis opens Alan's eyes to the fact that it is no better than what he's seen abroad, Alan goes over to his side. It is significant that the only other villagers who join Francis and Alan are male. Thus the Dog represents homosexuality: the reason for Francis's disappearance years previously was a quarrel with his father - ever since then he has been living in disguise. This would parallel the refusal to acknowledge homosexuality and the humiliating attitude of others who see homosexuals as a lower order of beings; also the role of the Dog as an outside observer very closely resembles the position of the homosexual artist of the Isherwood 'I am a camera' type. When Alan, disillusioned by women, sees the Dog as a real person, and is made to see by that person his own true relationship to society, one can see that the authors have presented an allegorical account of a man coming to terms with his own sexuality.

The theatrical forms that Auden and Isherwood chose for this treatment of the subject were really ideal for their
purposes. The revue aspect of *The Dog Beneath The Skin* allowed them to place their allegory in a form of presentation that gave them the freedom to cover all the subject matter but which, by its experimental trappings, diverted attention from the real meaning of the play. Assumptions would have been made about the direction of the satire and allegory, and for those who saw through the disguise there were obvious conclusions to draw; for those who did not, the meaning of the play would have been interpreted according to the well-known political leanings of the authors. It is interesting that the adoption of a style that was associated with political theatre should here be used to make a point that is political only in the wider sense. In terms of its adaptation of the methods of Expressionism, *The Dog Beneath The Skin* gives a useful example of how the style provided not only for its progenitors but also for successive generations of writers a freedom of movement and expression denied them by Realism. In this case it could be said that the authors were using the elements of allegory and symbolism that are so much a part of Expressionism to avoid putting their cards openly on the table, and it is certainly true that it is easy to miss the point of *The Dog Beneath The Skin*. But it was the nearest that the authors could get to what they wanted, and in many ways it can be seen as the nearest approach in the British theatre to a genuinely expressionist play, for the form was arrived at through the dictates of the content and the artists' vision rather than being imposed as a gesture towards modernism, or simply as experimentation for its own sake. Just as Johnston took elements of Expressionism and used them to create his own style in *The Old Lady Says No!* and subsequent work, so here Auden and Isherwood can be seen raiding the storehouse of foreign styles and manners and coming up with something which, while admittedly ragged and at times awkward, challenged the convention of what could be done in the British theatre.

If *The Dog Beneath The Skin* in its form and meaning approximated to the principles that informed German Expressionism, then the nearest that any English writer came to producing a play that approximated to the overall style, both
in language, action and structure to the German models was possibly Stephen Spender's *The Trial Of A Judge*, which bears striking similarities to the work of Toller. The theme of Spender's play benefits greatly from the mixture of symbolic dream, poetry/rhetoric, and action narrative that the form allows. There is a good case to be made for *The Trial Of A Judge* being the best new play produced by the Group in that it has far greater unity of style and subject that the Auden-Isherwood collaborations and pulls off a more effective theatrical coup than, say, *Out Of The Picture*. Unlike the other original plays put on by the Group, *The Trial Of A Judge* takes as its starting point a character study. The central figure of the Judge is presented as a multi-dimensional character, and position in his society becomes symbolic of what Spender recognised as a growth of European fascism and the abuse of the law and its spokesmen. Everything that is shown or told of the Judge relates immediately to his wider importance - his marriage and his involvement with government and the opposing fascist and communist rebels are presented only so far as they relate to Spender's overall view of the dilemma of justice in a fascist state. Spender has denied that he was deliberately modelling his work on *Masse-Mensch*, but he certainly knew the play, and seems to have imitated Toller's rigorous economy of means as well as the alternation of reality and dream scenes. Spender avoids the pitfalls of adapting a foreign style in his writing by the constant reference to an overall argument that dominates and motivates the play. The story of *The Trial Of A Judge* is a means whereby Spender can examine the different dilemmas faced by the Judge and the two other main characters, the Wife and Hummeldorf. There is no sensational effect; nothing is interposed between the subject matter and its clear expression. Occasionally Spender's tendency to allow his lyrical strain to lead him off the path of the argument, to explore tangents of no immediate relevance to the action dilutes the strength of the piece, but on the whole the verse is used very effectively to contrast with the terse argument of the prose sections:
HUMMELDORF: Do you approve of the three Communists carrying revolvers?
JUDGE: No.
HUMMELDORF: Then will you appeal to their supporters, who also carry revolvers?
JUDGE: No.
HUMMELDORF: Then to whom will you appeal?
JUDGE: To the just.
HUMMELDORF: The just! Pooh! Allow me to tell you that the just are those who will first be shot by one side, and then, if there are any of them left, by the other. And no one will care.
JUDGE: How strange it seems
That to me justice was once delineated by an inner eye
As sensibly as what is solid
In this room, tables, chairs and walls,
is made indubitable by the sun.
But now all crumbles away
In coals of darkness, and the existence
Of what was black, white, evil, right,
Becomes invisible, founders against us
Like lumber in a lightless garret.
I refresh myself in the country
Or I stare round faces in a room
And although there is gold in the corn and gaiety
In a girl's eyes or sliding along the stream,
Everything is without a meaning.
Voices of hatred and of power
Call through my inner darkness
Only that might is right.

The kind of realism that emerges from the play at moments like this is one of its greatest strengths, for it maintains a constant point of reference for the audience in a play that, nevertheless, mixes dream and reality, prose and verse. Spender refers to the need for some clear control of form in an article written for the *New Statesman* in March 1938, just before *The Trial Of A Judge* opened:

At present the plays of Auden and Isherwood and the group of writers collaborating with the Group theatre are experimental and they owe a great deal to Expressionism. Some of their devices, such as the soliloquy and the chorus, seem to be justified: the soliloquy because it represents the stream of secret or unconscious thought of the individual; the chorus because it expresses the generalised mood of a body of opinion at a certain time. But I believe that the writers of poetic drama will learn to do without improvisation as they build up a form which aims at a calm realism: a realism with a range of reference to contemporary problems, and with an approach which can evade the surface naturalism of the drama and the whims of the censor.

The improvisation to which Spender is referring is presumably the conglomeration of scenes and effects in *The Dog Beneath The Skin* and the melodramatic effects of *The Ascent Of F.6*; however, his criticism of these admittedly sometimes awkward
aspects is devalued by his critical vocabulary which confuses realism with the expression of truth. The expressionist writers, while seldom producing work that could in any way be confused with Realism, nevertheless evolved methods that sought to express reality in a more truthful way; it is this that Spender himself is attempting in his play. The staging methods used in this instance were similar to the general Group style, with sets by John Piper and a strong reliance on lighting to create mood, especially in the demarkation of reality and dream scenes.

Reviews for *The Trial Of A Judge* were polite but scarce - the Group was losing its novelty value for the press. *The Times* praised the play in ambiguous terms:

Those devices which suggest the progress of the revolution - groups of speakers speaking with one voice or breaking free from groups to engage in individual argument - are familiar, but more effective than usual, perhaps because Mr Spender has contrived for more than one or two of the figures in the foreground a saving distinctness.50

Lionel Hale in *Drama* (April 1938) simply mentioned that the Group had performed the play, 'which probably reads very well'.51 As always, the critics tended to regard any merits of a Group Theatre production as surprising little bonuses, because although they may have thought their efforts very worthy, they did not really agree with all the expressionistic trappings. When the Group stopped working in November 1938 it had lost the sense of insurgency that had inspired earlier work. The other original plays produced by the Group share to varying extents the strengths and weaknesses of *The Dog Beneath The Skin* but have less of the originality and sparkle of that piece - even *The Ascent Of F.6*, with its original theme and interesting method of execution, is overloaded with a portentous sense of its own significance that overshadows its more successful elements. *The Trial Of A Judge*, although in some ways a better play than *The Dog Beneath The Skin*, gave less scope to Doone and the Group to extend the collaborative, mixed-media style that characterised their best work, and represented a move towards the more directly literary style that was out of key with
the direction that Doone and Medley envisaged for the Group. The lack of a real sense of positive agreement between authors and producers in the Group eventually enervated the experimental energies that had created the early work, and as the writers moved on to other projects they left a company without material and without a positive ambition. The later Auden-Isherwood collaboration, On The Frontier, was the work of artists trying to apply confused and inappropriate ideas to the theatre; in this instance, more than any other, they seem incapable of deciding what the play is actually to be about - love triumphant, the corruption of the capitalist class, Hitler, Henry Ford, or any number of other things.

The Group Theatre was regarded in its time, and has since built on this reputation, as one of the foremost experimental theatre companies of the thirties. While not wishing to deny the importance of the material produced by the Group, which did indeed show to British theatregoers for the first time the potentials of mixed-media productions and poetic drama with a modern theme, their importance now seems more as an example of an approach towards theatre informed by a knowledge of, and interest in, contemporary innovations but not inspired by a real involvement with the issues they presented. There is something dilettante about the whole conception of the Group's work; one feels often that their exploration of the collaborative style came more as a result of a lot of different people wanting to be involved in theatre rather than from any clear idea of what the combination of acting, poetry, prose, music, scenic art and dance could be directed towards. In a way this is the most interesting quality of the Group's work: they seem to have been overburdened with volatile talents at a time when the British theatre as a whole was deficient in the very qualities of originality and egocentricity that the Group had in abundance. Another trait that stands out in retrospect is the irony that was inherent in a company that wore its left-wing sympathies (however far-reaching) on its sleeve and espoused the workers' cause, and yet comprised almost entirely members from the educated intelligentsia of the London literary and artistic circles whose very nature was elitist and highbrow. Just as the New Playwrights were mostly sympathisers
with the politics they so audibly supported rather than themselves being involved with the struggles they depicted, so the Group was an example of the application of artistic theories, that seemed suitable to the expression of contemporary issues, to material that arose from the interest of observers who were involved in theatrical art. The rise of the workers' theatre in both Britain and America during the thirties signalled the return to a more open-minded approach to the realistic presentation of material, and the style of this sort of drama, such as that of Odets, Miles Malleson, and Hodge and Roberts, was far more direct in its representation of events than either the N.P.T. or the Group. Ironically the style that was chosen in Britain and America by the workers' theatre groups was dramatically different from the expressionist material that, in many ways, had inspired the idea of workers' theatre in the first place; again, the difficulty of translating a style as well as ideas is important in the consideration of the expressionist influence. The two companies that have been discussed in this chapter were attempting to do the 'double work' of bringing new methods and new ideas into the theatre, and a consideration of their careers highlights the problem of fitting these innovations into the correct context. While the ideas they sought to put forward were, on the whole, socialist, the manner in which they communicated them were calculated not to appeal to the working class, but rather to the educated theatregoing middle class. By this dilemma the two companies were ultimately foiled, leaving a legacy of experimentation that remained thereafter largely the preserve of less deliberately left wing groups. The style of theatre that came after these groups was more deliberately propagandist, dealing often with the specific issues of political and industrial problems that the earlier groups had tended to submerge in their more general swipes at social ills. The lack of focus that characterises both the Group and the New Playwrights Theatre is similar to the muddled humanist passion of much pre-War Expressionism, where precisely the same problems were encountered. Perhaps there is something in common between the assiduous courting by these two companies
of the left-wing image, and the feverish desire of Franz Werfel 'dir, O Mensch, verwandt zu sein!' - both pre-First World War lyrical Expressionism and pre-Second World War experimental/political theatre had about them something of the guilt of middle-class artists trying to justify themselves in a situation in which they had become aware of social issues that condemned the class to which they belonged.

It is with the work of the New Playwrights Theatre and the Group Theatre that I wish to leave the pursuit of the expressionist influence. Even though there is a discernible response to the style in theatre work through and after the War, it is the result of the lessons learned by a previous generation, and applied according to a rapidly changing set of social and artistic circumstances. In the work of the American Group Theatre, who brought to Broadway the agitprop style that came to be associated with workers' theatre on both sides of the Atlantic, there is in both the dramaturgy and the design an obvious debt to the innovations of Expressionism; and in the work of the Unity Theatre in London not only the ideas of the German style are traceable but also the work of its greatest exponent, Ernst Toller, whose involvement with the company dated from the opening of their Britannia Street theatre in 1936 with his Requiem For Rosa Luxemburg and Liebknecht. Unity even produced Gas in 1934 (when it was still calling itself the Rebel Players), and its London programme between 1936 and 1940 includes The Star Turns Red and Pastor Hall, but it seems more likely that these pieces were chosen for their political content rather than because of any taste for the expressionist style. Unity had stated in its manifesto its intention:

... to foster and further the art of the drama in accordance with the principle that true Art, by effectively presenting and truthfully interpreting life as experienced by the majority of the people, can move the people to work for the betterment of society. 32

The sentiments are so similar to those that had inspired the writing of a play such as Die Wandlung, and yet the different interpretations of the concept of the means of presentation and interpretation of the subject matter had more to separate them than time and location. While the
expressionist writers had sought to reach the heart of their subject by probing into the hidden by means of satire, distortion and subjectivity, the later writers sought to present what is tantamount to a neo-Naturalism, eschewing what was seen as the obfuscating effect of experimental form in favour of what had the appearance of straight reportage. The 'Living Newspapers' that were presented both by the Federal Theatre Project and by Unity were the perfect example of the new style of Naturalism appropriate to these groups, presenting material in a way that was documentary beyond the dreams of Zola, but which had the looseness and speed of presentation inherited from Expressionism. When the Unity manifesto pledged the group to 'devise, import and experiment with new forms of dramatic art' it was to this style of theatre that it was turning, and away from the old style of Expressionism which, for nearly twenty years, had epitomised all that was new and innovative in the theatre.
CHAPTER FIVE: APPENDIX

I: PRODUCTIONS BY THE NEW PLAYWRIGHTS THEATRE

Loudspeaker by John Howard Lawson. Opened 2nd March 1927, 52nd St Theatre, designed by Gorelik and Throckmorton. Ran for 42 performances.

Earth by Em Jo Basshe. Opened 9th March 1927, 52nd St Theatre, designed by Throckmorton. Transferred to Grove Theatre. 24 performances.

Pinwheel, by Francis Edwards Faragoh, was produced by Alice Lewisohn at the Neighborhood Theatre, designed by Denslanger, and opened on 3rd February 1927. Lewisohn, due to adverse criticism of her production methods from Lawson and others, handed it over to the N.P.T. who gave 4 performances at the Grove Theatre.

The Belt by Paul Sifton. Opened 19th October 1927 at Commerce Street Theatre (a.k.a. the Cherry Lane Theatre). Designed by Dos Passos, directed by Edward Massey, with Franchot Tone in the cast. 29 performances.

The Centuries by Em Jo Basshe. Opened 29th November 1927, Commerce Street.

The International by John Howard Lawson. Opened 12th January 1928, Commerce Street Theatre. Designed by Dos Passos. 27 performances.

Hoboken Blues by Mike Gold. Opened 17th February 1928, Commerce Street. 35 performances.


Airways Inc. by John Dos Passos. Opened Spring 1929, Commerce Street.
II: GROUP THEATRE CHRONOLOGY

March 1932: The Provok'd Wife (Vanburgh) at the Everyman Theatre.


August 1932: First Group Summer School at Sudbury.

February 1933: Reading of Peer Gynt at Westminster Theatre, mise-en-scène by Robert Medley.

March 1933: Acquisition of premises in Great Newport Street.


24th February 1934: The Dance Of Death and The Deluge (a Chester mystery play) at Westminster Theatre, two Sunday performances. Produced by Doone and Tyrone Guthrie.


December 1935: Timon Of Athens directed by Monck, with music by Britten, Westminster Theatre.


26th February 1937: The Ascent Of F.6. Mercury Theatre. Ran at the Mercury for two months, then transferred to Keynes New Theatre in Cambridge, then to the Little Theatre in the West End. Revived in 1939 at the Old Vic, with Alec Guinness as Ransom.
5th December 1937: Out Of The Picture by Louis MacNeice. Two Sunday performances at the Westminster.

18th March 1938: The Trial Of A Judge, Unity Theatre, designed by John Piper.


(NOTE: Unless otherwise stated, all productions post-1933 were produced by Doone and designed by Medley.)

III: GROUP THEATRE MANIFESTOES

i. Programme notes by W.H. Auden from the first Group Theatre programme for The Dance Of Death in October 1935.

Drama began as the cult of a whole community. Ideally there would be no spectators. In practice every member of the audience should feel like an understudy.

Drama is essentially an art of the body. The basis of acting is acrobatics, dancing and all forms of physical skill. The music hall, the Christmas pantomime and the country house charade are the most living drama of today.

The development of the film has deprived drama of an excuse for being documentary. It is not in its nature to provide an ignorant and passive spectator with exciting news.

The subject of drama on the other hand, is the commonly known, the universally familiar stories of the society or generation for which it is written. The audience, like the child listening to the fairy tale, ought to know what is going to happen next.

Similarly the drama is not suited to the analysis of character which is the province of the novel. Dramatic characters are simplified, easily recognisable and over life-size.

Dramatic speech should have the same confessed, significant, and undocumentary character as dramatic movement.

Drama in fact deals with the general and the universal, not with the particular and local, but it is probable that drama can only deal, at any rate directly, with the relations of human beings with each other, not with the relation of man to the rest of nature.

ii. 'I Want The Theatre To Be' by Rupert Doone, from the Westminster Theatre programme of 29th October 1935.

I do not want the theatre to be a place where the musician or the financier or the choreographer or the actor or the machine or the painter or the illusionist or the stage producer dominates.

Most theatres today are content with supplying thrilling key hole spectacles to a passive audience. Theatre art should be dynamic: theatre audiences should be active. Jaques says 'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players'. Why not 'All the theatre's a stage'? The condition of the theatre depends on the society for which is is produced: society must be changed...
if we want a living theatre. The theatre should suggest those changes.

For those who want a living theatre there must be hard work, time, patience and experiment. If Gottlieb Daimler had not travelled at 10 miles an hour in 1886, how could Sir Malcolm Campbell travel at 300 miles an hour today?

Art should serve life. Life is creative: the author creates, the actor creates. There is not such thing as interpretative art. Art is man creating.

Authors should not live in their studies or musicians in the concert hall, or the painters in their studios. They should return. The theatre needs them.

Theatre art is the art of co-operation. I want the theatre to be a social force, where the painter and the author and the choreographer and the machine and the businessman and the actor and the illusionist and the stage producer combine with the audience to make realism fantasy and fantasy real.

iii. Anonymous article in Drama July 1934, volume 12 no. 10.

The Group Theatre is an attempt to put into practice a number of ideas which many people accept but do not know how to tackle. As is usual with new movements, it is the way of achieving the end rather than the end itself which is criticised, and because of this the Group Theatre has come before the public only as it has gradually felt strong enough to face the inevitable barrage of conventional criticism.

The Group Theatre wants to see a permanent company of players under their own director, trained together in the same style so that they have complete command of their voices and bodies, working on plays (often in verse) written for them by their own authors on contemporary themes - that is, on subjects which matter profoundly to us now. These ideas may sound very novel, except to students of theorists like Craig, Stanislavsky, or Copeau.

... in each company you see traces of the romanticism of Irving, the comedy of manners, the music-hall, true-to-life realism and continental expressionism. This is fatal, because in a co-operative art like the theatre you must have unity of style.

The Group Theatre wishes to perfect a theatrical unity of style within itself, and to place itself in the true line of theatrical development.
CHAPTER SIX: A FORGOTTEN EXPERIMENT?

From the dissatisfied few will the audiences of the future be made.

Terence Gray, 1931

In the January 1930 issue of Theatre Arts, Ashley Dukes summed up the course of the modern theatre and assessed the current situation as:

Forty years after the first production of A Doll's House in England, thirty years after the first productions of plays by Bernard Shaw, twenty years after the Court Theatre and the appearance of Granville-Barker and Galsworthy, ten years after the end of the World War, five years after the failure of Expressionism, five months after the death of Diaghilev and the dissolution of the Russian Ballet...

The dismissal of Expressionism as a failed experiment that had fizzled out in the mid twenties was easily made at this time, especially by one who had been as closely involved with the style as Dukes and who, at this time, was disillusioned by its seeming non-acceptability and was looking towards new types of theatre to provide the next impetus in his list of movements. Against this bitter consignment of Expressionism to the history books stands the surprisingly large amount of expressionist drama seen in the twenties and throughout the thirties - far more than could be accounted for by a mere passing interest in a foreign style. That University societies and amateur companies on both sides of the Atlantic had attempted productions of works by the German writers and their English-speaking imitators testifies to a far greater degree of infiltration into the modern theatrical idiom by Expressionism than might be surmised from the view taken by Dukes. It is true that in neither Britain nor America did the style receive a positive mainstream acceptance, and there were very few figures of note who were consistently identified with it; yet it can be seen simply from the fact that so many of the companies who were to form the backbone of the established theatre in the Second World War had cut their teeth on the production of at least some expressionist plays that the style had played a vital part in the shaping of attitudes towards
theatre throughout the period. As a reference point, if nothing else, the concept of Expressionism was vital - it is referred to constantly in the critical writing of the time as something eminently to be desired or scrupulously to be avoided. It remains to be ascertained to what degree Expressionism in the inter-war period should be seen as either a passing vogue, from which some methods and theatrical shorthands were learnt, or a fundamental principle derived from the social and artistic conditions of the day which manifested itself in different ways in different cultures but which remains a vital component of all theatrical art.

There is a number of ways of approaching this question, and in this final chapter, while not hoping to ascertain with any finality the place of Expressionism in the modern theatre, for that is constantly evolving, I hope to suggest some of the more fruitful avenues of debate that arise from the information we have on the acceptance and influence of expressionist drama. The first factor that should be considered in any such question is the definition of the term, and in this case the word Expressionism came to mean many things to many different people, to the extent that, as late as 1939, a writer in Drama could produce an article claiming for J.M. Barrie the title of 'The First English Expressionist', basing his argument on the evidence of Barrie's use of subjective devices such as the dream scenes in A Kiss For Cinderella. It has been seen frequently in the above chapters that the words 'expressionist' and 'experimental' were, in the minds of many, interchangeable: the overtones that came to be linked in the popular imagination with Expressionism, of a certain style and an overwhelming gloom and morbidity, were critical constructions rather than the result of a widespread experience of the style. The magnification of the extremes of any new artistic style is a common response by unsympathetic critics; Expressionism, with its naturally extreme nature, laid itself more than usually open to dismissal by those who deplored anything that went beyond a nineteenth century definition of good taste. The association between the new theatrical organisations that were springing up as a result of the new drama
and the sense that there was something politically and morally suspect about such innovation extended the cloud of distrust and distaste until it covered anything that smacked of progressiveness. The same problems had been encountered by the first wave of independent theatres which had marched under the banner of Realism, until all was caught up in a confused conception of what exactly the much-heralded new theatre was:

It must be borne in mind that although at that time (1913) there was much talk of repertory in the papers, the public at large had not the vaguest ideas as to what it meant. Some thought it was a trick whereby improper plays could be produced without the fear of the police, and others had the notion that you could take your wife or your daughter to a repertory theatre without running the risk of squirming in your seat. They were sure, anyway, that it had something to do with morals. The wedding of literature and theatrical art never occurred to them.4

This confused suspicion descended with possibly even greater force on Expressionism, where there was the added cause for concern that what was presented in the name of that style might not be immediately understandable and might have concealed within it messages and meanings even more unpleasant than the average uninitiated audience member could at first comprehend. Even the advocates of the style failed to clarify the confusion, often resting on the assumption that if a piece departed from the surface of Realism, and if it contained within it anything like a grotesque satire, a dream sequence or nameless characters it was enough to brand it expressionist. With this avoidance during the period of any clear definition of what constituted Expressionism in the minds of its exponents and opponents, it is difficult to make anything like a definitive evaluation of the extent of its influence. One can certainly say that the idea of Expressionism was more influential than Expressionism itself. It is easy to forget, in these relatively censorship-free days, how little a writer or producer had to do to have himself called (at best) 'progressive': at the time when the Court seasons began, the idea of reviving Greek drama was most decidedly progressive; Ibsen had not lost his image as a writer of shocking candour; anything
that hinted at experimentation with the form of drama was seen as quite startlingly new. Although there was a slight relaxation in the censoriousness of many critics and theatre-goers in the period, it remains true throughout the twenties and thirties that deviation from rigid norms, both in style and content, would be subject to the disapproval of a large number. Expressionism forever bore the brunt of this distaste for the 'advanced': seldom was it afforded the serious critical consideration that so innovative a form deserved.

The lack of a clear definition of the term was compounded by the continuous insistence of some critics that Expressionism was per se, depressing self-absorbed adolescent nonsense. The attempts of many of the British repertory theatres to introduce their public to what they saw as interesting developments in theatrical art were often thwarted by this belief in the morbidity of all German drama, especially Expressionism. The tone was set by M.R. Dobie in his Drama article of February 1921 - the first lengthy coverage given by that magazine to the subject - entitled 'German Expressionist Drama':

German theatre friends who wish to be in the swim have long since relinquished Sudermann and Ibsen and all the naturalist playwrights as old-fashioned people and Philistines. The up-to-date playgoer will look at nothing but Expressionist drama which the younger writers are turning out in masses ... The nursing of emotion and hugging of misery leads to a morbidity in unsere Jungsten. Their plays are full of tired, sickly, wailing characters, and of brutally repulsive and obscene passages ... On the whole the Expressionist writers display astonishingly little original thought.

The tirade concluded with the assertion that expressionist drama would find favour among those people 'who are not Christians, but like feeling religious'. Belasco had neatly combined a muddled conception of modern theatre with a popular distaste for the less rosy side of expressionist subject matter in his condemnation of 'the cubism of the theatre - the wail of the incompetent and the degenerate'. The puritanical dismissal of the worth of Expressionism was probably prompted as much by the (quite justified) suspicion that it dealt with the subject of sex which, if it was mentioned at all in the theatre of the pre-War period was dressed
up as the elaborated game of courtship and glossed with romance - a far cry from Mörder Hoffnung Der Frauen. It seems that anything that presented sex and its many adjuncts in terms other than those found in a Pinero play was bound to be labelled as degenerate. The other main cause for this unreasoned distaste for the style was its association with left-wing politics. Even though both Britain and America were suffering the upheavals of the post-War decades, and although both had strong labour movements which were fostering the growth of trade unionism, the theatrical establishment, including all the most influential journalists and critics, remained staunchly conservative. When attention was focussed on the political content of experimental drama, charges of naivety and pessimism were quick to follow, as in St John Ervine's characteristic criticism of Dos Passos's Airways Inc.: 

The new authors seem determined to add to the confusion. When they find light they put it out. They look into their dusty minds and, seeing there only dulness and an infinite dreariness, insist that the rest of us are as dreary as they. But all this infantile misery and pumped-up pessimism are essentially bourgeois in spirit and the proletariat, if they ever become acquainted with them, may well be afraid of the coming communism if the gentlemen who so dismally foretell it are to be accepted as samples of those who will be in control of it.
remained a huge majority of writers who were never blessed with this respectability. The German writers, for most English-speaking audiences, remained by their nationality outside the pail of decent entertainment.

For those who subjected Expressionism to serious consideration rather than unreasoning dismissal, there were few who, in the British and American theatre, displayed any positive taste for the style. There was a longstanding suspicion that the devices of expressionist writing were simply ways of covering up weak plots and adding unwarranted stress to unoriginal ideas. Norman Marshall, in his review of The Silver Tassie, revealed himself once again as an opponent of the new methods:

Up to now it has been impossible to make up one's mind about the value of expressionism, as this method, which claims to widen the scope of drama and enable it to express the most subtle shades of thought and feeling, has so far merely been used to refurbish the more hackneyed themes of the dramatists' stock-in-trade and deck them out with a spurious air of originality. The Silver Tassie is a case in point ... I cannot help feeling that this play was originally conceived on conventional realistic lines, and only translated into Expressionism because the author felt dissatisfied with his theme and hoped to make up for the lack of originality in the matter by the originality in the manner.

Marshall seems to have based his criticism of O'Casey's play on one section only, but ignoring this for a while it is worth noting his idea that something can be 'translated into Expressionism'. The misunderstanding of the most basic inspiration behind the style that this concept reveals is not uncommon; in fact it is rare to find any critic considering the merits of the style in any depth whatsoever. Marshall's evaluation is typical of a school of thought that regarded Expressionism primarily as a surface style or a gimmick; by implication he dismisses the claims made by champions of the new drama that it really can widen the scope and increase the subtlety of expression.

With the face of the critical establishment set so firmly against Expressionism it is unsurprising that the popular opinion of what the style represented was so vague and unsympathetic. There is no need here to attempt to prove that the products of expressionist writing merit better treatment;
what is important is that there was nonetheless an appreciable attempt on the part of a number of producers to present plays in the style or even to use the methods of Expressionism for their own original work. It has been seen in the discussion of the work of the British repertory theatres and the American independent/art theatres that a process of steady infiltration by the ideas of Expressionism took place in the English-speaking theatre in the period; in the case of organisations such as the New Playwrights Theatre and the Group Theatre we can see a determined turning towards the methods of Expressionism for the communication of a certain perception of contemporary events. The problem in the case of both the implicit and the explicit use of Expressionism came in the problem of identifying who the expected or required audience for these productions was. In the case of the Reps it has been suggested that there existed in every community an educated minority for whom the presentation of expressionist drama would be desirable; in the American theatre, especially in New York and the university towns where most of the expressionistic work was seen, it is safe to assume that there was a percentage of the theatregoing public who would welcome the chance to see examples of the type of theatre that they had no doubt been reading about. But although this was perhaps enough to sustain the occasional inclusion into the repertory programme of one expressionist play in every season, there were those producers who wished to see a more wholehearted adoption of the style, arguing that it was the only way in which the truths of the contemporary situation could be communicated. The obvious examples of these producers were the triumvirate at Provincetown, Gray at the Festival (although his interest was primarily stylistic rather than to do with the content of the drama), the N.P.T. and Group managements and some few repertory managements and little theatre producers. If the theatre was to set itself the task of interpreting current developments, then to whom was it addressing itself? There have been seen numerous examples of producers who believed that audiences could be gradually educated into an appreciation of the new methods;
there were many who regarded the low standard of drama at any given time as the responsibility of the audience whose tastes dictated the artistic quality of popular theatre. The idea that an improvement in standards could be effected by the steady raising of the audience’s critical consciousness was accurately exposed by M.R. Dobie in the July 1920 issue of *Drama*:

We should not blink the fact that in giving the public a better kind of play than those now prevalent we are giving them what they do not want ... You may capture an unspoiled village community and bring them up in a pure love of Schnitzler, Tchechov and Lady Gregory, but one day a full London Company may descend upon the fold and in one flying matinée of *Daddies* seduce their innocence for ever.  

In Germany, it was frequently pointed out, the audience for expressionist drama was a popular audience, the habitués of the Volksbühnen; the longing for a serious, popular theatre was caught in the paradox that British theatre was still, in the thirties, very much the preserve of the ‘theatre-going classes’, and the wish to return to the popular theatre of the Shakespearean period, or to emulate the democratic appeal of the modern German theatre, was all but impossible in Britain at this time. In America the class distinctions were less rigid, but there the exclusive focussing of theatrical work and critical attention on New York made the idea of the popular theatre similarly idealistic. Even though the New York City community comprised a high percentage of ethnic minorities and labouring or unemployed urban poor, they were outnumbered in the playhouses by educated theatre-goers who, to the chagrin of the advocates of the popular theatre, were mainly from affluent middle class backgrounds. By identifying themselves with the proletariat, producers and writers were making a hypothetical challenge to the theatrical status quo; and although the economic depression of the thirties did much, especially in America, to bring the class barriers down, the call for a popular theatre in these terms remained an unrealised dream in the interwar years.

It would be easy to dismiss much of the comment and practical work generated by the response to Expressionism as
simply the discontent of a theatrical tradition that was generating no new forms to match up with the vitality of the German theatre. But this does not explain the absorption into the theatrical idiom of both countries of some selective aspects of the expressionist style, nor does it give a fair judgement of the large amount of effort expended by the companies involved in experimenting with a style that, at first, was alien and hard to understand. One of the greatest barriers to the acceptance of the worth of Expressionism was the necessary admission that something interesting was coming out of defeated Germany at a time when there was nothing comparably original in the English-speaking theatre. This was particularly hard to accept in Britain, which had been used to seeing itself as the representative of the timeless standards of theatrical excellence. The perceived progress of English dramatic art from Shakespeare onwards could not accept the idea of an artistic idealism that so wholeheartedly espoused change and revolution; the tendency in English art in the nineteenth and early twentieth century had been towards synthesis and understanding, rather than towards the exposure and questioning violence of Expressionism. The critical tendency in both Britain and America was to measure theatrical productions against what seemed to be absolute standards of excellence epitomised by and enshrined in the work of the recognised masters of the art. The challenge that Expressionism offered was not only in the field of the style of theatrical production but also in the critical conception of the art; the deliberate pursuit of states of disintegration, distortion, change and uncertainty was the complete opposite of a critical tradition nurtured by the idea of artistic unity, balanced structure and verbal and visual harmony. The expressionist influence brought into sharp focus the conflict between idealism and tradition upon which the criticism of any new artistic style is based. As perhaps the most blatantly idealistic of all theatrical styles, Expressionism encountered the most virulent opposition from upholders of the traditional values of dramatic art.

It is rare to find an example of a company or theatre that can honestly be seen to have pursued a consistent policy
regarding the presentation of expressionist drama; given the strength of the opposition to the style it is surprising that so much was produced that bears a recognisable expressionist stamp. But this lack of any large sense of an expressionist movement in America and Britain raises important questions about why some producers and writers worked with the style in the first place. Expressionism was not native to these countries; despite its influence, it remained essentially a German phenomenon, created recognisably by circumstances prevailing in Germany and its neighbours in the first quarter of the century. Were those writers and producers who brought the style into the States and Britain simply imposing a foreign style that they admired onto inappropriate theatrical vehicles? Or was the use of Expressionism necessary to fulfil a need that existed in the theatre at that time and to provide a catalyst to new developments? It seems to me that, in answering this question, the most decisive factor is the individual's response to the expressionist style. In many cases it may seem that a healthy dose of Expressionism could have been nothing but a welcome relief from the sentimentality and unoriginality of the theatre of the twenties and thirties; surveying the scene on both sides of the Atlantic one can see that there was a perceived need for the rush of energy and inspiration that contact with the German work provided. Yet there is no doubt that in many cases the presentation of expressionist drama was the result of either a dilettante interest in a novel foreign style or an attempt to brandish something shocking in the face of the theatrical establishment without any real sympathy with the style. Also there was the even less laudable reason, which no doubt lay behind many of the less spectacular attempts to stage expressionistic pieces, of wanting to be seen to be up-to-date with the latest theatrical developments. There are many answers to this question, and none is ultimately more accurate an evaluation of the theatre of the period than any other. It is certainly true that on both sides of the Atlantic the influence of Expressionism helped to provide a platform for the reorganisation of the theatre
and acted as a spur to the new regional and independent organisations that emerged during the period. It is particularly true that the American theatre needed access to a body of modern, experimental drama, which at the time it did not have, in order to give a basis to the work of the new theatrical artists who were starting their careers around the time of the First World War. It could equally be argued that the legacy of Expressionism had been nothing more than a few stylistic devices, and that, in the long term, it did nothing to replace Realism as the most effective theatrical idiom. No British or American writers came to maturity writing recognisably expressionist work with the possible exception of O'Neill, O'Casey and Johnston, whose reputations were assured by their commercial success. Whatever one's final evaluation of the work that bears a recognisable debt to Expressionism from this period, it is apparent (if only from the sheer diversity of opinion expressed thereon) that the influence cannot be pinned down or summed up in easy terms. The problem of tracing an influence in the theatre is largely twofold: firstly, one cannot pin down a period and say that that was when the influence was significant without immediately begging the question of what happened outside the chosen timespan; secondly, because of the nature of the form, one cannot hope to present an adequate array of material to substantiate general conclusions, but only give an interpretation based on the information available for research purposes. The ephemerality of theatrical presentation makes the retrospective analysis of artistic style a particularly risky business. However, the venture would seem to be worthwhile mainly because it provides material for the formation of ways of understanding the creative and critical processes involved. The operation of the expressionist influence in this period shows much about the way in which artists and critics conceptualise artistic styles, and how the transfer of a style that in one country has been associated with certain circumstances and attitudes acts on that style to the extent that it can become in effect transformed into something else altogether. In the case of Expressionism, the apparent non-acceptance of the style
is called into question by the obviously very wide effects that it had on stage practice outside Germany. What is perhaps most worthwhile about the examination of this particular phenomenon is that it embodies one of the most crucial debates about theatre that is still running at the present time, namely the question of whether the art of the theatre should be turned towards the dissection and expression of contemporary issues, or whether it should be treated as a sophisticated commodity, avoiding issues likely to run counter to the predominant mores of its audience. With the question of the funding of the theatre more pressing than ever, as municipal support is withdrawn in Britain and ticket prices escalate ever further from the reach of the majority of the population in America, the need to define the role of the theatre is becoming more pressing. In a sense this return to a purely commercial approach to theatrical programming sees the completion of a cycle in theatre history inaugurated by the establishment of the first free theatres and brought into the wide public arena after the First World War with the new challenge of Expressionism, resulting in the establishment of theatres with public funding and of groups who sought to serve the needs of a different sector of society. Both because of its stylistic challenges and its content, which stressed a democratic/left-wing philosophy, Expressionism was the obvious focus for trends that were leading the theatre away from the exclusive preserve of the refined tastes of the literate and moneyed classes; its submersion or absorption into British and American theatre sustained a period in which some degree of artistic autonomy could flourish, but the forces that prevented a positive embracing of the style in either culture led to a situation in which the active involvement of theatre artists in the expression of their society was once again limited by the necessity of submitting to the financial dictates created by an essentially reactionary attitude towards the function and funding of the theatre.

The effects that Expressionism had in Britain and America were diverse. In Britain it has been seen that a whole
chapter of theatrical history, the development of the regional repertory theatre, had as its background the debate aroused by Expressionism, and can to a great extent be evaluated in terms of how far the theatre that was created in this period served the community. Much was made of the need for a serious experimental theatre, but against this desire was the more pressing need to find a style that would encourage local people to attend the theatre; in this context one can see the work of theatres like the Birmingham, Croydon and Sheffield reps as particularly impressive in putting onto the rep stages a fairly large number of expressionistic productions. The small groups such as the Unnamed, the Eyebrow Club and many of the independent and experimental London groups, all took Expressionism as being the direction in which their work tended; the higher-profile experimental groups such as the Gate Theatre Studio and the Cambridge Festival Theatre were seen at the time as the leading exponents of the style in Britain. The awareness of the importance of Expressionism, even if only as an ill-defined critical term or artistic ambition, was widespread and pervasive; if only in these terms, the importance of the influence should not be underestimated. In the U.S.A. the effects of the influence were if anything more visible - not only in the literal sense of having been most profound in the development of American scene design, but also in the way in which there was a sudden flourishing of American theatrical endeavour at the time when the expressionist influence was at its height. The literary products of Expressionism, although relatively few, have been of significant and enduring impact, if only because they show examples of the adaptation of an experimental style into the idiom of different cultures. One may look at the Auden-Isherwood collaborations, or the early O'Neill, or the dramatic work of Lawson and Dos Passos, or The Adding Machine, and see only clumsy experiments in a dramaturgical style that was essentially alien to the writers; but the way in which these works opened up the field for their authors as well as others is impossible to ignore. The judgement of British and American attempts at producing a native Expressionism is problematical, for
although many of the works that most obviously represent this endeavour seem ragged and awkward in retrospect, their effect in shaping the tastes and ambitions of theatre artists during and after the period has been seen to be decisive. One of the most complex issues to emerge from this attempt at evaluating the effect of the expressionist influence is the 'chicken or the egg' question of whether the British and American writers were imposing onto their material a stylistic device, or whether the style was the result of an artistic need for a certain freedom of expression offered by Expressionism. In the case of some of the German writers, even, this is not clear: it is certain that the expressionist style, like any fashion, was put on at times when it was not wholly applicable. However, in the case of plays like Masse-Mensch, Von Morgens Bis Mitternachts, Gas, Hölle Weg Erde, Hinkemann, Spiegelmensch, Die Menschen and Antigone the sense one receives of conviction and passion answers that doubt. Can the same be said of The Hairy Ape and The Emperor Jones? Do The Adding Machine and The Dog Beneath The Skin seem now like the products of a spontaneous evolution of new forms dictated by the necessities of their authors' inspiration? The question is misguided. The literary products of the expressionist influence cannot usefully be seen in isolation from their productions or from the context in which they were performed and criticised. While The Emperor Jones may seem a clumsy attempt at a foreign style, the Provincetown production marked the beginning of a process of artistic development, initiated by experimentation with Expressionism, that led to the mature work of O'Neill in the late thirties and forties and to the flourishing of native American drama during and after the Second World War in the work of Hellman, Odets, Wilder, Sherwood and other widely differing talents. The introduction into both countries of devices, attitudes, approaches, debates and technical and dramaturgical advances made the expressionist influence obviously crucial; because its results are often so far removed from the style that originated them it is easy to forget the importance that was attached to Expression-
ism during the period. It has always been easy to dismiss Expressionism - it is extreme, it is hard to enjoy, it offers no easy option - but it has never been easy to ignore it. The word is still used to denote an extreme, an ambition; the mainstream British and American theatre is still as far from realising a genuine native parallel to the extraordinary burst of creativity and involvement that characterised German Expressionism at its best. The influence did not peter out in 1940; perhaps people's interest was less focussed on theatrical developments than it had been in the twenties and thirties, and many of the practitioners of the style had moved on to other methods or, like Toller, had died; the ideas that he and his contemporaries had forced onto the theatrical scene did not die, and will remain pressing issues as long as the theatre attempts to do something more than please its patrons. Looking back on the expressionist era in 1961, the playwright Franz Jung mused:

Strange how fresh the language of Expressionism has remained. It has been buried by two wars and their aftermath, but it has remained so much alive, in both the written and the spoken forms, that one could build on it anew any time.\(^1\)

There has been a revival of interest in the products of Expressionism in the 1980s; even some of the drama has been given professional production.\(^2\) It is obvious that German Expressionist drama and the work that was directly inspired by it will never find a permanent and high-profile place in British or American theatre: the forces that clouded its original reception are still with us. But as a contribution to our awareness of the complexity and range of the art, and as an object lesson in the response made towards experimentation in style and content, its importance is assured; perhaps, given the current circumstances in the theatre, its importance is increasing.
NOTES ON THE TEXT

CHAPTER ONE: THE EXPRESSIONIST PERIOD


4. This poem was included by Kurt Hiller in his expressionist anthology Der Kondor in 1912, and was chosen by Pinthus to introduce the final part of the 1920 trilogy Menschheitsdämmerung.

5. Quoted in Willett, p.124.


9. For a chronological and geographical account of early expressionist productions see Willett, p.118.

10. Ernst Toller, 'The Author To The Producer', October 1921, in Seven Plays p.111.


12. All quotations from Der Bettler are from the Sokel anthology, translated by Walter and Jacqueline Sokel as The Beggar. This quotation from p. 72. Further page references given in text.

13. For Sorge, a posthumous success.

14. Reminiscent of the eerie shifting between Naturalism and a form of Expressionism in Strindberg's The Pelican and The Ghost Sonata.


16. This and following quotations from Masse-Mensch are from an unpublished translation by Pat Frost and myself, performed in London University, 1983.
18. Ernst Toller, transcript of an address given to the British Drama League in 1934, Drama vol.13 no.4, January 1935.
22. This stands true, even considering the important work of the art theatres in Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Pasadena and elsewhere, as well as the many university companies such as Vassar.
24. Quoted in Theatre Arts vol.8 no.9, September 1924.

CHAPTER TWO: BRITISH RESPONSES

I: INTRODUCTION


II: THE RECORD OF THE REPS

2. Basil Dean, The Theatre In Reconstruction (Tonbridge, 1945) p.3.

4. Although a production like the 1913 *Julius Caesar* showed the influence of Reinhardt in the non-illusionist simplicity of its design.

5. For a full account of the background to the formation of the Playhouse see Goldie, and Basil Dean, *Seven Ages* (London, 1970).

6. From a letter signed 'Disgusted' (possibly David Webster) in *Liverpool Echo* 1923, culled from the Liverpool Local History Library’s collection of press cuttings relating to the Playhouse (volume 1) p.30. For William Armstrong’s reply see this chapter, 'Context And Programming' note 11.

7. See appendix to this chapter.

8. See appendix to this chapter.


12. *Playgoer* magazine no.9 (December, 1925).


14. A photograph of this set can be seen in *The Playhouse, Liverpool - A Short History* (Liverpool, 1951).

15. See Croydon Rep programm, 1.4.35, for photograph.

16. See Croydon Rep programme, 3.4.33, for photograph.

17. Full accounts of the history of the Rep can be found in Matthews and in T.C. Kemp, *The Playhouse And The Man* (Birmingham, 1943).

18. A statement by Drinkwater concerning his attitudes towards stage decor is quoted in this chapter - see 'Context And Programming' note 14.

19. Matthews, p.64.

20. For example the Sheffield *The Machine Wreckers* of 1925.


22. Matthews, p.112.


25. *Twelfth Night* in 1921 was the production which inspired Gray to employ Prentice at the Cambridge Festival Theatre.

26. During 1934 and 1935 Toller lectured extensively in Britain, appearing at many theatres and universities.

27. For an example of the style (fairly representative of Rep design) see the Rep's programme 12.4.32 and the photos therein of sets for *Aren't We All*; see also the illustrations in Seed.

28. A photograph of the Sheffield *The Adding Machine* is reproduced in *Drama*, vol. 7 no. 3 (December, 1928).

29. See appendix to this chapter.


31 - 40. All these productions are illustrated in the Croydon Rep programmes; some are reproduced in the illustrations to this thesis.

III: THE PROVINCIAL CIRCUIT - REORGANISATION AND TRANSFORMATION

1. Goldie, p. 211.


3. Dyas, p. 34.


5. Goldie, p. 133.


8. I am indebted to Chisholm for this idea of the phases of dominance in the British theatre.

9. It could be argued that this never changed; the Birmingham Rep still had to rely on London transfers throughout the period.

10. Trewin, p. 140.


IV: EXPRESSIONISM - INSPIRATION AND INFLUENCE

1. The first two English productions of Toller's work were by the Stage Society: The Machine Wreckers in May 1923 and Masses And Man in May 1924.

2. Borsa, pp.105-106.


4. See other quotations in this chapter.

5. Vernon, pp.70-71: 'It is not generally known that Germany tried to win the war by softening the brains of the British with Chu Chin Chow. But Reinhardt produced Sumurun; Sumurun begat Kismet, and Kismet begat Chu Chin Chow'.

6. The Vorticists made very little impact in the British theatre.


10. Dean, Seven Ages, gives an account of his career at St Martin's.

11. Despite the apparently less passionate nature of Neue Sachlichkeit, it can be seen as a new generation's rebellion against the ultimately false idealism of the expressionists: the process of artistic revolution continued in Germany until the War.


13. For an account of these and other experiments see John Stokes, Resistible Theatres (London, 1972).


15. Birmingham's Gas is a notable exception. The work of the Cambridge Festival was also remarkable, especially in design.


17. Vernon, p.132.

18. Compare Lang's 1926 film Metropolis. The ideas behind the film, and certainly its resolution, are closer to Wells than to Kaiser.
19. For example Shrdlu's 'Matermord' story.
20. Playgoer no.9, December 1925.
22. Ervine, p.194.
23. Many of the Reps discussed in this chapter had their beginnings as amateur dramatic societies. See appendix.
25. Trewin, p.196.

V: REPERTORY THEATRE - CONTEXT AND PROGRAMMING
2. Dyas, p.176.
5. Liverpoolian magazine, vol.1 no.7, December 1932. Armstrong's reply to this criticism appeared in the Liverpool Echo - see 'Record Of The Reps' note 7.
7. Quoted in Dyas, p.38.
8. Quoted in Matthews, pp.xiii-xiv.
10. Liverpoolian, vol.1 no.7.
12. Trewin, p.236.
13. Of all the Reps, those in the Northern industrial cities had, by and large, the best record of expressionist production.
15. Vernon, p.72.
16. Trewin, pp.210-211.
17. The rather deliberate fantasy of Back To Methuselah is the exception that proves the rule.

VI: CRITICAL AND PUBLIC RESPONSES
1. Playgoer no.3, October 1924.
2. Quoted in Bentley, p.xiv.
3. Quoted in Matthews, p.xiii. The incident to which Jackson refers really happened: a lady at the première of Back To Methuselah was heard to ask if the 'Shaw cycle' was a novel music hall act.

4. See Jackson’s quotation above, 'Context And Programming' note 8.

5. Trewin, p.235.


8. Trewin, p.234.


10. A producer such as Norman Marshall used the expressionist reputation of the Gate as a means of finding a foothold in more mainstream productions.


12. Vernon, pp.16-17.

13. Vernon, p.136. Vernon concludes that 'The Machine Wreckers is not as good a play about the Luddites as The North­erners'.


16. Chisholm, pp.114-115. He continues with the sinister observation 'For the moment the German dramatists are concerned with reviving the play of peasant life, a specialised field of effort'.

17. The production by the Stage Society.

18. Grein, p.54.

19. His distaste for German drama at this time could well be explained by the fact that Grein was Jewish.


21. Agate re-reviewed the same production when it transferred to the Regent in March 1926, describing it as 'a yelp from the underdog'. See James Agate, Red Letter Nights.

22. Grein, pp.63-64.

23. The St Pancras People's Theatre and Grein's own attempt with Nancy Price in Whitechapel were near but short­lived approaches; Unity in the thirties was too overtly political to have universal appeal.

27. Quoted in Borsa, p.64.

VII: THE EFFECT OF EXPRESSIONISM ON THE REPS
2. Vernon, p.77.
3. Ervine, p.36.
12. Playgoer no.8, anonymous article entitled 'Politics And The Drama'.
15. Quoted in Vernon, p.2.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER TWO
In the notes for the appendix I have given most of the sources of information that I have used in this chapter. Where there is a primary source, such as a whole book devoted to a theatre, I have not given much in the way of lesser sources as these tend to repeat information - except in those cases where I have found important additional information. More detailed lists of sources are supplied for theatres without individual studies.
1. Very little information is available on the Citizen House. See Drama vol.2 no.7; vol.7 no.8; Theatre Arts vol.22 no.2; Theatre World vol.7 no.40; Allardyce Nicoll English Drama 1900 - 1930 (Cambridge, 1973) chapter 2 section 4.
2. See Theatre World vol.7 no.33; Chisholm section 1 chapter 3; Nicoll chapter 4; Croydon Rep programme for Cradle
3. For information on the Rapier Players I am grateful to Mr Roland Russell whose correspondence has been of enormous help.

4. See Matthews, and Kemp.

5,6. See Marshall, chapter XIV.

7. Croydon programme, 14.10.35.

8. The other was at the Manchester Rep in 1939.

9. For most of my information on the Croydon Rep I have used the theatre's programmes and the house magazine Rep; see also Chisholm.

10. I am indebted to Ms Amanda Laidler at the Harrogate Theatre for assisting in my research, and to Mrs Nora Bentley for kindly providing programmes and play lists.

11. For information on the Hull Little Theatre I have relied mostly on the theatre's programmes in the V&A collection; I am grateful to Mr Michael Boardman, of Humberside County Council, for his assistance.


15. See Marshall; Chisholm; the V&A collection.

16. See Drama vol.12 no.2 and vol.13 no.1.

17. I am grateful to Mr Henry Cotton, archivist of the Playhouse, for his generous assistance. Apart from Goldie, the main source of material I have used is Liverpool Public Library's collection Liverpool Theatrical Material vol.2, compiled by Johnson, which brings together much of the press material used in this chapter.


19. Dean, Seven Ages, chapter 5.

20. Designed by George Harris.

21. Recorded in Bisson.


23. See Drama vol.1 no.6; 2.4; 2.16; 2.32; 2.33; 5.7; 5.8; 6.9; 8.17; 9.4; 10.3; 10.7; 12.7; 13.4; 13.10; 14.4; Theatre Arts vol.10 no.9 and vol. 21 no. 10; Marshall p.97.
24. Photographs can be seen in issues of Drama listed above, and in Croydon Rep programme 27.5.38.
25. See Chisholm; Nicoll; Croydon Rep programme for Martine 1933.
27. See Marshall pp. 92-97; Andrew Stephenson The Maddermarket Theatre, Norwich, published by the theatre in 1971; Theatre World vol.7 no.38, March 1928.
28. See Marshall chapter I.
29. Theatre World vol.7 no.35, December 1927; Nicoll.
30. See Seed; and a collection of programmes and letters relating to the Sheffield Rep in the V&A.

CHAPTER THREE: 'OTHER' THEATRES

1. Norman Marshall, The Other Theatre (London, 1947). Inevitably Marshall's book features frequently in this section, and in many cases provides essential information on certain groups and productions. While I do not intend to make a riposte to Marshall's view of his subject, it will become apparent that my approach is essentially different from his.
2. Gray's opposition to Dean came to a head in the debate in Drama cited below, but existed by implication in his entire approach.
3. Marshall, chapter IV, 'Peter Godfrey And The Gate'.
4. Quoted in Marshall, p.44.
5. Quoted in Marshall, p.44.
8. See Trewin's 'intellectual skittles' jibe above.
10. Drama, vol.5 no.6, March 1927.
13. In fact it would seem that, for all his audible support of experimental theatre, Marshall disliked Expressionism.
His review of the Gate's 1929 Hoppla! (Drama, vol.7 no.5, February 1929) criticises 'the sterility of the purely expressionist play'.

14. Dean's initial attack is in Drama vol.7 no.2; Gray's 'financier's pocket' remark is in vol.7 no.3; Dean's piece on art theatres is in vol.7 no.4; Gray's final comment is in vol.7 no.5.


17. 'A Dedicated Drama Leaguer', perhaps.


21. The magazine often made intriguing juxtapositions. Directly beneath Gray's tirade is a letter from the Dramatic Adviser of the Boy Scout's Association.


23. It should be pointed out that, at the time, his presentation of plays such as Rosmersholm, The Cherry Orchard, Tobias And The Angel and Volpone was courageous and innovative.

24. Gray's massenregie usually used Cambridge undergraduates, including at various times the young Robert Eddison and Michael Redgrave.

25. Terence Gray, 'Verse Speaking And Movement' in Drama, vol.6 no.5, February 1928.


27. Gray is one of the few producers/designers covered at any length in Fuerst and Hume's Twentieth Century Stage Decoration and Theatre Arts; Dukes is another.


29. Strangely, there were very few productions of Toller's work in Ireland, considering the interest shown in him by Johnston. I can trace only three from 1925 to 1940: the Dublin Drama League's Masses And Man at the Abbey in January 1925; their Hoppla!, produced by Johnston (using the name E.W. Tocher) in March 1929; and the Abbey's Blind Man's Buff, December 1936 - January 1927.
32. Drama, vol.2 no.14, January 1922.
33. Drama, vol.5 no.2, November 1926.
34. See note 10 above.
35. Drama vol.5 no.10, July 1927.
37. Quoted in Marshall, chapter XIV, 'Many Others', p.211.
38. The announcement is in Drama, vol.11 no.7, April 1933.
39. Gray, for instance, applied the term liberally and without great accuracy or discrimination; it meant much the same to him (as it did to many others) as 'experimental'. He could, for example, term Beatrice Mayor's exercise in extreme Naturalism, The Pleasure Garden, expressionistic.

CHAPTER FOUR: AMERICAN EXPRESSIONISM

2. See this chapter, note 26.
6. Theatre Arts vol.14 no.9, September 1930.
7. An obvious example is his work on Lazarus Laughed, reproduced in Theatre Arts vol.11 no.5, May 1927.
10. Quoted in Price, p.44.
12. See Cheney article cited above.
13. Caliban At The Yellow Sands was an extravagant masque designed and produced by Jones for the celebration of
the Shakespeare tercentenary. For an account of Jones's involvement with this venture and some illustrations of his sets, costumes and masks, see *Theatre Arts*, vol.1 no.2, February 1917.


15. In Pendleton, p.64.

16. Pendleton presents contributions from, among others, John Mason Brown, Kenneth Macgowan, Jo Mielziner, Donald Oenslanger, Lee Simonson and Roland Young, all testifying to the high esteem in which Jones was held by his colleagues.

17. Hiram Kelly Moderwell's article on Simonson in *Theatre Arts*, vol.2 no.1, December 1917.


19. ibid.

20. Simonson, 'Down To The Cellar' in *Theatre Arts*, vol.6 no.2, April 1922.

21. ibid.

22. Eaton says of *Man And The Masses*: 'in our alien and prosperous town the underlying stab of imminent reality could not be there'. In Simonson's chapter in *The Theatre Guild - The First Ten Years*, 'Setting The Stage', he makes no mention of the production.


25. The *Roger Bloomer* designs can be seen in the Vandamm Collection, V.C. B-525/598 A2.


CHAPTER FIVE: PRELUDE TO THE POLITICAL THEATRE

1. Rupert Doone, 'I Want The Theatre To Be', in the Westminster Theatre programme of 29.10.35.

2. The collaboration between Unity and Toller was prompted, one suspects, more by his political reputation than by
any definite interest in his methods.

3. John Dos Passos, *Three Plays* (New York, 1934) p.2. The article forming the introduction had previously appeared under the title 'Why Write For The Theatre?' in *New Republic* LXVI (April 1st 1931, pp.171 ff.).


7. ibid., p.16.


10. ibid., p.139.

11. ibid., pp.50-51.

12. ibid., pp.141-142.


18. ibid., p.x.


21. Lawson had as the motto for *Loudspeaker* a quotation from a speech by Coolidge: 'America must look to the hearthstone. There all hope for the future rests'.


23. ibid., pp.116-117.


27. Quoted by Medley, p.160.
28. 'I Want The Theatre To Be' was the general heading for a series of articles written by Group members and published in the programmes.
29. Isherwood provides a vivid account of this world in his autobiography Christopher And His Kind (London, 1977).
30. See Breon Mitchell, 'W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood: The "German Influence"', in Oxford German Studies vol.1, O.U.P. 1966, pp.163-172. Mitchell collates much evidence to suggest that there was little direct influence on the writers from the German theatre of the twenties and thirties.
31. Medley, pp.142-143.
32. Fulgens And Lucrece by Henry Medwall had been in the early repertoire and included a dance of death that had been presented in Group 'selections', for instance at the Croydon Rep in 1933.
33. W.H. Auden, programme notes for The Dance Of Death, October 1935.
36. Quoted in Medley, p.157.
39. Christopher And His Kind, p.148.
40. Quoted by Mitchell.
41. See above, note 30.
42. Medley, p.138.
43. The Times, 31st January 1936.
44. Dog p.50.
45. ibid., p.174.
46. ibid., p.30.
47. See Mitchell.
49. Stephen Spender, 'Poetry And Expressionism', New Statesman 12th March 1938, p.409. Quoted in Mirko Jurak, 'Drámatur-
This kind of dismissal of attempts to use the expressionist style in dramaturgy and staging is commonplace, of course, but in this instance seems particularly shortsighted. The Silver Tassie was undoubtedly one of the most successful uses of the style in non-German drama of the period, and in its poetic language and symbolic use of imagery and character provided perhaps the most enduring theatrical response to trench warfare. Within The Gates, perhaps a more fully-blown expressionist conception, provided one of London's few opportunities to see an expressionist staging of an original play in that vein produced at the Royalty by Norman MacDermott in 1934. That critics could dismiss this sort of work as mere dabbling with a foreign style is evidence enough of the prejudice against the uncomfortable aspects of Expressionism that clouded their judgements.
gic Concepts Of The English Group Theatre' in Modern Drama, vol.16, University Of Toronto, June 1937.

50. The Times. 19th March 1938.
52. Quoted by Malcolm Page in 'The Early Years At The Unity', Theatre Quarterly, vol.1 no.4, October-December 1971.
53. ibid.

CHAPTER SIX: A FORGOTTEN EXPERIMENT?

1. Terence Gray, interviewed in Drama, vol.9 no.10, July 1934.
5. See William Armstrong's dismissal of the style. Chapter Two, section V, note 11.
12. For information on recent productions, and on the growing academic interest in German Expressionism and its repercussions, see Brian Keith-Smith ed. German Expressionism In The United Kingdom And Ireland (University of Bristol, 1986).
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Central Library, Croydon
Liverpool Playhouse
Hull Local Studies Library
British Library
University Of London Library
ILLUSTRATIONS

COMMENTARY

1,2. Jurgen Fehling's 1920 production of Masse-Mensch at the Berlin Volkstheater, designed by Hans Strohbach. These original sketches show the dramatic shadow effects that so impressed British and American designers, in scene four (the execution dream) and scene six (the cage dream) of the play.


4. Ludwig Sievert's design for a scene from Richard Weichert's 1918 production of Hasenclever's Der Sohn at the National Theatre, Mannheim. Through the window at rear is visible an industrial skyline; at each side of the stage are formal indications of doors. Otherwise, all concentrates on the central figure of the protagonist.

5. Scene six of the first production of Masse-Mensch, with Mary Dietrich and Josef Bunzl. Dietrich's dress was blue, the bars of the cage were red, and everything else in the scene was monochrome, except for the cyclorama which was illuminated yellow. The strained posture and exaggerated make-up and expression give some indication of the acting style.

6. A scene from the 1919 production of Die Wandlung, produced by Karl-Heinz Martin and designed by Robert Neppach, staged at the Tribune Theatre, Berlin. The set consisted of a free-standing painted unit; different units were used for each scene. The contrast between the two-dimensional simplification of Die Wandlung and the expansive, plastic approach of Masse-Mensch exemplifies the two main strands of expressionist design.
7,8. Two scenes from the Stage Society's 1923 production of Masses And Man, designed by Aubrey Hammond. In scene three the Nameless One addresses the revolutionaries from a rostrum, watched by the Woman; in scene seven, the Woman contemplates her imminent execution in the prison cell. The whole tone of the production appears, from these examples, to have been more realistic than the German and American productions shown elsewhere.

9. RUR at the Northampton Repertory Theatre, 1928, produced and designed by Herbert Prentice. Drama records: 'The basis or groundwork of the scene was black, with bright yellow lines. Scenery and furniture were carried out in straight lines and angles to interpret the spirit of the play. The colour of the furniture was lupin blue and silver'. (Drama, vol.7 no.1.)

10. The Theatre Of The Soul at the Bradford Civic Playhouse, 1935. The set for this production made efficient use of the small Bradford stage: three steps lead up to the large white heart, flanked by brilliant white lines. Costumes appear to have been exaggerated versions of contemporary fashions.

11. Toller's The Blind Goddess at the Barn Theatre, Welwyn Garden City, 1934. This production, designed by Stanley Herbert, was the play's British première, and was attended by the author.


15. William Armstrong's 1933 production of Macbeth, Liverpool Playhouse. The sets for this production consisted of gauze hangings that could be moved to suggest castle walls, interi-
ors, heathland etc., complemented by scenic units such as the steps visible here. The figure groupings here, and the use of different vertical levels, suggests some absorption of expressionist crowd groupings.

16, 17. Two scenes from Geoffrey Whitworth's *Haunted Houses*, produced in 1935 by the Unnamed Society, Manchester, in sets designed by Margaret Nichols. The tiny Unnamed stage lent itself particularly well to the use of painted scenic units and simplified backdrops; the mood of unreality created by this style suited the type of drama favoured by Sladen-Smith, which was usually slightly fantastic. In the scene above, a painted backdrop depicts a woodland scene and a small chapel at left; below can be seen a house facade on the curtain, with 'night' curtains showing stars at either side.

18, 19. Two examples of the expressionistic 'drawn' set. The scene from *The Cabinet Of Doctor Caligari* (1919) at top is typical of the juxtaposition of starkly-clad human figures with distorted, two-dimensional scenery, using the exaggeration of perspective to heighten the sense of hallucination that the film sought to create. In the Gate Theatre Studio's production of *Rampa* by Max Mohr in 1928 a projector was used to provide the background; here is a distorted and simplified room, using the unusual angles and stark crudity that epitomised the Gate's expressionistic productions.

20. *Grotesques* by Cloyd Head, designed by Raymond Johnson for the Chicago Little Theatre in 1914, described by the author as 'a decoration in black and white'. The use of Beardsleyesque massings of black and white, and the generally rather 'aesthetic' appearance of the whole, show the attempt by the early art theatres designers to introduce onto the American stage elements of the artistic advances in Europe of the previous twenty years.
21, 22. The contrast between the two-dimensional and the three dimensional approach to scenic design was pronounced in developments in the American theatre. Above is Mordecai Gorelik's 1925 design for the first act of the Theatre Guild production of Lawson's 'vaudeville' drama, Processional, using a brightly-painted canvas curtain representing in simple, bold designs an American street scene, fully in keeping with the analytical/satirical approach of the play. Below is the banquet scene from the Hopkins-Jones production of Macbeth, 1921, in which the spatial relationship between the scenic elements, and the interplay between light and object, created a mood of visual dynamism that was essentially three-dimensional.

23. Four designs by Norman Bel Geddes for his Divine Comedy project, planned for Madison Square Gardens, but never actualised. The extent to which Bel Geddes had contributed to something close to a genuine American Expressionism is evident from the spectacular use of light and almost abstract scenic elements in these designs.

24, 25. Two examples of the early work of Lee Simonson, contrasting with the heroic effects sought after in the work of Jones and Bel Geddes seen above. For Liliom (1921), designed for the Theatre Guild, Simonson provided a series of simple, elegant sets that used free-standing scenic elements such as the gate visible here, contrasting with the more deliberately pretty style of his earlier pre-War work for the Washington Square Players, represented here by Sisters Of Susannah from their second season (figure 25), where the approach was decorative rather than expressive.

26. Cleon Throckmorton's design for an early Provincetown production, The Verge by Susan Glaspell (1921). The scene is a tower with circular walls, accentuated by the patterns cast from the lamp; shadow effects combined with simplification and distortion are used to evoke the atmosphere of incipient madness which was the play's subject.
27. The lawyer's office in the first act of Capek's *The Macropoulos Secret* at the Pasadena Community Playhouse, designed by Robert R. Sharpe, 1926. The flats were painted in shades of grey, using distorted vertical lines and top-heavy triangular planes to depict the disorder and confusion in the scene. A cobweb design is visible at right. The use of exaggeration and distortion that was for many people synonymous with Expressionism was well suited to the small stages of the art theatres, as it could often do away with the need for large, costly, representational sets.

28. Jonel Jorgulesco's set for the factory scene in *The Machine Wreckers* at the Boston Repertory Theatre, 1928. Again the stress is on elements of stylisation and distortion, especially the use of acute angles as a repeated feature of the design.

29. Jones and Throckmorton designed *The Spook Sonata* for Provincetown in 1924 as a chamber piece, diminishing the size of the stage by the introduction of false wings, visible here covered with wallpaper and bearing portraits. Combined with the use of masks and the plain, simply-coloured costumes, the effect overall was of a series of tableaux, essentially pictorial rather than kinetic. The masks, just visible here on the fiancée (second from the left), Hummel (standing), and the Baron (second from the right) were made of rubber that only partially covered the actors' faces, giving the impression of animated dolls.

30. *Adam Solitaire* by Em Jo Basshe at the Provincetown Playhouse, 1925. The design by Throckmorton for the final scene, in which a New York bridge collapses beneath the protagonist, used patterns of rope silhouetted in front of the cyclorama which were simply dropped from the flies at the climax of the scene.

31. Gorelik's designs for the Philadelphia Players' 1925 production of Andreyev's *King Hunger*. *Theatre Arts* described the scene as 'a straining city painted on a backdrop close
to the curtain line, with a skyscraper-church masking a platform on which Hunger, Death and Time are standing'.

32. The Neighborhood Theatre's Pinwheel in 1927 was basically a revue, telling in sketches combining song, dance and action an allegorical story of the adventures of two innocents in the big city. Oenslinger's designs were extremely stylized, striving towards the effect of an animated cartoon, very angular and distorted, epitomised by the garish make-up worn by these three dancers.

33. The simple use of distortion and light enabled even the most basic theatres to produce experimental work. Here is a scene from the York Cocoa Works' production of Schofield's Judge Of All The Earth (presented by the drama club, the Rowntree Players, in 1927). The design, using orange blocks against a blue ground, was arranged by the producer, P.T.F. Cosby.

34. The Vassar Experimental Theatre was a college theatre group run by Hallie Flanagan, who later led the Federal Theatre Project. In these pictures from an experimental evening in 1927 of three performances of Chekhov's The Marriage Proposal, one can see a representation of what was—the general conception of the three styles of Naturalism, Expressionism and Constructivism. The realistic set, at top, bears a resemblance to some of Simonson's early work in its spare arrangement of scenic elements; in the expressionist version, symbolic, explosive graphics and an exaggerated stylization of acting present the basics of that idiom; in the constructivist version, at the bottom, lights are visible and the only important scenery is the set of steps at left and the slide at right. The actors are dressed in workday clothes, contrasting with the turn-of-the-century costumes in the realistic presentation and the masks and 'interpretative' costumes in Expressionism. In the article in Theatre Arts (vol.12 no.1, January 1928) that accompanies the pictures, Flanagan came down decisively in favour of the constructivist manner.
35, 36. British Repertory Expressionism. The works of the brothers Capek often provided producers with the degree of experimentation and fantasy that suited the contemporary vogue for Expressionism without too overtly political or sexual aspects to provoke displeasure. The 1931 production of Adam The Creator by the Halifax Thespians (fig.35), with its use of steps and formalised gestures and groupings, would seem to bear a debt to the work of Gray at the Festival. Sydney Thompson's design for the Hull Playgoers' 1931 production of RUR is another example of the use of unrealistic lighting, simplified scenery and costumes to communicate the sense of the future that was the play's main appeal.

37, 38, 39. From Theatre Arts April 1923 (vol.7 no.2). Roland Young's own International Theatre Exhibition parodied some of the foremost designers of the period in a series of designs for Alice In Wonderland. At top is the Cheshire Cat and the croquet game according to Robert Edmond Jones, and the Mad Hatter's tea party in the manner of Joseph Urban ('note the characteristic lightness of conception'). Centre, at left, is a costume design for Alice after the manner of Rollo Peters: 'Here we have a fine example of Peters' rollicking - I had almost said Rabelaisian quality. The sheer, boisterous jollity of this costume design is thrilling - I had almost said ecstatic. And now I have said it.' Centre, middle, is the Lion and the Unicorn arranged by Norman Bel Geddes, where 'the strong influence of the Woolworth Building struggles with that of the late Sir Edwin Landseer'. Centre, right, the Fish Footman according to Craig. Below (39) left, is the Tea Party according to Appia; at right is Alice and the Mushroom after Lee Simonson - 'Symbolism Rampant'.

40. Jones's design for the 1914 production of The Man Who Married A Dumb Wife. The simplicity and stylization of the set, which represents the exterior of a house with windows, shutters and a balcony, combines the two distinctive features of much of Jones's work: the elegant, sparse arrangement of the main features of the set and a restrained decorative element - in the repeated pattern of small squares
in gold around the window frames, and the use of draped cloth on the balcony.

41. This scene from _The Devil's Garden_ is an inspector's office, in which a postal clerk, accused of stealing, is arraigned by a group of his superiors. The extreme sparseness of Jones's design is in tune with the stark, unsympathetic mood of the scene.

42 - 45. From top: the first Witches scene; the letter scene; the cauldron scene; and the sleepwalking scene from Jones's _Macbeth_.

46. Two scenes from Hopkins's 1928 production of Sophie Treadwell's _Machinal_, designed by Jones. While the influence of Strohbach's _Masse-Mensch_ is obvious, it can be seen that Jones had adapted the style to suit his tendency towards restraint, producing images of striking simplicity.

47. Maeterlinck's _The Seven Princesses_ designed by Jones. This was one of the skeleton sets that Jones exhibited at his one-man show at the Bourgeois Gallery in 1920.

48. Lee Simonson's arrangement for the Theatre Guild's 1922 production of _From Morn To Midnight_. The overall style was one of functional simplicity, as in the instance of the design for the bicycle race in which the only elements are black curtains, a wooden railing, a few flags and the uniform costumes of the spectators. This and the Jones design above are typical of the American simplification of expressionist design concepts.

49, 50. Two moments from scene three of Simonson's production of _Man And The Masses_. Simonson restricted his scenery in the realistic scenes to step blocks, leaving him free to experiment with choreographic effects with considerable success. Here the change in the crowd's sympathies from the Woman, at left, to the Nameless, at right, is effectively
conveyed. In the dream scenes greater use was made of scenic elements, such as giant coins in the stock exchange scene.

51, 52. Simonson's designs for the Guild production of Chlumberg's *Miracle At Verdun* (1931) represent his work at its best, bearing close similarities to the primitivist vein of German expressionist design.

53. The staging style of O'Neill's dramas is a paradigm for the development of American scenic art. In this production of *The Long Voyage Home* by the Provincetown Players in 1917, the quest for simplicity and realistic, un-pretty sets was a response to the over-elaboration of designers of the Belasco school. This set, with its crudely painted two-dimensional backdrop, is typical of the work of the group under the direction of George Cram Cook, whose interest was squarely on the fostering of a native realistic drama. It was after his resignation in 1922 that the Players, under the joint direction of O'Neill, Macgowan and Jones, entered an experimental and largely expressionist phase.

54. Throckmorton's designs for *The Emperor Jones* at Macdougal Street in 1920 marked a watershed in the career of Provincetown and O'Neill. The cyclorama was fully used to create silhouette effects, as with the Witch Doctor and the Crocodile God here. Jones is visible down stage left.

55. The slave market scene from *The Emperor Jones* - further use of silhouette.

56. Scene one of *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, Provincetown 1924. Throckmorton's designs for this production effectively captured the stress laid in the text on the black/white contrast that is the play's dominant theme.

57. Later in 1924 O'Neill presented a less overtly expressionist drama, *Desire Under The Elms*, and the mixture of Realism and patterned action and emotion was expressed in Jones's designs, with the heavy, overhanging trees and the realisation of the house with the removeable walls.
58. While Throckmorton's O'Neill designs exposed the expressionist influence, Jones's tended to stress the patterning of the action with simple, decorative elements. In the two designers' collaboration on The Hairy Ape (1922) the two approaches combined with extraordinary results. The juxtaposition of human figures and two-dimensional painted flates reminiscent of expressionist artists such as Grosz accents the unreal, satirical aspects of the play. Here is the first scene in the stokers' cabin.

59. Yank confronts the residents of Fifth Avenue.

60. Jones's Desire Under The Elms design in action, with the two top sections of the house front removed to show the adjoining bedrooms. The characters, although both visible to the audience, remained unaware of each other.

61. 62. Simonson's work on O'Neill's plays never reached the interpretative subtlety of Throckmorton or Jones. In the two main sets for Dynamo at the Garrick Theatre in 1929, there is an uneasy combination of Simonson's characteristic flair for the arrangement of stage space, and the slightly tricksy sets that the play required. In fig.61, the plainness of the back curtain fails to give any impression of permanence to the flimsy frame houses, in which the realistic furniture clashes with the overall stylization of the scene. The set for the Hydro-Electric plant fails to give the impression of danger and power that the scene requires, and the vision of the dynamo itself as an object of worship is not realised. Perhaps O'Neill's conception is as much at fault as any inadequacy on the part of Simonson.

63. Elements of symbolism and scenic expressiveness spilt over into more mainstream productions, as in Jo Mielziner's design for Maxwell Anderson's Winterset (1935).

64. One of the most enduring contributions of Expressionism to American scene design was its use as an indication of fantasy or satire. The costumes designed by Woodman Thompson
for Beggar On Horseback used comic mixtures of incongruous elements reminiscent of Methusalem but without the same determined surrealism. Thompson's sets and costumes for this play deftly combined the surface of warped normality with a witty approach towards visual jokes.
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