A SURVEY OF CHARLES WOOD'S PLAYS FOR STAGE AND SCREEN, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE TREATMENT OF WAR IN DINGO, H, AND THE ASSOCIATED FILMS.

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by

Derek Francis Weeks

A Thesis
for the Degree of
Master of Philosophy.

Royal Holloway College,
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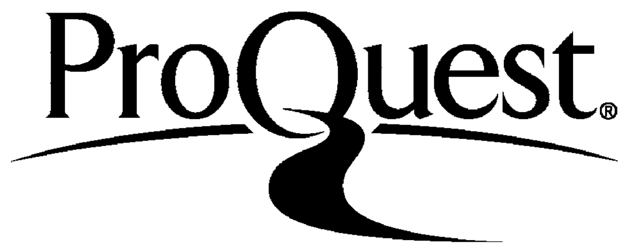

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A SURVEY OF CHARLES WOOD'S PLAYS FOR STAGE AND SCREEN, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE TREATMENT OF WAR IN DINGO, H, AND THE ASSOCIATED FILMS.

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Abstract.

Over the past twenty years, Charles Wood has written 13 stage plays, at least 20 screenplays, and more than 14 television plays (of which one was divided into two series, each of six 50-minute episodes). His major plays have been performed at either the National, Royal Shakespeare Company, or Royal Court Theatres; he has an international reputation for his work in the cinema; and writes regularly for television. Yet his work, though mentioned respectfully on the whole by modern theatre critics, has not received a full and considered critical appraisal.

This study sets out to provide a fuller examination of a major aspect of his work: his treatment of War for theatre and screen. Its first chapter offers essential, and hitherto unpublished, biographical material concerning Wood's own Army career, and his early connections with the theatre. This provides a foundation for a consideration of those of his early plays, written from 1958 to 1965, with the Army as the basis for subject matter. These two chapters form a framework for the main emphasis of the study: his portrayal, in theatre and film, of the Second World War in Dingo, and 'How I Won the War'; and the Victorian conflicts in India and the Crimea, as shown in H, and 'The Charge of the Light Brigade'. Finally, there is a consideration of Veterans, and Has "Washington" Legs?, two plays concerned with the making of films about War.

The writer's source materials, both written and visual, are explored, and photographs accompany the text. An analysis of important scenes and characters is provided. Most importantly, the focus, where possible, is on the plays in performance, with observations on the rehearsal process (studied at first-hand in Has "Washington" Legs?), and the interaction at various stages between dramatist, director, and designer. Where available, original typescripts have been used, and comparisons made, where appropriate, with final, printed versions. Existing prompt copies have been referred to where available, and use made of conversations and interviews with the author and his associates. To widen the perspective, there is also an appraisal of critical responses from both reviewers and critics of modern drama.

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N.B.

In the interests of clarity, all published works are underlined thus:

Spare.

All unpublished works, whether screened or staged or not, are delineated thus:

'The Charge of the Light Brigade'.

CHAPTER I.

THE WHIP AND THE BANANA.

EARLY INFLUENCES IN CHARLES WOOD'S DEVELOPMENT AS A DRAMATIST.

Charles Wood was born in Guernsey in 1932, into a family with very strong theatrical connections. In 1950 he joined the Army as a regular soldier on a five-year engagement, and started to write plays in 1958, during the great surge of interest in the new drama. From 1961 several of his plays were performed in the theatre and on television, and from 1965 he wrote numerous filmscripts. His main sources of subject material are the Theatre (Television and Cinema); and the Army.

These are the facts to be found, in similar bare outline, on the fly-leaves of the printed versions of Wood's plays, and in theatrical reference books. Stated thus baldly, they raise several intriguing questions. What exactly were the strong theatrical connections which provide him with so much subject-matter and such a compendium of methods for presenting it, and what was the real nature of his own early involvement with the theatre? When answers have been found to these, more questions follow quite naturally. Why did a writer with this unique background and such an apparent abhorrence of war join the Army, and how did this later experience help to shape his subsequent work? In this chapter I shall attempt to find answers to these questions from the author himself, and from some of his earlier work, at the same time tracing the outline of his writing career to 1965, a phase which will then be examined in greater detail in Chapter II.

In similar fashion to his contemporaries Harold Pinter and John Osborne, Wood is in the non-Oxbridge, even non-university educated, minority of important modern English dramatists. The other two playwrights learned their craft practically, from close first-hand involvement in all aspects of theatre, rather than approaching drama from an academic standpoint, joining repertory companies whilst still in their teens. Wood's connection with the theatre, however, began at a much earlier age.

In his play Fill the Stage with Happy Hours (which I shall refer to subsequently as Fill the Stage), which was first produced at the Nottingham Playhouse in November, 1966, Maggie Harris, the actress wife of an ageing actor-manager who runs a theatre in the Midlands, points to a photograph on the office wall and observes:

> They kept me at it. I was carrying Harry right up to the last minute...that photograph up there, that's me, that's your mother, that's me in Under Two Flags. That's Harry under me pinny. [1]

Here, as in so much of Wood's work, fiction is fused with fact. In the play, Harry is a self-portrait of the author in adolescence, and Wood actually has an original photograph of his mother, Mae, hugely pregnant, and playing Zigarette, the vivandière, in Ouida's melodrama about the French Foreign Legion. The large bulge was Wood himself and it would be very difficult indeed to discover evidence of an earlier link between a playwright and his medium. As Albert Harris, the actor-manager, reminisces ruefully, but with true professional detachment, 'We lost two feet of depth that week.'[2.]

A large measure of professional detachment was evident in Wood's earliest theatrical experiences for his real parents were both members of a travelling repertory company formed after the First World War by his grandfather, Albert Harris. Fill the Stage was dedicated to Wood's grandfather, though the real prototype of Albert Harris in the play was the author's father John (Jack) Wood. The factual Albert Harris, the author's grandfather, came from a family of animal trainers who had worked in a circus. Harris had served as a regular soldier, an occupation which his grandson was to follow later, and was recalled for action in the First World War, reaching the rank of Sergeant Major. On demobilisation, Harris formed his company. His daughter, Mae Harris, became an actress in it, and met her future husband, Jack Wood, through it. Ironically, after writing Fill the Stage, Wood's father told him that Albert Harris had not, in fact, been his real grandfather. His mother's natural father had been:

> a theatrical impresario in the North, and my grandmother was an usherette. She was made pregnant by him, and two or three months afterwards he was clapped in an insane asylum where he died because he went out of his mind. 3.

Despite this apparent canker at the roots of identity, the theatrical connection remains, and there is a gentle irony in the choice of Wood's filmscript of 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' for the Royal Command Performance in 1968, a film written by an author whose grandmother had been a cinema usherette (this was by no means the only irony as will be shown in Chapter IV); whilst the mentions and fears of madness which recur in many of the playwright's works might well have their source here.

The Harris company performed in repertory all over the country, including the Channel Islands, where Wood was born on 6th August, 1932. The fictional Maggie Harris gives a glimpse of her own mental confusion arising from the agony of giving birth, linked in memory with the fragmented, unreal nature of the peripatetic actor's life:

> I bore him. Do you know what that means? I was thirty-six hours. There is nothing can replace that. In Sunderland of all places, or was it Guernsey? I'm at a loss for names. It must have been Guernsey because I vowed I would enter the Church. 4.

The family was forced to stay in Guernsey following the confinement, but returned regularly in succeeding years. The author's earliest stage memories stem from some of these return visits. They are of his parents on stage:

> I've got memories of father doing Uncle Tom's Cabin in Guernsey, and I've got a vivid memory of him playing Uncle Tom and being lashed, and me in the audience screaming for them to stop hitting my daddy. 5.

This nightmarish clash of identities continued when he himself became one of the company:

> There's another vivid memory I have of my mother going across the ice floes in Uncle Tom, carrying me, because I was playing the little boy. 6.

and his recollections culminate in a strange, surreal image:

> I've got a vivid memory of my father......standing on the other side with a whip in one hand and a banana in the other, hidden, and the banana was for me if I got across without crying. 7.

Surprisingly, this lurid image does not figure in any of the plays or films, though Albert Harris in Fill the Stage recalls the white stage manager of the Ballets Nègres troupe who stood in the prompt corner carrying a large club to underline his authority. However, these early theatrical impressions give glimpses of a child's confusion with parental and theatrical role, and show the insecurity which can result from growing too quickly into an adult fantasy world. On the other hand, the conflicts and images are clear and essentially dramatic, the rewards and punishments are based on endeavour and perseverance, and provide an educational experience which Wood could not have gained elsewhere.

Since the real Harris company toured the country Wood, as a child, received a patchy and fragmented education, attending school only when the troupe stayed long enough in one place to make it worthwhile. This was not necessarily detrimental to his development as a dramatist, for he was gaining first-hand knowledge of the theatrical process from a very early age, and moving around the country from region to region provided him with an opportunity to develop an ear for language. He acknowledges the importance of this:

> I've got a very, very good ear, and it doesn't take me long to pick up regional dialects, regional music. 8.

and stresses the fundamental importance of language to his drama:

> The basis of all my writing is a knowledge. It's either knowledge of the Army, which nobody can refute, or a knowledge of a language which nobody can refute, and until I get that knowledge I can't write. 9.

Examples of his use of language will be considered in connection with some of the plays to be studied in detail later, particularly Dingo and H, but the roots of his varied dialogue - Dingo's polemical outbursts, Tanky's Midland vernacular ('That was me when I was in Chesterfield. Those were my memories of being a boy in Chesterfield') [10], the Bristolian accents of 'Labour', and Havelock's Victorian rhetoric - were struck in this unsettled childhood period. In spite of the diffused nature of his schooling Wood read voraciously as a child, citing particularly the normal children's classics, and G.A.Henty (who, with Ouïda, suggests an interesting starting-point for the later plays and films on the Empire), but when at school was not outstanding at English:

> I could never understand the structure of the language. I could understand the sounds and the images and the words. I could always spell, and if absolutely necessary, I could always turn out an essay that would horrify them because it had guts. 11.

a statement which reveals an intuitive response to language and a poetic absorption of its elements, whilst the impact of his essay writing is of some importance when viewed in the context of Wood's later development as a writer in the 'gut reaction' theatre of the post-1956 revolutionaries.

After the Second World War, which had led to the dispersal of the company, the family moved to Kidderminster. Wood was now able to attend the local Grammar School, and his parents managed the Kidderminster Playhouse. This rather grim-looking building (see Appendix B) had been bought by an amateur dramatic society, the Nonentities, during the War. It was reopened after renovation in 1946 with a deficit of £10,000, and its post-war history, like that of the theatre in Fill the Stage, is one of a constant struggle against philistinism, dwindling audiences, and increasing bills. Jack Wood was appointed manager in 1947, and established a permanent repertory company which occupied the theatre for much of the year. When this professional company finished its season, the Nonentities provided a wide selection of plays produced and acted by amateurs, the local operatic societies performed musicals, and professional touring companies played short seasons. This period was an important one in Charles Wood's theatrical education, and Appendix A lists over 100 dramatic performances in the three seasons during which Jack Wood managed the theatre which his son would have been aware of and often involved in, ranging from East Lynne to Phyllis Dixey's nude show, from Juno and the Paycock to The Lilac Domino, and from Ma's Bit o' Brass to Private Lives. Jack Wood himself played several leading roles in the repertory productions

notably the whisky-doctor in White Cargo, and Sweeney Todd. The list of plays shows that the Playhouse Company's productions leaned heavily on melodrama and comedy. Its repertoire was old-fashioned, and apparently calculated to appeal to a middle-aged audience and the Box Office. Charles Wood's comments about this company and the earlier troupe from which it evolved are revealing when viewed in terms of his own direct theatrical experience. He says:

> There was a working-class theatre then, and not only was it working-class but the actors were working-class. They didn't have to pretend to be working-class, what they had to pretend to be was upper-class, because most of the plays were about articulate upper-class or middle-class families. 12.

Wood clearly sees himself as having a working-class background and as being closely involved with a fading form of popular theatre, its original roots deep in pomping and barn-storming though now fairly respectably settled, but about to be swept away by television and new dramatic experiment in which he was to be an active and provocative participant.

The Playhouse is obviously the setting for Fill the Stage, though the stage directions also have a strong suggestion of the Theatre Royal Bristol, before its renovation in 1972:

> The setting is a theatre interior full of tight Georgian staircases and little cubby holes and the very cold mattress on the floor home of the Harris family in Worcester or some such - together with a hotel suite, pink green and lightly lit. A drop between scenes and acts shows the exterior of the theatre and huge photographs of Maggie Harris from the Palace. 13.

The photographs in Appendix B show a spacious conventional auditorium (which was apparently very cold and draughty in winter), and a large but dull-looking foyer. The Woods left the theatre at the end of the 1950 season, and two years later John Osborne joined the Company, or, as he puts it in his autobiography, 'I spent the summer of 1953 as Juv. Char. at Kidderminster.' 14. It is tempting to suppose that this theatre also provided the background for The Entertainer.

In Wood's play, the interior of the old theatre has a womb-like quality which contrasts with the coldness of 'home' which, in most of Wood's work is a place to escape from rather than return to. In the interval, a frontdrop of the theatre's facade hides the internal reality and sense of suffering of its inhabitants. In the play, fantasies of the retrospectively happy past and the possibly happy future exist to alleviate the mundane present. Maggie's huge photographs are reminders of a more cheerful and optimistic youth, now become drab through lack of love and achievement, and the imminence of a painful death; whilst the seductive lure of cinema, a potential

escape only for Harry, leads to the ending of his state of innocence in the gaudy, Hollywood-film style bedroom, a fantasy image conjured up by Harry from the back row of the local cinema.

Harry is a portrait of the adolescent Charles Wood, the focus of the aspirations of his failed theatrical parents. Underlying the thematic interweavings of failed sexual relationships, inadequacy, lack of understanding between individuals and generations, the confusions between role, religion, and living, the constant worries about money, the tears, and fears of madness, is a deep resentment at what Albert calls 'this pointless, entirely unnecessary, unwholesome, trivial, emp-ty, soft as a flabby hampton, this carrot called theatre.' 15. It is a hatred, tinged with a certain obsessive dependence, shared by Charles Wood himself, who has said that his interest in the theatre 'was stifled at an early age by being born to actors, themselves the children of actors and living, eating, sleeping in and around theatres throughout the country. It has never been properly reawakened.' 16. Nevertheless, he has always returned to the theatre and some of his best work has been performed there, but the oppositions of love and hate permeate his attitudes towards it, and to the Army, television and cinema. His work invariably reflects this conflict.

In Fill the Stage Harry remarks, 'I've been at the same school for two years now' [17], with evident surprise at such stability, but shows the family's financial difficulties by adding 'with a blazer from Berman's', (the theatrical costumiers), evidently borrowed from Wardrobe. Wood settled more easily to academic work at Kidderminster than he had at his wartime school at Chesterfield but he was actively involved with the theatre too, though he discovered that he had no interest in becoming an actor:

> I would much rather be working on the switchboard, or much rather be working on the stage, than be working as an actor. 18.

This is hardly surprising in view of his assertion that, until moving to Kidderminster, aged 15, he had never actually read a play, despite constant exposure to the theatre:

> All I'd read up to then, in all the plays I'd had were parts of plays, because you never got given a play when you were doing a play as an actor, you were never given the play to read, you were always given a part, which is why it's called a part, and they were about six inches high and the length of a page, and all that was in them was your cue and the line, and as I always had a small part, all I had were two or three cues and a few speeches, and as far as I was concerned, that was the play. 19.

This piecemeal way of looking at plays, and the periods of inactivity associated with rehearsals, made him break away from acting, though

he played boy parts in The Guinea Pig, and The Corn is Green, in the 1949/50 season, and always played his mother's son in Lancashire comedies (Molly, in Fill the Stage, is described as 'an hilarious scream of the cruel Lancashire comedy kind', but, Wood adds, 'I've never found her funny'). 20. Forced by unavoidable circumstances to play an old man of 75 in The Cat and the Canary when still only 16, he gave up acting and escaped to the comparative anonymity of the switchboard whenever possible. This was not without its brighter moments, as the fictional Harry recalls:

> I was on the switchboard for Phyllis Dixey and her all time low... when she came alive from being a wet white statue and the hero discreetly turned off the lights on purpose, I misread the cue and gave the old men in the front row of the orchestra stalls the benefit of a full up. 21.

This irresistibly recalls the fare served up by the 'Rock'n Roll New'd Look' of Archie Rice's theatre, though the fictional Albert Harris has a loftier view of its function:

> I myself have built this theatre up with my own two hands from nudey nudey come to titillate which was the norm to something I hope higher - something from the lips. 22.

His fragmented educational experience became more cohesive in Wood's final year at school. He became a pupil of the English master, who, besides being interested in the Playhouse, was also Commander of the newly-formed school Cadet Force. Wood joined, and became a Sergeant, gaining useful experience for his future Army career. At the same time he was given R.C.Sherriff's Journey's End to read and, for the first time, discovered pleasure in reading a play. Journey's End is a war play for which he still has great respect and affection, and he actually used a sequence from it in his 1967 film 'How I Won the War':

> 14 INT. THEATRE (COLOUR) DAY
>
> As GRAPPLE comes to the end of his poem we CUT to him in vision and ZOOM BACK to show him on the stage of a seaside Rep. Theatre in 1914 gear. Two actors with him as he says:
>
> (repeat) Of skill and guts and fortitude
> Of brain and brawn and guile.
>
> GRAPPLE
>
> They're coming, and they're yours young
> man - see you do well by them.
>
> As he finishes the tabs come down on 'Journey's End' and sparse applause. 23.

This is typical of the series of alienation devices used throughout the film, which will be considered in more detail in Chapter III. In this extract, too, there is a reminder of the Harris/Wood companies, and the 'sparse applause' is echoed in Fill the Stage:

> The bell rings for the interval and the exit doors clang open and laughter comes from at least fifteen throats. 24.

Charles Wood's own disenchantment with the theatre is compounded by small audiences and apathetic responses:

> What has put me off writing for the theatre is the theatre, and the fact that nobody goes to see my plays when they are done. 25.

Wood's views on, and treatment of, War are central to this study, and it is interesting to note that his impressions of War had been formed partly from the events he had lived through, but also from theatrical representations presented by the touring company. One of their productions, of Mademoiselle from Armentières, a melodrama about the First World War, provided particularly lasting impressions. In it, Jack Wood acted a scene where he carried a comrade's dead body over his shoulder, and, believing him still to be alive, talked to him. This theatrical image surfaces again with great savagery in Dingo, where it will be examined in some detail, and Mademoiselle from Armentières provides other clues to Wood's later theatrical practices:

> And that's what I thought the First World War was all about. I always saw it as a series of cloths coming down in Mademoiselle from Armentières. One was in the trenches, all painted beautifully, all going like that, and father staggered through a hole in the cloth. The other one was the brothel. They didn't call it that, they called it a café, with the cloth coming down, and people dressed as German officers, and Mademoiselle from Armentières was really a spy - a melodrama. Then I read Journey's End and I thought this was nearer to it. 26.

Here is the source of the great cloths of H, billowing over the stage of the National Theatre, protecting the audience from danger (see Chapter V), but the reading of Journey's End opened the door to drama in another way, for, after reading it, Wood calculates that he read over a hundred plays and spent some time discussing them with his English teacher.

With his strong theatrical background, and a developing interest in Art at school, Wood had always seen his future as a scenic artist. After leaving school, he attended Birmingham College of Art from 1948 to 1949, following a general art course with particular interest in lithography. Whilst at Birmingham he discovered that he was not outstanding at drawing, and his grant was withdrawn. Jack Wood left the Playhouse at the end of the 1949/50 season, and his son faced a difficult situation. The prospect of employment at the Playhouse had vanished, the Art course had failed to provide him with suitable qualifications and job possibilities, and compulsory National Service was in the offing. Since Army service was inevitable anyway, Wood decided to opt for a measure of security, and, having enjoyed his service in the Cadet Force at school, joined the Army for five years as a Regular soldier.

Wood's lifelong involvement with the various theatre companies had provided him with a vivid theatrical background, full of strong, sharp impressions. The succession of painted cloths, the costumes, colours, rhythms and sounds expressed a changing dramatic world where naturalism alternated with melodrama, biblical epic with nudes. This fantasy-oriented conception of the external world, as Wood well knew, cloaked the reality of the drudgery of learning lines and moves, of hammering and banging sets together, of setting the lights and running technical rehearsals late at night. There was a deep sense of insecurity, too, in this way of life, and it is a theme which runs through Fill the Stage. 'Why is it that the theatre attracts such inadequate people?'[27] laments Albert Harris, though, characteristically, he does not include himself or Maggie in that category. To leave that kind of life for the Army was, for Wood, rather like exchanging one kind of theatre for another. The Army also has vivid visual elements, from the gradations of uniform to its own rituals of parades and the panoply of ceremonial occasions. The sense of an individual's identity can be subjugated by dressing up in uniform, there are the strong rhythms of drill and words of command, barrack-room slang and the jargon of the Officers Mess, the 'backstage' drudgery of 'bull' and barrack routine, and the hierarchical gulf between officers and men. It has, as well, the savage and primitive excitement of ordered aggression and sexual sublimation, and the possibly mindless but comforting experience for the insecure, of anonymity as a cog of a machine. As will be demonstrated in Chapter II, Wood uses these elements and his own newly-acquired first-hand experience of Army life to express his fascination with ceremonial and pageantry whilst maintaining a wary and objective awareness of its less attractive side, exchanging, in fact, the comforting but nebulous banana-like quality of the theatre for the crack of the Army's whip.

His first posting was to Catterick, which he found 'squalid', but the experiences of recruit training provided material for a later television series called 'Death or Glory Boys', in 1974, which 'is almost absolutely autobiographical'.[28.] He then chose to join the 17/21st Lancers, and was sent with them to Germany, then Salisbury Plain, the setting for an early radio play 'Stick Man', which will be examined in Chapter II. 'Stick Man'

> ...comes from Tilshead, which is where we were, a little village which I've been back to, and it's still the same, exactly the same, even the hut that I slept in is there.29.

He continued to read whilst in the Army, and remembers particularly Stephen Vincent Benet's epic poem John Brown's Body, which he considers

a great influence on him. He envisaged the poem as 'a great play and a great film',[30] and also read Hardy and Tolstoy who seem to have had a strong unconscious influence on some of his later works.

Married in his final year of service, 1954, he spent his first month as a civilian unsuccessfully attempting to sell encyclopaedias in Bristol, his wife's home town. This was his first real experience of a place which figures prominently in much of his later work. Having become a Wireless Operator whilst in the Army, he was able to join the then Bristol Aeroplane Company as a wireman in the Research Department of Guided Missiles. A year later he had earned enough money to emigrate to Canada, where he took a variety of jobs in quick succession which included washing the walls of giant skyscrapers, designing neon signs, Technical Illustration, and, finally, he became a Typographer Advertising Artist for a Department Store. Throughout his stay in Toronto he continued to draw, mainly for his own pleasure, and mainly caricatures, like the youthful Ibsen in Christiania. Of his later work, Dingo, in particular, is a series of savage cartoon-like scenes with more than an echo of Daumier, Grosz, and the newspaper lampoons of Vikki. Though he has been shown to resent the theatre, the urge to return to it was always present, and the combination of his theatrical experience and drawing skill bore some fruit:

> I'd started doing theatrical caricatures, and by an extraordinary stroke of luck, my first one was put into the Toronto Globe and Mail...I had to get back into the Theatre, and the only way to do it was to say to people, "I am a caricaturist. Can I come to rehearsals?". 31.

He was paid 15 dollars for the first effort, and became a regular contributor to the newspaper, using the drawings to secure the job in Advertising. It is at this point that his writing ability comes to the fore for the first time, and, curiously, it recalls Phyllis Dixey, and Archie Rice's shows. The Advertising firm wanted to sell books of nude photographs, and Wood was given the task of writing copy for them:

> My first success was when I actually wrote a description of those books, in such a way that whoever wanted a book like that would realise what it was about, and that was my first writing success.32.

For the first time, too, he thought about writing a play whilst in Canada, but decided to concentrate on drawing instead.

He returned to England in 1958 and, after a short spell in the Advertising Department of Lewis's Department Store, decided to return to the theatre, obtaining a job with Theatre Workshop, then in its heyday. Brendan Behan had already gained success with The Quare Fellow two years earlier, and Wood was particularly excited by Joan Littlewood's rehearsals of a play by Henry Chapman which was called

'You Won't Always be on Top'. He was an assistant in this production to John Bury, the Designer, who was then conducting experiments in the use of texture on stage. Wood recalls covering old stage flats for Bury with gravel and concrete for this production, which Howard Goorney describes as follows:

> The theme was a day in the life of a building site, and John Bury's setting reproduced in every detail a three-storey building in the course of construction, including a working concrete mixer. During each performance an entire brick wall was actually constructed, the cast having learnt the art of bricklaying from builders working on a new post office in Stratford. The plot was a series of everyday incidents bound together by the job in hand, each incident developing easily into the next. 33.

Joan Littlewood's methods have had great relevance to Wood's work, particularly the collaboration with Geoffrey Reeves on several productions which will be examined in greater detail later, but the use of improvised dialogue in 'You Won't Always be on Top' led to a prosecution of Theatre Workshop by the Lord Chamberlain under the Theatres Act of 1843. This was Wood's first experience of censorship in action and he was to have difficulties with the content and presentation of several of his plays in later years. According to Goorney, Richard Harris, the actor, pleaded guilty to a charge of imitating Winston Churchill's voice in the play, at the official opening of a public lavatory, and Wood was to echo Chapman's audacity by having Churchill urinate on the West Wall in the final sequence of Dingo.

After the experience at Stratford East Wood concentrated on stage design for a while, working for a season in Colwyn Bay (mentioned fleetingly in Fill the Stage for the manager's nasty habit of eavesdropping on backstage happenings through the dressing room intercom system), Wimbledon, Unity Theatre, and then returned to Littlewood's company for Frank Norman's musical Fings Ain't What They Used to Be. With a wife and son to support in expensive London, more settled and better paid work was important, and he left the theatre for a post as Typographer with the CWS in Whitechapel. His wife was experiencing problems with her second pregnancy, and he made a decision which was to prove crucial:

> So I spent all the money I had on a TV set, and I hadn't seen TV up till then. I was fascinated. That was the time of Armchair Theatre, the real Armchair Theatre on a Saturday, or Sunday night was it?...Wonderful stuff. All the Alun Owen plays, and all the rest of it, the first ones. God, it was the great event of the week to see Armchair Theatre, and I suddenly thought, "I can do that, I can write a television play, and what's more, they pay money for it, don't they?". 34.

Inspired by the example of television, and the need to make extra money, he began to write, arriving before work started at 7a.m. to

make use of the space and the relative peace and quiet. Here he wrote his first three plays, 'Arthur had a Dream', which is lost, but which was set in two outside lavatories in back-to-back houses near a railway line, very like his lodgings in Stratford East; 'The Princess and the Rifle', set in a Territorial Drill Hall where a young soldier goes berserk in a setting full of army memorabilia; and Prisoner and Escort, his first real playwriting success. These two plays are given fuller consideration in Chapter II.

Prisoner and Escort was written as a television play for the Cheltenham Festival of the Arts in 1959. In the same year, Wood had left his job in Whitechapel, and moved back to Bristol as an Advertising Artist on the Bristol Evening Post. He was urged to send a copy of Prisoner and Escort to Patrick Dromgoole, then a BBC TV Drama producer. The play failed to win a prize at Cheltenham, and the BBC decided it was too controversial to screen - it concerns a prisoner who is being returned to England after urinating on a general's boots at a major parade in Germany - but commissioned Wood to write 'Drill Pig', another Army play. This, too, was considered too risqué at the time, though it was eventually televised in 1964, two years after Prisoner and Escort had been given a radio performance, and he wrote 'Traitor in a Steel Helmet' as a replacement. This was the first of Wood's plays to be performed, on 18th September, 1961, and it is interesting to note that the new medium, one of the major factors in the demise of the Playhouse, nurtured the emerging talent.

Other plays followed in quick succession. 'Cowheel Jelly', another Army play, was broadcast on the Third Programme in 1962. In the same year, Bill and Ben, a fragment of a play about interrogation, was published by Encore magazine, and 'Not at All' was performed on television. This latter work was about

> A seaside landlady and two fellows who had been on holiday, both from an Art department of an Advertising firm, from somewhere like CWS. 35.

With Bill and Ben, and 'Not at All', Wood passed through a Pinteresque phase, dabbling in menace, and using short, crisp exchanges of dialogue. Interrogations and seaside landladies provide the fabric of The Birthday Party, but Wood considered this style a dead end for him, and began to discover a unique voice. 'Not at All' was his first critical success. Maurice Richardson, the Observer television critic, gave it a very favourable review, and Michael Codron, the impresario, and mentor of many of the 'New Wave' dramatists, saw the television production and was impressed by it. By this time, Wood had engaged Peggy Ramsey as his agent, and she too played a very important part in Wood's development

as a writer, and indeed in the development of modern drama. Codron wrote to Ramsey asking if Wood had any other plays suitable for inclusion in a season of one-act plays he was planning to present. Wood offered 'Don't Make me Laugh', and then wrote Spare, and John Thomas. Codron liked the two new plays better, and decided to sponsor three of Wood's one-act plays at the New Arts Theatre, under Patrick Dromgoole's direction. Dromgoole added Prisoner and Escort, having already directed it on radio, and dropped 'Don't Make me Laugh', which was later presented by the RSC at the Aldwych in 1965. The three remaining plays made up the Cockade trilogy, Wood's first stage 'success':

> It was on for three weeks, and nobody went to see it. I didn't get my Royalties back, I didn't get my advance back at all. What it got was astonishing reviews, absolutely astonishing reviews. 36.

Unfortunately, the fruitful partnership with Dromgoole did not survive the '60s, but Bristol provided many opportunities to meet people connected with different kinds of Drama. In 1964 'The Drill Pig' was presented by commercial television, at John Hale's instigation. Hale had been a director at the Bristol Old Vic, and was directing television plays, besides writing novels and plays (his Littlewood-style Spithead, was well-received by public and critics), and H is dedicated to him. At the same time, the Drama Department of Bristol University put on Wood's anti-nuclear war play, Tie up the Ballcock, in a double-bill with an early Stoppard. Alan Dossor directed this production with a cast of students from the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. Dossor also played Harry in the original Nottingham Playhouse production of Fill the Stage, directed several Wood plays at Liverpool in the early '70s, and directed several episodes of the late '70s television series, 'Don't Forget to Write'. Besides the playwrights Tom Stoppard and Peter Nichols, who were both living in Bristol at the time, Wood also met Geoffrey Reeves, Peter Brook's assistant on US and in Persepolis, who was later to direct his major plays.

By 1965, Wood had emerged as a very promising, possibly major talent. His first five years as a writer had produced a variety of short plays, the form favoured by television in the early '60s. Their subject is nearly always the Army, a far cry from the homely banalities of Ma's Bit o' Brass. The possibilities for colour and spectacle of the popular theatre of his youth are largely jettisoned in favour of the taut, black and white, neo-realist demands of early television drama. Yet there is no compromise by Wood with audience susceptibilities.

The language is harsh, cruel, and often obscene, even within the censored limits. Strict attention to the detail of uniform and background setting is linked with the author's developing grasp of dramatic language - the quirkiness of barrack-room patois, the deep and stagnant cesspools of suppressed thought underlying the dialogue which surface occasionally with devastating effect. Nightmare lurks just below reality, and there is a constant dramatic tension in the juxtaposition, a strange mixture of Strindberg and Pirandello transposed to an Army setting. It is an uneasy drama, in which the underlying violence and meanness of spirit mock the sense of uniformed camaraderie, and reveal the law of the jungle which is the real norm. In it, character is subordinate to attitude, and psychology is concerned with domination rather than background revelations, a drama of types rather than people. Few of the characters in these early plays are memorable in themselves, but the overall impression of a deeply-tainted section of society whose way of life was the norm for several generations is sharply conveyed. Women rarely figure in it, and when they do, are immediately set on the bottom rung of the ladder of social order. Blake's cynical 'I've seen her kind in every back shanty café from here to Warcop',[37.] sets the Girl in Prisoner and Escort in the barren social wilderness so painfully portrayed later by Bond and Poliakoff. The soldier, under the invincible protection of the twin securities of maleness and uniform, is superior. Noone cries in this society, unlike the inadequate troupers of Fill the Stage, who rarely stop. It is a society where the whip predominates and rules, whilst the lost souls of Fill the Stage grope blindly for the elusive carrot of theatre as they slither on the banana's skin.

Wood's involvement with a particular kind of 'popular' theatre, his reasons for joining the Army, and other experiences and sources relevant to his development as a dramatist have been outlined. It is now time to turn to a fuller consideration of those of his earlier plays which concern the Army, as a prelude to an examination of those plays and films which deal with War.

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APPENDIX A.

PLAYS PERFORMED AT THE PLAYHOUSE, KIDDERMINSTER, 1947/50.

1947/48.

Smilin' Through
This was a Woman
East Lynne
While Parents Sleep
(all performed by Jack Wood's Playhouse Company)

Bird in Hand
Rose Without a Thorn
Someone at the Door
The Beggar's Opera
Juno and the Paycock
The Midnight Sun
You Never Can Tell
Lilac Domino
Goodnight Vienna
The Shoemaker's Holiday
Noah
Jack and Jill
Dick Whittington
The Hasty Heart
Fit for Heroes
Love on the Dole
Dark Summer
The Shop at Sly Corner
The Family Upstairs
The Importance of Being Earnest
Peace comes to Peckham
Jane Eyre
Without the Prince
Saloon Bar
Thunder Rock
Night Must Fall
Private Lives
Thy Name is Woman (with Phyllis Dixey)
Kind Lady
Children of Wrath
Arsenic and Old Lace
The Linden Tree
No Place like Home
The Cure for Love
The Girl Who Couldn't Quite
Pick-up Girl.

1948/49.

The Rotters
The Cat and the Canary
Hindle Wakes
The Ghost Train
The Wind of Heaven
Suspect
Artificial Silk
Moonlight Sonata.
Gaslight
To What Red Hell
Ma's Bit of Brass
Sweeney Todd
Blithe Spirit
See How they Run
World Without End
(all performed by Jack Wood's Playhouse Company)

Quiet Wedding
Musical Chairs
Honeymoon Island
The Long Mirror
The Little Foxes
The Snow Queen
The Two Mrs. Carrolls
The Scarlet Pimpernel
When We Are Married
Dear Brutus
The Glass Menagerie
As You Like It
Wuthering Heights
Dr. Angelus

APPENDIX A (cont.)

1948/49 (cont.)

It Might Happen to You
Man About the House
No Trees in the Street
Cinderella
Happy Days
The Desert Song
The Student Prince.
The Winslow Boy
Candida
Ballets Nègres
Spanish Rhapsody
Springtime Revels
The Country Girl

1949/50.

White Cargo
The Beaux' Stratagem
The Corn is Green
Jane Steps Out
My Wife's Family
Uncle Tom's Cabin
Easy Moeny
The Sacred Flame
Love's a Luxury
Mary Rose
Maria Marten.
An Inspector Calls
The Guinea Pig
Ghosts
Flare Path
While the Sun Shines
Love in a Mist
Nothing but the Truth
The Happiest Days of Your Life
Little Women
Present Laughter

(all performed by Jack Wood's Playhouse Company).

Tonight at 8.30
I Killed the Count
The Three Sisters
Faust
The First Gentleman
The Chiltern Hundreds
Jubilee
Madam Butterfly.

APPENDIX B.

THE PLAYHOUSE, KIDDERMINSTER.

A short account of the development of the Playhouse to 1953. p.25.

The Playhouse. Photographs of the foyer and auditorium. p.26.

Playhouse programme of The Chiltern Hundreds produced by Mae Harris. Jack Wood is shown as Manager and Licensee. p.27.

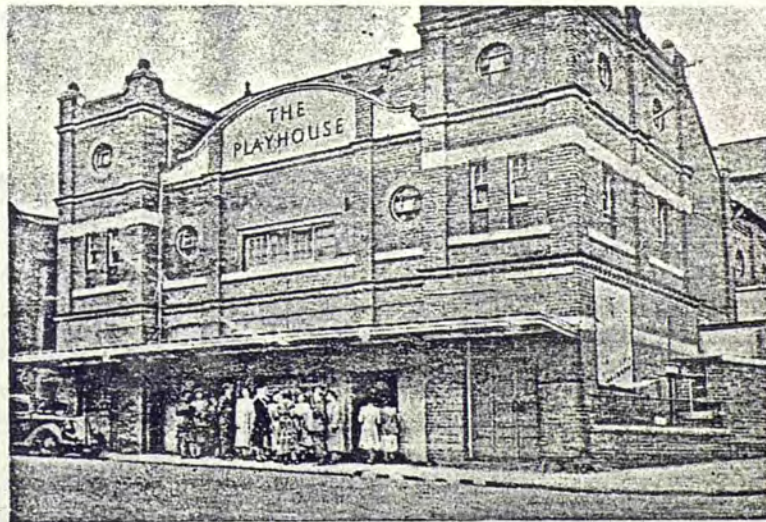
A short account of the 1948 repertory season. The young Charles Wood is the third character from the right in the photograph of Ma's Bit O' Brass. p.28.

A short account of the 1949 season. p.29.

THE PLAYHOUSE

PAST . . PRESENT—and FUTURE.

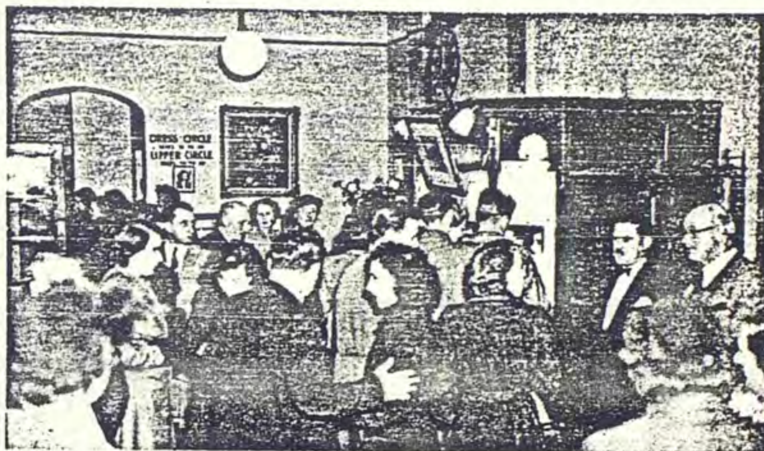
Though only fifty years old, the Playhouse—or the New Opera House as it was first called—comes of a long line of theatres on the same site. Tradition says that Sarah Siddons played here: but H. B. Irving, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, Vesta Tilley, Forbes-Robertson and Sir Frank Benson, certainly did; and within recent memory Pavlova, Harry Tate, José Collins and many more. Animated pictures cast their first shadows in 1905. In 1926 drama made a come-back under Sir Arthur Carlton, but the day of the Picture Palace had arrived, and soon the Opera House became derelict, ending up as a wartime store.



The Playhouse To-day.

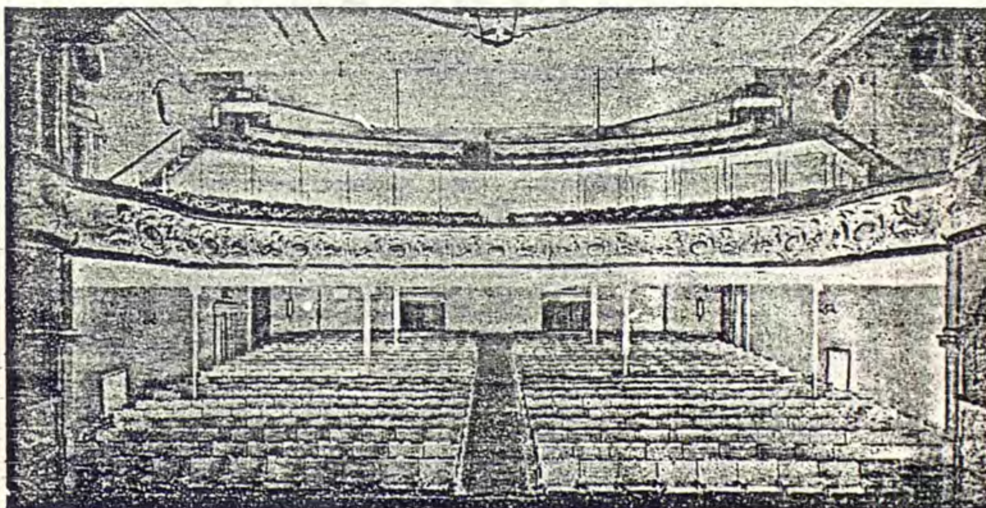
For years everyone urged everyone else to acquire this white elephant, and oddly enough a London combine was about to open negotiations, when the Nonentities Society announced to a startled audience that they had bought it for £6,000. A minor miracle of de-requisitioning and rebuilding was accomplished in eighteen months. A last-minute insistence by the magistrates on steel and still more steel almost wrecked the time-schedule, but punctually to the chosen day, November 18th, 1946, Sir Barry Jackson declared the Playhouse open. At the last moment, police regulations deprived the theatre of coat-hanging space; perhaps as well, for it was a bitterly cold night, and no amount of stoking could keep out the draught.

But the Playhouse was open, and open it has remained for five years of constant struggle, borrowing and repaying, with never a penny in reserve, fighting with its back to the wall, against apathy and abuse. In the end it has won through. The £19,000 which the theatre cost to buy, restore and equip, should, by the Fifth Anniversary Night, have been paid off to the last penny and in half the time that was originally planned.



The Foyer

The stars of these five years are mostly in the making; promising young artists who have won their spurs here, and are now winning laurels at the Old Vic and other leading theatres. But there have been acknowledged stars too; names like Sybil Thorndike, Eileen Herlie, Walter Midgley, to set beside the giants of the Edwardian days.



Auditorium, from the Stage

What of the future? The Screen, in home or hall, depends upon the living theatre for its artistes. The Playhouse will go on, loved and abused, to carry out its next five year plan of perfecting its workshop; cradling talent of all kinds; and making its unique contribution, that of amateurs and professionals working side by side, to the World of Theatre.

Phone 3760 **The Playhouse** Phone 3760

KIDDERMINSTER

(In association with the Arts Council of Great Britain)

Chairman	Mr. KENNETH ROSE
Manager and Licensee	JACK WOOD

MONDAY, MARCH 20th, 1950 .... And all the Week

Evenings at 7.15. *Saturday at* 5.30 *and* 8.0 *p.m.*

THE NONENTITIES

Present

" THE CHILTERN HUNDREDS "

By WILLIAM DOUGLAS HOME.

Cast (in order of their appearance):

The Earl of Lister (Lord Lieutenant)	**Harry Beresford**
The Countess of Lister (his wife)	**Ella Johnson**
June Farrell (of the American Embassy)	**Janet Harvey**
Bessie	**Valerie Scott**
Beecham	**Kenneth Rose**
Lord Pym (Lord Lister's son)	**David Cooke**
Lady Caroline Smith (Lord Lister's sister)	**Patricia Busby**
Mr. Cleghorn	**Leslie Batt**

The Play Produced by MAE HARRIS

THE PLAYHOUSE AS A REPERTORY

THEATRE

Our policy has always been to alternate a Season of Touring Companies and our own amateur productions with a Season of Repertory.

It is a policy which does not please everyone, but it is the one best suited to our circumstances, and at least, it has the merit of variety.

The Playhouse was opened with " Pygmalion," by the Midland Theatre Company, a resident company operating a small circuit. Notable performances were given by Ann Casson in " Anna Christie," Michael Aldridge in " Rope " and Douglas Campbell (the Old Vic's latest ' Othello ') in the new play " Yes Farewell."

Ma's Bit of Brass.

The 1948 Season.

The first repertory season with our own company began in 1948 and played 14 weeks. Manager Jack Wood was also Producer, and audiences responded to his flair for old-time melodrama and plays of the Lancashire School, exemplified by " Ma's Bit of Brass." The new play was the prophetic " World Without End," and the most memorable play, " The Wind of Heaven."

The Beaux' Stratagem.

The 1949 Season.

In 1949, there was an 18 week season, produced by Mr. Wood, with homely comedy again to the fore. Mae Harris gave an electrifying performance as Queen Elizabeth in " Royal Favourite," the second new play from the Chairman's pen. The best production was that of " The Beaux' Stratagem."

Present Laughter.

The 1950 Season.

CHAPTER II.

'WHAT WE FIGHTING FOR WHAT WE FIGHTING FOR WHAT WE FIGHTING FOR...' CHARLES WOOD'S ARMY PLAYS 1958 - 1965.

During the first period of his writing career, from 1958 to 1965, Wood wrote some 13 plays. They were all short, none lasting for more than 45 minutes, to make them equally adaptable for television, or as fillers in theatrical bills of one-act plays. Eight of them are totally concerned with the Army. Several of them were never published nor performed and, where necessary, reference is made to the author's own typewritten copies of the text, which are probably the only sources still existing. The other five plays have a civilian context.

In Wood's early plays, civilians inhabit a mysterious, inimical other world beyond the tight, secure confines of barracks. Trite, prattling, ill-defined women lurk in its shadowy cafés, or warm themselves indulgently before roaring open fires under the adoring gaze of uncomprehending, narrow-minded, bumptious parents. Life in Wood's Army is no better than life outside, but it is safer, and responsibility can be relinquished, particularly by the lowest ranks. In these early plays, the Army is a microcosm of a larger society which is male-dominated, selects its leaders on the basis of privilege rather than ability, and represses everyone else. In this chapter I shall explore Wood's view of the Army in peacetime, and outline recurring themes and dramatic techniques as a foundation for a study of the later plays about the Army at war.

The view of life presented by these early Army plays is unmitigatingly desolate. The soldier's existence is barren and filled with suffering. He is forced into a servile acceptance of power and rank gained by privilege and heredity; his irrepressible sexual urge results in unsatisfactory affairs, of which painful and unwanted pregnancies are the inevitable outcome; his barracks are chilly and cheerless, but even so more acceptable than the drab cafés and houses offered by the civilian alternative, one of which, in 'The Drill Pig', though ostensibly warm and cosy, shelters a family of Strindbergian vampires. The Army dominates and controls men, and consequently (and insidiously) women, not only by the petty gradations of hierarchical discipline, but by its inexorable and unavoidable omniscience and omnipotence - a dark, brooding presence to which all bend the knee or are broken. Yet the plays are made bearable, and often exciting, by the author's developing command of his chosen medium, his settings which provide wide perspect-

ives within the confines of the subject matter, and his use of language.

The lurking shadow of the Army is always present in the settings of these early plays, from the overtly sinister first shot of 'Traitor in a Steel Helmet', where a weed, growing bravely in spite of the mud, is crushed by the tracks of a tank; to the cold winter's afternoon parade ground of 'The Drill Pig'. Indeed, Wood's development as a dramatist can be traced most clearly in his handling of the setting for the unpublished and unperformed 'The Princess and the Rifle', written c.1958, and his reworking of it for Spare, performed as part of the Cockade trilogy five years later.

In 'The Princess and the Rifle', the earlier play, which was clearly intended for stage performance ('Bare stage no masking'), he provides a straight description of 'A drill hall and military museum, headquarters of the local T.A.Yeomanry unit.' Two rows of uniformed dummies are lined up on stage, together with a cannon, and a stuffed horse - an extraordinarily early pre-image of Havelock's horse in H (see photograph Appendix D). Above the stage, 'From the grid lashed to battens', fly the standards, 'some in tatters, others well preserved and colourful.' There are stands of firearms, too, on the stage, and the overall impression is of the interior of an Army museum presented naturalistically, though Wood soon breaks the atmosphere with a surrealistic touch:

> About the whole setting there is an atmosphere of expectancy. The ranks of uniformed dummies are lined up like two armies - a trumpet blast would send them smashing together. 1.

The later play, Spare, moves away from naturalism and embodies symbol. The flags themselves are described first. They, too, are in tatters, but set out in historical order of seniority, according to the level of faded colour in each. They provide, too, a poetic evocation of War. Exposure to the elements, and their actual involvement in real battle, has given them another dimension as ageless representatives of past events, or archangels of a savage God. At another level, they provide a clear link with tradition, seniority, and the importance to the enlisted men of length of service and its relation to advancement and promotion. In addition, the flags echo the men's preoccupation with sex and virility, a notion enterprisingly caught by the image of the newer flags 'still sexy round the pole from the touch of a Royal tart's hand'. This is presumably an ironic extension of the idea of serving the Queen, and Wood's soldiers sometimes fantasise about the monarch as part of their hatred of hierarchy and privilege, finding the ultimate symbol of total disorder and social reversal in their hidden desires, as stated explicitly by the Indian/Irish Bombardier of H (see Chapter IV). The visual context of H is prefigured in

these stage directions too. The flags of 'The Princess and the Rifle' are simply lashed to battens, those of Spare swing 'as battens do when dropped in quick'[2], giving them something of the same effect as the billowing backcloths of H.

The dummies, too, are given more detail in Spare. Their colour is added to the visual splendour of the flags - 'all the spiv martial colours plus brass and khaki'. Some of them are faded, not only, as with the flags, from exposure to sun and shot, but with the vestiges of human fear, the involuntary expulsion of sweat and urine. The dummies of Spare are lined up ready 'for a quick game of shinty or old time arme blanche chopping', which fixes the idea of War as a macabre game having no result and never ending, an oft-repeated Wood theme. In both plays characters make entrances from among or behind these uniforms, use them for drill sequences and parades, hide bottles of alcohol in their headdresses, and the theatrical effect is to emphasise constantly the continuation of tradition.

Wood also uses the stage directions of Spare to establish a wryly cynical attitude to the conception of the 'hero'. The dummies are lined up as though for an inspection and enough space is left between them for officers to walk through. These encourage the men, by the use of warlike rhetoric in the safety of the parade ground, to emulate those of their fellows who have gone before, heroes now, for they died in the service of their country. Officers are the object of great scorn for Wood, the former regular soldier, in these early plays. They are represented as 'born' heroes since their privileged position has been achieved not by merit but by the accident of birth. The term 'hero' in this context is used with heavy irony, and prefigures Wood's hammering of privilege and the status quo in Dingo. In the early plays, as in Dingo, he uses the term 'hero' in two main senses. The first is as a criticism of officers, a deliberate distortion of the idea of the hero as a demigod, and the second as a criticism of the society which automatically elevates the soldier who has fought for his country to that status, the bland acceptance of a dangerous myth. The fact that enlisted men have to fight whilst privileged officers merely issue orders is bad enough for Wood. That they die, too, in its service compounds the irony. For Wood, death is the only reward for the soldier in War, and he is at pains to stress how inglorious War is. Conversely, boredom is the only outcome of peace, and war games at least pass the time. Time, though, neither deadens nor heals. The past, on the surface at least more colourful than the present, was equally horrific for the ordinary soldier, despite the

lofty tales and descriptions of heroic exploits. All wars are one war, the individual is dispensable, the Army is eternal.

The setting of Spare, then, shows a considerable advance in Wood's mastery of stage technique, and increasing confidence and facility in the use of descriptive language in a free, symbolic way; and his handling of the subject matter in the later play is much more assured. Characters, too, are handled in a less realistic, more imaginative, even poetic way. Three of them - Bird, Garibaldi, and Spratt Hammond, are shared by the two plays, but, whereas, in 'The Princess and the Rifle', there is an attempt to provide them with realistic backgrounds, Spare offers little information.

In 'The Princess and the Rifle' (which I shall refer to subsequently as 'The Princess'), Bird is a north countryman who enlisted before the War, Garibaldi a Jewish-looking Londoner who has been in battle, and Spratt Hammond a Cavalryman of the between-wars period. These sparse snippets of background information provide a historical continuity in Army service from the First World War to the present day, and the introduction of another soldier, Mick Flynn, 'a young sweedo from Bristol', enables Wood to use different accents to gain variety in the language, and show the diversity underneath the Army's uniformity. Although Spare shares three of these characters, there are no descriptions, the soldiers being one component of the whole fantasia. Linguistically, Spare leans much more towards West-country speech rhythms, and provides a good example of how the author's 'good ear' picks up the Bristolian dialect, and how he uses this argot effectively and economically to flavour his dialogue.

There is a young soldier in Spare, called simply Harry, who disappears into the smoke at the end of the First Scene, and reappears for the next, 'only he's not HARRY now he's FREDDIE' [3], a theatrical device which illustrates well the theme of endless expendability and substitution, the first example in Wood of the technique described by John Russell Taylor:

> Neither Dingo nor H lends itself very well to simple (let alone brief) verbal paraphrase; both, like Spare, are shattering stage experiences which largely dispense with plot, reduce characterization as we usually understand it to a minimum, allowing characters to shift, fuse, change places, die and come back to life with dreamlike freedom and unpredictability. [4]

The most important addition to Spare, however, is an extra 'character'. 'He' is never seen but is always present, somewhere above the soldiers' heads, kicking dust down from above, a mysterious, malignant war daemon who will not go away but remains in the consciousness, adding a nightmarish dimension which is not present to the same extent in 'The Princess'.

John Russell Taylor's comments pointed out the difficulty involved in paraphrasing the plots of Wood's plays. He re-emphasised this in the Introduction to Cockade, the trilogy comprising Prisoner and Escort, John Thomas, and Spare.

> His plays depend no more on their susceptibility to ready prose paraphrase than do Shakespeare's sonnets or Edward Lear's "Nonsense Songs", 5.

but, as 'The Princess' has never been published, a short synopsis will provide some basis for comparison with Spare.

Four soldiers in a Territorial Army depot are told that they are to be posted abroad, leaving at 8 a.m. on the following day. Bird, a married man with five children has to go home to tell his unloved wife the news, and Mick Flynn has to inform his girl-friend. None of the soldiers has any money. They are always hard-up, and scrounge with a parrot-like cry of 'two's up', whenever someone else has something they consider worth having. All the easy and nefarious ways of making money are the preserve of NCOs, and the men have to supplement their meagre pay by offering to take over another man's fire picket or guard duty for a fee. Bird needs the money to drink himself into oblivion, and seriously contemplates beating up his pregnant wife to extort the money she had been saving for the birth of his sixth child. He is only dissuaded from this appalling course of action by Garibaldi, the NCO caring for his men's welfare, who advises a more subtle approach. This loathsome behaviour is par for the course for the lowest common denominator of humanity, the soldier, who, Wood is saying, is dehumanised by long service in the Army. The young Mick, though not yet totally tainted by the Army's shadow, behaves in an equally reprehensible manner. He appears to want to treat his girl-friend tenderly, but is clearly only concerned with seducing her by the empty promise of marriage.

There is a somewhat implausible scene in which two soldiers speak to their respective women (who do not appear - the soldiers speak to them in monologue), the tension is lessened, and an uneasy line of black comedy is introduced which is at variance with the Army context and its linguistic resonances. The action resumes when the soldiers return to the Drill Hall, and Spratt and Garibaldi begin to talk about their Army careers and experiences. Their tongues are loosened by the liberal gulps taken from bottles hidden by Spratt under the dummies' headgear, and in the gun barrels. Becoming increasingly drunk, Spratt remembers his past service in India, Mesopotamia, Palestine, Iraq, and the Sudan. There is a great sense of the vast space of the soldiers' world in the dialogue, and the litany

of place-names reeled off by the men when told of their move could have made an exciting link with the flags in performance:

Spratt.	Be prepared to move tomorrow - 0800 hours.
Garibaldi.	Again?
Spratt.	Again.
Dickie.	Catterick - Aldershot - Caterham - Salisbury. Again?
Spratt.	Again.
Dickie.	Colchester - Shepton Mallet.
Garibaldi.	Windsor - Bulford - Lulworth - Castlemartin - Silk Hill.
Spratt.	Again.
Dickie.	Cairo - Habbaniya - Calcutta - Bovington - Imber Village - Carlisle - Mons - Wipers.
Mick.	Barnard Castle.
Dickie.	Flaming nig nog.
Garibaldi.	Woolly bear. Shaiba - Oudenaarde - Cyprus - Dublin.
Dickie.	Vimy Ridge - Passion-dale.
Garibaldi.	Sebastopol Flanders - Inkerman Peterloo. 6.

Spratt also reveals that he took part in the last mounted charge of the 17th Lancers, an echo of Balaclava. He recalls the sense of excitement in preparing for the charge, and his fleeting impressions of the event, but uppermost in his mind is the sense of anti-climax after it:

March back, clean up stables. 7.

For Spratt, a soldier from boyhood, the Army had promised the hope of glory. Now, ageing and worn, the monotony of peacetime service is destroying him. Drink is his only solace, and in a last despairing fantasy he launches into an imaginary charge, eliciting the down-to-earth response from Garibaldi

You're stark staring raving nuts. 8.

The other soldiers return, very drunk after their earlier experiences, and find Spratt's bottles. Again, as the liquor works on them, they dress up in the old uniforms and start to sing dirty songs. Spratt materialises from among the dummies and starts to inspect the troops, madder now, and unable to distinguish between the dummies and real people, Past and Present. Drums and fifes offstage start to play 'The British Grenadiers', and Mick joins in with a regimental trumpet. The drink-induced fantasy grows wilder and develops into a grotesque War Game with the obnoxious Bird, of all people, imitating a Padre, whose unctuous comments are wickedly parodic. The stage directions show the action building to a frenzied climax involving varied movement, rhythm, vivid, violent language, and sound:

Spratt.	Ride ride ride on and on - grip tight arm out straight sabre slightly twisted inwards - on and on - slash - bite - cut - thrust...
Dickie.	Kick - gouge - fire and torment - vengeance is mine saith the lord...

Spratt kicks and saws at the mouth of his passive mount - arms and legs everywhere - sabre whirling round and round in wild abandonment. Garibaldi seizes the trumpet from the astonished Mick and blows call

after call.

Dickie jumps up and down with excitement - grabs a musket and bayonet and parries and thrusts, parries and thrusts.

Mick grows steadily more frightened and finally dashes at the mounted Spratt - tries to pull him down. 9.

Mick, the youngest soldier, less experienced in the Army's ways, and still not completely taken over by it, is able to see the madness taking over, and is carried out sobbing, after knocking Spratt's horse over. The frenzy subsides, reality returns, and the scene ends with Spratt's sober realisation of the emptiness of his fantasy, 'It's not the same'.

In the final scene, all the soldiers are in best battledress for the move, but Mick is missing. Shots are heard from offstage. The others assume that Mick is shooting at them, and take avoiding action. Then he appears, harmlessly enough, through the audience, bringing Spratt's keys for the armoury. He could have been shooting, but the ending is left deliberately ambiguous. Spratt makes a last inspection of the real troop, sober now in the cold light of day, and singles out Mick with an obscenely vivid comment which relates the play's language directly to the earlier description of the newer flags:

Spratt.	Flynn, Flynn, you're holding that rifle like a princess.
Mick.	A princess?
Spratt.	A princess holding a navvy's tool. 10.

Thus, the play builds to the final line, emphasising the title. Mick, the virgin soldier, unblooded in War, holding the instrument of death, is compared to the young girl, shielded from the world, faced with the reality of sex. It is a sharp image, catching the strange jargon of drill instructors, and stressing the equation of sex and violence, and unbridgeable hierarchical gulfs, but, in terms of the whole play, fails to encompass the element of madness allied to the fantasy. Significantly enough, the same line is used in Spare, in scene two, just before the end of the play:

Spratt.	Bird - you're holding that rifle like a princess.
Drummer.	A princess?
Spratt.	A princess holding a navvy's prick. 11.

The substitution of 'prick' for 'tool' gives the line an even more striking sexual emphasis, and the exchange is used as a starting point for Bird's elevation to 'hero' status. Soon after he rushes into the unknown, programmed to fight, and subtly induced to go to his death by an undermining of confidence in his own professional skill which leads him into compensatory action. In the later play the image is used in a much more carefully-controlled and cleverly contrived integration of

theme and action. In Spare, too, the title is not overtly echoed by the line, and is more mysterious and allusive. 'Spare' could refer to the spare man who is not present, or to all soldiers being spare in the sense of expendable, or, even, and more significantly, the Army slang word for madness.

The action of 'The Princess and the Rifle' is diffused and disrupted by the introduction of a civilian element (which Wood has rarely been able to integrate satisfactorily into an Army context), but in Spare it is focussed on the soldiers with no distractions. Similarly, the dramatic unity provided in 'The Princess' by the time device of the next day's posting is relatively mundane when compared with the sense of timelessness in Spare. The first part of the later play takes place on Balaclava Day, a device which not only serves to bring the flags and uniforms directly into the action, but adds to the general sense of unease, since it appears to be a day of misrule where the social order is reversed, the fool can be king, or a soldier kick against the traces:

> Nobody gets charged on Balaclava Day see... you can go through the camp like the titter and no slapping on the hooks. I promise you. Kotwalee is closed for the duration. 12.

Some maquettes for Wood's later work are also revealed in Spare. The importance of Balaclava to 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' is obvious, whilst Spratt's calling the soldiers around him to tell them stories of the regiment's past is reminiscent of Havelock's prayer meetings for his Lambs. The content of Spratt's stories is even more appropriate.

> ...at the last moment Captain Nolan of the regiment dashed across the front...he seemed about to utter...clapping...At the last moment a cannon shot decapitated the gallant Nolan. 13.

This points ahead to David Hemmings' wild dash in the film of 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', and Wood's treatment of it in the screenplay:

> 185. Nolan wildly runs his horse across the front of the Brigade.
> Seen from the front.
> Seen from above.
> Seen from where Morris is.

and,

> 192. Nolan still erect in the saddle of his galloping horse, his sword arm still high in the air. Everything stops for silence, the movement continues but silence and from the strange thing that was Nolan comes a cry so weird and appalling that every man in the field - except Lord Cardigan, who has other things to think about - is chilled by it. 14.

Here, transposition to the cinematic medium has allowed Wood to present the actual moment, from different camera viewpoints, and with a

startingly effective use of sound and silence, the whole culminating, as in Spare, in a nightmarish realisation of death in War. Spratt also relates a moment after the Charge which Wood made particularly telling in the film.

Spratt. after the engagement...we'd do it again sir! 15.

becomes,

236. The remains of the Brigade coming out of the Valley - some walking and laughing a silly laugh, some limping, some crawling.

Some dragged by their horses.
Some horses biting at terrible wounds.

239a. MEN. Go again, sir.
Go again my lord. 16.

The second scene of Spare takes place on Jellalabad Day, another excuse for indiscipline:

Bird. Jellybob? All gets pissed Jellybob Day. 17.

and is equally significant, both in terms of the never-ending celebrations of past battles, with all wars rolled into one, and in a study of Wood's later work. One of the scenes in the unpublished and unperformed screenplay of 'Flashman', written in 1969 (and discussed in Chapter IV), is of the Siege of Jellalabad in the Afghan Wars of the early Nineteenth Century:

144 EXTERIOR. NEAR TO JELLALABAD.

around the fort, fires can be seen as sparks of light still in the dull morning light, the whole fort is surrounded by Afghans, in the fort the sound of bugles calling the advance. 18.

The final scene of Spare strongly suggests an imaginative recreation of a similar situation, though the modern dress of the soldiers seen against the uniforms of the past, and the reference in the play to armour-piercing shells widen the context to Katharine Worth's 'bleak Epic now'[19] in a historic frame of reference. The historical connections are reinforced by Spratt's final speech, spoken in a flat, documentary, Brechtian narrative style, the language flavoured and enriched by excerpts from contemporary documents - another development in Wood's style and presentation which looks forward to both Dingo and H. This speech underlines Wood's concern with the inevitable triumph of privilege. Officers give orders and survive, the men suffer; but even more important is the central question in Spare, which Wood poses again in Dingo. It is the cyclically repetitive 'what we fighting for what we fighting for what we fighting for?'[20] and it is asked by the young Harry just before he disappears into the smoke of battle with a hop, skip, and a jump - a child to the slaughter. Spratt's answer blames the

unknown, unnamed extra 'character', and echoes the blinkered dogma of those responsible for Balaclava:

> Spratt: Yours is not to reason why...To stop that bloke kicking it down. Yes?
> Harry: But he's stopped.
> Spratt: That's right. That's what we're fighting for. 21.

There is no stopping. Yesterday's friend is today's enemy, and if the Army does not attack first Spratt's fear is that 'he'll come at us. At me...'[22.] In defence of his own skin he then sends Harry off to his inevitable death, trousers already messed like the dummies', with the bland reassurance 'Don't feel it.' [23.]

A consideration of these two plays, both conceived for theatrical performance, has revealed several developments in Wood's dramatic technique, and uncovered some facets which receive a final polishing in his later work. Several of the early Army plays, however, were written with television in mind as the performing medium, and it will be of value to examine some of these for the purpose of comparison.

Television presented a great challenge and opportunity to the new dramatists of the 1960s. The confines of the small screen provided a different set of problems for solving from those encountered in the theatre. There was no colour, naturalism was the accepted style, and the camera offered a particular, possibly restricted point of view; but the potential audience was much greater than that of the theatre, the author's payment did not depend on Box Office receipts, some very talented directors and actors were working in the medium, and creative ability of all kinds was being encouraged and nurtured. Two of Wood's plays are of particular relevance in this context. Prisoner and Escort provides an interesting link with Spare since it is the first play of the Cockade trilogy, and was actually performed in the theatre, on sound radio, and on television; whilst 'Traitor in a Steel Helmet', though actually written after the first version of Prisoner and Escort, was Wood's first play to be performed publicly, on television in 1961. It was directed by Patrick Dromgoole, who also directed Cockade for the stage.

The first scene of 'Traitor in a Steel Helmet' has already been alluded to, and in the television script it is outlined thus:

> EXTERIOR: NIGHT.
> A weed miraculously standing amongst the impressions of tank tracks in wet mud. It is raining. A tank track crushes it.
> (Sound dubbed: Rain. Distort headsets) 24.

This image has a cinematic quality, perhaps reminiscent of the overt symbolism of some of the artier films of the 1950s, but it is an important example of the way television (or cinema) can crystallise

the essence of a play in a single shot. Rarely does Wood state a theme so clearly and simply. The crushing of even this base form of life in an alien world represents the crushing of individuality by a mass, the indiscriminate destruction of Nature by man with his technology used for violent ends, epitomised by the tank. The Army is indestructible, the individual must conform to its will, or be destroyed.

In the play, Trooper Jupp, another of Wood's sensitive young soldiers, is on manoeuvres with Sgt. Pike, an experienced, war-hardened NCO, in Wales. The lorry Jupp is driving crashes, and the two injured soldiers seek shelter in a deserted farmhouse. The war game takes a nightmarish turn, invoked by the antagonism of Nature. Darkness, rain, and the mud cause the crash, and the only place for comfort and shelter is the farmhouse, now desolate and ruined because of its position in the firing line. The injuries sustained by the soldiers are part of the general air of disruption caused by the implied reversal of natural order.

Although it is remote, the farmhouse is, in fact, already occupied, by Sailor, 'a big unkempt lump of a man',[25.] who talks incessantly, sometimes rationally and sometimes with rambling incoherence. His appearance is grotesque. He is dressed in a strange mixture of civilian and military garments, capped by a R.A.C.-type steel helmet. Jupp describes him as coming 'up out of the night like a Parsifal in that helmet like a dirty great Viking God.'[26.] Sailor does seek a Holy Grail in his own demented fashion, trying to find an unsullied freedom. He does not actually admit to living in the farmhouse, but he clearly does so, and grows his own food. The soldiers nickname him 'Rommel', but also refer to him, rather more sinisterly, as 'Old Nick', and Sailor himself tells them that he has travelled extensively at home and abroad, but, 'they don't like the Antichrist in his lair in the United States of America'.[27.] 'Old Nick', and 'Antichrist', suggest a fiendish quality that Sailor simply does not possess. He is gentle and caring, wanting only to grow his vegetables in peace, and, once contact is made, tends the soldiers unselfishly. His rejection of an ordered existence within the framework of society elicits opposite responses from the soldiers, and the play also poses the question who is mad? The soldiers, attached to their inexorably violent, destructive machine, the Army? Or Sailor, lost in the recesses of his own mind, but hurting noone?

Jupp, the younger, softer soldier, is compassionate, and sees that Sailor

> ...can't stand being with the great white race of civilised Saturday shopping - Sunday kipping and Monday cold lamb crowd.'[28.]

and considers that 'he's better off here on his own than sharing a corridor with 500 other nutters.'[29] Not yet hardened by the Army, Jupp is able to look objectively at this outsider who refuses to conform, but Pike, on the other hand, is pitiless. He refuses to allow the younger man to offer Sailor food or tea, and bitterly voices his annoyance, which stems from the Army's wearing-down process:

> I've got no pity for those that can't find a way out - those that sit back and ask for pity. 30.

This seems particularly harsh, since Sailor has asked for nothing. Although the soldiers have lost wireless contact with the camp, Pike determines to report Sailor to the authorities as soon as they return to base. His reason is simple, and predictably conformist:

> we've got to live together - we've got to live as a mob. We can't exist on our own. 31.

He speculates that if they fail to report Sailor's presence someone else will. There seems to be no escape for Sailor, and Jupp, conditioned by his own failure to break the circle of conformity, finally condemns him:

> I said I'm in my rubber dinghy...but you can't do that. No one can...any bloke who tries to is a traitor. 32.

So, the play's title becomes clear. Sailor, a true child of Nature, a vital Life Force, treasuring only his independence, is seen as a threat to the depressing greyness of everyone else, not just the Army. Even Pike, however, can see that Sailor has something worth preserving, and urges him to get out while he is still able, well aware that the farmhouse is a range target. Sailor continues to plant his seeds, unafraid of the gunfire which will destroy him. His inevitable death is reported by a disembodied voice over the intercom of the lorry driving the two soldiers back to safety:

> S.L. There must be someone else because
> we saw him in the range finder -
> the range officer and myself - we saw
> him walk straight into the line of
> fire. 33.

In another powerful television image Sailor's packet of seeds lies where it has been run over, and the steel helmet, crushed, with the chin-strap broken, rocks slightly in the wind as the lorry drives on. The individual has been destroyed by an unyielding and powerful system, but the seeds remain as a hope for the future.

The unwillingness of an individual to conform is also a central issue in Prisoner and Escort. Another Jupp, this time a former Corporal demoted to Trooper, is being taken to Catterick before being

sent to the army jail at Shepton Mallet. Again there is a strongly autobiographical element:

> this was real-life me taking a deserter back to Shepton Mallet. 34.

and Wood is able to use this experience in a sharply-observed naturalistic study of the insidious workings of the military mentality to achieve domination over the would-be rebel, however strong he may be.

Whilst on parade in Germany, Jupp had had a moment of realisation, or inspiration, or madness, in which he saw clearly the absurdity of the soldiers' position. The serried ranks of men, standing obediently on the parade ground, wearing their campaign medals, while former enemies inspected them, had raised his ire. In a supreme gesture of disdain against officers, the never-ending idiocy of War and its consequences (now made worse by what he sees as game-playing), and in memory of relatives of his who died in the War, he urinated on the boots of a German general. This multiple series of reasons is compounded by the fact that the general happens to be a survivor of the German assault on Stalingrad, another irony since the wartime roles of the countries have been reversed. The Russians are now the enemy, the Germans the ally. Jupp makes it quite clear, however, that this derisive action was not specifically directed against Germans but a protest at what he sees as the mindlessness of militarism:

> I wasn't just having a go at the jerries. I was
> shooting it up the kilt of every stupid bastard
> as braces up to the beat of a drum. 35.

a comment which provides an interesting link with the blind conformity of the soldiers of Spare, activated in their wasted 'heroism' by the Drummer Boy's playing.

The Army has already taken swift revenge for Jupp's act of rebellion:

> They got a list as long as your arm. Conduct
> prejudicial's the least of it...there's wilful destruction of
> W.D.property...I burned it - arson - impersonating an officer...
> I said I was a captain...desertion, gunpowder treason and plot... 36.

and his anarchistic response to the Army contrasts with the tacit acceptance of military discipline by the soldiers of 'The Princess', and Spare. It differs from that of Sailor, in 'Traitor in a Steel Helmet', since Sailor is an outsider anyway, and a civilian, who has never performed an aggressive action. Jupp is a subversive element, working from the inside, and making his individual gesture on an occasion of ritual celebration at what he sees as the folly of war. It is interesting to note that the soldiers of the Cockade plays choose special occasions of historical military significance to create disruption, almost as though they were disturbing an ancient Dionysiac

rite. This, and the almost choric nature of the speech rhythms,

JUPP: What are you then?
HOSKINSON: And me.
JUPP: And you - give over.
HOSKINSON: Our duty.
BLAKE: You did it...
JUPP: What are you then? 37.

give the plays an Aristophanic flavour, recalling the anti-war sentiment of Peace, and The Birds. It is not surprising that Wood's first venture at the new National Theatre on the South Bank (which, unfortunately, never materialised) was to have been an adaptation of The Frogs for John Schlesinger.

Wood's use of a railway compartment, a setting reminiscent of Arnold Ridley's thriller The Ghost Train (performed at Kidderminster in 1948/9), for Prisoner and Escort allows him to focus the action of the play on the three men in a confined, claustrophobic space. On television, the compartment was presented as a real one, but, in the theatre, it was no more naturalistic than the stage directions suggest:

The carriage is framework only with a corridor and luggage rack that is net or some other string-like rope for the bars of a cage-like effect. 38.

In the theatre, the railway station acts as a reminder of the constant movement of the men from place to place, more circumscribed than that of 'The Princess', but an essential component of a shifting, ever-changing world where lasting relationships are difficult to establish, and dark journeys to grim camps (for the ordinary soldier) like Catterick are the norm. It also offers an effective backing to the more closely focussed action as the sad whistles of the trains and the lights of the stations en route combine with the visual effect of the recruiting posters to provide a surrealistic multi-media collage as a wider, more fantasy-like context for the corridored train.

Apart from the action which has precipitated this situation, this, unlike Wood's other plays, is concerned with the struggle for domination which develops between the rebellious Jupp and Corporal Blake, who is motivated by hatred, not only at Jupp's defiance of the military status quo but also at another of Jupp's actions, only hinted at obliquely in the play, by which he is said to have had another corporal, Blake's friend Smiler Lewis, 'busted' on a different train. Blake, a vicious, neo-Nazi thug, set in authority by his rank (though John Russell Taylor sees him as 'neither heroic nor villainous, but just there'[39]), uses both physical and mental means to underline his apparent superiority. His Gestapo-like tendencies are illustrated by his actions in handcuffing Jupp to the luggage rack, at the same time stuffing a handkerchief

in his mouth (which is hardly being 'just there'), and he actually states his political attitudes:

> Better if we'd kept going - joined up with the jerries and kept going...40.

He also has a reptilian subtlety, and is cunning enough to realise that force alone cannot break Jupp's will, quickly using any psychological means to gain the upper hand. Wood handles the shifts in the balance of mastery skilfully. The advantage moves from Blake to Jupp, whose mind is quicker even though he is physically shackled, and though Blake is aided and abetted by the spineless Hoskinson. More complications develop after the arrival of an unexpected visitor, a girl, who sizes up the situation intuitively, tending to side with Jupp against the other two, though, unwittingly, she becomes the agent for his final destruction. She is never named, but we discover that she has been living with a man for some time, and has even, in a relatively amateurish way, turned to prostitution. A relationship, tenuous, but potentially tender, begins to develop between Jupp and the girl, but it is almost destroyed by the revelation that her boy friend was black. This information disturbs Jupp, throwing him off balance, and at the mercy of his predatory captors. He appears by the end of the play to have been ground down by the treatment he has received. His last line is confused, and contrasts with his earlier cockiness:

> It was - frightened...it was...just no. 41.

His clear and positive early motivation now peters out, and in the final scene he is seen with the handkerchief stuffed in his mouth as a gag whilst the equally serpent-like Hoskinson extorts the girl's address for his own ends on the pretext that it is for Jupp. Hoskinson's final gesture, putting the envelope containing the girl's address into his breast pocket whilst hissing 'Don't bite on that handkerchief Jupp - you'll tear it', shows him to be totally tainted, very much the opportunist, and, carried along by Blake's example, a worthily nasty successor when inevitably elevated to his rank. Jupp's gesture of defiance has been stamped out. Again, the individual is, ultimately, powerless to resist the inexorable power of the Army, and its effect on all connected with it.

So far then, the early plays have shown the Army to have an unavoidably adverse effect on all individuals. Those who succumb to its needs are irremediable, and those who attempt to oppose them are destroyed. Prisoner and Escort differs from the other plays discussed so far because of Wood's introduction of the rebellious 'insider'. Jupp provides a transition , though ultimately defeated, in the author's handling of lower-rankers, from the meekly acquiescent soldiers of

'The Princess' and Spare to the indomitable Dingo. It is also more concentrated in dramatic effect, relying on a relative stasis to convey the underlying tensions, but an even more important factor which makes the play very different from the others is the addition of a female character. Women rarely appear in these Army plays and when they do they are portrayed as grotesque or degraded. The girl in Prisoner and Escort, thrown into a world of men, is quite unable to cope. She leaves the train at Birmingham and disappears into the night, having opened herself naively to Hoskinson's abuse. Two other women are mentioned fleetingly in the play. Jupp says he is married, but we discover nothing about his wife except that her father had been a soldier which leads straight back to the Army again from which Jupp is unable to escape. Hoskinson has a younger sister about whom he is nervy and protective, in contrast to his treatment of the girl, but she remains a shadowy presence at best.

Only two of the other Army plays include women. Trooper Bates, in 'The Drill Pig', is an early casualty of the marriage trap, and stands midway between young Flynn, and the irredeemable Bird. He has married the big-boned Rachel whose large legs perched over the roaring fire in her parents' living room 'vanish into a great confectionery of lace and petticoat'[42] Spoiled and coddled by her adoring, stupid, would-be bourgeois parents she represents all that is worst in civilian life for Bates. His view of her is nightmarishly grotesque:

> She just got bigger and slower and bigger and slower and she stayed in front of the fire all day...Got so as I was frightened of her splitting. 43.

So appalling is Bates' idea of Home that he would rather stay in barracks than go on leave, even at Christmas. Indeed, he is very clear about the reason for becoming a soldier in the first place:

> that's what I joined the Army for - escape - that's what it was - avenue of escape. 44.

Coaker, his drill sergeant, offers to accompany him, seeing the possibility of spending a free Christmas. Rachel is very taken with the handsomeness of the sergeant's uniform, seeing it in a childish, fairy-tale light which emphasises her mindlessness:

> like a royal prince - lovely uniform all shining with silver. 45.

She makes up to Coaker unaware that he has had similar experiences before. Coaker tells Bates that he stayed once with a family in Germany, and cautions him:

> Well - you've heard of Dracula?
>
> He was a German. Vampires - that's what I reckon this lot were.

> Like these three here.
>
> Only they don't suck blood - they
> don't need that. Could stand them
> if they did. They fill you up
> -feed you - stroke you - watch
> you perform and fasten their tubes
> to you - you are the only reason
> for them to even be. 46.

This succession of images, with its strong echoes of the Daughter's description of the Cook in Strindberg's The Ghost Sonata (though there is no reason to suppose that Wood had it in mind when he wrote this), unites the two soldiers. The Army has enabled them to opt out of this living death where people exist 'insulated under layers of smug sugary protectives',[47] and Coaker delivers the soldiers' final, damning verdict on the civilians.

> You know what you are - you busy little bees? You
> are the enemy. You funny little yobs - working like
> blacks for what? For her - for a budgie - for a telly -
> for a bunch of blue ribbon. Dust. Puff dust. You
> had a chance one time - you had the chance we
> all get - the chance to kick it all in the teeth. 48.

The two men try to persuade Rachel to leave with them - for what purpose, apart from making the gesture of leaving her parents is not clear (to join the Army?) - but she refuses, and Bates wavers before leaving in the end with Coaker, stopping only to collect and carry the Sergeant's greatcoat. This act of submission, which brings an echo of Strindberg's Hummel in the superiority of old over young, and the importance of rank, is an expression of total conformity to the Army, and an utter rejection of the possibility of love. The outside world for Bates is alien, has distorted, materialistic values, and women are vapid, monster-like threats to the soldier's maleness. Wood's emphasis in this play shifts from the soldier's rebellion against the Army to his acceptance of it as an escape from a meretricious and unacceptable civilian mode of living. There is nothing in the play, however, to suggest that the Army offers anything but submission, servility, and relative anonymity. The young soldier is taken over, manipulated into a particular way of thinking and responding by a mixture of physical discipline and mental indoctrination, and exchanges one unacceptable mode of living for another. As in 'The Princess', this play is much less successful in the home sequences. The language outside the barracks is flatter, more stilted, and lacks the free association, rhythmical, poetic quality of the soldiers' slang. The civilian characters are pale, too, two-dimensional only, and the surrealism is too overt. The vampire

image does not really fit into a modern naturalistic setting, and the symbolism is redolent of American-style horror comics, particularly in some of the visual sequences:

CLOSE SHOT OF RACHEL'S FACE. EVIL WITH HATRED AND RAGE. 49.

Three more women appear in the radio play 'Stick Man'. They all work in a café serving soldiers on Salisbury Plain. Mrs. Bell, whose husband runs the cafe, laments her marriage and her husband's fecklessness. She seeks solace with Alexandra who is younger, and pregnant (though unmarried) with Harry's child. Harry is a young soldier at the local barracks, and seems totally unconcerned at Alexandra's plight, though he does risk punishment to get off guard duty to tell her that he is being sent off on a three-day manoeuvre. However, as he has already offered her to his Army friend, Ted., the possibility of a meaningful relationship being developed between them seems as remote as in all the other plays. The other girl from the café, Sandra, has left her husband simply because he looks old.

Another of Wood's grotesques appears in this play. His name is Ragbag, and he has something of the strangeness of Sailor about him. He spends his Army service permanently in detention because he is always going AWOL to see his girl friend. As the soldiers start up the tanks to go off to the next War Game, Harry hears the news that Ragbag has gone missing again, and says admiringly

I think he's a hero.
He ought to get permanent stick man. 50.

The 'stick man' is the fortunate one who is the smartest in appearance on the inspection for Guard Duty, one of the burdens of the soldier's life. As Harry explains:

Guard. Smartest bloke gets stick man. They detail off an extra guard and if he's best on parade - smart - he gets taken off guard. 51.

The Army's insistence on smartness in appearance seems to be equated with sexual sublimation but, for the younger soldier, there is nothing comparable to sex itself, whatever suffering it may cause others. Sex is the ultimate escape from routine, and the complete selfish activity. The men carry on playing at being soldiers, safe behind their uniforms and with the Army to cradle them, while the women wash the dishes, carry the babies, and suffer.

A woman figures in 'Step Short in Front', an unpublished and unperformed play written for television, but does not actually appear until the final shot. She is Lance Corporal Skinner's wife, and, when the play opens, we discover that she has left him. Skinner is resentful both at his wife and the Army which he blames for causing,

the rift, and, together with Sgt. Major Pod, a weak old soldier, now caretaker of the Army depot, he tries to set up a scheme to steal a tank and sell it to CND. This totally illogical, mad scheme stems from Skinner's dream of non-conformity and need to protest against lack of opportunity, but, unlike Jupp's, his anarchy is in the mind only. He tells Pod of his fantasy of insubordination:

> My Colonel will
> say with his eyes on a Brigade before
> he's forty-five and no further...he
> will say Corporal Skinner...Target.
> And Corporal Skinner, sergeant maybe then,
> because I do try to be docile, will say
> "up you".
>
> And leave him standing on the steel stand
> of his seat, with his well-bred face, smooth,
> fresh, and slightly dismayed to fight his
> own battle. 52.

This is all deeply rooted in his resentment of rank and privilege, and in the necessity, however radically-minded a lower-ranker may be, to grovel before his superiors to achieve promotion. He also blames his low rank for his wife's desertion. She yearned for the ease and comfort of civilian life:

> Therefore the girl walks out in the
> street and she looks for a husband with
> only pin stripe on his arm...and she
> would not take comfort from a hug of hints
> of promotion and up the ladder we all
> come in time. The army was like a big
> wool blanket stretched across the light
> - polo dents clattering across the top. 53.

This stifling image of the Army, shutting the lower-rankers into an inescapable darkness while the officers cavort in sun and open space, is too much for any woman to accept, particularly when her need is for security, and some material comfort. At the end of the play, Pod manages to get back from Skinner the keys of the building where the tanks are laid up. He thinks Skinner is mad, and capable of anything. We assume that the woman who walks into the yard in the final shot is Skinner's wife, though the reason for her return is not clear. Does she realise that she loves him? Unlikely, as this is a Wood soldier and his wife. Or, has she come to terms with the knowledge that he must continue in the Army, conforming outwardly, and waiting patiently for the promotion from which she will, ultimately, benefit? The play is left open-ended.

Thus, in all the plays, the Army provides the soldier, though not the woman, with security. It is an uneasy base, however, sometimes frightening, invariably boring, but infinitely preferable to the alternative, Home. Home, for the soldier, is rented accommodation

or sharing with wife's parents. It requires a sense of responsibility, and an obligation to care and communicate. The idea of Home should provide a challenge to the individual's capacity to survive in an alien outside world, and improve the quality of his family's life, but none of the Wood soldiers accept it. They prefer to escape to the false, mindless, but non-demanding life, in human terms, of the barracks, to men, who present no sexual challenge or demands (life, in Wood's Army, seems to be entirely heterosexual), and the young virgin soldiers long more for their first uncommitted sexual experience than for being blooded in battle. Barracks offer the oblivion of uniformity, and those who do not accept it are bound to suffer.

Those lower-rankers who linger in the Army's shadow for long, and conform to its demands and wishes, inevitably become mad. The sense of the line of the past stretching to the crack of doom, the idea of all wars being interminable and one, the soldier's sense of the space of the world, and the possibility that he can be sent anywhere at a moment's notice, all make for unease. Drink is an escape for a while, but even that leads to delirium tremens, and mad hopes for lost glory. For the Army always wins. The soldiers must conform to its own imposed standards of smartness and behaviour, and grovel before their superiors for advancement. Significantly, though, officers never appear in these early Army plays. They are God-like figures, resented by the men for their natural superiority, and Wood only shows the dark underbelly of the Army, from NCOs downwards. Any disobedience on the part of the men is followed by punishment, and a Mosaic legality prevails.

All these plays, though giving a mordant picture of some aspects of Army life, presented in an often unexpected and highly imaginative way, are about the Army in peacetime. The stifling boredom of playing at being soldiers is summed up well by Harry in Spare. (Wood uses a similar speech in 'The Princess'):

> Not all that again. I've captured, sacked, looted and dug bog pits on Silk Hill so many times I know the local fairies for tantalising little flutter by nights. I call the left flank of Dumbell Wood my home - and it would sadden me to battle for Imber Crossing yet again. Up and down the plain from Blue to Red and back again to Blue I've chased Northlanders with atom secrets -scientists in the hands of a foreign power, terrorists from the territorial army... and once at dark I saw a bush become a Naafi bint waving leafy promise. I've stood all night and watched the stones start crawling... four hills where one was tumuli starred on the map... dew pearls on the tip of my cap motto... I aren't getting involved in all that again without it's real. 54.

The idea of grown men playing at war leads to hallucinations, in this

case, fortunately, harmlessly sexual; but madness is not far away. It can be staved off for a while. Harry, in 'Stick Man', breezes off to manoeuvres and away from responsibility, and Skinner and Bates bury their heads in the Army's unyielding bosom rather than in their wives'; but Jupp rebels and is destroyed, so is Sailor; the soldiers of 'The Princess' go off to serve the Queen in foreign parts, though unaware of where, why or who they are to fight or subdue; and those of Spare run screaming unquestioningly into the smoke of battle like their long-dead predecessors.

Wood's achievement in these early Army plays is the mapping out of a clear territory of his own. His view of the Army is uncompromisingly honest and outspoken, seen from a very different angle and in a very different style of presentation from that of any other playwright. Wood's Army, like society at large, is an amalgam of tradition, hierarchy and privilege, which stifles the individual and gives him no opportunity to develop as a human being, drowning him in a khaki sea of mediocrity. Some of the plays, like 'Traitor in a Steel Helmet', and Prisoner and Escort, have the rebel against a repressive society at their centre. Others, like 'The Drill Pig', and 'Stick Man' see the Army as a means of escape from the horrors of 'outside', but there is a gradual realisation that to join the Army is merely to exchange one cage for another, and, as Skinner in 'Step Short in Front' realises, once in the Army there is no way out, it is a dead end. Some of the soldiers benefit from their incarceration. Young and naive as Mick and Harry are, they do make a start at coming to terms with themselves and their plight, facing up to the consequences of their decision to join. They begin to look at themselves and their role more objectively and, though they have submerged their identity in the almost theatrical disguise of uniform, they do observe this seemingly ideal existence and realise that they do not actually like what they see, since violence and death are at the opposite, Army, end of the spectrum from civilian apathy. Neither of these two young men is mature nor strong enough to make a concrete protest about his situation, but Jupp, in Prisoner and Escort, is (though John Russell Taylor sees him in a different light as 'a born victim')[55] He is not able, though, to withstand his insidious and inexorable destruction as an individual, and his one supreme gesture of defiance is evaporated in the abyss of the prison which is all that remains after the cage of the railway compartment.

In these plays, resentment at the system begins to fester, but there is no one character defiant enough or strong enough to articulate

it. The shortness of the plays precludes the full development of character and the preparation of a fully-defined stance, and, as already seen, Plot is subordinated to a particular kind of total theatrical experience. The mention of Plot is of some relevance, since these early plays, despite their lack of linear development, are tightly constructed (several critics, as will be demonstrated, regard construction as Wood's weakest point but the evidence is certainly against this assessment in the short plays), economic in their use of setting and language, with rarely more than three characters on the stage at any one time. Wood does not set out to be a story-teller, and there is little narrative in these plays, at least, of the kind which advances the Plot line. Instead, the plays are more like dramatic poems, short, pungent experiences of one aspect of the human condition, written with a developing freedom which is actually held closely in check by the subject matter.

Although these plays are about the lower ranks, there is no harking back to the bland, knockabout humour of commercially successful Army plays and films of the early 1950s, like Worm's Eye View, or Reluctant Heroes. Nor do they have the somewhat trite sermonising of Wesker's Chips with Everything (of which Wood later wrote an unperformed filmscript), nor the kindly satire of Henry Livings' Nil Carborundum. Wood's view of the Army is savage, and unique. He sees it very much from within, whereas Wesker and Livings see service life from outside, as National Servicemen, and RAF at that - dilettanti. Wood, the regular soldier, understands the pursuit of military professionalism, has faced the relentless grinding-down process longer, without the National Service two-year escape hatch. His ear for Army language is much more incisive, and he uses it with greater imaginative force. Wesker's airmen speak naturalistically, and Livings' are reminiscent of some of the stock characters of Lancashire comedy. Wood's soldiers are presented through heightened, colourful language, which ranges from rapid, disconnected, rhythmical stichomythia, to extended monologue, full of vivid phraseology, often sounding strange, but setting off a series of images which take us deep inside the recesses of his characters' beings rather than their minds, and causing disturbing responses in ourselves with their sexual, violent resonances. His is a distorted, bigoted view, but there is no doubt of its validity.

It is not until Wood writes a full-length play, using a greater variety of theatrical techniques, and puts his soldiers into real battle, 'up the sharp end', that one of them becomes strong enough to state his anti-war case strongly and clearly, if not necessarily logically.

He, of course, is Dingo, and his role and function will be examined in detail in the next chapter, following the Spirit Sinister's advice in The Dynasts, as Wood appears to have done:

> begin small, and so lead up to the greater. It is a sound dramatic principle. 56.

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CHAPTER III.

'TURNING TH'ACCOMPLISHMENT OF MANY YEARS INTO AN HOUR GLASS:' CHARLES WOOD'S TREATMENT OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN DINGO AND 'HOW I WON THE WAR'.

The two years from 1965 to 1967 were an important time of transition, experiment, and development for Wood. His prolific output in this short period is related to a definite move away from the small-scale works of his first phase as a dramatist to full-length plays for the theatre; experimentation with new forms of theatre with directors well-versed in Brechtian theory and epic technique; and the opening-up of a whole new perspective provided by writing for the cinema. Before moving on to examine the more substantial works of 1967, it is important to trace at least the outline of Wood's development during this time, in order to provide a context for their study.

At first, he began to leave his exploration of the Army. His obsession with the military mentality had still been apparent in John Thomas, the second play of the Cockade trilogy (first performed in October, 1963), and the only one with a civilian setting. John Thomas, a nondescript schoolteacher, harbours fantasies of power, which he indulges by dressing up in Nazi-style uniform in the comparative privacy of his seedy bed-sit. A small man, in all senses of the word, he allows himself to be trampled on by an official from the local council, a representative of the real civilian world with its petty rules and authoritarian power structure. John Thomas himself is harmless enough, and the mildly sexual connotations of his name and fantasies are clearly linked with his need to escape from his own inadequacy by hiding in a uniform - very much what the soldiers of the other two plays of the trilogy had done. The Council itself represents another kind of Army with its privileged hierarchy and rigid rules which repress the individual. This short play started a transition in Wood's work from the rebellious individual's criticism of the Army to the conflict between the individual civilian and the pettiness of council officials, who take over the Army's repressive mindlessness.

Council officials also figure in Wood's anti-nuclear war play Tie up the Ballcock (1964). They are presented as farceurs playing a War Game, and quite unable to cope when the specially made-up 'casualty' of a mock nuclear attack turns real and becomes a kind of Frankenstein's monster returned to plague the inventor: a Grand Guignol image of the horror of the reality of war contrasting starkly with the naturalistically portrayed ineptitude of the Civil Defence exercise.

Wood continued his attack on local councillors in another play, 'Meals on Wheels' (1965), a light-hearted surrealistic satire on sexual attitudes, the council's philistine attitudes to Art, and its relative indifference, as Wood saw it, to social problems on its own doorstep. This play was written specifically to be performed in Bristol, and one of its characters, a particularly obnoxious one, was named Charles Smith. Since one of the local councillors was actually called Charles Smith it is hardly surprising that the council objected to its projected presentation in one of the locally-subsidised theatres. The play has not been published, but this extract gives some idea of the outspoken nature of its satire:

> Scene Two. The City Museum and Art Gallery, Bristol.
> Front Cloth:
> A painting of a red haired woman with no clothes on stretched gigantic on a kitchen table. Sauce bottle, remains of a bacon and egg breakfast, knife, fork. Before we have time to be corrupted by the depiction, a gallery attendant by name CHARLES SMITH, skids fast onto the stage, swinging on tab lines...blue tabs follow in a great pulling down of skirts.

CHARLES SMITH who ends up on his backside is heard to say at length

> SMITH More than my job's worth.
>
> (He gets up. Dusts his backside and adjusts the tabs so we don't catch another glimpse of the nude). 1.

Not only was the visual impact of the scene startling (Wood's use of paintings on stage and screen will be dealt with in some detail in Chapter IV; this is the first example of it), but the presentation of a local dignitary as a low comic performing pratfalls and acting as the epitome of bigotry and repressive arbiter of the public's taste in Art, was quite unacceptable to the solid bourgeois of Bristol. Instead, Wood's equally iconoclastic friend, John Osborne, offered to direct the play himself at the Royal Court Theatre in London, hoping that its McGill comic postcard, cartoon-like, music-hall style would appeal to a more liberally-minded, distanced London audience. In fact, the production was badly-received critically. The biting satire was diffused away from the local setting for which it was devised, and critics have been severe on the play. Hinchliffe remarks that

> ...The real difficulty was in seeing Wood, hitherto a devoted user of army obscenity and observer of army life, turned farceur with social purpose.2.

Once again, Wood's unease at using civilians was apparent, and his ironic tone failed to register with an audience unaware of what was being satirised, and bemused by the loose form of the play. Hinchliffe sums up thus:

...at the most charitable assessment it was a muddled play. 3.

and John Russell Taylor concurs:

...by general consent Wood's weakest stage play. 4.

These critics are almost certainly correct, though, had the play been presented in Bristol, it might have worked better, and could have been tightened up considerably before transferring to London. In fact, Osborne's production played to only 17% of the Royal Court theatre's capacity. In 1970, a shortened one-act version of 'Meals on Wheels' was produced by Alan Dossor at Liverpool as part of a triple bill of Wood's short plays under the broad title 'Welfare', and was quite well-received, suggesting that the play had some merit, and a more universal audience.

'Meals on Wheels', however, is an important milestone in Wood's development as a writer. It was his first play to be produced at the Royal Court Theatre, where Dingo was to be performed two years later. Its roots lie deep in the popular theatre of Wood's youth and in music-hall. In the play, Wood's technique relies heavily on cross-talk acts, heel-and-toe front cloth comic routines, a proliferation of front and back cloths; and he begins to develop from these a series of grotesque cartoon-like images which provide a collage effect which points forward clearly to the more Brechtian form of the later plays to be discussed. Although the play's visual presentation is much more flamboyant than the static settings of the early Army plays, Wood had neither managed to control his subject matter nor make it fully coherent, and the movement away from the short, tightly constructed earlier plays had led to what might best be described as a freewheeling splurge of anti-authority raspberry blowing.

Wood's berating of the local council continued in another work, 'Drums along the Avon', a film for television, shown in 1967. This was a fantasia about people living in Bristol, from the downtrodden blacks in the St. Paul's area, to the well-off whites in Clifton, a modernised, localised reflection of colonialism from native to sahib. Originally entitled 'Under Two Flags' (an interesting link with Wood's own past), this work shows a very marked technical development from the earlier television work. In place of the relative stasis of these plays Wood now writes scenes which start in one place and spill over, often quite illogically, into another, providing a dreamlike, kaleidoscopic effect. In one sequence Bristol changes into an Indian city, the Avon becomes the Nile (not, surprisingly, the Ganges), and troops in costume from the time of the Indian Mutiny are seen - an early pre-

image of the martial splendours of H. The images of a vanished colonial past, part of the very fabric of Bristol, mingle with the squalor of the present, compressing time, and providing what the author sees as the root causes of the social injustices around him. Council officials stumble through it all, totally unaware of the maelstrom of cultures which make up a modern urban society.

The very free, exuberant, uncontrolled quality of both 'Meals on Wheels', and 'Drums along the Avon', owes much to Wood's work in the cinema, and, in particular, to his contact with the American film director, Richard Lester. Lester had spent several years filming television commercials with flair and ingenuity, and, in 1958, had earned critical acclaim for his short surrealistic film 'The Running, Jumping and Standing Still Film', which featured Peter Sellers and Spike Milligan with their goonish humour. Wood first met Lester in 1965, and was asked to provide a film script of Ann Jellicoe's stage play The Knack, which had been performed at the Royal Court. Lester has often talked about his methods of film-making, and Wood was clearly influenced by them. Speaking of The Knack, Lester describes how the film developed from an initial idea rather than from the original work

> ...we started by removing almost everything that we felt we could from the stage convention, and wrote a total fantasy based on some of the mood of The Knack. 5.

Mood and fantasy are certainly important elements in Wood's work for the theatre at this stage in his development, and the liaison with Lester forced him to write quickly and fluently, adapting his language to match Lester's cinematic surrealism. Lester's views on the relation of words to images also influenced Wood's use of cinematic techniques in the theatre. Like Wood, Lester has a very strong visual imagination

> ...I always see things before I hear them. I am visually oriented, I like painting. Yet I think equal weight should be placed on dialogue, though not necessarily synchronised with the pictures. I would like to be able to move dialogue, so that it doesn't become just visualized theatre. And so that words don't always have to come out of the mouths of people who are on the screen. 6.

Although Lester is referring specifically to cinema, Wood has often 'moved' dialogue in his later plays. Several examples spring readily to mind, in particular the handling of Havelock's speech at the bivouac of the movable column in H (I vii). At the beginning of the speech Havelock is off stage and the soldiers face off to hear him. After eight lines, the stage directions state

> ...Enter HAVELOCK while his voice is heard still speaking off. HAVELOCK listens to himself.

Eight lines later

> ...HAVELOCK joins with his voice off.

Finally,

CAPTAIN JONES PARRY hears HAVELOCK's voice coming from behind him on the stage as well as off. He bustles to join HAVELOCK with HARRY and MAUDE.

HAVELOCK grins at his son while his voice shrills off-stage, he says:

HAVELOCK (on.) Now, there, you see, I am everywhere! 7.

In this way, Wood is able to point up Havelock's god-like omnipresence and uses the technique as a disjunctive alienation device to heighten the dream-like effect of the scene, breaking up its quasi-documentary realism. He uses the device again in Veterans (1972) and Has "Washington" Legs? (1978) to emphasise the gulf between the glamour of the cinema and the grim reality of making films.

It is clear, then, that Wood's connection with cinema was to have a long-lasting and fundamental influence in his later development, and that his work with Lester was formative. Since there were over 200 shots in the first 20 pages of the screenplay of 'The Knack', and, according to Lester, Wood wrote seven scripts for it altogether, this was a stimulating and demanding period of experimentation. The final version of the screenplay for 'The Knack' was more faithful to the original stage play than the others, and the film was a very successful example of British cinema in the 1960s, winning an award at the 1965 Cannes Film Festival.

Lester and Wood immediately built on this success, making the second Beatles film, 'Help!' (the first, 'Hard Day's Night', had also been filmed by Lester, with Alun Owen as script-writer). The film, a slick series of surrealistic fantasy adventures featuring the Beatles and their songs, was launched at the height of their popularity, and was assured of commercial success. Thus, in 1965, Wood was experimenting in a new medium with an imaginative and talented director, and reaping financial reward, whilst experiencing both artistic and commercial failure in the theatre (another play, 'Don't Make Me Laugh', presented by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Aldwych in February, 1965, had also failed financially and critically). It would have been quite impossible for him to have continued as a full-time writer without the finance provided by the cinema, and his future as a dramatist is bound up with his need to write for the more lucrative medium to achieve financial security. The working relationship between Lester and Wood will be dealt with more fully in connection with their work on 'How I Won the War', but it is worth noting that Marshall McLuhan saw some of these early films as being of great significance in the linking of television with technical progress in the cinema:

Critics of television have failed to realize that the motion

> pictures they are lionizing - such as 'The Knack', 'Hard Day's Night', 'What's New Pussycat?' - would prove unacceptable as mass audience films if the audience had not been preconditioned by television commercials to abrupt zoom, elliptical editing, no story lines, flash cuts. 8.

Wood's work in television had obviously been of immense value to him, and his association with a director who had assimilated so many new techniques in the one medium, television, and developed them in another, cinema, enabled him to make the important transition to the new medium with a full awareness of its possibilities.

Although Wood had extended the range of his subject-matter, and experimented with form during the two-year period under review, he returned to his earlier preoccupation, the Army, for the major works of 1967, though Fill the Stage with Happy Hours, a surprisingly naturalistic play for this period, was directed by his Cockade director, Patrick Dromgoole, at the Nottingham Playhouse in November 1966, and transferred to the Vaudeville in London - the author's first West End production. The critics were luke warm about this play, and it was only when Wood returned to the Army for his inspiration that his status as a leading 'New Wave' dramatist was enhanced.

All the early Army plays had been short, and had presented a view of soldiers in peacetime. The new Army play, to be produced eventually in 1967 as Dingo was of full length, and gave a savagely critical version of the Second World War as seen through the baleful and jaundiced eye of a hard-bitten lower ranker. This change of emphasis needs careful critical consideration, but before closely examining the text and performance of Dingo, it will be of some value and interest to outline the play's genesis and gestation, since three eventful years elapsed from the development of Wood's original idea for it to its eventual first performance in Bristol in April, 1967.

As early as January, 1964, some three months after the London production of Cockade, a short paragraph in The Observer stated that Wood was to be 'the one new English dramatist in the National Theatre's galaxy for next Autumn'[9], which would have been the supreme accolade for a new writer, and added that Wood 'is suitably stunned by the National news but, as no one has yet notified him officially, feels it may all be an elaborate hoax'.[10] Indeed, Michael Codron, the impresario who was nurturing many emerging talents had felt unable to present the play under his own management, but had sent it to the National Theatre. As a result of this action, the story circulated that the play had been commissioned by the National Theatre, but, according to Wood, this was never the case:

I think there was a political thing at the time. I think people

> were saying, "It's all very well the plays you're doing, but you're not commissioning any new plays and new English writers", and lo and behold they got one they wanted to do, and they said, "Well, we'll say we commissioned it". 11.

In its earliest form, the play was called 'I Don't Hold with Heroes', and Wood told The Observer that it was 'a sort of Second-World-War Littlewood',[12.] suggesting that its form might be similar to the famous Joan Littlewood Theatre Workshop production of Oh! What a Lovely War which had opened in March, 1963 at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, and which had represented the First World War through the theatrical device of a pierrot show. The mention of Joan Littlewood, for whose work Wood had shown admiration when working with the Theatre Workshop Company in 1958, is of some significance in a consideration of the development of the play from page to stage, for Geoffrey Reeves, the director of Dingo, used working methods adapted from Littlewood and Brook. The left-wing political stance of Theatre Workshop and its desire to appeal to a working-class audience are also relevant to a play which, Wood said, had arisen from his 'horror at those whose high-water mark for living was 1939-1945.' 13.

The Observer paragraph contains the first mention of the play which later became Dingo, and its eventual presentation in Bristol, in a club theatre, is worthy of attention because it highlights some of the difficulties facing writers in the 1960s, not the least of which was the constant struggle with the Lord Chamberlain over what was acceptable or not for the purposes of censorship. The Theatre Workshop production of 'You Won't Always be on Top' on which Wood had worked, had fallen foul of the censor because of departures from the submitted text, and the National Theatre itself had suffered much anguish over the possible presentation of Rolf Hochuth's play Soldiers, in which Hochuth had suggested, among other things, that Churchill had been ultimately responsible for the aeroplane accident which led to the death of the Polish General Sikorski during the Second World War, the Board rejecting the play as demeaning the memory of an outstanding statesman. As already noted in Chapter I Churchill had also been pilloried in 'You Won't Always be on Top', Richard Harris, the actor, having been found guilty of imitating his voice at the official opening of a public lavatory in the play, was actually fined by West Ham magistrates. Given the attitude of the National Theatre Board, and the strict censorship governing any public dramatic presentation, it would have been impossible for Wood's play to have been produced at the National Theatre. Malcolm Page is more specific about the reasons for the play's rejection:

> Late in 1964 the Lord Chamberlain refused to license the play because of the scene in which a medal is pinned on knickers worn by an officer dressed as a chorus girl in a 'Soldiers in Skirts' show.14.

He does not, however, produce any evidence to support this statement.

It was not until after the court case which followed the banning of the Royal Court production of Edward Bond's Saved, in February and March 1966, that, according to Richard Findlater, a joint committee of Members of Parliament from both houses was set up 'to review law and practice relating to the censorship of stage plays.' In his book, Banned, Findlater states that the criteria of the censor in 1966 were roughly those in operation in 1909, viz: The Lord Chancellor was able to refuse a licence if the play was held to be indecent, or if it contained offensive personalities, or represented on the stage in an invidious manner a living person, or any person recently dead. It could also be banned if it did violence to the sentiment of religious reverence, could be calculated to conduce to crime or violence, or to impair friendly relations with any foreign power, or could be calculated to cause a breach of the peace. 15.

Dingo could have been judged to fulfil most of these requirements. Evidence of indecency was provided by the soldiers masturbating; Dingo and Mogg are 'offensive' personalities; Montgomery was shown as an idiot clown; there was a sequence satirising the empty religiosity of those who rush off to kill others while singing hymns; in fact, it did just about everything possible to provide a view of the most recent war and its heroes as being debased, vile, and silly. No one scene was any more, or less, offensive than any other, and no censor could possibly have passed it for public performance. The only alternative for Wood was to put it on in a private theatre, licensed for club performances.

He had always shown great interest in the Bristol Arts Centre, founded in 1964. Its premises consisted of two elegant Georgian houses situated in a pleasant square near the centre of Bristol which had been totally renovated by volunteer helpers to provide an Art Gallery, Bar, Restaurants, Box Office, rehearsal rooms, and a fine 120-seater auditorium. Wood had often been asked informally to write a play for performance there, and when Dingo was rejected by the National Theatre it became clear that the Arts Centre would be the ideal place for it. It was a club theatre, with admittance restricted to members and guests, so normal rules of censorship were not applicable; the small auditorium obviated the need to attract large numbers, whilst the intimate actor/audience relationship it provided was ideal for the play's full impact to be achieved. Besides, the amateur company housed there had already built up an enviable

reputation for presenting new work, and had attracted directors of the highest calibre. Derek Goldby, with strong Royal Court connections, and a protégé of John Dexter, had directed the Centre's own opening production of 'Hang Down Your Head and Die', the Littlewood-style anti-capital punishment play, which Wood had seen. Two years later, Goldby was chosen by Olivier to direct Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead at the National Theatre. John Boorman, later to receive international acclaim for his work in the cinema, had directed Brecht's Good Person of Setzuan at the Centre in 1965, immediately after Wood's wife, Valerie, had played Claire Zachanassian in my own production of Durenmatt's The Visit. In fact, Philip French, film critic of The Observer, underlines the cultural significance of Bristol in the 1960s in a recent profile of John Boorman:

> The sleepy gateway to the West was nursing some extraordinary talents at the time, all working as ill-paid teachers, reporters and broadcasters - the playwrights Charles Wood, Tom Stoppard and Peter Nichols, and the future novelist and director of the Cheltenham Literary Festival, A.C.H.Smith, among them. They formed a little group for mutual criticism and protection, and shared a dislike of fashionable naturalism. 16.

Others of Wood's Bristol connections were mentioned in Chapter I. One of them, Geoffrey Reeves, was asked to direct Dingo since it had been decided to give the play a professional production. Reeves was a particularly good choice because he had been Peter Brook's assistant for US, the improvised anti-Vietnam War play presented by the RSC in 1966. Reeves had unsuccessfully tried to involve Wood in the production of US as the main playwright who would have sculpted a final text from the actors' improvisations, and it is tempting to consider the direction Wood's writing career might have taken had he chosen to work with Brook rather than Lester. However, Reeves decided to bring to Bristol as many as possible of the RSC actors who had performed in US, and who were therefore experienced in experimental work and improvisation, and had formed opinions on the nature of war. Money was very short indeed, and there was no hope of an expensive 'prestige' production at the Arts Centre, though it was entitled to a small Arts Council grant for putting on a new play. For four weeks of demanding rehearsals, which included drilling in uniform with drill rifles for at least half an hour a day in the gardens of the square outside (a method of which Joan Littlewood would certainly have approved), the main actors - Tom Kempinski, Leon Lissek, Eric Allen, and Henry Woolf - were paid £90 each, whilst Reeves received £100. Wood, too, came off rather badly financially. The Arts Centre was to retain the author's royalty of 7½% of the gross takings of the run to offset the loss they expected to make - and did.

A clause in the author's contract with the Arts Centre stated that

> ...the Author wishes the Bristol Arts Centre to receive all his royalties from the said Play at other theatres and from television and radio up to and until any loss incurred by the Bristol Arts Centre has been fully recouped and the Agent agrees to pay to the Bristol Arts Centre all earnings from the said Play to cover this. 17.

Since the overall deficit on the production, in spite of the low salaries and ridiculously small production expenses of some £150, was £728 (underwritten by the Arts Council so that the final figure was £347.11.2d.), it meant that all Wood's income from the play until, in fact, 1970, when it was performed at the Library Theatre, Manchester, was given to the Arts Centre. The pauper's existence offered by the theatre inevitably meant that Wood would concentrate on the more lucrative film medium, thus lessening the possibility of his becoming a major figure in Drama.

The year when Dingo reached the stage, 1967, also saw the release of Wood's film 'How I Won the War', directed by Richard Lester. The film was also set in the Second World War, and needs to be examined in relation to the play as evidence of the writer's treatment of the same subject in different media. This cannot be done adequately without some reference to the working methods of the two directors, and any influences they might acknowledge. In fact, both directors stress the importance of Brecht in their work. Reeves, speaking of US, had said

> ...if Charles Wood had been with us, it could have been a real Brechtian result, much tighter and closer to the effect we aimed at. 18.

whilst Lester replies to Joseph Gelmis' question 'Would you describe the alienation effect of your pasteboard characters in ('The Bed-Sitting Room') or 'How I Won the War' as Brechtian' with:

> Not in this film. But in 'How I Won the War' absolutely. Consciously and determinedly. The alienation that I meant in 'How I Won the War' is that at the moment that a character was in danger of attracting your sympathy because of his performance you turned on the audience and said: "Don't forget this is a film you're watching and I'm an actor and I'm playing this part. And it's not this I want to get over. It is something bigger than Corporal Transom I want to talk about." That, in a sort of Arturo Ui feeling, is what I meant by alienation in 'How I Won the War'. 19.

Any analysis of Dingo and 'How I Won the War', then, needs to take cognisance of a distinctive Brechtian influence which can be detected not only in the utterances of the directors but in the strong links with Littlewood and Brook. Wood's own first-hand experience of Theatre Workshop, his earlier experience of 'working-class theatre',

and music hall provided a firm base for the development of an epic form of his own, particularly in the theatre. Besides admitting theoretical influences, both directors have outlined the assumptions on which they based their rehearsals and presentations. Reeves, arguing in the idiom of Brook's US, suggests that he was concerned with challenging existing attitudes to the War which he thinks are based on false premises:

> Dingo wasn't about the Second World War - it was about the images of war which, since 1945, we've been told the war was all about. 20.

Reeves admits that he is unable to assert the truth or falsity of these images of war, but advocates a dialectic theatrical approach to attempt to reach a conclusion.

> ...Charles and I are both too young to have fought in the war - we don't know the actual truth. We were questioning the credibility of those images of war by taking them apart, pushing them together again, testing their power. 21.

Lester, director of the film, poses questions about the after-effects of the War, and is concerned with its contemporary relevance:

> I'm looking at the war from today and saying: "What is it about? What has it resulted in? What has it achieved?".22.

As an American, Lester is unable to take Reeves' more objective stance, and posits a more personally involved, emotional response to contemporary problems through an exploration of the War:

> 'How I Won the War' was made about my feelings towards the Vietnam War. 23.

Wood himself is more outspoken than his directors, responding to war from a standpoint of moral indignation:

> There is such a thing as a just war until the first shot is fired, until the first person is killed, until the first filth starts. It's filthy from that moment on. 24.

This very positive, generalised anti-war statement gives a wider perspective to his more specific comments on the last War:

> Churchill always talked about the Empire. We didn't find out until it was nearly over that it had been a crusade to save the Jews. The real reasons for going to war were purely political. Someone was looking at us across the sea again, and we were afraid that we were going to be occupied. 25.

Wood is therefore totally rejecting the widely-held British conception of the War as a just and necessary response to the unacceptable rule of Fascism (which would have been negated anyway in his view as soon as the first shot was fired), and sees it instead as an isolationist response to the problem of expansionism, manipulated by politicians. This view of the War is more overtly political than those of his directors, and his comments on Churchill and the Empire set up specific targets for attack. His writing wells from his indignation at the stultified and privileged society which, as his earlier plays show, the

Army represents so clearly for him, and he uses his invective rather than his intellect in order to pour scorn on cherished ideals, institutions, and great figures of the recent past. He is, like Lester, totally involved with his material at an emotional level, though constantly employing alienation techniques for its presentation, working very much in the Littlewood tradition. Peter Hall, Director of the National Theatre, has outlined very clearly the differences between Brook and Littlewood, and despite Reeves' more detached attitude, Wood's play leans more to Littlewood than Brook:

> Peter is an intellectual to his finger tips. He's economic, he's chic, he's surprising, he illuminates like a laser beam. Joan's theatre was about energy, vitality, blood and sentiment. It could be very common, it could be very vulgar. But it was very alive. 26

In form, too, the play is very much influenced by the same continental theatrical techniques developed by Theatre Workshop, which widen its presentation methods from a pedantic dependence on Brechtian theory alone to a free-ranging, anti-naturalistic style developed by Wood and Reeves to accommodate the author's striking images. As Clive Barker has pointed out, style in production was an important concept in the work of Theatre Workshop, and Wood's methods are derived from similar sources:

> ... you could use Music Hall styles, you could use Marx Brothers clowning, you could use pastiche, parody and satire, and you could use moments of intense realism within the one production. Or you could use direct contact with the audience, not uncommon in Joan's work. They are all from the Continent and they've all been used before. What Joan did, as did Copeau and Reinhardt, was to take themes, ideas, concepts and bring them together to create the work that was right for that time. 27.

I shall now examine the play itself, focussing on its theatrical presentation; Wood's handling and development of character, particularly Dingo's; and the play's critical reception. A consideration of the film 'How I Won the War' will follow, and comparisons will then be drawn between play and film. For the purposes of clarity, I shall refer to the original typewritten script for submission to the National Theatre as 'Dingo' I(a), the final typewritten version of the text actually presented at Bristol as 'Dingo' I(b), the published three-act Penguin edition of 1969 as Dingo II , and the Methuen revised two-act edition of 1978 as Dingo III. Dingo II,besides being longer than 'Dingo' I(a), has a totally different ending, and was the text performed at the Royal Court in November, 1967, whilst Dingo III reverts to two acts, relegating some of the Dingo II third act scenes to optional appendices. This was the version performed by the RSC in June 1976, and January 1978.

Judged by the evidence of text alone, read in the safety of the study, the play could easily be said to be nasty, brutish, and long,

but the effectiveness of the stage production, physical in its impact, depended on the aural quality of the language which was intensified by the powerful theatrical images. Linguistically, Wood uses the rhythms of the Drill Manual, the repartee of the Music Hall, the strange jargon of the barrack room, and the unctuous political or pseudo-religious statement, to make a weird and original poetry, which is greatly heightened by the visual context.

Any expectations of a naturalistic theatrical approach to War which an audience might have had, were completely eradicated by the first stage directions:

> The whole of the Western Desert during the Second World War against the Germans. All of it, from a small bit of it. 28.

At Bristol, Wood designed the play himself, which gave him a unique opportunity to develop the form as well as the content of the play through practical experimentation. A section of his contract for the Bristol production states that:

> The Author shall have the right to attend all rehearsals of the said Play and shall design the set and costumes without payment of a fee. 29.

He achieved the Western Desert effect by festooning the stage with camouflage nets, and pouring tons of sand into bags. The production photographs from Bristol (see Appendix C) give some idea of the impressive visual impact of the play, and a Brechtian note was struck by Wood's dismantling of an existing cyclorama to expose the back wall of the theatre. The lighting, too, is fully visible.

Wood uses the first scene of the play (curiously enough he uses act and scene divisions rather than an epic sequence of individual scenes) to introduce Dingo and Mogg to the audience in a short, almost Beckettian opening, in which the two soldiers, who appear to be military versions of Vladimir and Estragon wait, and pass the time, communicating in terse, rhythmical interchanges. The first act then builds through a series of relatively short scenes, to a surrealistic climax. Reeves explained the evolution of this structure:

> The desert design was an easy starting-point, one was aware of leading people in. But we still lit the first act very romantically - we put in the Rommel scene, the front-cloth gag scene, to deliberately prepare the ground for Charles' brand of surrealism. 30.

In fact, Rommel did not appear in the 'Dingo I' versions. He only fully exists in Dingo II, and is banished to an optional appendix in Dingo III. The theatrical presentation of historical characters is a new departure for Wood, but is analogous with the guying of Councillor Smith in 'Meals on Wheels', and provides an interesting dramatic tension between the fictitious soldiers who provide a more universal, and, in the author's view, more truthful, picture of the soldier at war than the

over-privileged, distanced commander, unaware of the realities of suffering. After Rommel's exit, a Comic is introduced into the action. He proceeds to entertain the troops and, at one point in his presentation, wears a beret with two badges as the real Field Marshall Montgomery had done. In the previous scene, Rommel had worn the long black leather coat made famous for a generation by newsreels, war films, and newspaper photographs. Using similar visual references (e.g. 'The Comic puts on a beret with two badges in it')[31], Wood makes the Comic look like Montgomery, and parodies some of his wartime speeches through the Comic's language. Although these two characters are factual figures Wood makes no attempt to make them realistic nor give them a documentary function. Instead, they are used as cartoons, caricatures of a well-known figure's generally-received image to question that image's veracity.

Another officer is introduced into the first act. He is not given a name but is a Navigating Officer, and, since at this stage in Wood's drama, all officers are by definition idiots, he is hopelessly lost, cycling around the stage in ever-decreasing circles. The utter cynicism of the two soldiers, Dingo and Mogg, is shown when, bitterly resenting officers in general, they send him off into a minefield. Then, in an attempt to relieve their boredom, and their inevitable sexual frustration, they masturbate. This expression of human misery and despair is treated very carefully by Wood and there is no attempt to make it daringly sensational. The idea is introduced by an erotically poetic speech relating the male sexuality of the rifle bolt to the female breech block, then a short exchange of dialogue which emphasised the desert heat and the soldiers' inertia ('The wonder is that they talk at all with this cartridge case hot and expanded after firing tight in their black mouth breeches')[32]; followed by wild notes of music which resolve themselves into a belly dance. The soldiers dance, and then:

> They lie flat. Arms out flat in the now hard overhead sun, and then they masturbate. 33.

Approached in this way, the whole sequence becomes a highly-stylised and powerful theatrical statement on frustration, lack of fulfilment, and the total isolation of the soldier in war.

The Rommel scene interrupts their fantasy and, after his exit, a new character, Tanky, appears. His entrance brings with it one of the most appalling theatrical images of the horror of death in war, a savage modern version of Wood's father's scene from <u>Mademoiselle From Armentières</u>:

> CHALKY has been burned to death in a sitting position. He is black; charred, thin as a black, dried-in-the-sun, long-dead bean. 34.

The photograph (see Appendix C), gruesome though it is, is quite unable to convey the full nightmarish impact of the torso on stage. At Bristol, in a small auditorium, it was uncomfortably close, inescapable, and, long after other parts of the play had vanished from the memory, it remained, seared into the mind. Again, Wood emphasised the power of the image with vividly appropriate language, hammering his point still harder in the theatre by making Dingo speak directly to the audience:

> No it's grotesque - and it's not Chalky. Do you think we'd make a mistake like that? Do you think that black, burnt up, high in the sun stinking charred old toothy old jerk of raw material is a British swaddie do you? Do you think we'd risk offending every mother here tonight with unlikely looking material. Highly upset they'd be. That's enemy. No British soldier dies like that. That's enemy. You won't find a photograph, a statue, a painting of a British soldier like that.35.

Our received images of war, Wood and Reeves are saying, have led us to believe that our loved ones died nobly, and cleanly, on the field of battle, whereas the enemy gained the just reward for his savagery. Chalky's corpse is a strongly antithetical theatrical response to this palliative. This scene then builds to its surrealistic climax and ends the first act.

An interval followed Act I in Bristol, but Reeves and Wood, following Brook's precedent in US, provided an alternative. Wood expresses his opinion on intervals in his Preface to Veterans:

> I hate intervals, because I never know what to do except talk and I would like my plays to have alternative entertainment... interval plays or films.36.

At Bristol, the house lights were brought up, and a cinema screen showed newsreels of Princess Elizabeth, Glenn Miller, and the White Cliffs of Dover, though any hopes the audience might have entertained of a brief respite from the horror through a wallow in nostalgia were shattered by the horrific shots of German soldiers cavorting with their girl friends over the corpses of the commandos who had taken part in the abortive Dieppe Raid.

The film show used some of the same newsreel shots which Lester inserted into the action of 'How I Won the War', thus providing an interesting parallel with the film, but, besides maintaining the momentum of the play, also enabled a smooth transition to be made in the play's setting from the heat of the desert to the chill of Europe. The second act changed the scene from the limitless space of North Africa to the drab confines of a prison-camp cell in Germany. Wood cleared the stage of sand and now festooned it with barbed wire:

> The wire is on frames dropped in and gets smaller and tighter as it recedes up stage. So that the effect is of barbed wire stretch-

> ing, sometimes fiddle string taut and sometimes looping in characteristic twirls - as far as the eye of a prisoner can see. There is room between the frames for movement. Searchlights pluck the wires and the wind makes the sound. 37.

Lighting is again given prominence, and is used to change the mood and tone of the play from Reeves' 'romantic' first act to a harsher depiction of the escalation of the conflict, whilst the sound of the wind is the first effect in a sound track which accompanies sections of the act in a cinematic way, and which culminates in the wailing of the Jews and all mankind in the final sequences.

A boxing ring was set up in the middle of the stage, presumably to add still more to the sense of confinement in a prison (it is lit by a small bulb dangling above it, rather like the single light in the railway compartment of Prisoner and Escort), and to give the impression of being in a cell. Whilst the ring confines some of the action it fails as a stage device to define the action, since one expects some of the war's conflicts to be explained by it, or that the idea of war as a brutal game might be explored through it. In this respect, it has similar defects to the Toy Theatre in H, which is to be discussed in Chapter IV, and the idea was somewhat derivative, having already been used by Brecht as the setting for his Kleines Mahagonny. Indeed, this stark setting is covered over in the second scene by a favourite Wood device, a Music Hall style front cloth to set the action of the play in the context of the Normandy Landings:

> A front cloth which is a badly drawn map of the European theatre of war. "The Bloody Beaches of Normandy" on the map is lit by a spot. 38.

The Comic/Montgomery has a series of monologues, which are really a collage of letters, statements, and views on war from a variety of people, which he performs in front of the cloth. In Dingo III, another scene (Act 2 sc.4) is performed by the Comic as a solo ventriloquist, sitting on a lavatory with two puppets resembling Churchill and Eisenhower. Although the basic form is that of the Music Hall, the content is sharply satirical, causing the theatrical balance to shift towards the strongly delineated stylisation of agit-prop performances (in which characters were often dispensed with, and represented by a marionette).

For the third scene, Wood removes the cloth and sets a performance of Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest in the context of the prison camp. The prisoners perform it in drag for the benefit of their captors, and Wood uses the scene to parody the idea of the 'classic' prison camp escape (it was a device actually used at Colditz). Whilst Gwendoline and Cicely take tea several of the soldiers disappear down

trapdoors on stage, and the portly, idiotic German Commandant, 'a George Grosz character come to life',[39] looks on benignly. This mention of Grosz (only in 'Dingo' I(a)), reinforces the strong agit-prop element in the play, and is reminiscent of the Littlewood production of Hasek's The Good Soldier Schweik in 1955/6. The Commandant, played as he was in Bristol by a very tall (6'4") actor, wearing a Pickelhaube, made another particularly striking visual image, and the reference was dropped from the later versions presumably because this actor was not available. Wood, with his own background as cartoonist and caricaturist, clearly recognised the quality of Grosz' savage sketches. Grosz' work with Piscator, his illustrations of Hasek's novel, and links with the Neues Sachlicheit movement in post-World War One Germany, make him a very appropriate source for a play dealing with satire and anti-war sentiment.

The final scenes sprawl across the stage. Bodies still hang on the wire, but the whole cast is paraded to welcome the 'Victorious Allied Armies'. The ensemble remains on stage and performs a Memorial service, with hymns and prayers, a medal-giving ceremony, and the acceptance of the German Army's surrender (symbolised by the Comic taking the Commandant's flag and sword); the wailing of the Jews is eerily juxtaposed with the singing of 'Jerusalem', and the soldiers queue to see the horror of the Concentration Camps. Finally, the Comic, now imitating Churchill, invites everyone to join him in the joyfully deprecatory act of urinating on the West Wall of Hitler's Germany, and, after a blackout to accommodate this action and change the mood from jocular to serious, the whole cast gathers for a final tableau as Tanky's accusatory repetition of Churchill's alleged guilt for his death ends the play.

An examination of Wood's scenic outline has shown a succession of powerful visual images set in the context of popular theatrical forms like music hall and agit-prop, which enable him to cope with an extended range of material and characters. The vast spatial and temporal scope of the play demanded a more epic treatment than his previous Army plays, and he used montage and collage in a loosely-connected series of scenes rather than a tightly-knit, logical construction, to convey the fragmentary, confusing, disorganised experience that war and battle is. These methods suited the strongly satirical tone of the play, though the patchy, review style of some of the scenes added to the critical confusion with which it was greeted.

His use of character, too, was in contrast to the surface naturalism of his earlier plays, and his deployment of caricature as an

alienatory device opened up new satirical possibilities. Although the author's dramatic method shows an important expansion of stylistic references, the most important new feature of Dingo was the introduction of officers into Wood's drama. Hitherto, they had been shadowy figures, on the periphery of the men's consciousness, though shaping it insidiously and inevitably. Now, they become important figures in a warfare which is not merely viciously nationalistic in its external 'necessity', but which has another, internal, dimension perpetuated by attitudes to class. In Dingo, Wood chooses to caricature officers unmercifully, preferring to criticise them from a distance, lampooning and scorning them without mitigation, rather than examine the expression of their inner attitudes and motives as he did later with Havelock. This method is germane to a play which sets out to reexamine attitudes from a clash of opposites, and the essential unreality of the officers' presentation was heightened by the central focus on a naturalistically-conceived ordinary soldier. For the first time, Wood named a play after a character, and, unlike the lower-rankers of the Army plays who had been components of a group (though some had made protests and essayed individuality, but were crushed by an inexorable system), Dingo is a protester and survivor. He is the ordinary soldier, the Wood prototype of the true British 'swaddie', foul-mouthed and dispassionate, with an ambiguous moral code, but ultimately unconquerable, a survivor, who even has an altruistic sense, idiosyncratic though it is. I shall now consider this unique character in some detail from the standpoint of characterisation, that is how Wood has developed Dingo in terms of his physical and mental wants and state; from the angle of his function in the drama as a filter of opinion, a mouthpiece for the author's anti-war sentiment, providing contrast, balance, and polarisation for the heavily-loaded satirical dialectic; and as a unifying factor who lends some coherence to the diverse form of the play.

Dingo's very name suggests the low cunning, restlessness, and opportunism of the prairie dog, a loner, scavenging under cover of darkness. Like the prairie dog he is faced with the problem of survival in an alien world where enemies abound, and for Dingo these take many forms (specifically officers, politicians, and NCOs), and are by no means confined to the other side. Apart from the form of the play, Wood's first didactic opposition to prevailing dramatic convention was to present Dingo in this light, as a complete contrast to the simple, kindly, lovable lower-ranker with his good-humoured banter and deference to superiors who had been the prototype of the

innumerable war films of the post-war period. Above all, Dingo is a tough, professional soldier, who, despite his defects, retains a hard-edged compassion for others of his class. He chose to join the Army, well aware of the moral consequences of his action, but his choice was made less as a means to join a crusade against Fascism (an idealism he would dismiss as the myth-making of politicians), than a way of escaping from a drab, unskilled civilian existence. As the play and war wear on, he expresses bitter resentment at the way his life, and that of everyone of similar working-class origin, is shaped and manipulated by the power and expediency of privilege. For Dingo, the Army represents security and excitement, a way of avoiding the rut. As his fellow soldier, Mogg, the alley-cat (whose amateurish naïveté towards the Army allows him to succumb to its insidiously brutalising effect and become a particularly nasty NCO), points out, in a sharp, cartoon-like verbal image:

> Try as I may - I can't see you standing for a number eight bus picking your nose with the edge of your paper. 40.

Since Dingo, the professional, understands only too well the workings of the Army he is able to use it for his own ends as well as being manipulated by it, and he is able to establish an acceptable identity for himself within the confines of its corporate anonymity. This sense of identity and the retention of individuality in a repressively uniform society is necessarily manifested by an inner resilience, expressed through the language and action of the drama, for, externally, Dingo looks like everyone else. In the first act, he and Mogg appear thus:

> boots scuffed white, hair bleached white.
> Faces are burned, bloated, splashed with gentian violet. 41.

Gentian violet is used to alleviate the pain of the sores which are the inevitable result of the merciless beating-down of the desert sun, and which emphasise the individual as well as the corporate physical suffering of war in the desert. It was also used to treat the sores of under-privileged children in the pre-war years, of whom Dingo was presumably one. Escape from death or wounding still leaves the soldier to combat the elements, and if Nature has contrived to divest Dingo of some of the outward vestiges of humanity it has combined with the Army to aid in the diminution of his individuality. He is dressed, like everyone else, in yellowing khaki shorts, with webbing equipment, and is in battle order. Later in the play, in the German prison camp, where the heat is exchanged for a cold greyness, this sameness is portrayed in Dingo's ragged uniform and greatcoat. The unalleviated suffering and conformity are compounded by the boredom of

routine both in the desert and the prison camp, and Dingo finds it stifling. As a lower-ranker there is little he can do actively to escape it, but, as the War grinds on, his resentment against the powers that be who instigated and sustained the War festers. It finds expression in a series of articulate tirades against the System - politicians, officers, and NCOs - and all who succumb to the inhuman attitudes generated by war, which he sees as the glorification of viciousness, of inhumanity, and the sustenance of unnecessary suffering, rather than the need to save civilisation by heroic deeds of arms.

Dingo is not, however, merely a suffering soldier metamorphosed into an articulate political opponent of the status quo by his circumstances, and Wood offers glimpses of his function as a social being with an emotional life. Dingo reveals that he is married, and that his wife cried when he left home to join the Army. In fact, this domestic facet of Dingo's character is a most important addition to the later versions of the play. There is no mention of a wife in 'Dingo' I (a), but she appears in the extensive rewriting Wood did for the Bristol production in 'Dingo' I(b). The author maintained his convention of rarely showing women on stage, and Dingo's wife is never seen, though her existence as a woman who epitomises the grief of all women whose men have left them lonely and isolated for the War, lends substance to Dingo's compassionate outbursts at the folly of politicians and others. Yet Dingo's endemic hardness precludes any kind of sentimental yearning for family life, and his relationship with his wife, sketchy though the information about it in the play is, is clearly not a full and loving one (which Havelock's in H is). Dingo uses his memory of her the first time she is mentioned, at the end of the first act (triggered by the Comic who starts a typical music-hall joke with the words 'my wife'), to protest at his comrades' easy acceptance of sentimentality, conformity and the status quo. In a howl of frustration, Dingo shrieks an incitement to anarchy as the other soldiers softly sing 'We'll Meet Again':

> For my wife who cries, don't cry. Go out and drop your drawers - loosen your blackouts, don't tell me, but let the top of your head go whirl with the stir of Churchill's cigar... for my wife who cries - don't cry. 42.

He informs us that she cried because she was unable to cope with his departure for the War, and that her tears eventually landed her in a lunatic asylum

> ... which is where she is today in 1967. 43.

a striking reminder that the effects of war are long lasting, and a device which gives the play a stark immediacy transcending time. She is next invoked when Dingo, in Act 3 sc. 3, weighed down with the horrors

of war and man's folly, feels a faint prick of conscience:

> My wife - it comes as a shock, I haven't thought of you once, you wouldn't want me to think of you in all this, I haven't thought of you once, twice, twice I've thought of you twice. 44.

This is the second time, since he did not care to think about her even when masturbating, preferring to conjure up a foul, death-like fantasy image, thus escaping still further from drab reality. His third reference to his wife comes just before the end of the play, when the wailing from the concentration camps stops, and their full horror is presented for public inspection. By this time, Dingo has had enough of war, and has started to lose his grip. The slaughter of innocent civilians, and the political wrangles following the surrender are all too much for him:

> I want to go home to my wife who cries, she has cried since the day I went away, she cried because I went away - she cried all the time I was in the drill hall down the road, she cried when I moved to Wembley Stadium, a twopenny bus ride, she cried all the weekend I was home, she has cried since 1939. 45.

Her tears are the expression of a grief which wells from a deep, aching loneliness which will drive her into the mental hospital. That kind of utter dependence on another human being is something Dingo can neither face nor understand. He sees it as an essentially civilian, and feminine, trait, and therefore, in his terms, weak and despicable. He finds the Army's mindless routine more acceptable than the civilian alternative, particularly because demanding personal relationships can be avoided there, and he can concentrate entirely on his own survival, the ultimate selfishness. This is precisely what the soldiers of the early Army plays did, but the war, and its consequences, constantly impinge on Dingo's consciousness, cutting off avenues of escape into deadening routine or even enticing fantasy, and forces him to be aware of the sufferings of others. At the end of the play, Dingo's description of his wife's sorrow mingles with the loud wailing of the sound track, and even he voices a lamentation on the utter waste of war:

> What was this wailing, it was the wailing of my wife - it was the wailing of myself, it was the wailing of all that I have seen die and it was nothing. 46.

This escalation from the private and personal sphere into public matters still embodies an obstinate denial to discern any merit at all in the war's outcome, and is a bitter negation of the notion of selfless sacrifice for a better world; but any generalised statement of this kind necessarily begs the question of the Nazi treatment of the Jews. As a protest against the conduct and perpetuation of the war he refuses to join the queue of soldiers who go to gaze in shocked awe on the horrors of Belsen and Buchenwald, although his

conscience had been aroused earlier in the play by the genocide issue, and he appeared to have accepted the possibility of a just war with his statement 'I'd run the hardest war of all for them'[47]. Earlier still in the play Dingo had rejected this as a possible reason for fighting when, in a discussion of Chalky's death with Tanky, Wood inserts another alienatory time device:

> Tanky: He died to rid the world of evil - what about the concentration camps?
> Dingo: We don't know about those yet.
> Tanky: What about the Jews?
> Dingo: We don't know about the Jews yet. 48.

By the end of the play, Dingo has rejected any justification, and cynicism permeates his being:

> It is such a pity this war was not fought for them...I might have kept my compassion, I might not have felt guilty, which I don't, because everybody will say it was fought for them. It was not. It was fought for all the usual reasons. 49.

a statement which echoes Wood's own view that 'the real reasons for going to war were purely political'[50]. I shall return to Dingo's statements about responsibility, guilt, and possible remedies later, for he reveals much of himself in the earlier acts, and this information provides a useful context for an examination of his views.

Dingo's aborted escapism has already been noted. Masturbation is an unsatisfactory substitute for sex, and love is never even mentioned. As a professional soldier, only too well aware of the dangers of battle, he is unable to take solace in Mogg's view of battle as a sublimatory alternative to sex. Even sleep provides him with little respite from a harsh world for his dreams suggest the lurking omnipresence of death. There is a coldness and blackness about them, and in one of them either he or Mogg is dead since only one of them exists. This awareness of death is never far from Dingo's consciousness. The barking of dogs outside the prison camp, the machine guns, the weeping, wailing, and screaming, and Chalky's hideous corpse, all emphasise its closeness. As he sits in the prison camp contemplating a new career to pursue in the hopeful future after the war, death is still on his mind. He reasons, somewhat hopefully, that the carnage he has seen on the battlefield will provide him with a useful background for the study of Surgery. There is little else that soldiering has fitted him for, except perhaps digging, and his thoughts are soon on to digging his own grave. The thought of his dying adds fuel to his resentment at privilege, and he is able to come to terms with it as he becomes aware of the possibility it might offer him to return as a ghost to plague the officers at Sandhurst.

His awareness of death is a motivating factor for some of his,

actions. The notion of the heroic soldier's end on the glorious field of battle holds no appeal at all for him. His essential selfishness coupled with an unquenchable desire to survive at all costs is shown in his survivor's catechism:

> The best place to be in a battle is in the thick of it, only with your head down and a look of eager bloodlust in your eyes. Better still if you look confident you know where you are, you can direct others where you're not. 51.

This total self-absorption has a deleterious effect on the way he views the suffering and death of others. In the first act, the dying Chalky's screams from the burning tank rend the air, but Dingo makes no move to help, blandly suggesting instead that Tanky should shoot him to put him out of his misery. Later, in the same sequence, Dingo probes Tanky for his real motive in wanting to extricate Chalky from his pyre, genuinely unable to believe that there could be any other reason except that Chalky owed Tanky money. This bitter, cynical attitude is repeated in the prison camp when the newly-promoted NCO, Mogg, shows his subhuman Army side by gratuitously kicking Tanky's head to a pulp. Dingo remains, seemingly unmoved, preferring to talk to Willie, the 'lovable' German guard. There is an explanation for his apparent insensitivity and apathy. He tells us that war has changed him for the worse, a subjective view of his own decline which Wood develops in his overall dramatic statement to include everyone in the play. Before joining up, Dingo reminisces:

> I brought up my ring to tongue my toes at the sight of sparrow raked by a cat...mention maternity whilst eating and I'd peck at my food. 52.

but his pre-war sensitivity to the violence of even the natural order is replaced during the conflict by a grim acceptance of the physical horror of warfare:

> With me - the sights I've seen - the indifferentism - the dull in my head for red on my boots and what you might step on in the night...the normalcy of mates cut to chunks - stands me in good stead. 53.

Dingo makes Wood's point about the obscenity of war clearly and unambiguously. As the war drags on his energy flags still more. He is too apathetic to even attempt to escape from the prison camp, reasoning that the security of a cell is infinitely preferable to the menace outside. By the end of the third scene of Act Two he hangs dejectedly like an unstrung puppet over the ropes of the boxing ring, only recovering to take part in a variety show sequence in which he represents the resilience of the true British squaddie by his indomitable sense of humour and cheekiness under pressure. This burst of action prepares him for the eventual arrival of the

Victorious Allied Armies, who not only signal the end of his captivity and the ending of the War, but carry with them the hope of a better, harmonious future world. They did not make an appearance in 'Dingo' I(a), but, in the later versions, the author puts more emphasis on the need for judgments to be made, consciences reawakened, and blame apportioned.

The question Wood raises at the end of the play is whether society is collectively responsible for war and its disastrous effects, or whether individuals should shoulder the blame. The resurrected Tanky accuses his murderer, Mogg, the NCO, for whom the Army and War have destroyed moral judgment and action, but Dingo is quick to point out that Mogg is only part of society as a whole, and directly accuses the audience as representatives of it:

> Tanky. He killed me.
> Dingo. No.
> Tanky. He bloody did.
> Dingo. No, look out there.
> Tanky. Ghoulish buggers. 54.

The audience (society, the people) allowed the War to happen by its passive acceptance of the politicians' expedients and must accept a collective responsibility for Mogg's action. Wood presses the point further, introducing the fear (voiced before by the author in Spare) that the soldiers' death has been in vain, society will not profit by its mistakes, and the whole dismal cycle will be repeated in the future. In this sequence, Dingo becomes more judicial and objective, and tries to soften the harshness of Tanky's criticism, but Tanky is the voice of the dead and will be heard. When Dingo reminds him of the mothers in the audience, whilst the rest of the cast sing Kipling's Recessional, Tanky's bitter riposte is that 'they should be home burning their kids' toys'[55], which implies, with some justification, that wrong attitudes to war are formed and perpetuated in the nursery. The argument continues. Society is responsible for allowing the myths surrounding war to be continued, Mogg is a product of that society. He has been elevated to the rank of NCO by a machine fuelled by brutality, and Tanky, the little man, the ordinary, innocent civilian/soldier is smashed by it. Dingo attempts to construct a logical argument to refute this, though it seems that Wood deliberately obscures the issue by using an esoteric phrase that is incomprehensible without the glossary:

> If every bloke as went for a shit with a rug round him blames it on the blokes that sent him out. 56.

'Going for a shit with a rug round him', according to the glossary, means Missing or Dead. Dingo's argument is that if all the soldiers who have gone to their fate as a result of obeying their superiors' orders blamed them... but his logic fails him, and Tanky supplies the

inevitable conclusion: they should not have joined in the first place. At this point, Dingo's subjective view of the world banishes his newly-acquired sense of balance. His mind is ill-adapted to the complex reasoning required to apportion blame and responsibility, and he fails to respond to Tanky's statement, presumably because it directs blame to Dingo himself, the archetypal professional soldier who chose to join. Instead, he allows emotion to take him over, and aims his frustration at the biggest target of all. In his view, Churchill is to blame:

> That's what I blame the bastard for more than anything, chopping off, more like wearing away, rubbing down my compassion to not a thing, it is nothing. 57.

and, in his last line in the play, he divests himself of any passivity with a positive outburst at Churchill's public joke, which Dingo takes as a personal insult, and it spurs him into taking up an opposing political stance as a basis for creating a better post-war world:

> I do not... I have not come all this way to be pissed on twice by Mr. Churchill. 58.

Although he has blamed everybody for the War (except, apparently, himself), his own personal experience of anguish and despair lead Dingo to voice an unexpected hope for the future. New possibilities arise for him in the development of a beneficent Socialism, in the workings of a true democratic process which will eliminate the injustices perpetuated by privilege, and lead to the arousal of an all-inclusive social conscience. 'Too true I shall vote'[59] is a kind of clarion call to all the 'little people', who can use the franchise to state their opinion of the existing order, and establish a welfare state and social equality, a Utopia to be built on the ashes of the old, failed System.

This political awareness in Dingo was added by Wood to the revised version of the play performed at Bristol. The tentative attempt to construct an argument for collective responsibility for the War with Tanky was used in the Bristol version, though Tanky's speech in 'Dingo' I(a) reads:

> Shouldn't have joined then
> They all lapped it up - that's why you'll never stop it
> ... it's too interesting.
> He killed me. 60.

This makes a very definite statement about the nature of war and its appeal to the military mentality. In 'Dingo' I(b) there is no reasoning:

> Shouldn't have joined then. They all lapped it
> up... it's very interesting... he killed me.
> And they saw it. 61.

but the final line firmly sets the blame on the onlookers who did

nothing because they experienced a sadistic satisfaction, which suggests a less frenetically polemical, more oblique approach by the author in the revision. In the earliest version, these speeches were set in the context of a quiz show with the Comic as compère. Churchill did not appear, and Dingo did not make his final political statements. The 'Dingo' I(a) text ended thus:

Comic. For...
(He looks around - silence)
For the jackpot question tonight - all you have to do is answer the following...
What...
(Looks around again - silence)
What were we fighting for?

(Drowned to his rage and despair by renewed wailing and smoke begins to drift again.)

CURTAIN. 62.

In the revised versions this question (implied throughout the play rather than stated directly), is answered by Dingo's generalised statement 'for all the usual reasons', a view which he and Tanky substantiate without clarifying, but the prevailing negativity is countered by the hope for the future added by the author. Thus, the answer is not merely based on evidence of the lesser human attributes, envy, greed, political advantage, cupidity, intolerance, and idiocy, but also encompasses a brighter side. The War was also fought in order to prepare the way for a better society.

Dingo's thinking (it is too loose and incoherent to be termed philosophy) is based on strongly antithetical prejudices to those in authority, and is derived from his own social status and experience of a limited world, and is firmly left-wing in content. Wood has made a series of 'line drawings' of Dingo, a man steeling himself as far as possible against the grinding-down process of conformity required by an uncaring society, and still retaining a capacity for action. His flawed nature, and his own inconsistent behaviour and attitudes allow the audience to remain detached and objective, rather than identifying totally with him. To set him in dramatic, and didactic, perspective Wood has parodied and trivialised the conventional right-wing heroes of the time - politicians, generals, officers and gentlemen, and treats the ideals of bravery and courage with similar contempt. Dingo is no conventional hero. His role is even decentralised by Wood's use of Tanky to articulate an anti-war attitude in the play's final stages, and the author actually gives Tanky the line which contains the play's original title 'I Don't Hold with Heroes':

Dingo: Hey, hey, come on Tanky, you're a hero, having died.
Tanky: I don't hold with bleeding heroes. 63.

Even so, Dingo provides the focus for the play's anti-war sentiment, unifies the diverse scenes by his unambiguous critical attitude, and generally makes the most important statements. There is no question of his being a great man brought low in the Aristotelian sense, his destiny in the hands of wilful gods; he is a social animal, reviled and trodden on by his superiors, and full of bitter resentment at his treatment. Another of his functions is to remind us constantly of the folly of war which leads to madness. Everyone else in the play appears to be mad: Montgomery, the self-deluding leader; the degenerate Mogg; Tanky, babbling to Chalky's corpse as though it were a ventriloquist's dummy; the Navigating Officer, hopelessly lost in a world of compass points between Blue and Green; the schizophrenic Comic; and Dingo's wife. Perhaps Dingo's greatest achievement is to hang on to his sanity through all this lunacy, though even this is achieved at the expense of his lost sensitivity.

I have already outlined the dramatic techniques the author used to define the form of the play, and have examined the central character at some length. Stanley Mitchell sees a strong connection between the conception of central characters in Brecht's epic plays and the dramatist's method of presenting them, which helps to clarify Dingo's function within the play's structure:

> It is through the 'empty', 'consenting', pliant, adaptable 'hero' that some of the principles of montage - Verfremdung (alienation), exchanging roles and identities - may best be enacted. 64.

Dingo is 'empty' in the sense that he lacks ambition and aspiration, though he acquires a vision of the future; 'consenting', in that he has voluntarily accepted his status, i.e. that of the professional soldier; he is 'pliant' insofar as he has a survivor's resilience: and 'adaptable' in terms of being able to adjust to changed circumstances. He does not change role and identity in quite the way that, for example, Brecht's Galy Gay, Azdak, or Shen Te/Shui Ta do, but the Army, paradoxically, provides him with the possibility. He is able to move from husband to 'swaddy', lovable comic, choric conscience, and, finally, a mouthpiece for social change, with a Utopian vision of a Marxist classless society. He is undoubtedly different, both from the other characters in the play, and from us, the audience, a man who arouses our feelings, even our indignation, and demands a strong reaction.

The play certainly provoked strong reactions. A galaxy of national newspaper critics attended the Bristol première, clear evidence of the author's growing prominence. B.A.Young, of <u>The Financial Times</u>, thought the play all boiled down to 'little more than a long succession of sneers',[65] and pointed out that anti-war sentiment had been expressed

much better by writers like Owen and Sassoon. Young also wrote, and here he echoes Yeats' criticism of O'Casey over The Silver Tassie, that Wood's non-participation in the War was a positive disadvantage. He also found the conclusion (of the 'Dingo I' version) 'somewhat puerile'.[66] Eric Shorter, in The Daily Telegraph, agreed with Young that 'the final bitter message with its angry sneer at Churchill, Montgomery, and Eisenhower is not so much offensive as juvenile in its sweeping contempt',[67] whilst Michael Billington found the play 'Intellectually... often wildly confused', and 'rather incoherent'.[68] Practically all the critics found it too long, the second act in particular being 'prolix and repetitious and at times downright tedious'.[69] There were, however, many positive comments. Although Young found it 'nauseating', he countered this with 'it confirms the high opinion I already have of Charles Wood's capabilities.'[70] Billington found some 'wildly funny passages', and thought the play 'original and provocative', praising the language of Wood's 'customary taut, close-cropped style, turning army slang into something rhythmical and semi-poetic in its effect.'[71] Peter Rodford of the local Western Daily Press, thought it 'one of the most disturbing plays ever seen in Bristol'[72] and, metamorphosed into 'Peter Ford' for The Guardian, wrote that it was 'one of the most calculated deglamorisations of war ever written for the stage',[73] whilst even Shorter relented enough to praise the language: 'His Rabelaisian way with words, as we saw in "Cockade", sometimes turns into a fountain of trooper poetry'. There was unanimous praise for Geoffrey Reeves' production, and for the performances of the cast.

The Royal Court production, for which the play was extensively rewritten, taking special note of the critics' attack on the second act, lacked something of the excitement and sense of occasion of the original production, but the newspapers still found much copy. D.A.N. Jones had an ambivalent attitude towards it:

> Exciting, serious, comic and healthy, though it is, I found the play foul in both senses - revolting and not fair. 74.

Ronald Bryden, who, at Bristol, stressed the fact that he was of the same generation as Wood and found that the play 'expresses something felt strongly by the generation grown up during and after the war, which has not been said and needed saying',[75] went even further after the London production:

> I suspect it may be one of those milestones at which a younger generation overthrows the taste and beliefs of an older one. 76.

Like Eric Shorter, Benedict Nightingale lamented Dingo's anti-war sentiment, which, he claimed, had already been overdone, and had even reached Hollywood by the mid-sixties. He did, however, think that Dingo went further than most plays, films, and novels in that direction.

He found the play 'prolix and impressionistic'. 'Prolix' seems to be a favourite critical expression for Dingo, with some justification, but 'impressionistic', a term also used by others, is quite erroneous. The play's dramatic roots, deep in agit-prop and epic, ensure that its form and structure are much more expressionistic. Innes' description of agit-prop expressionistic structure as 'short, semi-independent scenes aptly named "pictures"'[77] fits Dingo exactly. Nightingale also noted that 'the 'bad' language is inclined to become oddly cerebral, literary', running 'the grisly gamut of sexual disgust'. He also found that the play 'always has the smell and sweat of life about it', and that the effects produced are 'almost tactile', though, he concludes 'even they can't hide the hysterical immaturity of much of the play.' 78

The consensus of newspaper critics, then, which probably mirrors audience reaction, too, was that the play's theatrical qualities, its language and visual effects, were unusually striking and original, but that its arguments lacked shape and coherence. Since Dingo is very difficult indeed to write about coherently, few 'academic' critics have written about the play in any detail, preferring to generalise about it on the whole. John Russell Taylor makes some telling points, setting the soldiers of Dingo in the context of all the Army plays:

> Wood's soldiers are doggedly consistent only in their determination not to be heroic, not to swallow any of the bull dispensed by top brass, not to sentimentalize themselves, one another or their situation. 79.

a series of negative capabilities which he links to the idea of the soldiers' suffering in War:

> Suffering here does not ennoble; it embitters and then, very rapidly deadens, kills off the ability to feel, at any level, even the most basic. 80.

This is not entirely true, for Dingo does recover enough by the end to make a positive statement about the future, but Taylor sees clearly that the alternative to this deadening is madness:

> Montgomery, Churchill, Rommel - all the heroic figureheads are savaged and in their place is put nothing but a bloody-minded determination to hang on, somehow, emotionally cauterized in a world which has gone mad. 81.

Katharine Worth stresses the theatrical context:

> always the visual imagery presses forward the idea of the war as a brutal game organised for profit and somebody's pleasure. 82.

whilst Hinchliffe blunders through it with a few factual inaccuracies. Dingo is:

> an unheroic view of the North African campaign showing soldiers as foulmouthed, callous and sex-starved. 83.

Apart from leaving out the whole of the European section of the play,

this shows a serious lack of understanding of the soldiers' view of War, whilst his comment that Dingo is 'a kind of riposte to Cavalcade' is vague and unhelpful.

Malcolm Page is the only critic to have written specifically about Dingo in connection with 'How I Won the War', though Taylor noted the connection, and considered that 'in each case ('The Charge of the Light Brigade', and 'How I Won the War') the film seems like a sketch of the play'.[84] Page notes similarities and differences between play and film, and concludes thus:

> ...if Dingo is to gain weight by including the war (the big battles, newsreels, the presence of tanks and corpses), then the possibilities of film are needed, not the stage re-creation of Alamein with smoke, a tape-recorder and a few men. Wood's conception, in fact, needed hundreds of thousands of pounds, not the limited resources of the theatre. 85.

This is clearly nonsensical. Page seems to be unaware of Shakespeare's ideas on the stage presentation of War as expressed through the Chorus of Henry V, and seems to be suggesting that Wood's approach should be naturalistic (as if that were possible), immediately negating all the imaginative surrealistic and epic qualities of the play, which are its essence. 'The limited resources of the theatre' seem to have been a very positive advantage, particularly in the Bristol production, emphasising the need to work in a 'Poor Theatre' context, improvising imaginatively and creatively, as Brook and Littlewood had done in similar circumstances. Page goes even further when he suggests that Wood 'needed a mind as independent and determined as Lester's in order to shape his vision ruthlessly'. Not only would that have destroyed the group ethos, but would also have subordinated the author needlessly to a director instead of working in tandem.

It is now necessary to turn to a consideration of the film to ascertain how the collaboration with Lester, and the use of a different medium, affected Wood's screenplay for 'How I Won the War'.

The main difference between play and film lies in the fact that, whereas the play was based on an original idea by Wood, the film was an adaptation of Patrick Ryan's novel How I Won the War, published in 1963. The novel is written as a first-person narrative, and the War is seen through the eyes of Lieutenant Goodbody, who immediately offers a different perspective from Dingo, because he is an officer. Ryan's treatment of Goodbody in the novel is satirical. He is inexperienced, stupid, and naïve. After a conversation with a soldier, for example, Goodbody informs the reader:

> I know that he took my advice to heart because I distinctly heard him as he walked away, asking God to give him patience. 86.

and this statement accurately conveys the mildly sardonic tone of the

book.

The novel opens during recruit training in England, and then follows Goodbody's War adventures in various countries in episodic fashion. As with 'The Knack', Lester's approach to the film was to take the novel as a starting-point only:

> We kept very little of the book: the names of about four characters, the title and one or two episodes. 87.

The two main 'plots' of the film are concerned with the mission of Goodbody's platoon to establish a cricket pitch somewhere in the North African desert, which has its origin in a short episode in Ryan where soldiers set up a pitch in the desert for recreation, and as an antidote to War; and the purchase of a bridge over the Rhine by Goodbody from a civilised German officer called Odlebog, to speed the advance of the Allied Armies. This, too, is enlarged from a short sequence in the novel. Both work well for Lester's purposes, enabling him to place the film in the two important theatres of war with documentary realism, and the zaniness of the story-lines allows him to introduce many surrealistic techniques to heighten the absurdity. The main difference in the film's treatment of the novel lies in Wood's and Lester's concern to emphasise the horror of War, its demeaning qualities, and the inadequacy of those in authority, in a very direct way, whilst Ryan seems more concerned with making his readers laugh at the bumbling inefficiences of officers, underlining the serious consequences of their actions by his mocking tone, a more indirect, allusive approach. In the novel Ryan is detached and critical, despite Goodbody's first-person narration, in a style that is at the same time amused and horrified. In the film, Wood and Lester use the screen's many resources to express an emotional attitude to war, which tends overall to negate the Brechtian objectivity they sought to convey, though there are powerful and important moments of alienation.

The film of 'How I Won the War', then, sets out to cover the same period and space as Dingo, and is based on similar assumptions. War is a game played by khaki-covered fools, privilege is a passport to survival, and the common man is an expendable cog in the machinery of State, power, wealth, and class. The main differences between play and film lie in the manipulation of the cinematic medium, the portrayal of characters, and the complete change of emphasis in the central focus from hard-bitten squaddie to foolish and inexperienced subaltern.

In the final scene of the film, Goodbody, the irredeemably stupid and incompetent Second Lieutenant, ironically not even born to be an

officer, a mere Grammar-school boy, a representative of a new middle-class which the System moulds to its own image, has survived. The time is the Present, 1967. Now, be-suited and middle-aged, a caricatured representative of 'those whose high-water mark for living was 1939 - 1945', he talks to a reunion of his old platoon, attended, sinisterly, by only one other former soldier, the only survivor. Throughout the film Goodbody's smugness, complacency, and idiocy have been held up to ridicule, and he appears to have lost none of them. 'I won the War' he tells us, and childishly munches peanuts, their scrunching sound echoing louder on the sound track like the tramping of boots on an eternal parade-ground, grinding Dingo's Utopian dreams in the dust. Twenty years after the War the reality is that, for Wood and Lester, nothing has changed. The bourgeoisie survive and rule.

Like the play, the film is a montage, stressing the primacy of the visual image, and leaning towards the strip cartoon for the thrust of its narrative. The action dodges in and out of time and place, from the pre-war cricket match on a village green in England where Hitler is seen putting up the score, to the making of the cricket pitch in North Africa, through the actual newsreel shots of Dunkirk, Dieppe, and El Alamein, to the end of the War, when Odlebog, having finally sold the bridge to Goodbody, is run over by a tank leading the Victorious Allies' advance. It is a restless, fluid, ever-changing collection of images, and an examination of one of the filmscript versions yields up some interesting facts about the way the film was conceived and made. Lester's views on the director's role are particularly important:

> A director's job in this period of filmmaking - and I know that this may change, as it has in the past - is to be an absolute dictator and produce a personal vision on a subject that he has chosen. 88.

This appears to relegate the role of the writer, and Lester's description of his working methods seems to support the assumption:

> I normally spend about 3 to 4 months in pre-production, working with a writer on the idea. Then about 3 months shooting and about 4 months in the editing and music stage. 89.

a leisurely schedule compared with the frenetic 4-week rehearsal period of Dingo. He continues:

> During shooting, I usually look at the script in the car on the way to the location - not having looked at it before then. And in that way, I plan in my head what I will do that day. This changes when I see what the weather is like or what shape the costumes or sets are in. 90.

This is a very different approach from the creative collaboration of

cast, director, and author in Bristol, where the writer often arrived at rehearsals carrying newly-written pages of script based on the previous day's improvisations, but Lester thinks that it worked well:

> Only in ('How I Won the War') have I been able to approximate (Wood's) style sufficiently for people not to know where he stopped and I began. But even he would write complete versions on his own. In fact, we had seven versions of 'How I Won the War' which were totally different. 91.

Wood's reaction to Lester's cavalier approach to the writer was to annotate the whole of the first page of his copy of the screenplay, describing a whole page of movement details with which the film opened, with the terse comment 'Written loosely if at all by M. Crawford'. Michael Crawford, the actor, well-known for his acrobatic 'stunting' had clearly improvised with Lester. Crawford played Goodbody, and his first speech:

> It all started in 1939 - I suppose it did for you too. My commanding officer's name, rank and number is Col. Grapple... I can't remember his number, but I'm sure it will come to me in a minute...but first things first.

has two annotations by the author; one a factual 'by Dick Lester', the other a growl of annoyance concerning factual detail:

> Wrong! His Commanding Officer is Colonel Plaster but who cares but me? 92.

The film begins, unexpectedly and effectively, just before the penultimate chronological action. A British attack is about to take place on the Rhine bridge, and the director, working in what appears to be the normal war-film idiom of the period, raises (or, Lester would argue, lowers) audience expectations for the typical thriller. Lester immediately negates this by having Goodbody teeter on the edge of a dinghy and fall into the water, breaking any tension and injecting an element of farce to remove any audience misconceptions. Throughout the film, Lester alienates the audience by juxtaposing farce with seriousness. As a result of his foolishness, Goodbody is captured, but, as Wood points out sternly in the screenplay 'There is nothing comic about his capture'.[93] It is a moment at which the make-believe trappings of the medium are removed, and the audience is faced with stark reality, a technique which Wood uses to great effect in the plays and films to be discussed in the following chapters.

Time and Space are immediately dislocated when, in flashback, the film action moves to the beginning of the War, and Goodbody's history of incompetence is traced from his conscription. His training as an officer in England is seen to be in the hands of the very people decried so often by Dingo. Lieutenant Colonel Grapple is a soldier whose formative years were spent on the North-West frontier fighting

'the wily Pathan' about whom he gives several cautionary lectures. His total confusion about modern warfare is cleverly conveyed in an interesting combination of surrealistic dialogue and quick film editing:

> Grapple: Dig in. Only way to beat the Hun, dig in and then break through with sword and lance.
>
> (he stops and looks up at where the Huns are coming in their thousands in a quick flash of b.&w. newsreel footage). 94.

Grapple continues to 'educate' Goodbody as the camera pans along the training trenches, where a young officer cadet sings 'Keep the Home Fires Burning', an echo of a similar sequence in Oh! What a Lovely War, and the nostalgic harking back to the First World War is brought out tellingly in the sequence from Journey's End already mentioned in Chapter I. Drill has to be mastered, and Goodbody is unable to march. The film squeezes dry all the visual possibilities of all this and there are funny walks, jokes, and canned laughter. At the end of training, Goodbody is posted, and the film uses the 'Voice Over' technique to change Place, and destroy the notion of Time:

> Goodbody (V.O.) We didn't all die - I often didn't feel well... but I put a brave face on it and we were soon sent overseas to Egypt it seemed at the time. 95.

The point at which Dingo started has only just been reached. Goodbody is given his order to set up an Advanced Cricket Pitch by the General, and the frame changes to a landing craft off the coast of Africa. In it, 3rd Troop, the assorted collection of civilians we saw being trained, are being sick. They provide one of the major differences between film and play. There is no Dingo among them to act as a mouthpiece and give edge and focus to the satire, no Mogg to show the brutalising effect of the Army at War, though Cpl. Transom has some of his vicious tendencies, common to all NCOs in Wood's eyes. Instead, they are a group of character 'Types', cardboard in essence, from the bumbling Musketeer Clapper to the sadistic Cpl. Transom, and from the wry-humoured Liverpudlian, Gripweed, (played by John Lennon, who had worked with Wood and Lester in'Help!'), to the schizophrenic Juniper, who later becomes a clown very like the Comic in Dingo. Now, they sit tight and frightened in the landing craft. The filmscript points out that 'It is a moment of sharp and horrible reality',[96] another example of the film's attempt to juxtapose seriousness with the jokiness. Third Troop's attitude to officers, particularly Goodbody, is shown clearly too:

> Goodbody is fine. He is so well that we can see why his men hate him. 97.

He plunges into the sea and is next seen, alone, amongst dunes, screaming

for his troop like Richard III for a horse. His physical isolation is stressed in a short fantasy sequence, another change of gear in the film, and a good example of the cinema's flexibility and Lester's skill in using it. The fantasy is reminiscent of Dingo's dreams since it involves death. It occurs on the landing craft and in it the mild-mannered Goodbody shoots Gripweed, one of the men, as an example to 3rd Troop who, in the dream, paralysed with fear, have refused Goodbody's order to disembark. This officer's nightmare is heightened by the total silence in which the scene is shot. In the next sequence, Lester has Goodbody confide to the camera:

> Actually you see - I could never do that. It's not in my nature - we're trained to understand as well as lead. 98.

a platitudinous attempt at bland reassurance which raises more doubts about his feebleness in relation to War's uncompromising reality.

On the other hand, the soldiers, like those of <u>Dingo</u> (with the exception of Mogg), are wise to all pseudo-statements. In a ghastly parody of the shining pioneers in Riefenstall's film 'Triumph of the Will' they all intone together:

> If you play ball with me, I'll play ball with you, you do your bit and I'll do mine, we're all members of the same team - each playing our part in the fight for freedom and democracy... Let us together, work hard, train hard, play hard, kill hard. 99.

and this parroted negation of the propaganda of officers and politicians leads into a moment of macabre reality coupled with fantasy. A Wireless Operator lies dying in the middle of the desert near the ruin of his tank. His wife, wearing pinafore and fluffy carpet slippers appears, and in his delirium he tells her that his shattered limbs hurt. Her reply shows the civilian's bland unawareness of the real horror of War and its injuries:

> Run them under the cold tap love. 100.

Lester constantly shifts the focus of the film by using these short, contrasting, and unconnected scenes. At one moment Goodbody is the central figure, but he is replaced at the next by one of the more peripheral characters, a group of soldiers, or a documentary or fantasy sequence. Goodbody's main function appears to be to hold the film's two plot lines loosely together, and several scenes take place on the Rhine bridge where Goodbody and Odlebog converse. There are many echoes of <u>Dingo</u> in their dialogue. Goodbody, for example, voices the early sentiments of the play:

> The thing about fighting a desert war is that it is a clean war, without brutality, clean limbed without dishonourable action on either side. 101.

which is exactly what Dingo said in the first scene of the play, and

then, like Mogg in the play, he informs Odlebog that he has never stopped being a civilian. The film, though, stresses Goodbody's amateurishness, and his thick-skinned ability to go through the War without being moved by it, rather than taking over the play's emphasis on the way Mogg is degraded by the War, a clear difference in War's effect on officers and men. Goodbody also tells Odlebog:

> Try as I am (sic) - I can't see you standing for a number eight bus jongling your fourpence. 102.

This is almost exactly what Mogg said of Dingo but, in the film, Odlebog, the direct opposite of Dingo, is the professional. Not only is Odlebog German, and an officer, he is also civilised and sophisticated, caring so little for War that he spends a great deal of time occupied in his middle-class leisure pursuits, watering his plants and painting. He elicits Goodbody's admiration, in much the same way as the British Officer looked admiringly at Rommel in the play, but there are no heroes in the film, and Odlebog meets a sticky end. In another conversation, the first mention of Jews is made. Odlebog has been evading responsibility for war guilt ('I think underneath we're all blameless')[103], but when Goodbody asks him if he has killed any Jews he replies:

> O. Quite a lot...What would you say to that?
> G. Good lord, but then I try to find good in everybody. 104.

This is in stark contrast to Dingo's withering blame, and underlines another major difference between the film and Dingo. In the play, the wailing of the Jews and the atrocities of the Concentration Camps represent the ultimate madness of War, and its utter inhumanity. This short exchange is the only mention of Jews in the film, and is used more to satirise the English officers' sense of fair play, with the added implication that Odlebog, for fools like Goodbody, was simply carrying out orders, than an attempt to apportion blame. Dingo certainly did not think like this. The direct opposite of the weak-kneed Goodbody, he scavenges the battlefields to uncover yet another skeleton to use as supportive evidence for his ultra-critical attitude to those in power.

More echoes of the play occur in the role and function of the Comic in the film. One of the soldiers, Juniper, takes over this role, and his fellow-soldiers scornfully suggest that he is feigning madness to secure an early release. He appears first as a clown, complete with red nose, checked trousers, and pulling a toy horse, entertaining the troops like a one-man ENSA show with 'my wife' jokes like the Dingo Comic. Later, he appears as a black-and-white minstrel, and has a ventriloquist scene with a dummy which looks and speaks like Churchill (an idea which Wood used in Dingo III Act 2 sc.4. (see p.70). His

role is very similar to that of the Comic in the play, although he started as an ordinary soldier in 3rd Troop in the film, and became the Comic, rather than being an entertainer from the start, as in the play. He mouths the platitudes of officers, dresses like Montgomery, and, as a clown figure, relishes the idea of battle. As Juniper, the ordinary soldier, however, he had tried to avoid the conflict by shooting himself in the toe. The cinematic medium enables him to perform many more tricks, but his madness, cowardice, and fear as Juniper are not entirely sublimated by his clowning. In his soldier persona, he hits out at several officers, and is court-martialled. When sane again, and almost normal, he is shown as a shrunken parody of Montgomery, 'a pathetic, frightened, and exhausted little man covered in medals, shrinking into his uniform'.[105] His triple role as Juniper/Comic/Montgomery is not, in fact, quite so confusing on screen as it appears on the page, for the visual presentation, and use of vocal range define the particular characterisation. The very fact that the Comic is one of the soldiers, though, diffuses the focus of the satire. In the play, we know that we are present at a 'show' when the Comic enters, and the convention of an improvised concert works better in a theatrical context. In the theatre, there is immediate contact between the Comic, his on-stage audience, and, through them, his real audience. On-stage reactions were particularly important in the play, and the author aimed at creating an interesting contrast between Dingo's responses and the real audience's. In the cinema, the stage set-up seems more contrived and distant, and since we know that Juniper is acting comically so as to work his ticket we are unable to respond to him quite so readily. On the other hand, he does give us, through his comic vision (the madman voicing lucid truths), a whole series of valid reasons for escaping from the universal lunacy of war. Much more of a Fool, a jester, he represents, in the film, partly the soldier's need to escape from his awful circumstances into madness if that is the only alternative; partly the madness of the Army's leaders and controllers; and partly the entertainer who tries to alleviate the suffering and madness.

More differences between cinematic and theatrical presentation occur in the dislocation of time sequences. The film switches from El Alamein in one sequence back to England:

> House Garden, 1966.
> A miserable back to back house that has two up and two down and a small garden in which children play. The Soldier sits, still in his desert clothes - one of the larger children aged about 33 calls out to the other children playing in the garden.
>
> He's going to tell us all about the second battle of Alamein.

The soldier smiles an idiot smile. His wife wipes his nose. 106. This is a bleak vision of the results of war. Nothing has changed, the sub-standard housing remains; and the grotesquerie of the adult children adds to the scene's impact. Dingo's wife is in a lunatic asylum 'now, in 1967', but, in the film, it is the soldier who has gone mad, and remains so now, in 1966.

The final section of the film is quite different from the later stages of Dingo. As Lester explained:

> We knew at one point, a troop of men goes to Germany, and three of them die. How that happened was left to me, and, in fact, it was left to me with the camera. 107.

He used the camera in the same fashion as news cameramen had done, crawling on the ground with the same kind of camera as they had used. This sequence starts after the Arnhem landing, and the film's style changes to that of a conventional, tough, black and white documentary war film, though the surrealism is still present:

> 3rd Troop do their dying all tinted blue. At the moment they aren't all gone and you've never heard as much grumbling and yelling. 108.

One of them, Gripweed (in an eerie prefiguring of Lennon's own violent death), speaks to the camera as he dies, shot in the stomach, voicing similar sentiments to Dingo:

> Fought for 3 reasons - I can't
> remember what they were, the first
> reasons get you in - the reason when
> you're in is staying alive, I won't know
> the reason we find afterwards - but it will
> be a very good one, why it is fought, I'm
> sure we'll be glad. 109.

This suggests that the reasons for fighting the War change. War may be justified, as Lester and Wood have suggested, at first. Once the first shot is fired and the 'obscenity' starts the reason for fighting becomes obscured by the need to survive; afterwards, a retrospective justification will be found. Indeed, in the film's final scene, where Goodbody talks to the only survivor of 3rd Troop, the Melancholy Musketeer, who had acted in 'cowardly' fashion throughout the film, carefully keeping out of harm's way wherever possible, and, consequently, surviving, explains:

> The strange thing is - the really strange
> thing is that I agree, there was a good reason
> for fighting the war, I knew it, I felt really
> despicable - we had to fight the war, I couldn't
> that's all, I just couldn't do it.
> I've got to leave it to chaps like you, who
> hadn't got a reason...
> I wanted to fight - honest. 110.

His logic is totally confused (though neither this speech nor Lennon's has an authentic Wood rhythm). He never tells us what he thought the

reason for fighting the War was, but is certain of his own response to the War itself. Faced with the reality of battle and slaughter, its abstract justification became unimportant, and he found himself unable to participate. The mindless officers, on the other hand, because of their privileged position, could treat the War as a game, enabling them to distance themselves from it, and be less directly exposed to its horrors. The implication is that officers gain from war, the men do not, and the final shot of Goodbody crunching his peanuts and insisting that he won the War underlines the importance of class in the War's conduct. There is none of Dingo's hope for an ideal Welfare State here. Fools, like Goodbody, who survive, benefit from war, 'winning' it, whilst ordinary people, cannon fodder, like 3rd Troop, suffer, and die horribly.

Wood actually wrote his final screenplay for 'How I Won the War' in 1966. Dingo was shown at Bristol in April, 1967, and at the Royal Court in the following November. The film was released for distribution in October, 1967, but only at selected cinemas, not on the full circuit. Wood had clearly benefited from his liaison with Lester when writing Dingo. His seven screenplays had been adapted by Lester, new ideas developed, and a final version of the film completed. The text of the play went through a similar development with Geoffrey Reeves, though the creative process in the theatre seems to have been more democratic. The final decision on the finished print of the film, however, was Lester's, the definitive version of the play Wood's.

Lester's visual imagination and gimmickry exploited the cinematic medium by employing a multiplicity of techniques - silent Keystone Cops films, television advertising, other war films, camera tricks, angles, music, captions, actual newsreel shots, parodies of newsreel shots, all contribute to the somewhat chaotic overall effect of the film. They are all used to show the director's distaste of war, but, because there are so many of them, they provide more a series of popshots than an overwhelming broadside against war's futility. My final impression is of a very skilfully made and imaginative film, which is rather too long, its satire diffused by the lack of a central character. Goodbody is obviously hopeless, inefficent, and inadequate, but he does not provide a positive, hard core of opinion to react against, as Dingo does in the play. Goodbody moves passively along the tide of bourgeois mediocrity, Dingo swims against it, trying to turn it, forcing us, by his tenacity and bludgeoning insistence, to re-examine some of our opinions. Goodbody only elicits a wry smile from us, Dingo calls forth either apoplectic anger or loud cheers.

It is in characterisation that Wood's play shows the greatest

advance on Lester's film. Lester thought of his characters thus:

> I use cardboard cutouts of clichéd people as devices to run through the film and bump into each other and continue on.[111]

The problem with this technique is that the collisions can be used too often and provide too much of the main thrust of the action. It works with the crude satirical technique of agit-prop plays because cardboard cutouts of caricatures are used (often literally) where necessary to make strong political criticisms. When all the characters are cardboard cutouts, however, the intended comment is dissipated. 'How I Won the War' has too many of them - the whole of 3rd Troop, individually and collectively, Goodbody, Grapple, and Odlebog. Since they all keep bumping into each other we never really have the opportunity to listen carefully to what they say, and Wood's text is made subordinate to the restless action, deadening the language, and reducing the possibilities for building a characterisation. 'Dingo' I(a) still suffers from this pasteboard character approach. Dingo himself was not so fully rounded as he became in the Royal Court production. Wood's work with Reeves in the aftermath of US, and willingness to take criticism seriously, enabled him to increase the depth of the play. In the film, Goodbody's background was sketchy, Dingo's, by the time of Dingo II, was deftly outlined. Important lines scattered around the filmscript, as already demonstrated, are spoken by Dingo in the play, adding force to his yelping rhetoric. The focus on an enlisted soldier rather than an officer breaks the traditional dramatic approach to war, and the emphasis on his professionalism in contrast to the officers' amateurism adds a cutting edge to the satire. The men of 3rd Troop simply do not have the collective force of Dingo, the individual.

Neither does the film have as strong an impact on an audience as the play. Though it can display a hard, uncompromising, serious naturalism, and can provide a compendium of tricks, besides moving through Time and Place with ease, the film remains trapped in the flatness of the cinema screen, at a distance from the audience despite its insistent attempts at involvement. Lester has no illusions about the difficulties of film making for an industry which is 'tied up in finance, banking, marketing, research, front of house posters, cold cinemas, rude usherettes, bad projection, insensitive distributors'.[112] Whilst the theatre is by no means free of these restrictions, the artistic freedom Wood had when working on the play, and the lack of pressure to achieve a commercial success, meant that he was able to develop his surrealism, eschewing logic, and investing Dingo with a nightmarish series of expressionistic images. The fact that he was able to form his own visual context to accommodate them,

by designing both set and costumes, added immeasurably to his own vision of the play and its presentation. In performance, the play was an almost tactile experience, an assault on the senses more than the mind, and inescapably direct and challenging. As the critics have shown, it was impossible not to be moved in some way by it, whether it aroused admiration or anger. The film, on the whole, did not elicit such definite responses. Penelope Mortimer thought it 'a trick', but found that Lester 'uses the camera as a battering ram to break down all our sentimental superstitions about war as a necessary evil',[113] and the critic of The Guardian pointed out that Lester's technique

> ... is to invite us to laugh out loud at the unreal antics of these funny men in uniform and then to jolt us into silence with some very real blood. But the irony never convinces, and the jolt we get is more embarrassing than disturbing. What cushions the impact is Lester's anxiety never to miss a trick. And the tricks here divert in the wrong way, drowning a good idea in a sea of incidentals. 114.

The majority of critics echo these opinions.

There are some 260 scenes in the film, and the play is more successful in the way the language, as opposed to the montage, finds a rhythm, which it is unable to do in the film because of the speed of the shots and the primacy of the visual image. The examples of similar language used in both play and film already quoted, show that invariably the language in the play is richer, more vivid, moving towards the poetic. Little of the dialogue is allowed to develop in the film, points are made as quickly as possible before the next collision is arranged, and there is no opportunity for monologues like the demented Tanky talking to Chalky's torso:

> Chalky's pissed again.
> Will you rattle should I shake you? Or will you
> slosh? Remember the leaves all had water on them
> Chalky my son/my old mucker, clambering back into
> where was it? You pissed yourself at the water on the
> laurels... water you cried - tasted of metal, soot. It
> was really humorous. And you sat down with me
> laughing, wet through, pulled by the tab of my jacket
> down to you, bum in mud... in my ear while my
> booted foot swayed to the laugh of my belly... 'to the
> guard' - 'stand to the guard - I'll wake the bloody
> guard'... bring out the guard in the rain - 'stand to
> the guard by the seaside'.
>
> You shouted.
> You said.
> 'Stand to the Blackpool Tower guard.'
> For there are spies up the Blackpool Tower watching
> us wash the water up from Ireland between our -
> stinking dirt and sock fluff between the ranks -
> military toes.
> You were aggressive.
> This beer's watered down, this beer's adulterated

> with pig's piddle. It's all we can get now Jack.
> Try it on your hair for a tonic.
> Splash splash - up through the leaves on your face. 115.

The power of the visual context, as already noted, is striking enough, but the heightened language of Tanky's reminiscence of a past drinking bout in damp England - the reference to wet leaves, mud, rain, beer, and water, is even more effective as we look at the burned corpse in the stifling desert heat - has no equivalent in the film, except possibly the episode of the blown-up wireless operator and his wife, already mentioned. There, the impact was short and sharp, the language economically conveying the punch-line, but the next scene followed on immediately. Here, Wood is able to use his words more carefully to sustain the effect he is trying to achieve. The use of simple onomatopaeic words like 'rattle', 'shake', and 'slosh' emphasise Chalky's corpse as an image of emptiness, but the rest of the speech conjures up a vivid impression of a simple drinking man, mildly aggressive in his cups, but capable of laughter and friendship at home in England. Above all, he was alive. Wood's speech rhythms, 'in my ear while my booted foot swayed to the laugh of my belly', and reiteration of consonants, 'bum', 'booted', 'belly', 'Blackpool', the criticism of the beer (pre-dating Pinter's usage of similar language in Duff's speeches in Landscape, 1968), the amusingly economical verbal image of Chalky pouring beer over the barman's head ('Try it on your hair for a tonic'), added to the visual context, build Tanky's relatively banal recall of a past pub crawl into a powerful dramatic statement, which has a poetic dimension too.

The other major difference between play and film lies in the apportioning of blame for the War. Lester does not blame anyone for starting the War, but criticises its conduct, concentrating on the main battles, and excluding the important Dingo references to Concentration Camps. Both works condemn the role of officers, but, whereas in the film the Melancholy Musketeer makes a relatively mild criticism of the officer class, the play condemns their apparent condonement of brutality. Grapple is harmless enough, with his fantasies of far-off wars, but the Hero Colonel seems to glorify the worst human traits. In the film, the senseless killing seems hardly to touch the fools who blunder on, blissfully unaware of what is really happening, like the local council officials in some of the earlier works. By contrast, Dingo throws his blame at targets from Colonels to politicians, basing his antagonism on class differences, privilege, foolishness, lack of care, business, and profit, seeing the working-class as merely pawns in the hands of those set in authority over them. He is an agitator, a

protester, an avenger, who wants to see the world changed. There is a world of difference between the endings of 'Dingo' I(a), still under the influence of the film, and 'Dingo' I(b) and Dingo II, where the criticism is explicit and sharply focussed.

Dingo, and 'How I Won the War', were not the end of Wood's pre-occupation with the Second World War. He scripted another film in 1967, which has received scant critical attention, called 'The Long Day's Dying'. This was an adaptation, almost a cinematic paraphrase, of Alan White's novel, a tough psychological thriller first published in 1965, which concerns the plight of three British soldiers in Germany in the final stages of the War. Like Ryan's novel, White's is written in a first-person narrative. The narrator is a hard commando, immensely skilled in the violent crafts of war, and Wood's screenplay outlines his character (whom he calls John) as that of an educated 25 year old individualist who is unable to be 'a lonely pacifist in a world of warriors'. 'In peacetime', adds Wood, 'he might have applied his sort of determination and skill to mountain climbing',[116] a very different background from Dingo's, although his view of war is very similar.

Unlike Lester's adaptation of Ryan's novel, Wood and his director, Peter Collinson, follow the structure and plot of the novel very closely. John and the other two soldiers, Tom, a conscientious, reliable 30 year old who is equally tough and follows the military text book, and Cliff, a 20 year old who has a survivor's instinct and little more apart from his military hardness, are detailed to patrol the area around a deserted farmhouse. White uses this naturalistic locale cleverly to provide a limbo-like setting, 'a breathing space between two - conflagrations', for the tensions which arise between the soldiers, trained to a psychotic peak, and are then complicated by the unexpected arrival of Helmut, a German officer. Helmut first captures the soldiers, is overthrown by them in his turn, and then accompanies them as a prisoner on their attempted return to base.

Both novel and film are strongly anti-war, and are very concerned with the violence bred by it. White's narrator, for example, says:

> War for me is the triumph of the animal. I can forgive the destruction, but not the debasement, the festering unwashed sore in the body of mankind. 117.

and he is well aware of his own gradual brutalization and will to survive at the expense of anyone else.

There is no hatred for officers nor guying of politicians in either novel or film, only the close scrutiny of the paranoid individuals and their will to survive. Helmut, who, in the novel, informs the other

soldiers:

> I was a man who grows disgusted with his present, who walks out into limbo to think about the future. 118.

and whom Wood describes as 'a pro among amateurs',[119] seems to be a likely survivor, or 'winner' particularly after the violent deaths of Cliff and Tom, but, just as he voices the belief that he has indeed survived to face a better future, John kills him. In the novel, his action is motivated by John's realisation that, in an earlier incident, Helmut had been responsible for the near death of one of the soldiers, and by Helmut pointing out that they are the only two left, thus still posing a danger. In the film, it is a swift unmeditated reaction to Helmut's statement that the two of them had won through. Wood's screenplay uses the novel's language to convey John's state of mind:

JOHN (voice over)
I imagine I was temporarily of
unsound mind - many men are
driven insane during the war
through pain and suffering - most
of them pacifists like me....
skill though. Skill. Main thing
needed to kill pacifists. 120.

There is one major difference between novel and film. In the novel, the narrator survives, but, in the film, John dies, in an ending which has echoes of 'Traitor in a Steel Helmet'. Having just killed Helmut and acknowledged his probable insanity, he staggers towards the gunfire of his own lines shouting:

Not a mealy mouther, not a
brotherhood of men man...
you can keep all that crap for
me - nothing but contempt for the
human animal... Triumph of the
animal - war, but the skill. I
like the skill. Have the skill.
I'm a pacifist.
(he gets hit and dies.
FREEZE FRAME)

OFFICER'S VOICE
Hold your fire, I think he is
one of ours. 121.

Wood has again stressed (even more than White, who allows his narrator a somewhat remorseful postcript, in which he stresses the composite truth of the narrative, heightened by the writer's art) the horror and futility of war and its dehumanising effect on even the intelligent individual, pushing him towards madness and ultimate destruction. For Wood noone wins, and the final irony is that John, the 'pacifist', is killed by his own side.

The author's achievement, in this relatively short period, lies in the development of his theatrical imagination, nourished and enriched by an exploration of cinematic technique and practice; in the movement

from short, quasi-naturalistic plays about the Army in peacetime, developed from his own experiences, to a full-length epic drama about War, embracing surrealism, expressionism, fact, and argument; and from targets for satirical treatment which started with the Army's hierarchy, progressed through local council officials, to the Government itself, and figures of international importance. The fantasy battlefield of Spare has become the nightmare field of conflict of real war, and the war game has been jettisoned for War itself, the ultimate Game. Dingo broke through the proscenium arch in a way that none of the earlier works had even attempted, and the older, more experienced, hard-bitten soldier had taken over the role of conscience-arouser from the naïve and inexperienced young recruits. Characterisation had become an important element in the author's work, and an individual provided a new focus from the previous groups of soldiers. His ability to juxtapose word and image provided powerful, arresting dramatic effects, and critics regarded him at this period as one of the most promising theatrical talents, though some had reservations about his organisation of material in the lengthier play form he had adopted.

This broadening and deepening of the author's artistic powers enabled him to progress, a few years later, to a portrayal, again in cinema and theatre, of the Victorian conflicts of the Crimea and the Indian Mutiny. The next chapter will explore further developments in these two works.

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APPENDIX C.

DINGO IN PERFORMANCE.

Dingo at Bristol Arts Centre. p.105 - 108.

Tanky, Dingo, and Chalky's corpse. p.105.

Navigating Officer, Mogg, and Dingo. p.106.

The Boxing Ring. p.107.

The Comic and his Booth. p.108.

Dingo at the Royal Court. p.109 - 110.

Comic, Navigating Officer, and Commandant. p.109.

Frank O.Salisbury's painting (1945) of Montgomery of Alamein. p.109.

The entrance of the soldiers in drag. p.110.

Dingo at Bristol Arts Centre.

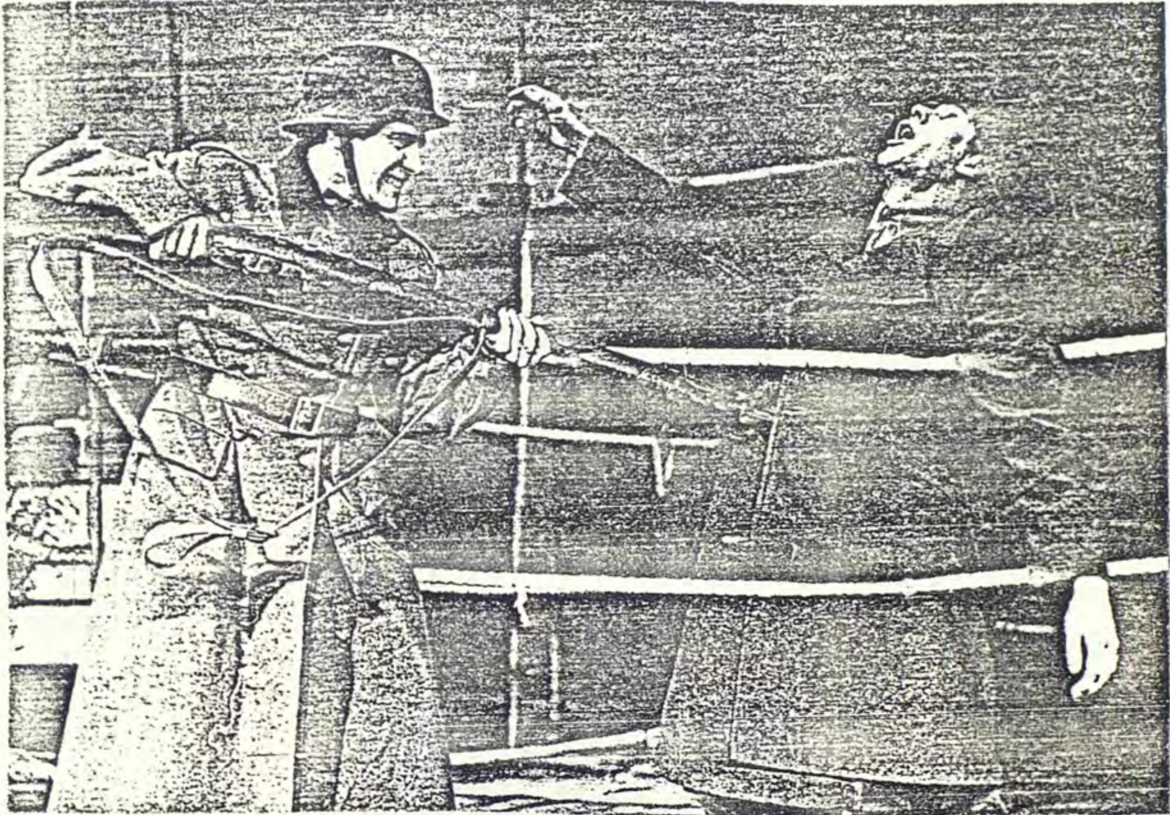
'have a good hard shufti at that pipe cleaner you got sitting on your lap'. Act 1 sc.5.

Tanky (Mark Jones), on left of picture, and Dingo (Tom Kempinski), talk to Chalky's charred torso.

Dingo at Bristol Arts Centre.

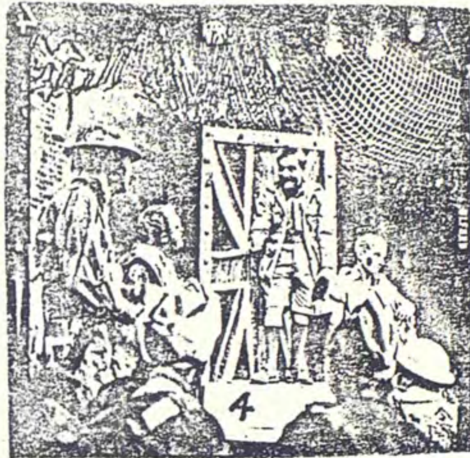
'Left at the Rifleman's grave. I know - I'm a navigating officer.' The Navigating Officer (Esmond Rideout) asks Mogg (Leon Lissek) for directions. Page (op.cit. p.261) maintains that 'the bicycle is an addition in the London version', which is clearly erroneous. The exposed back wall of the stage can also be seen in this photograph.

Dingo at Bristol Arts Centre.



Willie (Neil Cunningham) the 'lovable' German guard bayonets Tanky. This picture shows the positioning of the boxing ring, the central stage feature of Act Two.

Dingo at Bristol Arts Centre.



'Stand Easy and let yourself go - it's the Tails up and Lick 'em show.' Act 1 sc.5.

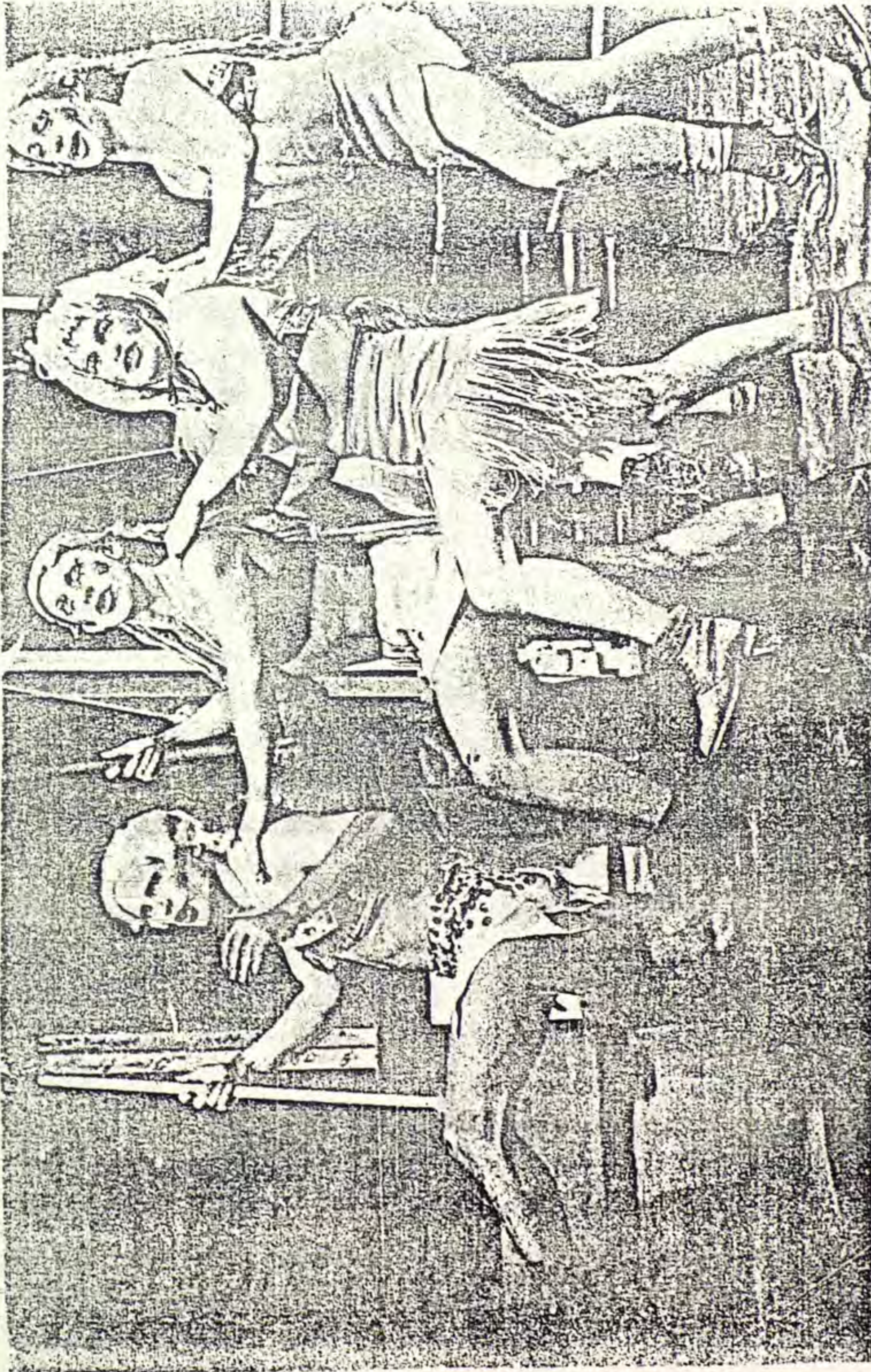
The Comic (Henry Woolf) stands on his booth, backed by the Union Jack. Dingo's positioning to the Comic's left isolates him for important reactions.

The strong visual element is emphasised by the impressive 'tableau' effect of the grouping. The lighting and back wall are visible, the camouflaged netting forms a canopy, and sandbags are piled up on the forestage.

Dingo at the Royal Court.

(left) The Comic astride the Navigating Officer astride the Camp Commandant.
The Comic is clearly a parody of Montgomery (see Frank O. Salisbury's painting of 1945 below). His beret has two badges, and the medal ribbons are very similar. Montgomery stands against a backcloth, pointing to 'The bloody beaches of Normandy' .

Dingo at the Royal Court.



The entrance of the soldiers in drag. Act 2 sc.3.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRUMPET, THE GALLOP, THE CHARGE AND THE MIGHT OF THE FIGHT.

CHARLES WOOD'S DRAMATIC TREATMENT OF THE VICTORIAN CONFLICTS OF THE CRIMEA, THE INDIAN MUTINY, AND AFGHANISTAN, IN 'THE CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE', H, AND 'FLASHMAN'.

A short, one-act play, 'Labour', and another film made with Richard Lester, 'The Bed-Sitting Room', preceded Wood's major works of 1968/69, Tony Richardson's film 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', and Geoffrey Reeves' production of H at the National Theatre in February, 1969.

'Labour' was given its première at the Bristol Arts Centre, as Dingo had been, this time in my own production. It was a much shorter and slighter work than Dingo, written as a curtain-raiser to Joe Orton's The Erpingham Camp, with which it shared a double-bill; a comedy with a social conscience, harking back to the author's earlier 'civilian' plays. Mr. Carver, who had already appeared in 'Tie up the Ballcock', as the inept Civil Defence leader, is here a bumptious office manager. The play is set in a hierarchically-structured newspaper office, which mirrors the world as the Army had done, and recalls Wood's own background between 1959 and 1962, when he had worked for The Bristol Evening Post. Mr. Carver has a mortgage, a wife past 50, two grown-up children, and an Acme cleanser wringer; Chats Harris, his clerk, has a mentally-ill wife and seven children; June, a typical Wood female caricature ('like a "Men Only" cartoon'), is an unmarried mother; and young Nigel and Sandra, who walk across the front of the stage like front cloth comics from time to time, stressing the music-hall sketch style of the play, need money to buy a house when they marry. All of them bring their troubles to Mr. Carver, who tries very hard to help, but he has enough of his own. The author's comment to me that the play was derived from the Labour Party Conference suggests that it was an attempt to set public concerns in a private context, and that, as in Dingo, behind all the personal anxiety lies the hope of a better world. Indeed, the idea of a socialist Utopia which Dingo looked forward to is taken up by both Nolan and Havelock in the other works to be discussed, and is an important Wood theme. In 'Labour' money is the panacea, and the characters are only really happy at the end of the play when they receive their buff envelopes. This play, like 'Drums Along the Avon'

which preceded it was written for the Bristolian dialect, and shows Wood's unerring ear for regional speech and its nuances. Linguistically, it provided a short pause in the transition of style from the vividly surrealistic language of Dingo to the relatively sparse dialogue of 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', and the complex Victorian rhetoric of H. In tone the play is much more naturalistic than might have been expected after Dingo, but it fulfils an important function in the development of Wood's methods for presenting his work. The importance of tableaux in Dingo, and the use of a painting in 'Meals on Wheels' have already been mentioned, and 'Labour' was conceived as a series of snapshots. Each scene started with a tableau, animated by the click of a camera on the sound tape, and Wood develops this technique to great effect in the works to be discussed.

Fantasy and surrealism were much more to the fore in another screenplay, written in 1968, for Richard Lester. This was an adaptation of Spike Milligan's play 'The Bed-Sitting Room', a work born from the fears of a society facing the possibility of nuclear extinction, a theme which Wood had treated sceptically in 'Tie up the Ballcock'. In this film Wood's style blended well with Milligan's goonery, and Lester's visual flair, to make a disturbing comment on society's acceptance of the so-called nuclear deterrent.

Hierarchical structure, private suffering, communal anxieties, fantasy, surrealism, and the pressures and responsibilities of office, are themes developed more fully in the major works of 1968 and 1969: the film of 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', the play H, and the unpublished and unperformed filmscript of 'Flashman', which survives in two different and distinct versions, written in August and October, 1969 respectively. These form a trio of works which treat similar themes and ideas. They are welded closer together by their historical period, which, in 'Flashman', covers the Afghanistan tribal conflicts of the 1840s; in 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' the Crimean War of 1854 - 6; and in H the Indian Mutiny of 1857. This new historical context, dealing with events of over a century before, provided a fertile source of development for Wood. All his work to this point had been set in a contemporary or near-contemporary period, though, as in Spare, a sense of tradition and history had permeated much of it. The implicit importance of the Past to the modern soldier was now to be examined explicitly, and enhances the other plays by giving them a clearer perspective. These three works embrace a multiplicity of events and situations from history, and the methods employed in presentation cover a wide range. Wood's canvas is a huge one, calling for spectacular effects, encompassing as it does the halcyon days of

Empire, but, its surface scratched, teeming with injustices of all kinds. As in the earlier plays Wood's indignation at the even more plainly delineated status quo has its roots in the Army's hierarchical structure, and its mirroring of deep divisions in society. A number of incidents arise from these divisions, involving attitudes to discipline and obedience which, in turn, raise questions about vengeance and justice, domination and subservience, the position of women, and the conflict between cultures and religions. Against these wider, public concerns are contrasted the sufferings and inadequacies of individuals, both great and small, particularly when an important decision has to be made. In these works the emphasis changes from the yelping and snarling of the bitter private soldier, and the ingrained ineptitude of incompetent officers, to the actual struggles, both internal and external, of those who are faced with important decisions which affect everyone, though the situation of the lower-rankers is vividly portrayed too. Agit-prop techniques are, on the whole, jettisoned, and the cock-a-snooking approach of Dingo is exchanged for a more measured and objective consideration of the officers' dilemmas, which requires special attention to characterisation, and a different style of presentation. In place of the sneering at a Churchill, or the depiction of a Comic as a parody of Montgomery, are carefully formed portraits, based on historical fact, of Lords Cardigan and Lucan in 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' who carry their family rivalry into battle, and whose bombast and overweening pride lead to disaster; of General Havelock in H, his struggle with his Christian conscience and his duty as a soldier, his nightmares, and fear of making wrong decisions; and of the cowardly Flashman (though he is not a 'real' factual character, being an invention of George MacDonald Fraser based on the later years of the bully from Hughes' Tom Brown's Schooldays) who romps through all his adventures as a figure of flesh and blood, believable despite his weakness and fictional base.

Although the works are, in many ways, complementary, each forms a complete entity. Some characters spill over into one of the other presentations - Bingham is Flashman's CO, and Sir Colin Campbell from H makes an appearance in 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' - but there is no sense of any development or continuity in their portrayal. Besides their totally different focus on leaders, all have in common a consideration of the role of the ordinary soldier, though, in complete contrast to Dingo, he tends to be passive and subservient, accepting his place at the bottom of the pile where, he is told, and accepts, he belongs.

Other officers, besides generals and leaders, are also portrayed.

Generally, they are used dramatically to point up the difference a privileged background makes to the conditions soldiers have to endure, but, as in 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' (which I shall refer to subsequently as 'The Charge'), they provide important background information about the nature of Victorian society with its attitudes to marriage, sex, war, and expansionism, besides showing their happy and complacent way of life filled with horse-riding, balls, and promenades by the river. So strong is the factual basis of these works that it is possible to trace the different phases of an officer's career in documentary fashion from his purchase of a commission, through initiation ceremonies, to training, embarkation, command, and likely death in the field; or, for an enlisted man, from conscription onwards. Different segments of this progression occur over the three works but, pieced together, they provide a certain coherence, which underlines the pressures, both public and private, all soldiers undergo.

Women, too, are of some importance, though there is not one role of any real substance. The ladies are generally vacuous, perhaps bigoted like Mrs. Middleton in 'Flashman', or seemingly empty like her daughter Elspeth (who does, however, turn this chauvinistic assessment of her quality to her advantage by outwitting Flashman), or Clarissa, in 'The Charge' whose idyllic wedding contrasts starkly with the later scenes of carnage. Clarissa's initial scepticism of the approach of war changes to euphoria as she becomes increasingly romantically attached to the dashing Nolan, epitomising the vapidness of a nation which could send off the flower of its youth from its loved ones to death for totally spurious reasons. As played by Vanessa Redgrave on the screen with an apparently shining innocence, which cloaked a growing lustful passion for Nolan, her husband's best friend, Clarissa provided a perfect example of Victorian sexual hypocrisy. 'Gaily goes the ship when the wind blows fair', she played and sang at her wedding, though it should be pointed out that her adulterous coupling with Nolan in the actual film is an addition to the Wood screenplay used here as a textual source. Mrs. Duberly, in the same film, is more overtly sexual, and sails to the Crimea. She picnics on the heights as the Light Brigade charges, sighing lustfully as she watches the strong men go to their deaths as she munches her cucumber sandwiches. In an earlier sequence she had been happily seduced by Cardigan, following a dinner on his yacht. On the other hand, Havelock's wife, though unseen, exercises a steadying, benign, and crucial influence on him, as will be demonstrated in Chapter V, whilst Mrs. Jones Parry, in H, despite undergoing horrifying experiences, survives and grows wiser as a result of them.

One of the chief interests in these works, however, lies in the author and his directors' use of the medium for which they were devised, and particularly in the way they refine and develop the snapshot technique of 'Labour'. Wood allowed his visual sense full rein, and developed a method of presenting some scenes by animating actual paintings. This device, an important feature of Victorian spectacular theatre, developed from the 'tableaux vivants' of the early nineteenth century, is used to great effect by Wood and is employed differently according to the medium chosen. In the first version of 'Flashman', for example, (which, it should be borne in mind, was written for Richard Lester to direct in the cinema, though the film was never made, for reasons which will be discussed later), the titles of six actual Victorian paintings are given in the text as the basis of a scene's visual presentation. They include 'The Grosvenor Family' by C.R.Leslie, which would have shown the Morrison family at home, and 'The Last Stand of the 44th at Gandamak' by W.B.Wollen, R.A. (see Appendix D p176 .), and the action of a scene often develops from a static representation of the painting, with characters walking freely in and out of the frame:

Ext. 133 A PLAIN

CAPTION The last stand of the 44th at Gandamak
is the title of the painting,
by W.B.Wollen, R.A., by kind permission
of the National Army Museum,
and is a tiny square of soldiers of the
44th Foot on a slight rise,
not an Affghan to be seen,
stretching from them is the droppings
of the march, dots of red, blue, brown,
on the rocks, blue grey rocks, the snow
is left behind in the passes,
they have come through, to be left to
face death at the hands of another
enemy, for a moment there is no sound,
a respite in which one can hear
breathing, there they stand, the
young and the old, and among them is
HARRY EAST with colours of the 44th
wrapped around his body under the poshteen
he is wearing, sword in hand,
they wait for what is going to be the end,
a sudden movement and the painting
slides together,
a smaller group,
some of the original painting gone. 1.

These directions continue in the screenplay, but the extract shows the detail Wood suggests in terms of colour and picturing, and the way the camera and screen can be used in a most effective and imaginative way to show the diminution of the group of soldiers. The lack of sound also helps to emphasise the dramatic pause before the Afghan hordes' attack.

'The Charge of the Light Brigade' uses photographs, lithographs, and paintings as a starting-point for its depiction of Victorian attitudes to war. Sequence 74 in the filmscript sets the scene 'As in the photographs, row upon row of bell tents' (see Appendix D. p.177), and Sequence 207 is based on 'The well-known lithograph: Russian cavalry drawn up in foreground. From the Fedoukine Hills' (see Appendix D. p.178). Another device is used in the film to fill in historical background, and to show political attitudes of the period. It consists of a series of animated cartoons, drawn and coloured, based on the Punch-style caricatures of the time. They are inserted at various stages of the film. In one, the British Lion rescues the maiden Turkey from a large Russian Bear; in another, as 'Rule Britannia' plays, the fleet issues in perfect order from Victoria's skirts. These are called 'Drawn Sequences' in the filmscript, and break up the quasi-documentary realism of the other sections of the film, though still retaining perfectly the period flavour. They are used, too, in typical Wood fashion, to contrast the horror of reality with the fantasies of fashionable thinking. After the fleet has left the Queen, Cardigan and Lucan are seen as caricatures, jockeying for position with their yachts. As soon as the Crimea is reached the film suddenly turns 'real' again and the inglorious disembarkation at Varna is shown. Water cascades below desks, horses panic, and next morning the dead ones are thrown over the side.

H consists of a whole series of front and back cloths, many of them based on original paintings. One of them is a map of the Grand Trunk Road (see Appendix D. p.179), based on an original, showing the whole area covered by the Mutiny. Originally, Wood had wanted the march of Havelock's army to be shown on it by an animated line, as is often the case in the cinema. This proved impossible in the theatre because the map, as a front cloth, was actually involved in the action of the play, an interesting example of the 'limitations' of the theatre being put to good use. One of the most imaginative effects in the play was to have been a gigantic reproduction of the painting of 'The Meeting of Generals Havelock, Outram and Campbell at Lucknow', from the picture by T.Jones Barker (see Appendix D. p.180.). According to Michael Annals, the designer, work started on this huge cloth, but the rehearsal period was so short and the play's technicalities so demanding that it was not used for the performances at the National Theatre, so the effect Wood aimed for exists only in his imagination. He sets it out thus in the printed version of the play:

Scene Six within Scene One

The cloth is vast, over the whole stage, and set at an angle so that the top vanishes into heaven. It leaves the stage empty of

debris. CAPTAIN JONES PARRY presents it.

CAPTAIN JONES PARRY. The Evacuation of Lucknow.
Shows the historic meeting
between Sir James Outram, Sir Colin
Campbell, and General Havelock.

OUTRAM places himself where he should be on the painted cloth,
with his hand out to be shaken. Enter MAUDE to find himself.
The cloth is a gigantic reproduction of the famous painting. 2.

In fact, the whole play is a succession of paintings and tableaux, real and imaginary, and Wood is able to play with the theatre almost as a toy, using it to make important visual statements, but he ruthlessly exposes his own purposely overt 'theatricality' by stripping away these trappings to show Havelock's death, alone, on a totally bare stage, its walls and fire extinguishers open to view. This idea of 'theatricality' - the heightened effect which scenery gives, and the knowledge the audience has that it is watching actors on the stage or screen, all adding to the essential unreality of the experience it is undergoing - is often broken, in the works in question by alienation effects like those used in Havelock's death scene.

'The Charge' is full of moments which jolt the audience from its enjoyment of the colour of the soldiers' uniforms, or the natural beauty of Victorian England. In Wood's screenplay, the army goes off to Chobham Ridge for manoeuvres looking beautiful and heroic, but what starts as a great game soon gives hints of the disasters to come, for they end in a screaming inferno of crippled horses and men. Then, the author adds, 'the theatrical characters are gone', pointing out that this is the reality, not the playing at soldiers that had preceded it. These manoeuvres (not seen in the actual film) are a prelude to the later cataclysm, but the final battle itself has something of the nature of a public performance for those not actually participating. Civilians, even women, like Mrs. Duberly, sit on the heights enjoying the spectacle, much as they had when, earlier in the film, they had watched a performance of _Macbeth_. They are anaesthetised, distanced, unable to contemplate the reality that faces them. Men will undoubtedly die or be maimed, but glory and honour, colour and panoply, all the external trappings of war interest them, and they treat the battle as if it were a ceremonial parade. Wood contrasts this insensitive behaviour with a scene before the conflict which shows Raglan, the pompous Army Commander as a vulnerable human being, and brings home the vast responsibility which weighs on his shoulders and those of all commanders, past and present:

He looks at his watch
- now suddenly all the theatrical aspect
of this film is gone. There is a cold
change of mood. Truth is in the morning

> cold, as if we had switched on a television
> documentary of the Congo, or Vietnam. 3.

Tony Richardson, who directed the film, was, like the directors of Dingo and 'How I Won the War', well-versed in Brecht from his close association with the Royal Court, and was able to bring home to the audience the relevance of these events to the present, allowing, like the directors of the earlier works, no easy escape into the nostalgia of history.

Even Flashman, the swaggering hero of the filmscript of that name, has some of these stark moments of truth. After the defeat of the Army of the Indus at Gandamak, which he has watched, characteristically, from a safe distance, and has consequently become the lone survivor, he is captured by the Afghans and Wood shows the real man in:

> A strange insert.
> The Affghans (sic) squat very close to watch
> it, to watch this child scream out his
> fear and anger and his obscenities,
> no sound, just the writhing embarrassment
> of it all, and over very quickly. 4.

In all these works, too, the vast Hardy-like panoramas dissolve into cameos, and there is a pervading sense of the epic sweep of history and great events affecting everyone, as in The Dynasts (though there is no evidence that Wood had this work in mind as he wrote). The visual effects are often memorable and, amidst all the overwhelming spectacle, the sheer size and technicality of it all, the important moments that remain are those of some simplicity - the dying Havelock sans everything, the shocked soldiers stumbling back after the Charge and begging to go again, the gilded Flashman pleading with his wife.

It is clear, then, that these works have much in common, both stylistically, in terms of presentation, and in their subject matter, which is once again primarily concerned with the Army at War. Again, they are permeated by a horror of war, and class distinction features prominently as in the texts discussed in Chapter III. Now, however, in contrast to those works, there is colour and spectacle, the exciting possibility of watching great armies on horseback clad in resplendent uniforms, the thrill of the charge, and the opportunity for individual heroism, before the introduction of sophisticated technology made war the senseless, depersonalised slaughter of the twentieth century. Wood reaches back to the past for his inspiration in both form and content, using diaries of the period for historical authenticity in the language, and often achieving the effect, on both stage and screen, of the spectacular battles staged at Astley's in the nineteenth century, described thus by Michael R. Booth:

> Moscow burned and amidst a desolate winter scene the remnants of the French army were ridden down by Cossacks in J.H.Amherst's The

> Invasion of Russia (1825); in battles of this kind the spectators were usually overwhelmed and deafened by the boom of cannon, the crack of rifles, clouds of smoke, waving banners, the stench of gunpowder, and the swirl of cavalry charges. 5.

Unlike those presentations, however, there is no attempt by Wood to capture the audience's emotions, and the writer and his directors retain a hard-edged detachment from their material which forces the spectator to be aware of the reality of war, the inadequacy of any human being to make momentous decisions in a short time on the field of battle with inadequate systems of communication, and of the inhuman treatment meted out to those who are there simply to provide cannon fodder.

I have already stressed the important change of theatrical emphasis from the relatively bare stage of Dingo. Now, to provide continuity with my examination of Wood's depiction of the ordinary soldier at war, I shall concentrate more closely on his portrayal of lower-rankers in these three new works before moving towards a fuller description of an entirely new element, the officer. Then, my emphasis will shift from generalisations about all three works to a focus on the play H. An analysis will be made of the text and its sources, some scenes will be studied, and Havelock himself will be carefully scrutinised, a claim being made for his recognition as Wood's only real dramatic hero.

The Royal Court again figures prominently in Wood's development in this period. John Osborne and Tony Richardson were directors of Woodfall Films with Oscar Loewenstein, and had close links with the theatre. Osborne was to have written the filmscript of 'The Charge' originally, but ran into difficulties over the use of source material, and became involved in litigation. Wood was invited to take over. Richardson, his director, clearly takes an anti-Establishment line and has strongly left-wing views. He considers himself 'a luxurious communist', which appears to be a contradiction in terms, stressing that he is not a political activist, and insisting that 'artists are basically apolitical animals'[6], a statement which is immediately belied by the perspective taken on the lower-rankers.

The early scenes of 'The Charge' show the recruitment and training of the ordinary soldiers. When first seen they are naked, dirty, and verminous. Some of them have sores (though there is no gentian violet to treat them), and their stench is enough to cause officers to skirt the building. Their eyes are downcast, and their brains are dull. As their Troop Sgt. Major explains whilst holding his sword perfectly straight at arm's length as an example of discipline, this is as they should be:

> Look down now... down, where you should be used to looking, your station in life, no gentlemen have we?. 7.

The negative dullness of the lower classes, clearly the result of their exploitation by those in authority over them, is also shown in 'Flashman', where civilian life is seen to be equally miserable. Flashman, posted to Glasgow, leads his troop to a mill where an accident has just occurred. The mill workers are sullen and very sad, and there are many grey-looking children. One of them, who has lost an arm in an accident, is carried out by the other workers. None of them has any capacity for action:

> clustered around the child, not all
> of them affected by his suffering, some
> sullen and brutish, but no fight in them,
> a heaviness, faces staring at the mill,
> a few women in them but difficult to tell
> them apart from the men. 8.

This same sense of hopelessness is the lot of the soldiers' families in 'The Charge'. A woman watches the soldiers with her ten urchins who suck dummies of rag and bread, and, later, the totally unsatisfactory and uncaring provision for them is shown:

> Night.
>
> Metcalfe watches behind the curtain across
> the far end of the room where the married women
> are sitting smoking pipes, their children, some in bed,
> some waiting for a bed when a man goes on duty. 9.

The soldiers' privations continue when, doused with water from the pump to rid them of their foulness they are only able to respond with a strange, joyless dance. Even the ritualistic baiting cry of 'Raw... 'cruity', yelled by the more experienced soldiers has no joy. It is not even a ragging, more a statement of fact. Their dullness and dispirited quality is emphasised by the author's comment:

> There is nothing in this place, there is no comradeship,
> there is nothing but dullness, and one man coming in
> drunk, not happy drunk, just reeling drunk. 10.

The men's lack of education, common sense, and initiative of any kind fails to surprise the Troop Sgt. Major. This training, unlike the zany early scenes of 'How I Won the War', is not funny in any way. He is merely stating fact when he says

> It's like a foreign tongue to them, they don't know any
> direction back or front. 11.

Since they do not know their left foot from their right, the recruits are helped by a Corporal, who inserts a straw in their left boot. This drill emphasises rather than alleviates the crass monotony of their lives. Horse-mounting is learned to the accompaniment of a monotonous and unfunny chant and everything is geared to a relentless breaking-down of the spirit to ensure instant obedience at the right moment. The Troop Sgt. Major himself, dedicated though he is to the Army and the upholding of authority, makes one slip later and is instantly

demoted to the ranks of another regiment. Not only does he lose all seniority and pension, he is also flogged in front of his own men as an example. However,

> None of the men are much affected either,
> this is too much part of their dull
> brutish life. 12.

Life, for the enlisted men, is unmitigatedly harsh, and breeds a total indifference to suffering. In the later filmscript, Flashman, leading a troop of Lancers past the fortress at Mogala in Afghanistan, points to a group of blackened bodies hanging from gibbets. His Lancers are no more concerned than those of 'The Charge':

> they have seen the same often enough
> and sometimes in England where they
> might well end up on a gibbet themselves. 13.

The troops in 'The Charge' have a collective anonymity, though some of them are named. Not one, however, emerges as a distinct personality. One of them, Metcalfe, starts out promisingly, though vaguely, as a 'bad character', but the vicissitudes of film-making evidently caused him to be jettisoned quite soon. Another, Pridmore, is more fully sketched in. While training he is seen to suffer a great deal, falling from his horse, in pain from his legs, and bleeding from the incessant chafing on the inside of his thigh. Fortunately for him, the Troop Sgt. Major takes him under his wing, and tries to help him to gain some advancement. The Sgt. Major's tips are particularly interesting. He warns Pridmore to be especially deferential to Cardigan:

> You should never look up at him
> for this is not usual as I have told
> you, you put yourself forward for
> a crime of dumb insolence by looking
> up at an officer, look down in
> respect or fearlessly slightly above
> in a soldierly manner is best. 14.

Even more important are the three cardinal points for a lower-ranker to remember at all times:

> Keep off the drink and keep steady and do not
> be socialist and you will not go far wrong. 15.

In the filmscript, Pridmore's lot does improve somewhat, unlike the majority of his fellows. In the Crimea he becomes Cardigan's trumpeter, but loses his bugle in the Charge, has his hand chopped off by a sabre cut, and his horse sits on him. He does have the dubious satisfaction, though mortally wounded, of being tended personally by Lord Cardigan, who shouts defiantly in answer to Lord Lucan's astonished stare at such un-aristocratic behaviour:

> My trumpeter sir.
> I am going to feed him champagne
> until he dies. 16.

Sadly, not all of this reaches the screen, and, in the actual film, a single character, Corbett, becomes an amalgam of Pridmore and the Troop Sgt. Major.

Generally, in the three works, the soldiers of the lower ranks keep their mouths tightly shut, quite unlike their modern counterpart, Dingo, and follow orders with total obedience. They have little alternative, since the spread of free education for all, better living conditions, and social revolution, lie in the future. The insensitive, querulous, dictatorial Cardigan in 'The Charge' maintains his position by repressing these potentially subversive elements. The saintly, caring Havelock in H prefers to lead his 'lambs' by kindness and example. Two of his ordinary soldiers in H are more carefully characterised than any of those in the film, and provide an interesting contrast in their different aptitudes, qualities, and potential.

One of them has the time-worn pre-Tommy Atkins name of George Hodge. He is a poor, illiterate soldier who tries untiringly to understand the world despite his ignorance, figuring prominently in Havelock's Bible class as one who is not afraid to question the General about religion. Unlike Cardigan, Havelock encourages the soldiers to talk to him, and his Bible classes are an attempt to make the Army into a kind of alternative to the family, a practical application of Havelock's own socialistic ideals, based on Christianity. Hodge dies later in the play after preparing himself to meet his Maker:

> GEORGE HODGE: George Hodge here, how may I
> speak to him as a friend who is my master?
> HAVELOCK: With humility and with fellowship
> as you speak to me. 17.

Symbolically, Hodge is at the bottom of a piled pyramid of soldiers.

Much more prominent in the play is the figure of Cpl. Forbes Mitchell. His role is based on that of a real character who was, in fact, a sergeant in the 93rd Sutherland Highlanders. The real Forbes-Mitchell (Wood does not use the hyphen) was far from illiterate. He actually wrote a book about his experiences during the Mutiny which was first published in 1893 and reissued in 1962 in an edited version by Michael Edwardes, who also wrote the Preface to the printed version of H. Wood based his character on the information contained in this book, though he does not follow Forbes-Mitchell at all slavishly. In the play, Forbes Mitchell himself is the right-hand man and marker to the company. In his book this position (of some importance to the soldier for its status) was taken by a Jack Brian.

In contrast to the lower-rankers of 'The Charge' (or any other of Wood's works for that matter) Forbes Mitchell has many positive attributes, the most notable being a sense of honesty and justice. Like

Havelock himself, he is motivated by high moral principle. His knowledge of a benign Christianity, which he displays in the Bible class, is not confined to theory. It is shown in practice on several occasions, particularly in his compassionate handling of prisoners. He scornfully rejects Jones-Parry's inept attempt to bribe him to be an arbitrary hangman:

> We of the 78th enlisted to fight
> men with arms in their hands. I
> would not become your hangman
> for all the loot of India. 18.

This particular episode in the play is developed from this extract in Forbes-Mitchell's book:

> No one volunteering for the job, the commissioner asked Jack Brian, a big tall fellow who was the right-hand man of the company, if he would act as executioner. Jack Brian turned round with a look of disgust, saying: "Wha do ye tak' us for? We of the Ninety-Third enlisted to fight men with arms in their hands. I widna' become yer hangman for all the loot in India!" 19.

Wood has exchanged Brian for Forbes Mitchell; Hodson, the officer making the request, for both Jones-Parry and Harry Havelock; the 93rd for the 78th; and rejected the Scottish accent.

Though he has bravery to match his impressive height, even Forbes Mitchell faces a crisis in his belief after the horrors of Cawnpore. He squats at the naked body of a young girl and cuts her hair with a bayonet. In a stark, uncharacteristically vengeful way, he echoes Sjt. Musgrave's logic:

> and for every
> hair counted we vow that one of the
> rebels shall die. 20.

The real Forbes-Mitchell was much more objective and factual:

> On the date of my visit a great part of the house had not been cleaned out; the floors of the rooms were still covered with congealed blood, littered with trampled, torn dresses of women and children, shoes, slippers, and locks of long hair, many of which had evidently been severed from the living scalps by sword-cuts. 21.

In the play, however, Forbes Mitchell appears to have become temporarily unbalanced by the carnage, a victim like so many others of the madness of War. He takes to writing slogans on the walls - 'Revenge, I am slain', and 'We are murdered, foul deed'. In the book he returns to Cawnpore two months after the event and notes:

> I visited the slaughter-house again, and found the walls of the several rooms all scribbled over both in pencil and charcoal. This had been done since my first visit in October; I am positive on this point. The unfortunate women who were murdered in the house left no writing on the walls whatever. 22.

This suggests that the soldiers had done the writing themselves to fan

the flames of revenge, and Wood, by his change of emphasis, makes the dramatic point that, faced with the horror and reality of War, even the best are irrational, although, historically, Forbes-Mitchell was not involved with this action of the soldiers.

By the end of the second act Forbes Mitchell has recovered his sense of fairness. When a drunken Highlander suggests that they should smear the captive Jemadar* with pig's fat, thus condemning him to eternal torment, Forbes Mitchell refuses the soldier's request, calls him a disgrace to the British Army, and threatens to charge any guard who molests the prisoner. This compassionate recognition of his prisoner's spiritual needs is in great contrast to the attitudes of his superior officers in the Prologue to H, to be discussed later. There is no softening in his attitude to the Mutiny in general, however. For him, the Jemadar is still a spy and a traitor, and he will see to it that as many of the natives will die as he can manage, so long as the methods to be employed do not include torture. When Neill's A.D.C. throws a newly-flayed pigskin at the Jemadar to soil his caste, the Corporal kicks it away, and later allows him to make proper devotions before dying, by untying his hands. This occasions the Jemadar's gratitude:

> Thank you Corporal
> though an uneducated man you are
> a gentleman. 24.

Forbes Mitchell is motivated by Christian principle, which regards all men as equal before God. His blend of Old Testament vengeance and New Testament mildness give him an officer-like bearing which the Jemadar is gracious enough to acknowledge, even though he faces a horrid death:

> The gun is fired off, the JEMADAR is blown into the auditorium of the theatre, and red rose petals are hurled into the expensive seats and faces. 25.

---

* The Jemadar is a saintly Indian, commissioned as an engineer officer by the East India Company. Because he is a native, he is made subordinate to an illiterate British sergeant, thus becoming, like the rest of his countrymen, the lowest link in the hierarchical chain. A sensitive and perceptive man, he admits to feeling shame at the atrocities committed during the Mutiny, though he is sure of the inevitable removal of the British from his country in the fulness of time:

> You shall be gone as a wet
> footprint on sun hot stone. 23.

This effect was used in a Dress rehearsal I attended but Lord Olivier complained because of possible adverse audience reaction, and, in the actual production, a flash gun was used, and a maroon exploded offstage. Again, Wood has taken a factual starting-point and used it imaginatively in the theatre. A contemporary photograph (see Appendix D p.181.) shows a native being fired from a gun, and Wood wanted to involve the audience as directly as possible in the horror (particularly the 'officers' in the more expensive seats).

The factual basis is also important in the whole sequence between Forbes Mitchell and the Jemadar in the play. The Jemadar is entirely Wood's own creation, and, through him, he stresses the hierarchical nature of the conflict, but Forbes-Mitchell's own dignity is clearly brought out in his own narrative:

> My prisoners had no sooner been made over to me, than several of the guard, as was usual in those days, proposed to bring some pork from the bazaar to break their castes, as a sort of preparation for their execution. This I at once denounced as a proceeding which I certainly would not tolerate so long as I held charge of the guard, and I warned the men that if anyone attempted to molest the prisoners, I should at once strip them of their belts, and place them in arrest for disobedience of orders and conduct unworthy of a British soldier, and the better-disposed portion of the guard at once applauded my resolution. I shall never forget the look of gratitude which came over the face of the unfortunate man who had called himself Jamie Green, when he heard me give these orders. He at once said it was an act of kindness which he had never expected, and for which he was truly grateful; amd he unhesitatingly pronounced his belief that Allah and his Prophet would requite my kindness by bringing me safely through the remainder of the war. I thanked my prisoner for his good wishes and his prayers, and made him the only return in my power, viz., to cause his hands to be unfastened to allow him to perform his evening's devotions, and permitted him as much freedom as I possibly could, consistent with safe custody. 26.

This scene, at the end of the second act of the play, is the apex of Forbes Mitchell's contribution and he becomes only one of the many soldiers who plough through the carnage of the later sequences, becoming more and more exhausted and insignificant. Despite this anti-climax, Forbes Mitchell is a very new portrait in Wood's military collection. His compassion, though sorely tried, is not worn away like Dingo's. He has no bitterness, nor cynicism; he does not complain about the harshness of his life nor the defects of his commanders; but he is able, for most of the time, to stand outside the horrific events with an objective sense of fairness. He is in no way downtrodden like the soldiers of 'The Charge'. Instead, he possesses a quiet strength of purpose, and an impressive maturity which make him stand out among all Wood's lower-rankers as unique.

On the other hand, the soldiers of 'Flashman' are much more

anonymous, like those of 'The Charge', and far less is seen of them than in any of the other scripts. Their demise at Gandamak has already been mentioned, but there are other vivid pictures of their collective suffering:

> EXTERIOR. THE CANTONMENT.
>
> a cold day, sentries huddled to keep
> warm, and a silent day,
> there are no bugle calls, no brisk
> shout of orders, the European soldiers
> seen are sullen, pick at things,
> anything at all,
> a strip of bark, teeth, the fluff on a
> comrade's coat until a snarl stops it,
> skin, fingernails, a vast picking and
> nervous tugging at things, some walk
> slowly in circles, watching hard the
> way their feet come down on the ground. 27.

This is merely a preliminary taste of the rigours to come. The difference in the quality of the officers' life is shown in a scene where Elphinstone eats devilled ham, omelette, and a little pheasant, whilst the whole Army waits outside, ready to move on to Jellalabad. Like the great march of _H_, this is a time of immense difficulty for all concerned. In appalling conditions the Army sets up camp in deep snow, a scene which, in fact, proved to be logistically impossible. As McBride says in his article on Lester:

> One cherished film project, a spectacular adaptation of George MacDonald Fraser's novel _Flashman_ was cancelled by United Artists a month away from shooting in 1970, after Lester had spent more than a year in preparation. 28.

In the article Lester gives several reasons for the film's cancellation:

> "Flashman" was one of the more successful abortive projects. It's a very complicated situation, but "Flashman" came about at the time when the film industry began to collapse within itself. A sort of implosion. It's a very expensive project, a period film where at one point 13,ooo of the British Army have to retreat in January from Kabul into India, being attacked by hordes of Afghans. It's not the sort of thing you can do on a shoestring. 29.

It is interesting at this point to turn to Wood's screenplay to determine what demands were actually made on resources:

> THE NIGHTMARE MARCH
>
> Ext. 121.
>
> A white expanse of snow, nothing
> but snow, the Army has vanished,
> not more than first light yet,
> and a solitary GILZAI TRIBESMAN
> sits his horse and watches from
> the summit of a small hill,
> rocks, swept clear of snow by
> the wind, he watches and he can
> see vague shapes under the snow, some
> begin to move.

> a BUGLER comes up out of the snow
> and looks around him, there is
> only him and the GILZAI TRIBESMAN
> can be seen, the BUGLER decides
> to sink down again into the snow
> as if pulling the sheets up
> around him again for another five
> minutes in bed, but more shapes are
> coming up out of the snow,
> a long way off a fire is lit,
> a small black dot miles away it
> seems is the head of the column,
> dot after dot comes out of the
> snow and by this means we see the
> full extent of the withdrawal of
> the Army of the Indus.
>
> Nearest are the camp followers.
> A wailing from them, an intense
> wailing, and whining from the native
> camp followers. 30.

With this in mind United Artists' decision to cancel seems reasonable, and Lester continues:

> I mean, apart from the logistical problem of how do you get, let's say, 5,000 people under the snow so that the next morning they appear on cue as the bugle arises in this empty snowfield, blows a few notes, and then slowly 5,000 heads appear... To do it properly it would be a very expensive film; and I don't think one should do it improperly. 31.

Wood told me that he wrote 'Flashman' to purge his system of the nineteenth-century wars subject, and all three works required enormous budgets. For now, however, in a consideration of the filmscript's handling of lower-rankers, it is sufficient to say that only one of the soldiers in 'Flashman' is singled out. Sgt. Hudson does play an important part in some of Flashman's adventures, and is the only person to witness his true cowardice. Fortunately for Flashman, Hudson dies without telling anyone of it. This film, had it been made, would have shown the Army as a whole, a huge mass of men, marching and fighting en bloc, seen in its entirety as part of the vast panorama of war. 'The Charge' at least showed some individuals being broken down as personalities, then welded together again to form part of the Army machine, and _H_ has individual characters with some depth. But, in these three works, Wood's concern with showing the plight of lower-rankers has developed a very different perspective from that of _Dingo_. In that play there was a strong sense of impending and inevitable social revolution as the outcome of war, of which the lower echelons, Dingo himself, and others like him, would be an important and articulate part. The difference in Wood's chosen historical context also changes this emphasis. In the nineteenth-century works the soldier's time had not yet come to take a hand in changing the world in social terms. That was still the dream of a

handful of enlightened officers, none of whom has any real power to implement it.

The most important difference in these three works, however, is the way officers are explored in detail for the first time in a Wood play or film. Their portrayals add a richness to the texture of the works in question, and show an important advance in the author's dramatic development of character, though, in 'The Charge' and 'Flashman' the essential superficiality of the main historical figures leads Wood to treat them differently from his more detailed study of Havelock. Several of the real personalities, however, have an intrinsic dramatic appeal, the most prominent being the chief characters of 'The Charge', the brothers-in-law Lords Cardigan and Lucan.

Cardigan, the bucolic, intemperate aristocrat, detested by his officers because of his sudden changes of mood, and his unreasonableness, commands his soldiers like a very superior gentleman farmer. His men are treated worse than their horses, and his officers constantly run the gamut of his foul temper. The film portrayal uses much of the factual material of Cecil Woodham-Smith, whose book The Reason Why is a graphic account of the misdemeanours of the Brudenell (Cardigan's) and Bingham (Lucan's) families, culminating in the fatal charge. The book is credited as source material in the film, and additional material was researched by John Mollo, who also provided information for H.

Lord Cardigan is first seen in the film on horseback, inspecting his troops as a band plays. In 'Voice Over' he informs us that he is indeed Lord Cardigan and does not propose to recount his life in any detail, since it is 'no damn' business of anyone'. Immediately, Wood and Richardson reject the full depth of Woodham-Smith's detailed characterisation. Instead of concentrating, as she had done, on the background struggles and conflicts of Cardigan's early career, they prefer to give him a clear dramatic function as the butt of their anti-war, anti-privilege, anti-Establishment schema. His presentation lies somewhere between the carefully-rounded treatment of Havelock, and Lester's pasteboard cutouts. Indeed, it seems the historical Cardigan was such an appalling man that it is hardly necessary to caricature him. He provides his own parody, though, in the film, Trevor Howard's powerfully-voiced, florid-complexioned depiction of him was all too convincing. Cardigan's array of weaknesses from total self-absorption to blundering incompetence was memorably displayed. His arrogance and high-handedness were notorious, and the film loses no time in showing his concern with externals. He proudly shows off his officers and men

of the 11th Hussars, a regiment whose command he had purchased for a vast sum, his wealth providing him with both privilege and power, and an intrinsic superiority over everyone else:

> them cherrybums you see 'em tight my cherrybums.
> I keep 'em tight. £10,000 a year out me own pocket
> I spend to clothe 'em. 32.

In return, he expects total obedience:

> If they can't fornicate they can't fight
> And if they can't fight hard
> I'll flog their backs raw
> For all their fine looks. 33.

He expects his officers, too, to submit to all his whims and fancies. Historically, he was something of a gourmet and dandy, ordering the food in the Officers Mess to be changed from good sound English cooking to fancier French dishes. One of the sequences in the film is based on a famous factual occurrence, when Cardigan invited a number of officers to a Regimental dinner. Among his quirks was a quite irrational abhorrence (though one shared by many others) of those officers who had served in India, regarding them as uncivilised and inferior. His own regiment had served there for many years before he took command, a fact which added to his difficulties. On this occasion, Cardigan had ordered that only champagne should be served. Many of the officers would have preferred to drink ordinary porter from the customary black bottles, but deferred to Cardigan's order. One of them, a Captain John Reynolds, who had served in India, and was, therefore, in Cardigan's eyes, an 'Indian' ordered Moselle instead of champagne. Seeing a black bottle on the table (containing Moselle) Cardigan immediately jumped to the conclusion that the officer in question was undermining his authority by drinking porter, and was openly and embarrassingly furious. Next day, Reynolds was placed under arrest. The film handles this episode slightly differently. Wood introduces William Russell, <u>The Times</u> war correspondent, as a character at this point in the film, and has him requesting the Moselle. Reynolds does not appear in the film. Instead, Nolan, another 'Indian' officer, whose contribution to the film will be discussed later, takes the burden of Cardigan's wrath. Wood avoids a factual recreation of the scene, and heightens the tension surrealistically. In the film version, Cardigan, beside himself with rage, thumps the table:

> He thumps the table hard and fast with
> no sound. The bottles shake but no sound.
> He shouts.
> No sound,
> He shouts again;
>
> You are drinking porter.

No my lord.
Yes.
No.
See it.
Not my lord. 34.

This is not the 'real' Cardigan, but a recreation of a historical figure, glimpsed as in a dream, the sparseness of the unattributed dialogue adding to the sense of unreality. Wood is not attempting to depict the historical personality in a naturalistic way but pointing out, artistically and imaginatively, his intolerance and uncontrollable anger.

Many of the other scenes have their basis in fact, besides the whole reconstruction of the Charge, but Wood always seeks to heighten them, moving away from documentary realism, by his method of presentation. Another example may be given where Wood demonstrates Cardigan's fetish for smartness in his troops, and the way in which he maintains it. Woodham-Smith mentions that he gave some of his smartest men five shillings and a day's leave. To earn his further approval they would post themselves as prominently and smartly as possible at a point he would pass so as to appeal to his vanity. In the filmscript this is transcribed as:

He stands on the corner of the street
and waits, Lord Cardigan. The street
behind him empties of soldiers. The
street in front of him fills with his
own smart Private troopers with here and
there a corporal thrown in.

He turns round to go back to his club
and the street fills up with 11th Hussars again. 35.

In the actual film, Richardson treats the sequence more naturalistically. Cardigan, walking two dogs, receives salutes from various soldiers. This seems to negate Woodham-Smith's point about Cardigan's pride, and Wood's surrealistic expression of it, and the actual film version generally tends to reject Wood's fantasy sequences in the screenplay in favour of reportage and social comment.

Another scene, this time not contained in the filmscript, but appearing on the screen, is based on Woodham-Smith's account of a theatrical performance Cardigan attended at Drury Lane. She relates a contemporary description of the event:

'The first audible indication of his presence was a cry of "The Black Bottle", followed by a general hiss. A crowd gathered under his box, shaking their fists and shouting, "Turn him out!" "Shame!"' Lord Cardigan sat in his box, ignoring the demonstration, until the uproar became so great that it was obvious no performance could take place. 'His Lordship then, advancing very deliberately to the front of the box, put on his great coat, and making a bow, retired amid one universal shout of disapprobation. 36.

This sequence is reproduced almost exactly in the film, except that it was filmed in the Georgian auditorium of the Theatre Royal, Bristol, and Sir Donald Wolfit could be seen giving a performance of Macbeth on stage.

The other 'civilian' sequences are full of social comment. Cardigan is seen at an elegant Ball which provides a strong contrast with the previous scene, a fight in the drab barracks over stolen money. At least one of the women present finds him attractive. Mrs. Duberly confides to a friend 'I must stop looking at Lord Cardigan as if I want to be ridden by him'. This unconscious equation of women with horses, sexual in essence, has many sexist overtones. Horses figure prominently in the film - as themselves, as caparisoned steeds, bearers of messages, carriers of death and the dead, and as agents of men's suffering. On the whole, they are given more care than the men themselves, and most women are regarded as being their equals at best, otherwise decidedly inferior. The domination of both by strong men is linked with the power of the strong over the weak in a short scene in which a small, peaceful group of anti-war demonstrators are viciously dispersed by Cardigan's troops - a moment when past and present meet and the audience is forcibly reminded of the handling of the anti-Vietnam War demonstrations in America.

The chief dramatic concern of the film, however, besides the excitement of the Charge itself, lies in the all-important private conflict between Cardigan and his brother-in-law which was to have such public consequences. Lucan, historically Cardigan's senior in terms of Army service and experience, was commander of the 17th Lancers by purchase. He is not seen in the film until almost halfway through, when he is summoned by Lord Raglan to be informed of the forthcoming war with Russia, and his responsibilities in the Crimea. Raglan, the Army Commander, an inept, former deputy to the recently-deceased Wellington, is also introduced late into the film, and then plays an increasingly important part in the film, as he did historically. No information is given in the film of Lucan's stormy background, nor of the family tensions (Cardigan's sister had left Lucan just before the outbreak of war), and his late entrance, whilst lifting the pace of the film and giving it a new dramatic impetus, weakens the crucial focus on their continual wrangling, and makes Lucan less important than Cardigan dramatically. Throughout the film, Cardigan is given prominence, and the resulting imbalance is a major criticism of it. Woodham-Smith's early chapters also concentrate on Cardigan, but Lucan is given a full and considered treatment when introduced, and the later chapters from the making of the appointments are evenly balanced between the two. In Raglan's office, dominated by the statue of

Wellington which is being erected outside, Cardigan, who has also been invited to attend, asks if he is to be given command. All the required information is economically conveyed in these exchanges:

> No. No you don't get command. I shall command the expedition, you get the Light Brigade.
>
> A brigade. Who has the division?
>
> Your brother in law - Lord Lucan.
>
> CARDIGAN notices LUCAN for the first time. He snorts:
>
> Lucan.
> Cardigan.
> Haw.
>
> He storms out. 37.

The waywardness and lack of communication between all the officers continues and grows after their arrival in the Crimea, and contrasts strongly with the discipline they expect from their men. Cardigan is given a letter which establishes the firm chain of command in which he is only to communicate with Raglan through Lucan. This only makes matters worse and the petty niggling between them grows despite the awful conditions the Army experiences, and both officers show their complete insensitivity. Lucan insists on the men continuing their march though many of them are suffering from cholera. In another sequence, the hardships are mitigated as tents are erected, and the soldiers relax. Soon they are ready to watch the entertainment provided by a dancing bear, and a cricket match is organised. Cardigan arrives, and petulantly orders all the tents to be repitched. No sooner is this task completed than Lucan arrives and orders them to be moved again, followed by Cardigan again, who has them re-erected once more.

The rhythm of the film changes, and builds to its climax, the Charge, in a series of short scenes. Cardigan is first seen without his trappings, being pushed into his corsets, followed by his elegant and striking uniform. He looks magnificent, his rings flash in the sunlight, and his arrogant sneer remains. Then the camera shows the panorama of the battlefield, its viewpoint changing from that of the commanders on the heights surveying the whole area for miles, to the valley itself. Lucan brings a letter bearing orders, and advises Cardigan:

> I suggest you advance steadily and keep your men well in hand - if the Brigade is handled with control there should be no useless or unnecessary loss. 38.

For once, the two men tacitly agree, and the camera is able to capture the moment when Cardigan looks at Lucan with as much indifference as he can muster, but the tell-tale drops of sweat are seen as he shakes his head and points out the invincibility of the Russian position. Lucan responds with a simple statement which crystallises their dilemma. Nolan has brought the letter from Raglan who is the Commander. The order it contains must be obeyed:

> Lucan: You are quite right sir, but what choice have we? 39.

The Brigade is ordered to advance, and Cardigan takes his place bravely two lengths ahead of his staff officers. As the soldiers move off, Nolan commits his strange act of running his horse wildly across the front of the Brigade, attempting to address them, and presumably pointing out the folly of the attack. This is the famous factual action which Spratt Hammond told the soldiers of in Spare, and here it serves only to increase the tension. Cardigan glowers in fury, his rage increasing. Now, however, is the moment when all the training and discipline are summoned up and put into operation. In the screenplay Wood, the ex-soldier, writes exultantly:

> The main impression is of grace and ease and perfect dressing.
> Ranks close up as the nasty is shuttled
> out, the flogging and training work you
> see - there is skill and will. It is like
> some grim extraordinary mechanism. Breathtaking.
> Discipline always is, it's lovely. 40.

The irony of this is, of course, lost on the screen, but Cardigan rides on, taking the flash of the centre Russian gun as his point of attack, ahead of his men, and apparently blissfully unaware of what will happen to them. Woodham-Smith states that Cardigan said after the Charge that he could think only of his anger at Nolan's action. The film shows this anger but does not stress it. When Cardigan returns to see the sorry remnants of his men he admits to them that it was 'a mad brain trick', but refuses to accept any blame. The other commanders have an acrimonious exchange:

> Lucan: I have orders in my brigade from my superior general.
> Raglan: Who?
> Lucan: You. I have the order still. The written order. In your handwriting Lord Raglan.
> Raglan: Not my handwriting... Airey, you have lost the Light Brigade.
> Airey: I will not be blamed. 41.

Their quarrel merely serves to underline their incompetence and unreliability, and the film ends amid scenes of desolation as farriers go about their work of shooting the wounded horses. This changes to a print of the same scene, and the credits roll.

Bombast, arrogance, overweening pride and show, all the panoply of war, have proved no substitute for the basic human values of common sense and concern for others. So utterly selfish are both Cardigan and Lucan that their only concern is with avoiding blame. Their incompetence is too heavily ingrained in the System they represent where power depends on wealth rather than ability. Dingo's selfishness and will to survive constantly goaded us to consider his criticisms and to take a stance either for or against the system he scorned. When Montgomery, Churchill, or Eisenhower were mentioned we questioned his comments about them, basing our doubts on our own received information about the people concerned, which was often contradictory. Cardigan and Lucan were clearly in the wrong, and were known to be at the time. It is very difficult to feel any sympathy for them, except perhaps, ironically, the moment in the valley when they are hoist with their own petard, or to take an opposing attitude to Wood's and Richardson's. There is never any question of our taking sides, we face a foregone conclusion. Woodham-Smith's book had been published in 1953, and had already made short shrift of Tennyson's lofty rhetoric. Richardson's absorption in realistic cinema ensured that the overall effect would be one of historical veracity, and pared down Wood's more surrealistically conceived filmscript. His 'luxurious communism' offers little opportunity for counter-argument; and radical, entrenched criticism of the leading participants loses the extra force it might have had if our imaginations had been engaged in Wood's potentially more fruitful form. As the film stands, there can be no doubt that the enlisted men were victims of an unjust system, and that Cardigan, Lucan, Airey, and Raglan were idiotic but typical representatives of it. No one in the film would dare to ask Dingo's question 'Am I a fool, are we fools that comedians are set to lead us?'. There is nothing comic about these leaders, and the men are too downtrodden to even attempt to formulate the question.

If the highest and lowest ranks come off rather badly in the film, at least some soldiers experience a little joy and happiness. The younger officers of 'The Charge' have a student-like camaraderie and sense of gaiety in the early scenes which polarise the gloom and despondency ultimately engendered by great and small. Their chief representative is Nolan, another historical character. In fact, he did not actually join the Brigade until it reached the Crimea, being General Airey's aide there, but, in the film, Wood makes him into something of a jeune premier, weaving a romantic interest around him, and setting him in Cardigan's regiment from the beginning. An expert horseman (historically, his two books on the Cavalry and the training of

Cavalry horses became Army text-books, as Woodham-Smith points out), he is also the one officer in the film who is intelligent enough to have a vision of a better society. His revolutionary system of caring for horses by kindness is carried over into a hopeful view of society's future. As the Army prepares for embarkation to the Crimea, at night, its pennants softly fluttering, Nolan voices his dream of things to come. The Army will be Christian in outlook, the men will fight because they will be well paid, and their women and children well cared for. Efficiency and professionalism will be its chief qualities, and Nolan himself will do all possible to help bring it about. He develops his theme by referring to the forthcoming conflict:

> This war will be the revolution
> -this war will be the war that
> sees the end of the nobleman as
> leader and soldier without regard
> for his knowledge or experience. It
> will be the first of the modern wars
> and the last of the gallop, it will
> be the beginning of true comradeship. 42.

As with so many of Wood's longer and seemingly important speeches, Nolan's is never allowed to reach climactic heights. A confusion between horses and men comes in before the end, and the rhetoric fades as he compares a horse jumping a difficult fence with men attacking under heavy fire. This is the filmscript version. On screen, the speech, heavily truncated, is delivered in the Company stables before the announcement of War.

Nolan figures prominently in the Crimean action too. Superb horseman that he is, he provides the important link from Raglan and Airey to the commanders in the field, carrying the crucial letter of instructions. Much of his time is spent in being furious, not merely angry, at the indecision and stupidity of the leaders, and madness seems very close at hand. The screenplay's description of his death during the Charge has already been given, in Chapter II. Oddly, despite Nolan's very positive attributes as a soldier, Wood has built up a love affair between Nolan and Clarissa, the newly-wed bride of his best friend Captain Morris. This seems totally at variance with the character. There is a hint of chivalry in the affair, with Nolan playing a sensitive Lancelot to Clarissa's pre-Raphaelite Guinevere, and Morris's Arthur, but the relationship seems contrived, put in simply to provide some love interest, and, although it has a cutting edge, with the deception involved and its betrayal of Victorian sexual mores, it still seems unnecessarily protracted and spurious.

Many of the other young officers are killed in the Charge. Their naive dreams of glory and honour, bravery and courage are all nothing

to their fly-blown corpses. Their skill, training, and expertise have been to no avail, for the incompetence of people in privileged positions has caused their deaths. There is no Epilogue. After the Charge little remains to be said. Bodies litter the battlefield, and surgeons start their grisly task. Hope rests only in Nolan's ill-defined statement that the war would be a revolution, and that, after it, conditions would improve. The clarion call of Dingo is missing, but now, in the twentieth century, according to the author, responsibility is collective. In the nineteenth century it was still the prerogative of the privileged.

'The Charge' did reach the screen, and enjoyed the prestige of a Royal Command Performance, a supreme irony in view of the attitude it takes to the status quo, though Field-Marshal Sir Richard Hull, writing in the programme, presumably before seeing the film, anticipated a very different approach:

> This is a film about Soldiers and, whatever else it may portray, it pays undying tribute to courage and self-sacrifice. Soldiers of the Army of today took part in the making of the film and representatives of the Regiments who took part in the famous charge are present tonight to provide fitting ceremonial and a visible reminder that the spirit lives on. 43.

He continues in similar vein, and finishes with a stanza of Tennyson, inviting the audience to 'Honour the charge they made!' This is potentially a different view of the Charge from Wood's and Richardson's, but courage and self-sacrifice are not held up for admiration in the film, and, unfortunately, the Field-Marshal's opinion of the film is not known.

Before the previews Richardson had made the film appear more notorious than it was by refusing to invite critics, following Royal Court practice in the theatre, because:

> They don't think in terms of the influence they have; and whether they're helping or hindering the film they're writing about and whether they're helping other films to be made; and the sort of cinema we can have, and, finally, the sort of society that we have. 44.

He goes on to describe critics as 'a group of acidulated intellectual eunuchs, hugging their prejudices like feather boas'. Perhaps because of this attack, the reviewers all paid to see the film, writing rather longer criticisms than usual, which generally praised the film for its fine visual qualities, and some of the performances, but found it flawed. John Russell Taylor's review for The Times sums them up well:

> (The film) resembles, unexpectedly, another recent British prestige production, 'Far from the Madding Crowd', in that there is rather less to it than meets the eye. Visually it is nearly always striking: the misty, slightly sepia views of Victorian,

England in the opening scenes, with their overtones of very early colour photography, are beautiful, and the charge itself, when it comes, is spectacularly staged and brilliantly edited. The trouble with the film is nearly all below this splendid surface, in the very conception of it. It is dedicated to showing that war per se is senseless, so that it makes very little odds whether it is intelligently or stupidly waged. Very well: but if we are denied any real drama over the bungle and the reason why, then at least the characters caught up in it all should be interesting in themselves.

That they rarely are. 45.

On the other hand, 'Flashman', the other film written at this time was not actually filmed. Wood's scripts were adapted from George MacDonald Fraser's book, and Flashman himself is Fraser's own creation, a fictionalised character who is given a factual background, culled from the diaries and journals of the period, so that he seems authentic. Wood simply (if that is the correct word) adapted his adventures, using the vast knowledge of the era he had acquired during his own researches to provide a sumptuous cinematic backcloth. The descriptions of the visual settings give a rich evocation of place and period, and only one example will have to suffice to sample their flavour. A seven page description of Kabul is written for filming whilst Flashman talks of his impressions in 'Voice Over'. These are just two paragraphs of pictured detail:

Ext
57b The Banks of the River Kabool,
crowded with natives, a fakir sits
in the water cooling his sores,
another defecates, all the camp
followers of the Army come to bathe,
drink, and wash clothes,
hundreds of dhobies wash whites,
pounding them with a stone on their
boards, grinning up,
and strong patient gun bullocks,
tranquil of eye are brought down
to water by drivers.

and,

Ext
57d A Street in the City of Kabool, a
wrapped Affghan WOMAN, eyes from
her boorku, a giggling boy veils
himself, his face painted like a woman,
a big AFFGHAN TRIBESMAN with a beard
dyed brilliant red pops a sweet in
the boy's mouth
a WOMAN flits through the crowd,
seen as a darting silk shadow, and
fruit, peaches, melons, grapes, silk
buttocks, pistachio nuts, cherries,
nostrils flared, tongue seen, Dresden
China, weapons, the hiss of a
dagger laid on sheath for a sight
of it, its hilt a fabulous creature
of twisting gold coils and jewels. 46.

This kind of picturing, reminiscent of the paintings of Alma-Tadema, and Frederick Leighton, with the scrupulous attention to detail of Frith, is in direct line of descent from Victorian theatrical antecedents like Wilson Barrett's production of W.G.Wills's Claudian at the Princess's Theatre, London, in 1883. Michael Booth quotes the Daily News review of this performance:

> as the crowds of Greeks, Romans, Gaulish, and Dacian slaves, and men of Egyptian and of Nubian race, here watch the wrestlings and the games of boys, there passes from time to time a peasant girl bearing upon her head an earthern jar just filled from the fountain....... 47.

Wood's rewritten Second Version, however, excises all this Arabian Nights wonder and is, by contrast, rather prosaic, a lithograph rather than an oil painting:

> 50 EXTERIOR THE CANTONMENT NEAR KABOOL DAY
>
> in the early morning before the sun is hot,
> seen as a pleasant place of orchards,
> white trousers and gardens, a neat array
> of tents, horse lines, a gun park,
> bungalows for the married officers. 48.

Somewhere in the middle of all this is Flashman himself, a subaltern whose brave façade hides a timorous, weak, rather pathetic man, concerned, ultimately, only with saving his own skin, and indulging his sexual appetite. His weakness is revealed to the audience but remains hidden to his superiors, although his wife and family also see the real man.

As the public school boy at Arnold's Rugby, seen in the Prologue, with its Brechtian-style captions, he manages to keep out of the worst scrimmages, and the words liar, mean-spirited, braggart, and drunkard, are all used of him. Good fortune also attended him at birth, and although his Latin is too bad for Bingham to accept him as a soldier, his uncle Brindley is at the Horse Guards, and his father sends him there to purchase a commission, helped by the fact that his mother was a Paget. From then, his progress is charted by a series of paintings. After a notorious duel the following occurs:

> 'Honour is Satisfied' is the title of the painting.
> Flashman is pulled from the painting by his
> crony Bryant while the painting remains the same. 49.

He is posted to Scotland, lives with the Morrison family, and has to marry their daughter, Elspeth, as a matter of honour. Soon after he leaves for India and, whilst there, has some poignant private moments. Letters from Elspeth move him, and, like Nolan and Lucan, he can be extremely emotional, if not disturbed. His behaviour during his capture after Gandamak has already been mentioned. Later, he and Hudson are thrown into a stone cell, and they comfort each other.

Flashman is weeping, it seems, at the memory of the awesome spectacle of the 44th's demise. Instead, he says:

> Not them, not that lily livered
> bunch, Jesus Christ, not them
> at all - I am weeping for me.
> Meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee! 50.

On his return home, after many amorous adventures, he finds his wife, too, has been unfaithful, the realisation coming after his greatest public triumph, an audience with the Queen, who greets him as a great hero. Now a public figure, he discovers that he needs his wife, not just because he loves her (which, surprisingly, he does), but because he is financially dependent on her, his chauvinism defeated by her feminine wiles, and his public persona deflated in private by subservience to her.

Again, however, an attempt to define a character is held up by the lack of any real psychological depth. Motivation is simple and physical, and external events define the terms of action. Flashman's very immaturity precludes creditable analysis, and the trappings of the medium dwarf him. Possibilities of change in the social order do not interest him for his own position is already privileged and assured. In this respect, he belongs in the category of Cardigan and Lucan.

In 'The Charge' and 'Flashman' there is a yawning gulf between officers and men, and most of the characters of both classes are presented in an unsympathetic light. In H the chasm is bridged, the play itself has more dramatic substance than either film, and the characters are, on the whole, fuller and richer. Some of its soldiers have already been mentioned, and Forbes Mitchell has been singled out as a new departure for Wood. I shall now examine the play in more detail, with the cinematic characters and techniques as firm points of reference.

Tennyson's poem 'The Play', though written for the admonition of a nineteenth-century audience, and concerned with a Victorian theatrical performance, could well have been inserted in the programme for the production of H at the National Theatre in February, 1969. It reads as follows:

> Act first, this Earth, a stage so gloom'd
> with woe
> You all but sicken at the shifting scenes.
> And yet be patient. Our Playwright
> may show
> In some fifth Act what this wild Drama
> means. 51.

Such an action might have avoided the storm of critical abuse which greeted the play. I shall now provide some background information

necessary to an understanding of it, consider the critical responses, both hasty and measured, to it, and, by an analysis of some of the text and performance, attempt to discover 'what this wild Drama means'. Havelock himself will be my central focus.

H, or, as it was subtitled, 'Monologues at Front of Burning Cities', was Wood's first full-length play to be staged at the National Theatre, following the rejection of Dingo. The printed text occupies a massive 185-page volume, complete with a useful historical introduction by Michael Edwardes, reprinted from the National Theatre programme (which also included contemporary accounts of events at the time of the Mutiny, photographs, and drawings); comments by the author; and an indispensable glossary. This printed version shows several major alterations, additions, and excisions from the National Theatre's Prompt Copy which, in turn, differs from the original typescript. Clearly, the play was altered considerably in the progress from page to stage, and the printed version represents the author's ideal, rather than actual, stage presentation.

The play was written after 'The Charge', and grew from it in both form and content. As Wood told Ronald Hayman:

> I constructed a completely artificial language for 'The Charge', which was a parody of Victorian memoir language, because I'd read an awful lot of Victorian memoirs written by soldiers. 52.

Kenneth Tynan, the National Theatre's Literary Adviser, seized on this material:

> ... it was Charles Wood's subject. He said that while he was doing research for 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', he had learnt a lot about what happened to many of the people involved immediately afterwards. A lot of them had served in India, and been caught up in the Indian Mutiny. He fascinated me, talking about it, so I said, for God's sake, write a play about it. And he did. 53.

Wood has said that he wrote the play because he was in a rhythm of writing in that particular idiom, and explained its conception to Hayman:

> I wrote 'H' because I wanted to try some of the techniques of screenwriting in the theatre - a series of short, close scenes. 54.

The resulting script was commissioned by the National Theatre and, as Tynan says, it was:

> a commissioned play and a flop. Not to my mind an artistic flop, but a critical flop. 55.

There are many possible reasons for this, but perhaps John Russell Taylor's statement that

> the play seems to call for a fantastically equipped ideal theatre of the mind 56

is the main one, for, although he was commissioned to write the play,

Wood admits that it was not written as a work that could necessarily be performed in the theatre. As with the filmscripts of 'Flashman' he allowed his imagination full rein, knowing that the first draft could not be staged:

> Consequently I wrote this enormous thing - which is the way I always write my screenplays - an outpouring, about 300 pages long, a great sheaf of words and ideas. But I didn't, I think, make it into a very good play. When Methuen published it, I rewrote it and I think I staged it better on the page. The last act is now almost back to the kind of poem I wrote at the beginning. 57.

Hence the discrepancy between the three versions already mentioned: the original, a challenge to Director and Designer to extend the limits of what the theatre was capable of achieving - an important consideration when the play is seen as the filling of the sandwich of the two associated filmscripts, and in the context of the techniques Wood was able to employ in the cinematic medium with its relative freedom in the imaginative exploration of Time and Place; the Prompt Copy, the actual theatrical achievement; and the printed version, for an ideal theatre of the mind.

As a result of Wood's artistic indulgence, and the sprawling nature of the play newspaper critics, forced to make snap judgments about it, found its content indigestible and bemusing. Many of them also show a depressing facetiousness, which was partly the reason for Richardson's attack on them, and it is worth recording some of their statements to show how ill-equipped many of them are to assess unusual new methods and techniques.

Benedict Nightingale agreed with B.A.Young that Wood was 'prone to bringing frivolous and irrelevant passages into his work at the most august moments',[58] and Nightingale mentions a specific instance:

> At one point a soldier falls beside him. 'His was a lovely death, my lambs', cries Havelock. 'He died in the service of his country, some of him upon my boot'. The play's ironies aren't usually expressed as facetiously as this. 59.

Since this is a strong and well-defined criticism, it will be of some value to examine it more closely, tracing Havelock's remarks to their source. Wood has marked the following passage in his copy of Archibald Forbes' <u>Havelock</u>:

> Havelock was close by. He took a long look at what remained of poor Laurence, and then remarked: "His was a happy death, grenadiers. He died in the service of his country." The anticlimax came from somewhere down the line: "For masel', sir, gin ye've nae objections, I wad suner bide alive i' the service of ma cuntra!" 60.

Here, Wood has taken Havelock's original line, substituted a favourite adjective, 'lovely', for 'happy', and altered the rather formal 'grenadiers' to 'my lambs', the nickname of Havelock's troops which, if

anything, emphasises Havelock's bravery in adversity, his warm, shepherd-like relationship with his men, and his ability to enthuse them. Forbes gives the Scotsman's realistic fear of death, Wood tacks on a new sentiment, 'some of him upon my boot', which gives the awareness to Havelock himself, a moment of horror when the reality is all too close, and contrasts with the apparent heroism of the language. Nightingale shows the depth of his criticism when he argues that H is 'a longer, wordier Dingo in fancy dress, no more.'[61] Even a cursory glance at the text disproves that, notwithstanding the totally different emphasis implied by the two titles and periods. Any further examination makes it totally untenable.

Irving Wardle was attracted by the play's language, and saw it as of great importance:

> The intention, I think, is to contrast the barbarity of the military action with the verbal convention that masked its real character. 62.

This tentative statement has some truth, but the play is by no means wholly concerned with the barbarity of military action, and Wood uses many variations in language to point up differences in attitude, as will be demonstrated. Wardle adds that the play 'shows Mr. Wood rivalling John Arden in recapturing the demotic speech of another age'.[63] However, he found as a whole that:

> Poised between an exploration of patriotic legend and camp Victoriana, the play has no evident expressive purpose beyond a devouring interest in the detail of military life for which Mr. Wood is well known. 64.

This is a totally erroneous view, as will also be shown later.

Other views of the play's meaning were expressed by John Barber:

> in depriving the Indians of their leaders, their self-respect and their religion, the British were in the wrong. 65.

Herbert Kretzmer:

> The British in India were but actors playing a script, and that in the long reach of history they were but puppets in an ageless land. 66.

and Peter Lewis:

> a senseless and avoidable tragedy in which nobody understood what they were really fighting about. 67.

All these, of course, are hasty first impressions, but they all make the cardinal error of diminishing the play by trying to reduce it to just one sentence, necessarily implying a political statement. Closer study will demonstrate that the play is much more complex, and that the careful attention paid to the character of Havelock, together with the warmth of relationships established in spite of the horror of events, give it a much richer texture than any other of Wood's works.

The newspaper critics are much clearer, and more helpful, when they describe the play's presentation. B.A.Young hints at a positive audience reaction:

> Without so much visual ingenuity... the play could never have generated so much excitement. 68.

and at a unity in the production (again by Geoffrey Reeves), missed by most other critics:

> The splendid designs that often uncannily reflect the irony of the writing are by Michael Annals. 69.

'Uncannily' is perhaps the wrong word for, in the same way as the author had used diaries, documents, and original accounts of the events as source material, so Annals based his designs on photographs, prints, and paintings of the period, in consultation with author and director. The relationship between Annal's original material, his designs for the play, and their eventual realisation on the stage is worth a study to itself. Space precludes this, but some photographic evidence is provided in Appendix D which is analagous with Wood's own imaginative use of sources, and I shall draw attention to this when particularly relevant to the text and its presentation.

John Barber recalls some of the details of the sets:

> Behind painted velvet curtains, barley-sugar columns, and a row of mock gas floodlights - and on an inner stage got up like a toy theatre. 70.

The 'toy theatre', a specially constructed inner stage based on Pollock's Victorian toy theatres, built, like the Comic's booth in Dingo, to be wheeled on and off (see Appendix D p.182-186.) was a source of some contention. Wood comments on it in his Introduction to the printed version of H. He found it to be at odds with his intentions, and somewhat 'arch'. My own impressions from the National production were that, though it was entirely in keeping with the overall style of the presentation, it failed to provide a much-needed artistic unity. Had it been used for battles, or interiors only, it could have made many of the 'shifting scenes' more coherent. Instead, it seemed to come on and off quite arbitrarily, a costly device that had to justify its existence by appearing as often as possible.

Barber's description is clear and evocative. Herbert Kretzmer, however, seems to have been somewhat bemused by it all. He informs us that:

> The play is performed on a Victorian melodrama stage, with a bewhiskered master of ceremonies in a filly (sic) white shirt introducing the gory chronicle. 71.

No evidence of such a character exists in any version of the play, but he continues:

> At the end, all the scenery disappears to show the Old Vic stage as it really is, with stacked props under the bank of electric lights above. 72.

This suggests that he had probably dined rather too well, watching the production in a state of total confusion, and left before the Transformation Scene in the Epilogue.

Fortunately, Philip Hope-Wallace, possibly because of his long association with the spectacular effects of opera, redresses the balance somewhat. Although he found that Wood had 'not organised his material', and that the National Theatre audience 'quite evidently thought it had misfired', he was prepared to admit that the play was:

> no doubt ready to yield more than it did last night under second examination. 73.

Yet, those critics who have had the advantage of studying the play are still divided. Hinchliffe, for example, finds the whole thing just as confusing as the newspaper critics:

> His subject here, could be the dilemma of being a Christian and a professional soldier, although this would hardly be a dilemma in 1857 and, for different reasons, would hardly be so now. Or the theme could be the plight of those Englishmen who loved India and felt rejected by her, or simply a study of military men. 74.

The critic here makes the fundamental mistake of trying to assign a basic argument to Wood. The dilemma he mentions is certainly present in the play, particularly in Havelock's saintly approach to his men, and Neill's vengeful bombast. Wood himself has acknowledged it:

> Havelock on the top, explaining himself and trying to get an attitude out of it, trying to be a Christian and a soldier at the same time which he was desperately anxious to do. And as an intelligent man, he must have found it impossible. 75.

The other themes are in the play, too, though not so prominently as Hinchliffe suggests. He goes on to criticise the play's construction, and considers that the long solo speeches hinder it, putting the characters into counterpoint rather than conflict. Since the importance of monologue is stressed in the play's alternative title, and since it is concerned to a large extent with Havelock's inner conflicts, the contrasts between the private and public man, and his relationships with his immediate family and his acquired family (of men), these criticisms seem somewhat tenuous. He also criticises some of the short interludes which, though amusing, he finds extraneous. These are not specified so it is difficult to comment. Wood has been unfortunate in attracting generalised and rather nebulous criticism of this kind.

Elsom, too, is critical of Wood's construction, but praises the ironies and contrasts of the play, particularly that between the Christian general whose beliefs drive him towards unchristian and bloodthirsty acts, and the more humane professional soldier. This points in a more considered direction, but it is left to John Russell Taylor and Katharine Worth to restore balance, and probe beneath the surface chaos to find at least some order and depth.

Taylor establishes a link between H and 'The Charge', and stresses that what he saw as a largely realistic portrayal of military and human follies in the latter work is capped by:

> the fantastic and unrelenting stage spectacle he has written in H from closely comparable material. 76.

He makes connections with Dingo and Spare, and points to the important fact (missed by everyone else) that characters, like those in Strindberg's A Dream Play:

> shift, fuse, change places, die and come back to life with dreamlike freedom and unpredictability. 77.

Most importantly, Taylor stresses the emphasis of the theatrical form and, contrary to the critics of the play's construction, notes that:

> The limitations of the theatre become positive advantages, allowing the dramatist to take all sorts of short cuts, to escape from exposition and literal scene-painting. 78.

This totally free use of the theatrical medium prompts Katharine Worth to set Wood's technique in relation to O'Casey's, and the Yeatsian world on wallpaper, though she is more concerned, like Taylor, with the play's peripheral mystique. She sees the Brechtian-style historical perspective as being manipulated by a kind of giant theatrical hand (Wood himself was very aware of this aspect, as the stage directions show), which sets the play in a historical context encompassing many dramatic forms:

> A sense of unstoppable, malign destiny comes through these strange scenes; past and present run together in a bleak epic "now" in which tenses can no longer be distinguished. 79.

and the dislocation of historic time is seen in the context of an alienatory theatrical device:

> The heroic world dissolves into the personal in a thoroughgoing Victorian scene change. 80.

The epic quality has been narrowed in focus to allow us to view the characters from a private viewpoint, involving us in the action in a new way. She emphasises the paradox that arises from this, and concludes that the epic gains in stature from the juxtaposition. Finally, she notes that, in spite of the horror, something has been saved, and life can continue:

> a child for a childless couple, a kind family feeling that has been able to cut across the cruel barriers of race and religion. 81.

It should be noted, however, that Taylor takes a different view of the ending, seeing Mrs. Jones Parry's final line ('Timothy, this (sic) is where your father was shot and died in agony') as a deflation of the conventional heroic picture. In my analysis of the scene I shall provide textual evidence to support Worth's view.

Hope-Wallace pointed the way towards a fuller critical appraisal of the play, and Taylor and Worth have developed interesting perspectives. They are, of necessity, generalised, and I shall now turn to the text to look closely at the opening and closing scenes of the play to attempt to unravel the author's meaning.

The Prologue and Epilogue present, in very different theatrical styles, which reflect accurately the change of mood and tone in the play, the events leading to the Mutiny, and the developments after it. Wood's dramatic method in the Prologue follows that of Hardy in The Dynasts:

> to establish a firm setting of time and place and then to move rapidly into an action. 82.

Hardy's work offers many parallels with the printed version of this play, and with the screenplays of the associated films, though, again, there is no evidence that Wood had it in mind as he wrote.

The chief protagonists of the Prologue are the Bombardier and Ensign Mullett, the former epitomising the rape of India by the British, and the resultant bastardisation of native culture; the latter, the naïveté and high-handedness of the British in expecting privilege and the status quo to be maintained as the natural Imperial order, in the face of deep and developing native resentment. Here, there is conflict rather than subservience, and the possibility of social change, even revolution, is real and necessary. By the Epilogue the Bombardier is dead, having met a violent end in retribution for his series of violent actions which include, ironically, the rape of a Victorian lady. Another bastard is born as a result of this union, but Timothy Jones Parry is the new India, conceived in the passion of battle, his birth-pangs those of a developing nation, his childhood spent in the love and care of parents of nations who have suffered, but reached a new maturity and understanding. The Jones Parrys embody the family wholeness of the new outpost of Empire, freed from the commercial exploitations of the East India Company. The Bombardier's hope for the future has been realised:

> your child shall be a gentle child
> and brought up son of an officer,
> have him in a Queen's regiment,
> not cocky in a Company coat. 83.

Even Mullett, the unwitting representative of the old England, has learned through bitter experience. He is 'resurrected', hideously disfigured, for the penultimate scene, and confesses that he never understood India because:

> I never knew what to say. 84.

and exits awkwardly, a cautionary reminder of what had been.

The theatrical presentation of the two scenes is determined by the progression of the play from unrest, through chaos piled upon chaos, to the eventual restoration of order. The Prologue heightens the violence by presenting it in terms of a Music Hall sketch, whilst the tranquility of the Epilogue is achieved by an enchanting Victorian pantomime transformation scene. Wood's original working script for the Prologue starts with a file of Sepoys looking at a chupatty, but the Prompt Copy of the National Theatre production has a long, disembodied chorus-style speech, giving the historical background: 'Present in India in 1857, two armies'. The Prompt Copy version tells of the Sepoys' discontent, mentions chupatties, and the prophecy that 'English rule shall last for a hundred years/from the battle of Plassey', besides the Lee Enfield rifle, and the greased cartridges. All this was spoken to the accompaniment of the tune 'Barbara Allen', and the visual context was a Front Cloth of British India. For the printed version, Wood has used a description of the visual effect as his starting-point, for it clearly shows the opulence of the British in India, with the implicit system of privilege, and cleverly points out its foundation:

the whole supported left and right by smiling Johnny Sepoy. 85.

Wood stresses the importance of scenic cloths in his Introduction to the printed version:

> The front cloth is very important and must be painted by a good scenic artist in the best trompe-l'oeil manner on old or soft canvas so that it hangs from a batten with the curves of a sail. It is used to stop dangerous sharp action from spilling into the auditorium where paying people have a right to feel safe from bayonets and involvement, it used to shut off din and let us hear ourselves speak, not easily done in battle; it is used, to paraphrase an apt phrase... to give style and description to what might otherwise be vulgar sprawl. It fails in all these things, I hope. 86.

Apart from being a good example of Wood's avoidance of pomposity, which could be construed as facetiousness, this extract also gives an insight into his attitude to the audience. His own background as a scenic designer and constructor is recalled, and the idea of the theatre as a giant plaything is also contained in it. He elaborated on the importance of the front cloth to Ronald Hayman:

> The only thing I wanted, really, was a frontcloth and people marching towards you all the time. And every now and then the frontcloth came down and as the soldiers charged towards you, the bayonets went through it. It was a continual march. Because I saw it as an epic screen version of something like 'The Charge', but right down in the right-hand corner two little people saying 'Look, my feet ache'. 87.

The Bombardier makes his entrance through the cloth, as the front-cloth

comic of the Music Hall, speaking directly to the audience. His first line draws attention to his grotesque appearance, and the juxtaposition of the words 'black' and 'Irish' point up his own personal dilemma in relation to the implicit hierarchical correctness of the scene depicted behind him. He is by no means self-conscious about it, however, and makes objective references to 'black niggers in white cloths', 'Heathen niggers', and even goes as far as labelling them 'Fiends' and 'Soors'. His second line sets up more resonances. 'The day war broke out' is, of course, Robb Wilton's catch phrase, and this not only sets us even more firmly in the Music Hall context but effectively dislocates the Time scale too, whilst relating the play to other wars. Wilton, like Charlie Chester, whose catch phrase Wood used in Dingo, was a favourite radio comic of the Second World War, and the Vietnam War was still in progress when the play was presented at the National, in 1969. If we add the mention of Plassey, it is clear that the play is not just about the Indian Mutiny, nor Victorian India, but occupies Worth's 'bleak, epic "now"', with an underlying historical perspective.

To be fully effective, the stand-up comic needs a foil, and this is provided by Ensign Mullett, the perfect straight-man and stooge. He comes fresh from Addiscombe, the officer training centre in England, his head full of book-learning and theory. Although well-meaning and well-educated, in the bookish sense, he is, at the same time, callow, inexperienced, and pompous, the prototype of an easily-recognised theatrical caricature - a sort of Wise to the Bombardier's Morecambe. This is to simplify too much, for the characters have a far longer theatrical pedigree. Caliban must surely have been one of the Bombardier's ancestors, whilst his slyness and artfulness are worthy of a machiavel, an appropriate role for a play which deals with revenge and vengeance, envy and deprivation. In this scene alone, the Bombardier is narrator, commentator, and intermediary, alternately inside and outside the action in an alienatory Brechtian sense. He is always the Outsider, one who transcends the Music Hall form and gives the scene a context more like Meyerhold's 'devil's vaudeville'*. There is a sense, too, in which he is a black and mischievous Harlequin, instigating and disrupting the lazzi, a reminder of early Victorian pantomime, and of the 'evil harlequinade' of The Dynasts (I vi vii).

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* The method Meyerhold devised to cope with 'the fantastic realism and contrasts of horror with vulgarity, laughter with despair, and the combining of history with everyday life'. 88.

The Bombardier also provides an interesting insight into the author's dramatic method and imagination. Forbes-Mitchell, who was discussed earlier in the Chapter, mentions an incident in his book in which an Indian named Jamie Green (later transformed by Wood into the Jemadar) arrives at an army camp, accompanied by a coolie who intrigues the men. They inquire about him, and are told:

> Oh, never mind him; he's an Irishman, and his name is Micky. His mother belongs to the regimental bazaar of the 87th Royal Irish, and he lays claim to the whole regiment, including the sergeant-major's cook for his father. He has just come down from the Punjab with the Agra convoy, but the commanding officer dismissed him at Cawnpore, because he had a young wife of his own, and was jealous of the good looks of Micky. 89.

From this relatively scanty information, Wood has built up the character of the Bombardier, and linked him with Mrs. Jones Parry (yet another historical character, who functions differently in the play from real life). He did not appear in the original script, but was inserted, and developed through rehearsals. His speech before facing death from a Firing Squad relies heavily on Forbes-Mitchell, with the addition of some startling and grotesque Wood images:

> I am Irish, has you never seen a black
> Irish? And my mother black
> as the bottom of a pot. My father is the
> whole regiment of the 87th Royal Irish
> who has been through my mother,
> very often carrying their boots
> and wearing their packs, for she
> is of the regimental bazaar and
> very bandy,
> as well as Irish. 90.

Language, props, and stage 'business' also lift the Prologue from being merely a Music Hall sequence, or a pedantic re-enactment of a historical event, or even a pale copy of a commedia scenario. Language, in particular, is shown to be a great barrier to understanding. All the characters, except the Havildar, have a 'second-hand' way of speaking. Such lines of the Bombardier as 'to the which I replied him', sound like ill-digested grammar exercises, whilst the long section of his first monologue:

> never did
> a Government or a People meet a
> terrible disaster with a more
> Undaunted Front than that displayed
> by the Government and White people
> of India, when the full extent of the
> Peril caused by the rising of the
> Sepoy Army was first understood. 91.

reads suspiciously like a passage from an English History textbook. Both are the results of an inadequate and inefficient system of native education and development, and are directly related to the cultural'

conflict. Mullett, of course, tries hard to communicate with the natives in their own language, but he has made no effort to learn it, and reads from a primer, only to be rescued by the Havildar, who uses the vernacular. There is clearly no substitute for first-hand experience, and the privileged subaltern is hopelessly unprepared.

The Havildar embodies another of the play's ironies. A representative of the old India, passive, accepting, but wise, he is prepared ultimately to fight for his deeply-held beliefs, remaining totally trustworthy until his hope of eternal salvation is threatened by the desecrated cartridge, and he is incited to violence. His deferential reference to the green young Englishman as 'father', although he himself is old enough to be Mullett's grandfather, contains the roots of the later conflict, whilst its Oedipal nature is explicity summed up by the Bombardier's later confession of his private fantasy of coupling with the Queen, a startling contrast to the Victorian ideal of natural order expressed by Tennyson's 'The mother featured in the son.' 92.

The action of the Prologue is developed from the use of two props, both with vital historical significance, a chupatty and a cartridge. According to the Prompt Copy, the chupatty, a flat piece of unleavened bread, was passed first of all through the curtain in the National Theatre production, then from Sepoy to Sepoy in music-hall fashion, with Mullett performing a vaudeville-style funny walk backwards along the line, reading his Manual. Although warned by the Bombardier that it is a message of 'Some Disturbing Kind', Mullett laughs and passes it on, an action vividly illustrating the prevalent English incomprehension of, and indifference to, the potentially ugly situation. The chupatty was, historically, a symbol of imminent uprising, and was passed from village to village with the instruction, as the Bombardier says:

> In the Affair
> Of the Chapati, they are to make ten
> more, keep one and pass on the others
> is generally told them. 93.

As a matter of historical fact, the accepted symbol for the Sepoy was a lotus flower, but the chupatty presumably made a better theatrical prop. The ripples of underlying violence caused by the mention of the uprising at Meerut by Mullett, and his use of the word 'Mutiny', are made more disturbing by the ending of the sequence, when the Bombardier catches the chupatty after Mullett has indifferently thrown it over his shoulder, and, using it as a swab, rams it up the barrel of his gun on a ramrod: another vivid, violent theatrical image underlining the menace of the situation.

Next comes the cartridge, and the explanation that it is smeared with the fat of either pig or cow, and therefore offensive to Hindu or Moslem. The caste system is explained, and the fact that, once defiled, the only way for a Brahmin to be resanctified was to spend a large sum of money, an impossibility on the Sepoys' (most of whom were Brahmins) pay of seven rupees a month. The inept British attempt to rectify this fundamental error is portrayed by Mullett's dependence on the drill outlined in the Platoon Exercise Manual of 1847 (revised), and the demonstration of how the cartridge should be held and torn, not bitten. This is all too much for the Indians, and the Havildar mutilates Mullett with his own sword. The Bombardier throws in his lot with the natives, who have wheeled off his gun (a cutout in the National production), the symbol of his security, and a Freudian outlet for his understandable aggression, with the final words 'Alas, poor Mullett, I knew him well', a jokey parody relating Mullett, his skull cleft by the Havildar, to Yorick the Fool, the skull beneath the skin, and the Prologue to the themes of usurpation and revenge, and the cataclysmic events to follow.

Thus, the historical facts have been outlined, the roots of the conflict detailed, though it is very doubtful if an audience would be able to identify and understand all the issues involved. One of the drawbacks to a clear understanding of the play in the theatre is the density and unfamiliarity of the language, though, paradoxically, this is also one of its strengths. Peter Nichols, Wood's fellow-author, commented at an advanced Dress Rehearsal that he thought it would be difficult for an audience to attune itself in the first quarter of an hour, which means that much of the rest of the play would be very confusing. This obviously happened in performance, and here lies a fundamental weakness of the play, together with a proliferation of necessary historical detail, and a duplication of words and images. Both Designer and Director were concerned with making the material as lucid as possible, and ensuring the audience understood what was happening, but in a short rehearsal period, with a fluid script, a huge cast, and elaborate scenery, this was not really possible.

The Epilogue could hardly be in greater contrast to the almost agit-prop caricaturing of the Prologue. The full resources of the stage were used for it. In the National Theatre production four cut-out cloths were flown in, and Havelock's monument rose on a lift. At the rear of the stage, a pale-tinted cloth with an Indian temple and mountains in the background provided a backdrop. In front of it, a grove of trees appeared, then a verdant glade of the Dilkusha, with a small bandstand, and the British flag proudly fluttering; at

the front of the stage more trees were flown in, and Havelock's grave occupied the centre. It is a scene of great tranquility, suffused with the natural beauty of India. There is no hot sun beating down, nor torrential downpour, and this is clearly a place for reflection. (see Appendix D p.187-190.). The mood is reflective, too. The hierarchical structure still remains as part of the visual context of the scene, for native servants still hold sunshades over the Jones Parrys, and there is an Ayah to look after the child, but, of course, this is no more than a Victorian family of good standing would expect at home. Instead of the confusion over religion of the Prologue, there is now a sense of forgiveness. All suffered, and the places of greatest suffering have now become shrines rather than excuses for vengeance. Once again, Wood quotes directly from his sources. Jones Parry's lines:

> 'So long as the memory of great
> deeds, and high courage and spotless
> self devotion is cherished among his
> fellow countrymen, so long will
> Havelock's lonely grave beneath the
> scorching Eastern sky,
> hard by the vast city, the scene
> alike of his toil and triumph
> and his death, be regarded as one
> of the most holy of the countless
> spots where Britain's patriot
> soldiers lie.' 94.

are, in fact, the final paragraph of Forbes' Havelock, unchanged. The sentiment is Victorian, a hymn to heroism, echoing Tennyson's

> The man remains, and whatso'er
> He wrought of good or brave
> Will mould him thro' the cycle-year
> That dawns beyond the grave. 95.

The use, later in the speech, of words like 'brotherhood' and 'weary blanks in the family circle' bring home the importance of Havelock's family to him, and extend into the wider context of everybody's loss. Here stands a new family, the result of the conflict, a new hope for the future, but they have lost too. Timothy is not to forget that this place was also where his real father was executed, a sacrifice to a better world. Once more a Tennysonian note is struck:

> and never more
> Careless of our growing kin
> Shall we sin our father's sin. 96.

The immaturity of the Prologue has been left behind, memories of the past are seen as cautionary reminders, and the future is to be given over to wholeness and adulthood.

A careful consideration of just two scenes has revealed rather more than merely meets the eye. The play's title, however, suggests

that the events of the Mutiny, and its aftermath, provide a framework for the more important central figure, Havelock, and since he existed as an extremely well-documented historical figure, it will be of interest and value to examine Wood's own historical sources for Havelock and the Mutiny, and to outline his theatrical development of them.

Wood used two main books by military historians which deal specifically with Havelock; one by Archibald Forbes, first published in 1890, the other by Leonard Cooper, in 1957, the centenary of the Mutiny. Cooper relies heavily on Forbes, and another biography by Havelock's contemporary and brother-in-law, Marshman. Wood's use of Forbes' final paragraph has already been mentioned, and other examples will be quoted, but Cooper provides the visual stimulus for Havelock, and, indeed, for at least some of the play's presentation, a fact on which the author and Michael Annals are agreed, and one which is substantiated by the illustrations (see Appendix D p. 183.).

The frontispiece of Cooper's book (see Appendix D p. 191.) is the reproduction of a painting of Havelock by an unnamed artist. In it, Havelock sits under the awning of his tent, a slim, immaculately-dressed officer in frock coat, overlaid with sash, and medal. On the table at his left lie maps, an open dispatch box, and bound Bible. To the right of it stands his military chest with the insignia of the 78th, and his sword of office. To its right, a soldier in Highland dress is on guard before a camp of tents, and beyond lies an Indian city, looking exactly like a painted theatrical backcloth, complete with lowering clouds, rays of sun breaking through, and tall palm trees which provide little shade. Havelock's sharp, intelligent gaze is fixed on the observer. His expression is ascetic, and the aquiline nose is more suggestive of a scholar than a man of action, an impression heightened by the quill pen in his right hand.

Forbes, however, finds this painting, and a marble bust of Havelock, too idealised, and publishes instead the only photograph of him, a miniature worn in a locket by his wife (see Appendix D p.192.). Here, he looks older and rounder. The hair, immaculately white and well-groomed in the print, is grizzled and untidy. The painter caught the nose well, but there is worry and anxiety in the furrows above it in the photo. These do not appear in the painting, where the high forehead is accentuated. The sharp incisiveness of the painting is transformed, in the photograph, into the wistful expression of a man who has suffered much. There is a maturity and experience in it which the print loses in its idealised superficiality. The

painting is of Havelock, Victorian soldier and hero, the photo of Havelock, the man. There is at least one other portrait, that reproduced on the front of the National Theatre programme (see Appendix D p.193.), which shows the splendour of his regalia, and makes him look a little older.

Cooper describes Havelock verbally:

> Havelock's hair was perfectly white, but he was as erect as ever. He wore, as he continued to wear throughout the campaign, a blue frock-coat, tan leggings which were buttoned from thigh to ankle, and a forage cap with white cover. 97.

Wood's description at Havelock's first entrance in the printed version of the play is very similar:

> General Havelock is a small, grey-whiskered gentleman in blue undress frock coat with forage cap and white cover. He is tanned almost black by the sun and looks very old. He wears drab coloured waterproof leggings buttoned the length of his legs. He is neat, erect, and quick as a bird. 98.

Wood stresses his smallness, and gives him grey whiskers rather than white. He also emphasises the physical problems of the campaign by stressing Havelock's weather-stricken complexion, and emphasising his age. The man of action is depicted in the possibilities for movement offered by the stage, and the actor is able to take up the hint of bird-like qualities to develop the character's extremes of hawk and dove.

It was Wood's original intention and wish that the role of Havelock should be played by Sir John Gielgud, who had played Raglan in 'The Charge', and Olivier was to have directed the production. It is idle to speculate what might have been had this formidable team brought the play to the stage, but, in practice, this proved impossible. Geoffrey Reeves was brought in to direct, and Robert Lang played Havelock. Lang's photograph (see Appendix D p.194.), shows a striking resemblance to the later Havelock painting, but historical verisimilitude is only a starting point, and I shall now examine the role of Havelock in terms of its dramatic development.

Two of Forbes' statements seem to be particularly relevant in this context:

> There are two occasions on which a man, reserved by nature and training, is apt to disclose himself without restraint; in confidential communication with his closest and most trusted friend; and on his deathbed face to face with eternity. 99.

and,

> among the best evidences of his qualification for leadership was the ready magnetic tact with which, while indulging his propensity, he could by a happy word get at the hearts of men who were adamant to oratorical bunkum. 100.

Since the first of these quotations appeared on the first page of

Forbes' book, and the second is starred in Wood's own copy, they provide a firm basis from which to develop a consideration of the private man, confiding his fears, worries and doubts to his wife, and son, Harry; and the public soldier, the General urging on his men, against ever-increasing odds.

Like Dingo this play is very much an epic presentation despite its dependence on Victorian theatrical practices. It ranges over wide areas of time and place, presenting a heightened and stylised view of real events, and seems to owe much to Brecht's dictum:

> The poetic approach to history can be studied in the so-called panoramas at sideshows in fairs. 101.

As in Dingo, war is seen to be intrinsically wrong, and full of dreadful happenings, but this play is softer, more compassionate, the targets and criticism diffused, and the suffering and sacrifice are not without nobility. Dingo himself, a small man, was the central figure of his play, and his function as a key feature of epic theatre in the Brechtian sense has already been examined. Always a survivor, he remains very much alive at the end of the play. Havelock, on the other hand, is a 'great' man, one who occupies a high position, has fatal flaws, and dies at the end. He is, therefore, a direct opposite of Dingo,one who seems to be cast dramatically in an Aristotelian mould but is, in fact, much closer to the kind of modern, pre-epic 'bourgeois' dramatic hero outlined by Lukacs. With his portrayal, Wood comes closest in all his works to the conception of a dramatic hero figure, although the character is often overwhelmed by the extraordinarily complex theatricality.

Lukacs' essay was first completed in 1909, but his views seem particularly relevant to this characterisation, not least in the immediate link they provide with the public and private pressures which assail Havelock:

> ...the more the vital motivating centre is displaced outward (i.e. the greater the determining force of external factors), the more the centre of tragic conflict is drawn inward; it becomes internalised, more exclusively a conflict in the spirit. 102.

There was no conflict in the spirit of the commanders in 'The Charge', much more a clash of wills. Havelock has as much to contend with externally as Cardigan and Lucan but, unlike them, has inner qualities to fall back on, and the conflicts in his spirit, though deep and seemingly irreconcilable, are at least capable of resolution by his Christian faith. The will, however, is for Lukacs the means by which man grows into a dramatic hero. His essence is poured out in deeds which depend on the intensity of his will, and the essential dynamism is provided by the total identification of will and deed. In fact,

> drama remains possible so long as the dynamic force of the will is strong enough to nourish a struggle of life and death dimensions, where the entire being is rendered meaningful. 103.

It is an outward force, though, one which remains alien to the hero, which moves him to action. Man is merely a pawn, and his will is his possible move, not his actual, which is subject to 'the abstractum'. Certainly, Havelock is a man of strong will who has triumphed over adversity to gain the highest position, although, as a pawn, he has it taken from him at a critical moment. There is no doubt that, for him, 'the abstractum' is God, but Lukacs' statements that the modern hero is passive, and requires less of outward splendour, success, and victory than his predecessors, are surprisingly true of this unusual soldier. His regalia is correct rather than ostentatious and, although success and victory are important to him in what he sees as a crusade, his passivity is that of the Lukacs hero who is more acted upon than acting for himself, who defends rather than attacks, and whose heroism is one of 'anguish, of despair, not one of bold aggressiveness.' Moreover, according to Lukacs, the new hero should have a sense of the ecstatic, and a view of Death as a rounding-off which will fulfil and perfect his personality, and offer him 'the transcendence, greatness and illumination which life withheld.' Havelock's Christian view of the after-life as an ideal Christian (and socialist) Utopia is his constant preoccupation.

In H, Havelock is given full heroic prominence as befits his public status, but his internal struggles - his private worries, sense of personal inadequacy, and the importance of his strong and loving family relationships - are given even more detailed treatment. His beginnings appear to have been relatively humble (the real Havelock's father was a shipbuilder who put all his money into land and was forced to sell it just as his son was about to enter University). In the play, he has been in the service for over 40 years, most of them spent in relatively low rank, preferring, as a non-purchase officer, to spend what little money he earned on his family. Army life has not been easy for him. He informs us that he has been purchased over by 'three sots and two fools', a statement which actually first occurs in one of his letters, quoted by Forbes; and, when first in India, was forced to look for employment which would offer him the opportunity of promotion. Unlike the privileged Binghams and Brudenelles his climb to fame was long and arduous. He is at all times motivated by his Christian faith although, ironically, he can also be seen as a vengeful Imperialist with a purgative mission.

Religion, Victorian views of society and the Army with its hierarchy, provide Wood with chains of command and structures to

present, compare, contrast, turn inside-out, and provide the audience with an astonishing theatrical experience. Across the stage, men from the highest of Victorian generals to George Hodge, and from saintly Jemadar to foul-mouthed Bombardier - and even a woman - fight, love, excrete, argue, tremble, and die, in front of, behind, and through front cloths, replicas of toy theatres, backcloths, wings, sets, and even fire extinguishers, in a series of complicated panoramas. Through this chaotic morass Havelock ploughs on, or, rather, floats, for, authentic as the painted backcloths and uniforms may be in terms of period, the play is really a more subliminal, dream-like evocation of battle, and once again, as in Dingo, people die, but are resurrected. Havelock himself has an eerie, ghost-like quality, something which was hinted at in the filmscript portrayal of Cardigan but failed to materialise. He often appears from darkness, or silent as a ghost, or watches from the shadows, and the already-mentioned dissemination of his speech in Act I sc.vii by the use of the 'Voice Over' technique occasions his comment to Harry 'You see, I am everywhere.' He has very solid physical attributes, too. Harry wonders in admiration how many horses he has had shot from under him (in the Sikh War at Moodkee, Forbes informs us, 'Havelock escaped unhurt, but had two horses shot under him'),[104] and refers to him, affectionately, as 'The Hammer'. He was strong enough to march 126 miles under India's hottest sun (a feat substantiated by the Order of the Day Havelock published after the battle of Cawnpore, quoted by Cooper), and is able, at the height of his delirium, to take his place at the apex of the pyramid of soldiers, in spite of the fact that when he sways the stage sways with him, and we share in his sickness (at least, that is what the printed version says, but this effect was impossible to achieve on stage). He is aware of his failing powers, however, and does not find it so easy to starve now, aged 63, as he did when 47 and shut up in Jallalabad (a fact again ratified by Forbes). By the time Lucknow is relieved even his energy is sapped as death approaches, and Harry has to take his place in the painting of the meeting with Outram and Campbell.

His bravery and courage are much respected by his men. One of his officers, Captain Maude (another factual character who wrote a book about his experiences, though a minor character in the play) says admiringly that he could willingly follow Havelock along the Grand Trunk Road for ever. Another, the Surgeon, Sooter, has formed a relationship of some warmth with him, whilst George Hodge sees him as a kind of Messiah. There are dissenters, too. Colonel Neill, the self-styled scourge of the natives thinks Havelock is too meek, a

Baptist, wey face, time waster. 105.

but much of this is pique at the way Havelock asserts his authority at their first meeting. Hopes and wishes, strength of character, and magnanimity, are all part of Havelock's makeup, and despite Neill's criticism, he always speaks gently and highly of him. Maude, too, complains of the way in which Havelock lost the initiative in the narrow streets of Lucknow, putting Outram, and the soldiers, in an untenable position:

> Where was your father
> when we looked for a direction,
> a bound, an objective,
> a word to carry us? 106.

and the men in the field hospital at Cawnpore condemn him in chorus:

ALL. Damn you Havelock, I am dead. 107.

Although sustained by his faith, and the love of his family, Havelock is still assailed by doubt and fear. A compassionate man, he talks sadly of the deaths likely in the unrelieved garrison of Cawnpore, and is particularly concerned at the plight of married people. This concern extends to his soldiers, too, and he has halted the advance guard for Cawnpore because, he says, they need his protection. His attitude to women is unexpectedly caring, both for a Victorian man and a Wood soldier, and he urges his soldiers to respect British ladies, particularly Christian mothers. He informs his officers that he expects them to regard him as accompanied by his wife at all times, except on the actual field of battle. Forbes quotes an Irish soldier who was impressed by Havelock's gentleness:

> Sure he talked to us as to ladies in a drawing-room, so quiet and polite. 108.

This homeliness is present in Havelock's explanation of what faces the ladies of Cawnpore. For those at home in England, he tells the men, death is:

> merely the going from the one
> room to another
> to meet children who have
> gone before so oftentimes and gently
> wait their mother. 109.

and is a common occurrence, almost taken for granted. In Cawnpore, however, what the ladies are faced with:

> without shelter,
> without calm,
> without Peace,
> with fear of savage Carnage,
> is to suffer the agony
> of hell though
> not yet judged. 110.

They are to face the heathen onslaught without the opportunity of coming to terms with their Maker, and this public agony is to be made

by the soldiers into a 'poignant memory', of which vengeance is the keynote. Havelock's vengeance differs qualitatively from Neill's, and his insistence that some of Neill's prisoners be hanged 'without brutality', though seemingly absurd, is seen to make sense when the kind of torture meted out by Neill and some of his men is observed. Later, Havelock shows true Christian concern, stating that though he would not advocate mercy for the perpetrators of some of the horrific actions:

> The time for such terrible punishment
> is gone, it can only appear now
> as the blind rage of an unreasoning
> brute. 111.

Havelock's predilection for purification is emphasised by Jack Brian's use of words like 'sweep' and 'clean' for him, and this is just one facet of the Old Testament element of his Christianity which is tempered by his compassionate view of the lower orders, but hardened by his first-hand experience of them in the Army. A paterfamilias by inclination as well as by convention, he laments the fact that he has not had time to train his men to temperance, and bemoans the fact that the rum ration does not seem to dry up, because:

> they improve out of all
> imagining when the grog is
> run out. 112.

His opinion of his men differs very much from that of the Crimean officers. For him they are:

> sweet persons,
> very dutiful and kind to their
> officers and civilian vanquished. 113.

and this decidedly rosy-tinted view is seen for what it is worth later in the same speech, when he tells us:

> it is very rare to have
> them rape when they are sober, that
> is a thing not known to those who
> would criticise the soldiers of Britain as the scum of life. 114.

His speech to the soldiers in the rain (Act 2 scene 7) reveals more of his attitude towards them. Although drunk, they satisfy him in battle, he tells them, petulantly singling out a soldier with his head uncovered. In his eyes the only remedy for bad behaviour is strong discipline, and he makes hard rules. Any man caught outside the lines, or catching game, will be flogged, and anyone caught selling loot will be hanged in his uniform, though the men are given a day to sack Cawnpore. Drunkenness, rapine, and sacking, are as endemic to a Victorian army on the march as cholera, and Havelock has a constant struggle to counteract their effects. He is not entirely depressed, however, by the low standard of morality among the lower

rankers. Before dying he tells us that he has been thinking a lot of England, where, on his last leave, he had seen signs of great social changes:

> the middle and
> even the lowest classes have
> improved their morality and decency. 115.

and he notes with some pleasure the formation of trade unions:

> for the promotion of industry,
> comfort, and decidedly of religion. 116.

There does seem to be great hope in him for a new, classless society, with all men equal before God, and morally decorous. The only cloud on this Utopian horizon is provided by the upper classes. England, he says, seems to be more intensely aristocratic, and the wealthy and great seem entirely wrapt in themselves, 'avarice is their great idol'. In these sentiments, Wood's character echoes the thoughts and language of the real Havelock, who recorded his impressions of England in 1850, after a 30 years absence:

> England appears to me to be more intensely aristocratic than ever.. The great changes are, the rapidity of communication by locomotives, the extraordinary increase of the power of the press, the improved morality and decency of habits of the middle and lowest classes, and the accumulation of unions for the promotion of industry, comfort, and decidedly of religion..... The wealthy and the great are entirely wrapt up in themselves and their own interests. Avarice is the great idol, greater even than fame just now. 117.

His own main contribution to this ideal society lies in the promulgation of Christian values, and the men submissively form his flock. He is seen giving a Bible-reading class, where his simplicity, sincerity, and humility are in clear contrast with the inflated and meaningless 'religious' rhetoric of the Dingo officers, and absolutely unthinkable for Cardigan or Lucan. Joshua is the subject, and the name is equated with 'God the Saviour', and also with the slang word for soldier, 'josher'. This involves the soldiers personally, and Havelock extends the analogy. For him soldiers and Christians must have the same qualities. Courage is one of them, but this virtue, for a Christian, signifies far more than mere courage in battle, for a Christian soldier should aspire to do all that is written in the law of Moses. There is no likelihood of Havelock being carried away by hubris in any of these meetings. He knows that he is not the Saviour. He is a commander who will watch over and care for his soldiers, but they must lay no great trust in his human strength. Instead they must place it all in God. Havelock sees India as a gift from God, and the British are especially favoured by Him to administer it.

For Havelock, Christianity is not merely a moral code to be adopted to avoid trial and tribulation on earth, he is also concerned with the intangibles of time and eternity, and the care of the immortal soul which, with his sense of the ecstatic, and the idea of death as a rounding-off of the mortal coil, link well with Lukacs' conception of the dramatic hero. He implores the soldiers in the fallen pyramid to give themselves to Christ, and to speak to Him with humility and fellowship as they would speak to Havelock. His vision of an ideal Christian socialism will be fulfilled after death, when:

> you shall speak with them as equals, where
> there is nothing private, all
> worship of that glorious company
> is public. 118.

The general's hope for a better earthly society, and his conviction of a heavenly after-life, allow him to see the possibility that his men will, as he appears to have done,

> reverse the Vile Falsehood that
> it is never possible to be a
> soldier and a Christian at the
> once. 119.

This visionary quality does not allow him to neglect practicalities. He is concerned that, after his own death, his grave shall not become a shrine, and he himself shall not become a martyr to a false religion. People must not start a new religion based on hatred, and simple words of Christ must be put up in forgiveness.

His public avowal of Christianity, and the fortitude he receives from his faith, are not always reconciled with his inner doubts and fears. He is only too well aware of his isolation, and of the ultimate responsibility that is his alone:

> it is the fate of Generals to have
> no conversation other than
> monologues at front of burning cities. 120.

Harry describes his mood after Cawnpore as one of 'blackest gloom', and, after inviting the luckless Jones Parry to dinner, Havelock hardly instils confidence in him by asking if he has ever been near to death. He is consumed by anxiety, and the fear of failure is constantly with him. The death of colleagues, and of Lawrence, his dearest friend, adds to the prevailing sense of depression but he is, at least, aware of it, and asks Harry if he thought his father was 'drowned in my gloomy forebodings'. Harry is perceptive enough to see that the pressure caused by his replacement by Outram has affected him deeply, and the sensitivity of his position vis-à-vis the new commander worries him, though the latter regards him with respect and admiration. Havelock was never happy about the liaison with Outram, who delegated

command to him immediately after superseding, and the decisive moment when he and Outram were in the street at Lucknow and Havelock made his fatal hesitation has tarnished his military reputation. It was:

> not military correct
> and it gave me such times. 121.

Havelock is only too well aware of his own limitations as a man and a commander. He admits that he is a general who relies on intuition in battle, and knows that much success depends on luck. In a moment of truth ('in confidential communication with his closest and most trusted friend'), he admits that he made a bad decision at Lucknow:

> I had reasons, when I can, when my
> brain stops its whirl, I shall put
> my reasons to you. 122.

He dies before telling us what they were, but refuses to make excuses.

His doubts and fears lead him at times into horrible imaginings and, like Dingo, he has vivid dreams which he recalls clearly. After the liberation of Cawnpore, he dreamed that he was taken by a child into a nightmare of horse and cannon. His sword was cardboard, and there was mud to his thigh. Although he hacked and slashed, and fought, he was impotent, 'as a woman', and his horror at the treatment of women and children is captured in a series of vivid verbal images of children hanged on a hook, of the natives butchering so horribly that Sepoys were unable to look, of women pathetically offering themselves so that their children should be saved, of their pitiful attempts to defend themselves by tying rags to their doors, of their crying in vain:

> They cried, but there was none to
> hear, even unto the Lord they cried
> but he answered them not. 123.

He watched, a ghostly observer, adopting the other-worldly quality noted earlier:

> I stood ignored,
> a spirit in the real fleshing. 124.

It is this speech that Wood has Sir Geoffrey Kendle, played by Gielgud, the original choice for Havelock, speak twice in his next play Veterans.

These inner conflicts, fears, and anxieties, are compounded by external events, but, unlike the characters in 'The Charge' who, in the earlier scenes, did not know who their opponents would be, Havelock has a clear sense of history, nourished by reading Macaulay, and is positive and well-informed about the aims of his mission. He sees these as embracing both politics and religion. His political objective is to:

> restore the Supremacy of
> British rule and avenge the
> fate of British men and women. 125.

but he also sees himself as the leader of a crusade:

> This is a fight for the pure Christ,
> a fight against the devil for a
> Christian India. 126.

His faith sustains him throughout the campaign, and he is secure in the knowledge that God is on his side. Cawnpore, for example, was 'won by God's blessing, non vi sed arte',[127] and when, after all his struggles, the hand of death is upon him, he is able to bear the pain with equanimity because:

> God Almighty has seen fit to afflict
> me for some good purpose. 128.

Glimpses of the private Havelock are seen at various times when he is with his son Harry, also his aide, who has not yet fully accepted the Christian faith. When the men of the 78th remain silent and refuse to cheer after Havelock's speech urging them on to Cawnpore, he confides to Harry that it was 'a worryful moment', and later calls him over to protect him. His heart is beating fast with excitement, and he does not want the men to see him lest his elation might appear to be 'madness in an old gentleman'. Havelock suffers the torture of the spirit, but madness is seen only when he is in delirium, a physical manifestation, and Wood lays no stress on it in this play. The twin props of a loving family and a profound faith help him towards achieving an inner tranquility. Hannah, his wife, is seldom far from his thoughts. She forms for him a sacred ideal of womanhood, a concept which none of the other works includes, and one which is based on fact. Forbes informs us that Havelock's marriage 'was the source of unalloyed happiness till the last day of his life.' As his death approaches, Havelock speaks to Hannah, the family ties strengthened, for Harry, too, is at his side. The delirium of his illness appears to lead him into what seems another fantasy, in which he sees his wife disfigured, her house burned down, and her child killed. Cooper's narrative, however, shows that this was a factual occurrence:

> In 1836, when the regiment was at Kurnool, Mrs. Havelock had gone with the girl and her younger brother, then aged five, to the hill-station of Landor, where they had a bungalow. One night the native servants ran out of their quarters and gave the alarm, when they saw flames leaping from the roof and playing round the wooden walls. They got Hannah out, but the little girl was dead and for weeks Hannah's life was in danger. 129.

Hannah shares her husband's deeply-held faith, and this sustains him to the end. Her name is on his lips as he dies:

I thank God dear Hannah, I thank
God for our hope in the Saviour,
We shall surely meet in Heaven. 130.

This speech is spoken so softly that he can hardly be heard, and the moment of his death is spectacularly bare. All the trappings of the stage have been removed, even the cloth he was lying on, and the walls of the theatre are seen, complete with fire extinguishers. And so, as in 'The Charge', the panoply, the colourful uniform, the neighing of horse, the excitement of battle, and the petty bickerings of commanders have led to nothing. Havelock, the hero of Lucknow, dies of dysentery, alone, and unencumbered by wordly goods. The contrast between the public and private man is complete.

Both Hinchliffe and Elsom came close to a sensible assessment of H. There is an inherent conflict in the demands of the Army and Church, and a strong element of the clash of cultures in the play; but, much more fundamental to the author's thinking, is the simple, basic question how do people come to terms with, or succumb to, or overcome, their own inadequacy, particularly when they have a public façade, and have to make crucial decisions? Wood's emphasis has shifted from Dingo's easy criticism of leaders from outside to an examination of the internal struggles behind the heroic exteriors, and from clear anti-war propaganda towards an awareness of complex issues and undercurrents. The simple condemnation of Montgomery, Churchill, Cardigan et al. is now replaced by a very full examination of a multi-faceted man for whom there are no easy decisions, and who can be muddle-headed and noble, inept and incisive. Havelock is the most positive of Wood's characters, one for whom we can feel great sympathy though being well aware of his failings. These are the result of human weakness which we all share rather than the bumptious pride Wood wanted us to see in other public figures. Dingo was always quick to criticise others but gave us nothing to admire in himself. Havelock is equally aware of malpractices, but deals with them, on the whole, compassionately and sensitively, showing consideration rather than carping unnecessarily. He is not, like the other officers Wood condemns, privileged. He had to work hard to achieve his position, learning much at first-hand on his way to the top. Wood shows that his public persona is moulded by such external factors as the irreconcilable conflict of cultures, and the deep divisions in English society, exemplified by the Army. He is the commander, the apex of the pyramid, a man to be admired by all despite his failings, and who, after his death, justifiably, if rather ironically, became a popular hero thus, in Lukacs' terms, achieving 'the transcendence, greatness and illumination which life withheld.'

His internal struggle - the difficulty of retaining a Christian meekness and humility, the importance of caring for others less fortunate, his sense of personal inadequacy, and the magnitude of the decisions to be made - is to some extent resolved by his faith, but this, in itself, is not always easy to maintain when anger rises at deeds of appalling and unnecessary violence. Strong conflicts arise, too, in his accepted role as a man of action. He has displayed strength of will, fortitude, resilience, and immense stamina to reach his present position, but his very maturity as a leader and father, coupled with his qualities of imagination, slows him down, breeds passivity because of his recognition of danger to others, and makes him occasionally inept and indecisive. Unlike all the other characters mentioned so far, Havelock is capable of forming deep and lasting relationships, which survive great adversity. Even so, his emotional stability is still not sufficent to shield him from anguish and despair and his death is not only the result of his dreadful privations. It is also brought on by his intense personal worries about the rightness of his decisions, and the usurpation of his position. There is a sense of his taking on too much too late, of which he is well aware:

> I am too old for fame
> but I think I shall have it. 131.

and Wood leaves us, in that last powerful theatrical image, a final view of a man of rare quality destroyed by circumstances. In Lukacs' terms, Havelock is as near as Wood comes to portraying a hero of tragic dimension.

The problem with attempting to write coherently about H is that there is enough material in it for at least five plays. Havelock is evidently the main character but, as the author points out in his Preface to the printed version, the play should really be about another officer, Jones-Parry. This little man, yet another real character who wrote an account of his adventures, is an absurd, clown-like figure in the play, who constantly seeks advancement but never finds it because of his ineptitude. His wife accompanies him, and her motivating force appears to be dedicated to achieving sexual fulfilment. She finds it, but in horrific circumstances which, paradoxically, lead to happiness, as the Epilogue shows. In his book, An Old Soldier's Memories, the real Jones-Parry recounts how he set sail from England with his new bride, but, hearing from an officer of the Madras Fusiliers that 'all India was in a blaze', he sent her home from Suez only a month after they married. As a character, she is Wood's own invention, the only woman in the play.

Jones-Parry provides a contrast with Havelock's dignified saintliness. He is a natural fool of fortune. At crucial moments, when called to parade for example, his trousers cannot be found; he has a finger tip shot off, and the rest of it is unceremoniously and unexpectedly bitten off by Sooter to avoid infection; the Monkey God (another of Wood's stage devices, a gold-painted dancer) squirts water over him from its outsize phallus, though he does have his own back later by cuffing it around the ear with a rifle. Worse still is his behaviour when invited to dinner by Havelock. He commits numerous faux pas, and is snubbed on several occasions by both Sooter and Maude. On another occasion, when the Jemadar is strapped to the gun, waiting to be launched into eternity, Jones-Parry embarrasses everyone by breaking from the ranks and delivering a long, passionate speech about the inherent superiority of the British, even though he eventually realises his mistake and ends lamely 'Oh dear'.

Although a born loser and accident-prone (the real Jones-Parry tells many amusing stories against himself: 'I ran back, and, just as I reached the guns, I tripped up and came head over heels, much to the amusement of the gunners. I gave my message, and was about to rejoin, when I found I had lost my revolver'),[132] he does have private moments when he reveals inner qualities. He has a deep concern for his wife's fate, and a private sadness descends on him when, weary and bloodstained from the battle, and after his marvellously atmospheric rendering of 'Watchman What of the Night?' Sooter tells him of his wife's capture by the natives, and the probable consequences. He is an efficient officer, too, well-versed in the function of Enfield rifles and, like his leader, intolerant of sloppiness in the men, whom he smartens up before they shoot the Bombardier. In an important moment in the play, which relates directly to the 'theatrical' instances noted in the two films, he is faced with the enemy, and loses his grip for a moment, not because he is a coward, but because he is suddenly faced with reality:

> Here we see the greasepaint for a moment. Captain Jones-Parry seems to lose way, his mouth opening and closing and no words to bite on, a slackening and grinding down. For an instant. And then back again. 133.

This reaction is surprising in one who normally shows a bland equanimity to difficult circumstances, a characteristic which Sooter finds it difficult to understand:

> You has no doubts whatever you
> are to survive, you has no doubts
> you are destined for glory you
> has no doubts in any way that this
> shall be the most famous of wars,

> yield the most honours,
> and have the most value to civilisation. 134.

and Jones-Parry is just as surprised at Sooter:

> I shall be astonished to find any
> normal ambitious officer in India
> today has doubts. 135.

War and battle change him, and, later, worried at the way in which some of Sooter's words have called into question the whole purpose and nature of existence, and with the change in tone of the play from heroic to pathetic, he eventually sits down:

> exhausted, shaking his head and plucking at
> the debris, pulling on a piece of cloth and
> soothing it on his knee. 136.

His main theatrical function in the later part of the play is to set up the cloths.

Like Havelock, his wife is of great importance to him, and being without her is like losing a limb. Their reconciliation is touching. They talk only of trivia - health, friends and pastimes. He has gained no advancement but has collected some gold and silver, and his attitude towards the natives has hardened for none of them assisted his wife when she was in desperate straits. She smells, but he is so delighted to have her back that he offers to wash her clothes himself.

He is at his sensitive best in the Epilogue, although, even here, he perpetrates what Havelock would construe as false religion by telling 'his' son, Timothy, that Havelock's grave is sacred, and recalls his earlier embarrassing speech about the holiness of places. He reads the inscription, which honours the memory of great deeds, high courage, and spotless self-devotion, and notes the cross which Outram had carved himself, a generous gesture indeed. His wife sounds perhaps the most private note of all with her reminder to Timothy, and Samuel, that, besides being a place of great tranquility and beauty, hallowed by the General's grave, it is also the spot where the Bombardier was shot, a cautionary reminder of the horror of war rather than a deflation of heroic sentiments. For all his silliness, Jones-Parry never utters a word of reproach to his wife, and accepts Timothy unquestioningly.

Jones-Parry is another well-rounded portrait of an officer who is by no means totally stupid. There are two other contenders for inclusion in Wood's new gallery, set apart from the cartoons of Dingo: the hubristic Neill who actually says that the play should be about him (and the fact that Wood relegated this thoughtless, vindictive commander to a relatively minor role shows the way that his approach

has changed from the mud-slinging of Dingo - he would have made an ideal anti-war, anti-officer target); and the thoughtful, perceptive Surgeon Sooter, seen by John Russell Taylor as:

> the only character able partially to bridge the gap between ideals and realities. 137.

Each officer, from Havelock to Sooter, is of interest in his own right, and Wood seems undecided which one should be of most importance. Havelock has to be because of his undoubted prominence, but for his role to be as dominating and impressive as it should be, the others, particularly in such a huge play, needed to be pared down to provide more of a background. As it is, they perhaps occupy the foreground too much.

Proliferation of detail hampers the play's progression generally, and clouds understanding. We cannot be sure whether it is a drama of character with tragic overtones, or of ideas, or a history play with contemporary relevance, an anti-war melodrama, a grand spectacular showing the advantages of live performance, or a fantasia in which an audience of the Swinging Sixties could further indulge its fascination with colourful military uniform. It contains all these elements, and further confusion is caused by its hybrid theatrical form which uses the potentially bathetic methods of Victorian spectacular theatre in an alienatory, Brechtian manner, with a 'bourgeois' hero at its centre; and its linguistic spectrum which ranges from the appalling language of the Bombardier to the sensuality of Neill's recollection of youth in the Indian service, from the pidgin English, sprinkled with native language and slang from the Sepoys, to Havelock's biblical rhetoric, and from the fulsome phrase to the odd twang of the British soldiers. A rigid hierarchy is reflected in the language, and it reflects uncommonly well the differences between public and private attitudes. If to all this we add the richness of factual and imaginative reconstruction of period and events, the result is a veritable Trimalchio's feast of drama which, because of its fascinating variety and unfamiliarity, is bound to be indigestible. One could perhaps wish that the author had been more frugal, but the play's flaws come from an excess of imagination and experience rather than dull pedantry.

In fact, H is so much denser in texture than the two films associated with it that it is difficult to understand how Malcolm Page could surmise that:

> Wood's script for the film 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' (1968) may be superior to his play about the British army of the same period H (1969). 138.

In the films, the language tends to be subordinated to the visual impact of the scenes, the camera being an important additional 'character', through whose 'eye' we view the dramatic events on

the screen. Thus, the first scene of Wood's screenplay of 'The Charge' has us seeing it through the camera 'At lower orders eye level', immediately making a selective social comment about the way we should view their superiors. In H the whole stage is before us, and we have to work hard to select our own detail from the mass of information presented. The film, then, can be said to be more 'disciplined', and has a clearer viewpoint than H (though it is imposed rather than allowed to develop), but lacks the depth of characterisation, linguistic richness, and sheer theatrical amazement of the play. 'Flashman', had it reached the screen, would have made fascinating viewing since its presentation grew from that of H, and would have used the freedom of the screen and its resources to great effect, but it would have been empty at the core. Flashman is too nebulous a character, too sub-Casanova, for him to really engage our attention amidst the welter of cinematic effects, as Havelock just manages to do in the theatre.

The author's development from the taut, short, small-screen oriented Army plays to the prodigality of H, via the strictures of Dingo, shows an increasing confidence in handling vast amounts of material. The poetically-heightened restricted language codes of the early plays are opened out into a fluent, though possibly loquacious, use of rhetoric and imagery, and the single sets they occupied are now festooned with ever-changing panoramas. In the move from relative simplicity and technical frugality towards increasing complexity something has been lost, and much gained. The earlier plays were tighter in construction and more focussed on an event or set of characters; the later one is rambling, loose, and bursting at the seams with ideas and information. The subject material, though basically similar, now needs more careful critical appraisal, and the would-be critic requires some specialised knowledge of historical background and theatrical techniques to examine them.

H, 'The Charge', and 'Flashman' are all about war and battle, and their effect on soldiers and, occasionally, civilians. A survey of other factors common to these works has pointed to the writer's preoccupation with status, and the great chain of being, which extends from God at its highest, in Havelock's vision (though Cardigan is seen singing heartily 'The heathen in his blindness bows down to wood and stone' in church), through commanders and subordinate officers, to NCOs and lower ranks, natives, and women, closely followed by horses. Suffering of all kinds is also an ever-present ingredient, only partially mitigated by an occasional deeply-held faith, and the support and love of family and friends; and human failings are omnipresent, from the bigotry of the aristocracy to the loathsomeness of the Bombardier.

Chief among them is the sense of inadequacy, the inability to cope with intense and demanding pressure, and make important, correct decisions. These were all present in Dingo, but Wood has now developed an ability to characterise rather than merely caricature. This process started with the filling-in of Dingo himself as a character, and continues with Cardigan, who comes over strongly, created with a few bold strokes, though he functions all on the surface. It culminates in Havelock, Jones-Parry, and Forbes Mitchell, who are all sensitive men, unlike most of Wood's earlier characters, trying to resolve the conflicts they find in themselves and their circumstances. In place of Dingo's clear didacticism, they have problems to overcome, ambiguities to deal with. They do not always make the right decisions, but now Wood does not condemn them. He presents them, warts and all, without bias, for us to make our own judgments on, not, as in Dingo, as a foregone conclusion. This is not necessarily so beneficial a development as it sounds. On the whole, there is much more to admire in the later play, as an analysis of some scenes has shown, but its impact is decidedly fuzzier, less direct and challenging than that of Dingo. The constant and bigoted criticism of Dingo forced the audience to come to terms with it in some way. The bland humanity of H often submerges in a sea of theatrical magic (which Dingo's Brechtian bareness rejected), occasionally surfacing to allow us to glimpse it, only to disappear again as we struggle with the complexity of history and its symbolism, and fumble for our programmes to check what exactly is happening.

In the theatre, the author has an assured mastery of stage technique, which is not always so apparent in his control and shaping of material. Indeed, the quality of his visual imagination, based in part on an obsessive attention to minute detail in vast panoramas, and enhanced by the sonic effects of language, is perhaps unique in modern British drama; whilst the taking-over of techniques from one medium to another is an impressive and effective way of extending the limits of both. These later works suffer from the very weight of the material used, and its trappings, and the ending of the exploratory, extravagant '60s sees Wood's obsession with the Army per se beginning to fade. Uniforms continue to fascinate him, but, in the plays of the '70s they are worn by actors playing roles in the epic conflicts of the film world. Two of them will be considered in the next chapter.

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APPENDIX D.

VISUAL MATERIAL RELATING TO 'THE CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE', H, AND 'FLASHMAN'.

'Last Stand at Gandamak'. p.176.

'Encampment of Horse Artillery near Balaclava'. p.177.

'Charge of the Light Cavalry Brigade'. p.178.

H. The Frontcloth. p.179.

'The Meeting of Generals Havelock, Outram and Campbell at Lucknow', by T.Jones Barker. p.180.

'Gunners await the order to blast mutineers from cannons.' p.181.

H. The Toy Theatre. Designs by Michael Annals and production photographs. p.182-186.

H. The Epilogue. Designs by Michael Annals. p.187-189.

H. The Epilogue. Photograph of Mrs. Jones-Parry and Timothy. p.190.

H. Havelock. The frontispiece of Cooper's book. p.191.

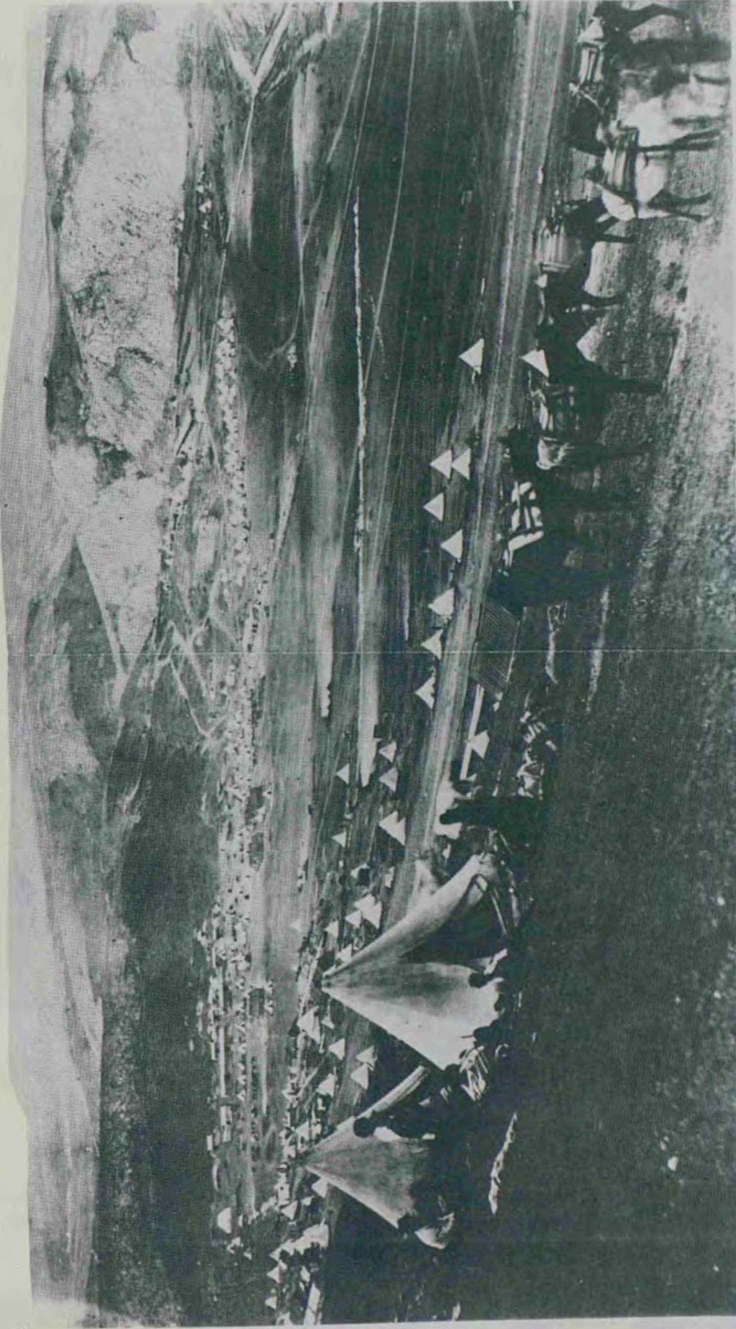
H. Havelock. The Forbes photograph. p.192.

H. Havelock. Portrait. p.193.

H. Havelock. Robert Lang as Havelock. p.194.

Last Stand at Gandamak

Seven days after leaving Kabul, the last tattered survivors of the Company's army – bar a few horsemen who had ridden on ahead – reached the village of Gandamak. The 59 officers and men made easy targets: they were frozen and exhausted, and had just 20 muskets and 40 rounds of ammunition left. But the Afghans made no move to finish them off. Instead, a British officer was called out to parley and in the lull tribesmen came up and chatted to his men. Then, when the tribesmen began to snatch the men's muskets from their hands, the British forced them back and thus sealed their own fate. The Afghans retired to pick off the survivors one by one and finally, as the British fired off the last of their ammunition, closed in with drawn swords. The only officer to survive this final slaughter (below) was a Captain Souter (right of centre), who had swathed the regimental colours round his waist. Because of this, the Afghans, believing him to be worth a large ransom, took him and a few privates hostage.

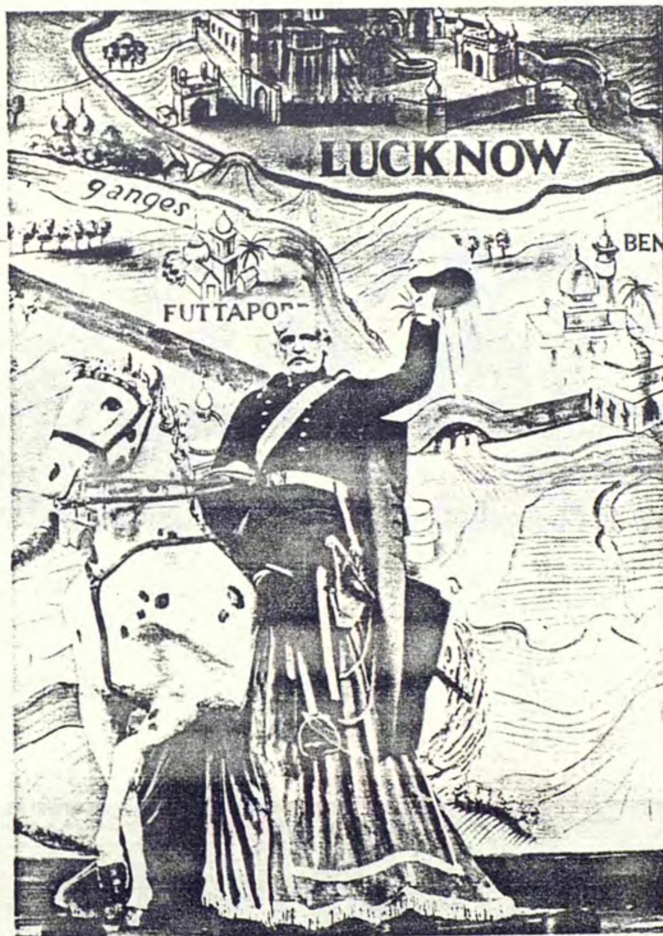


Encampment of Horse Artillery near Balaclava.

"CHARGE OF THE LIGHT CAVALRY BRIGADE"

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

H. The Frontcloth.



This is a photograph of the frontcloth actually used in the National Theatre production, not the one described by Wood in the printed version. Havelock (Robert Lang) is seen in the foreground riding a property horse.

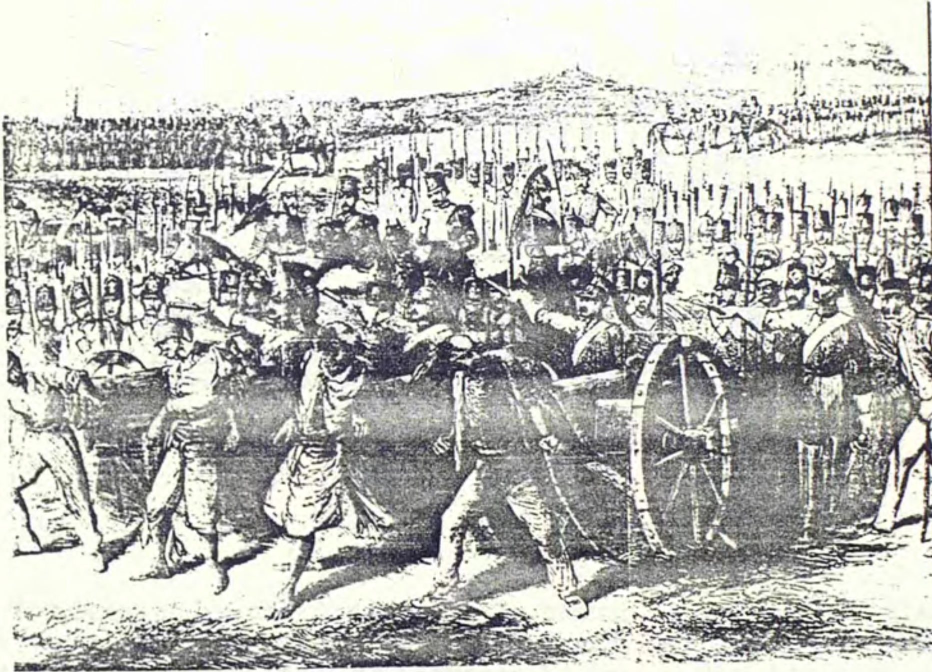
'The Meeting of Generals Havelock, Outram and Campbell at Lucknow'.

by T.Jones Barker.

(H. Act Three, Scene Six within Scene One).

1. The Painting.

2. The Key.

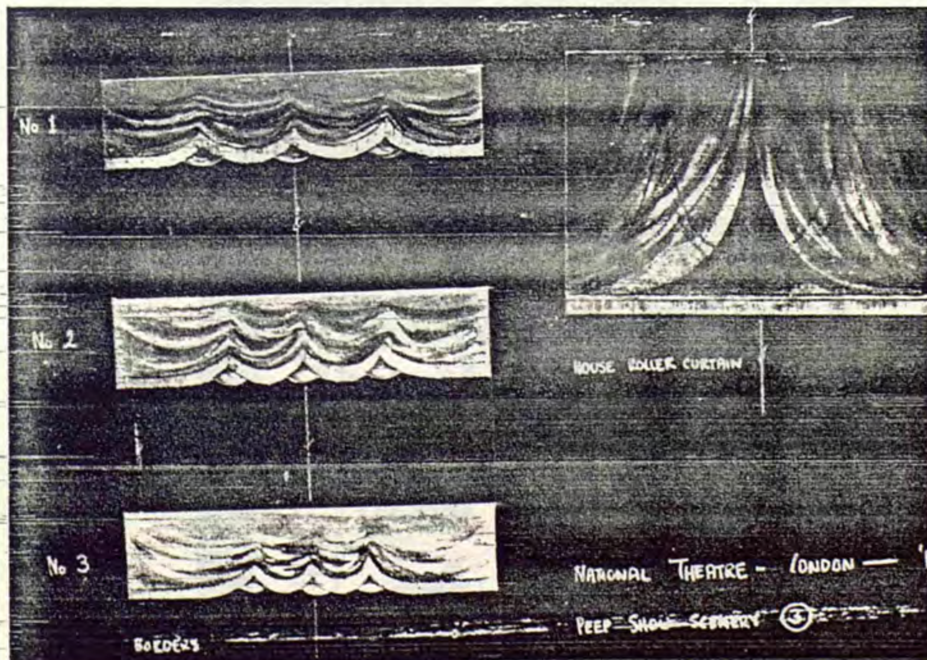


'Gunners await the order to blast mutineers from cannons. This was a traditional method of execution in India, but its adoption by the British shocked Western nations.'

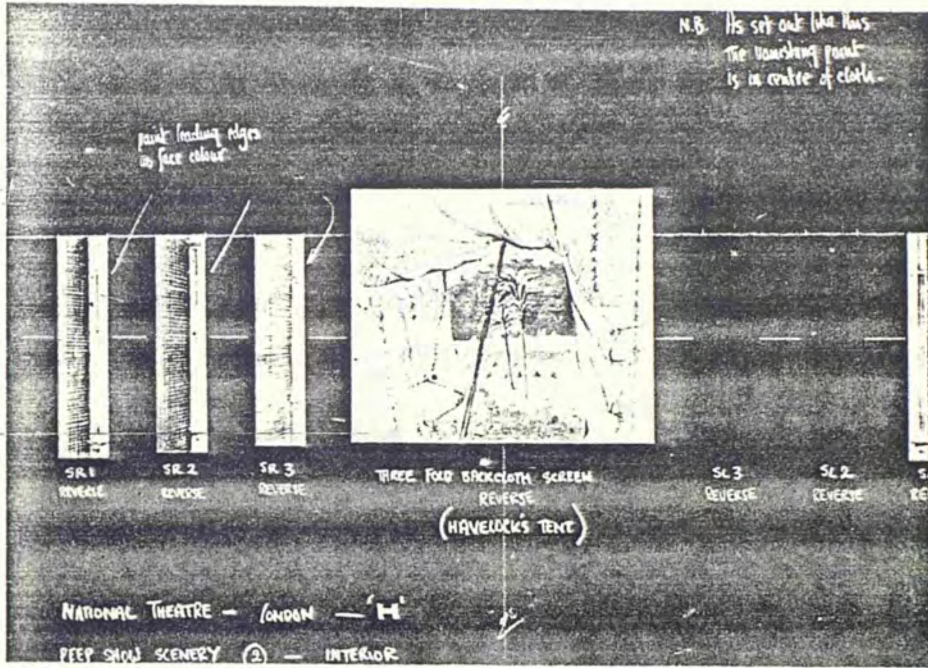
(The British Empire no.23. 'The Indian Mutiny'. ed. M.Edwardes.)

H. The Toy Theatre.

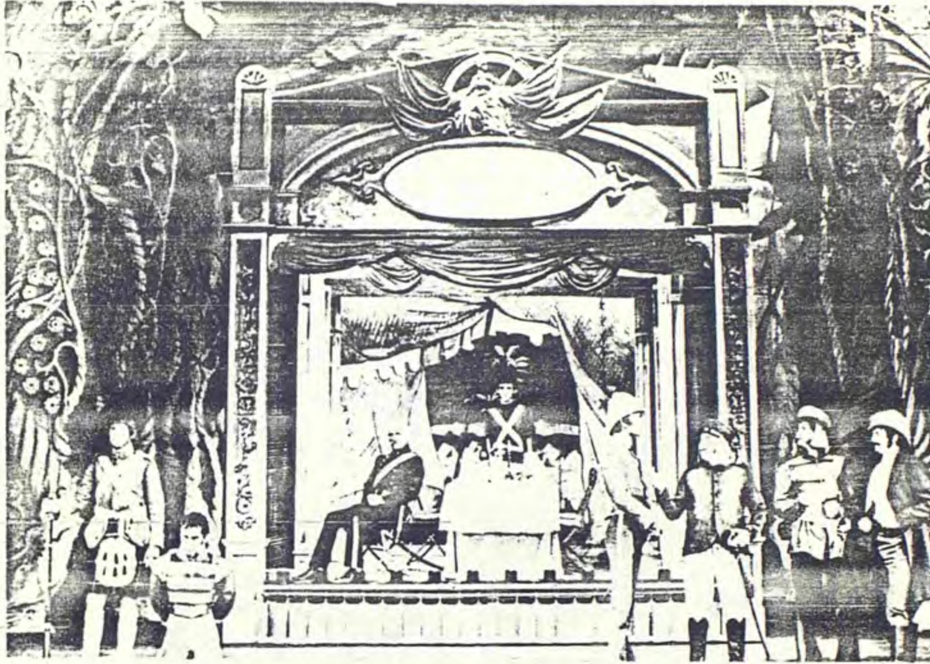
The Toy Theatre in use for Havelock's dinner, Act 2 sc.v. Characters from left to right are Captain Jones Parry, Captain Maude, General Havelock, Harry Havelock, and Surgeon Sooter. The detail of the carvings on the upright pillars, and of Britannia above the proscenium, are particularly noteworthy, as are the gas footlights and roller curtain. (see details in Michael Annals' original designs below.)



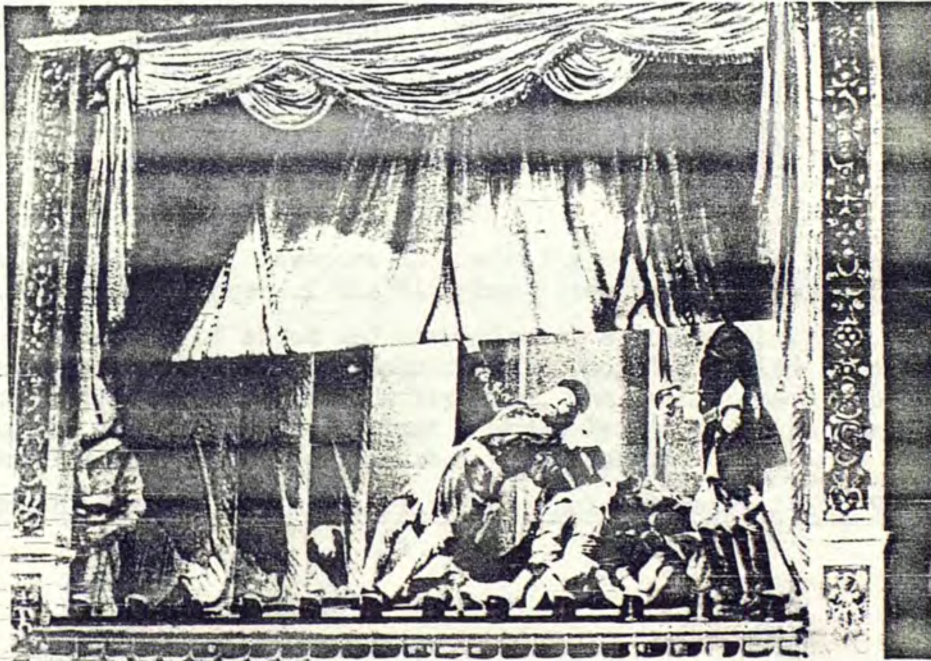
H. The Toy Theatre (2.)



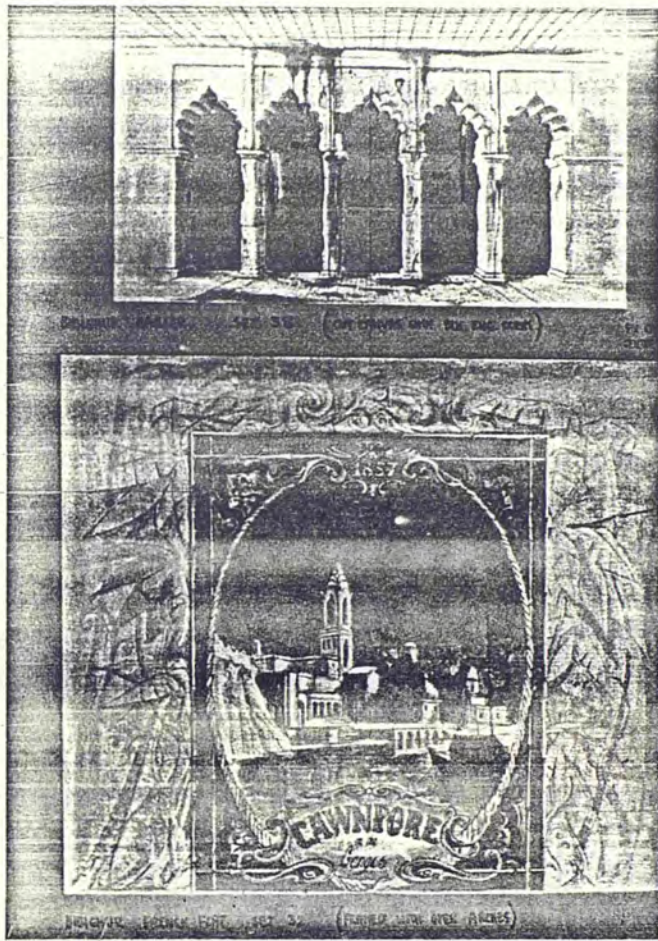
Michael Annals' design for the toy theatre backcloth is clearly taken from the background to the Cooper frontispiece. (see p.153 &191).



Act 2 sc.v. An 'in-scene' showing the Jemadar. The elaborate decoration of the main stage is clearly visible.



Act 3 sc.i. 'CAPTAIN JONES PARRY has got the painted cloth out now, it is pulled over the protesting groaning SOLDIERS and HAVELOCK who shouts in his delirium. (s.d. p.166.)



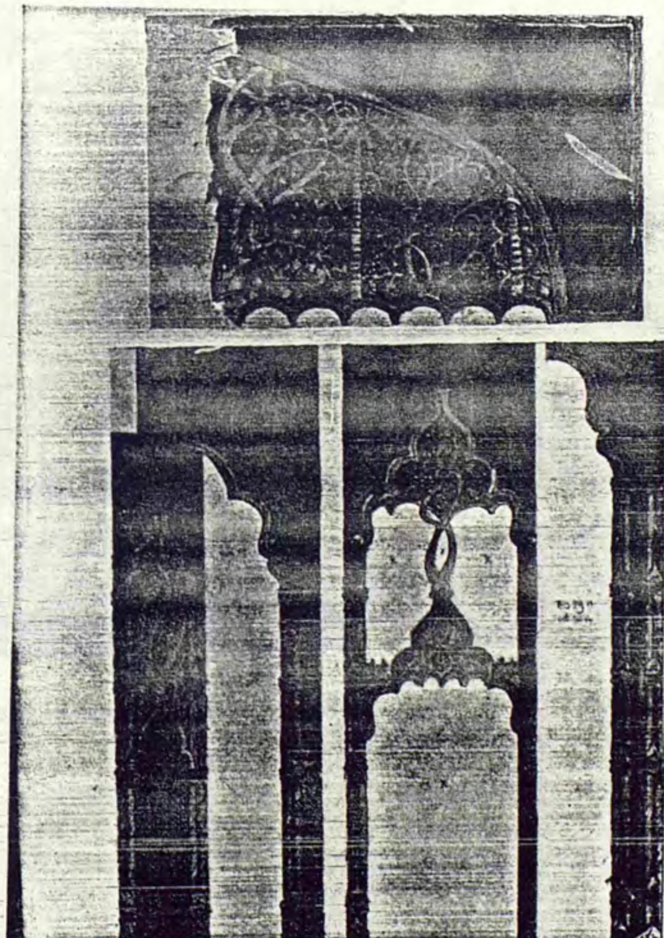
The frontcloth of Cawnpore is gradually rolled up to reveal the bloodstained horror of the Bibighur. (see s.d. Act 2.)

'The use of shock and sensation to shock and horrify is a necessary part of Gothic melodrama, especially in the appearance of ghosts and apparitions of every kind, the transformation of hooded figures into skeletons against a suddenly livid red background, the streaking of Bluebeard's chamber with blood.'

(Booth, Michael R. <u>Victorian Spectacular Theatre 1850-1910.</u> p.62.)

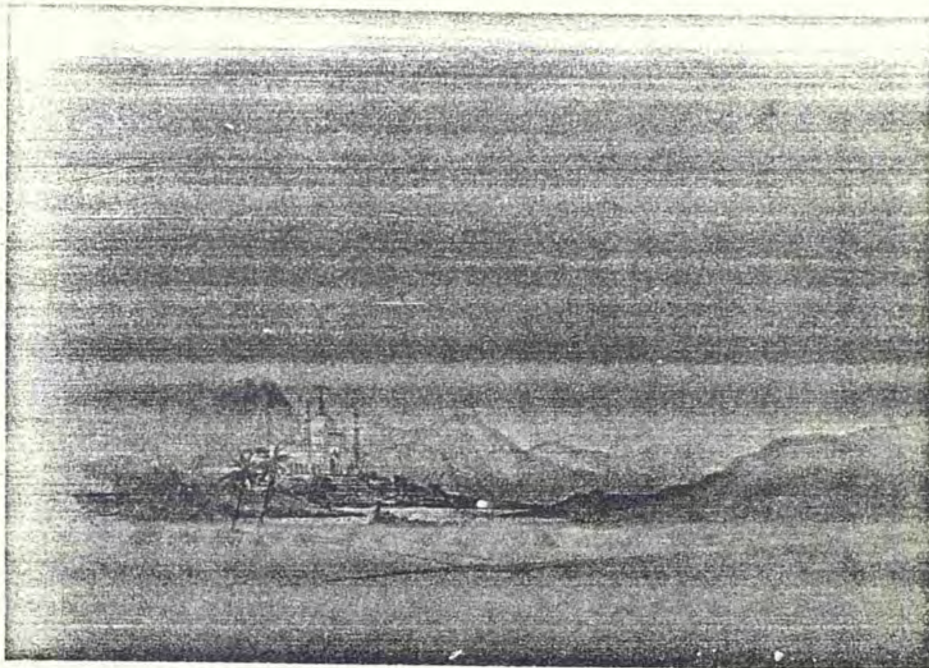
H. The Toy Theatre (5.)

Brechtian-style captions to be inserted above the proscenium arch.

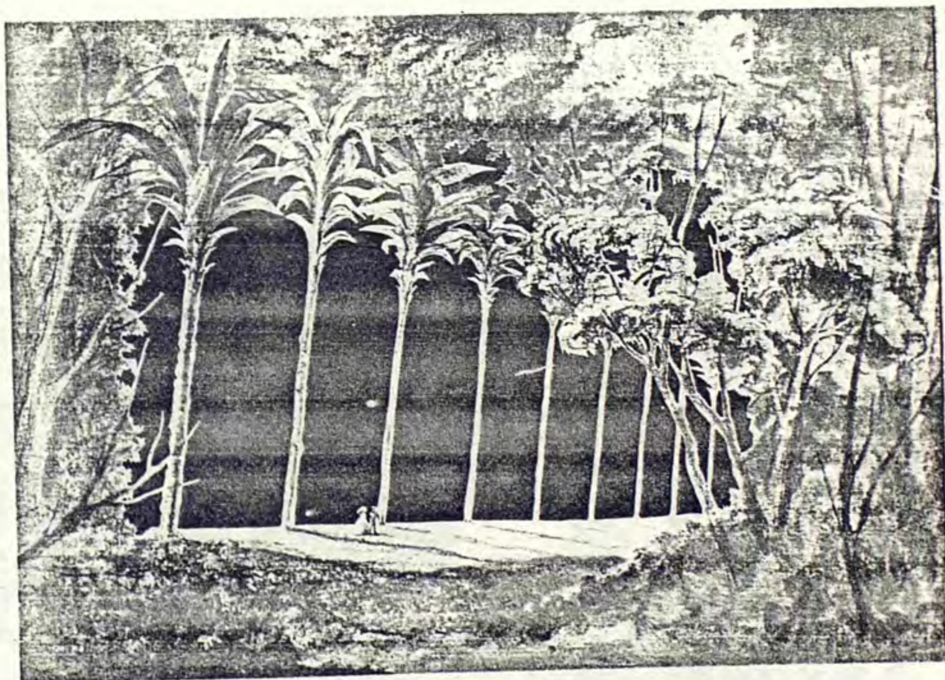


Intricate detail in a flat.

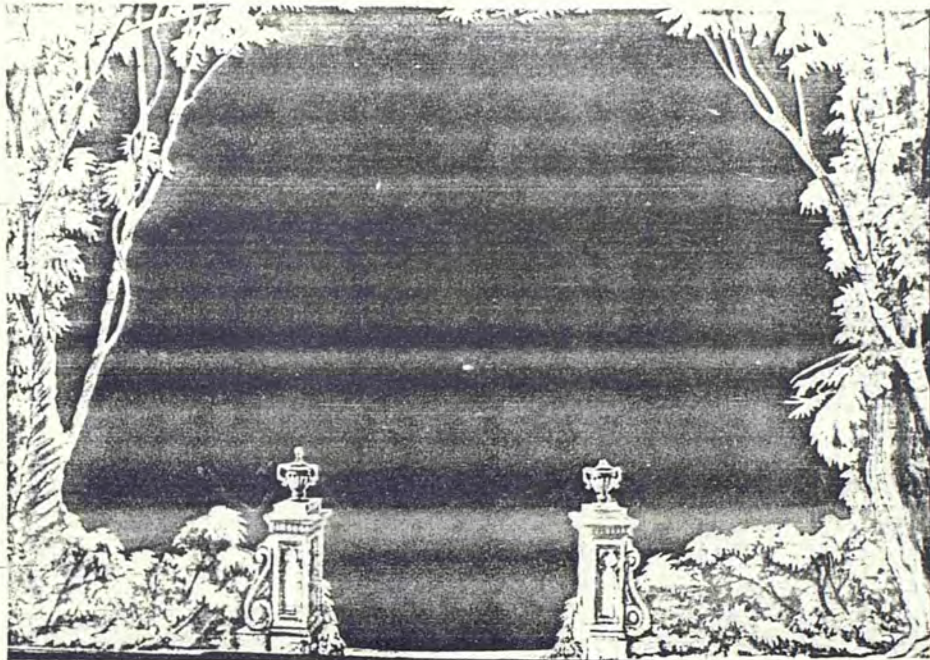
H. The Epilogue.



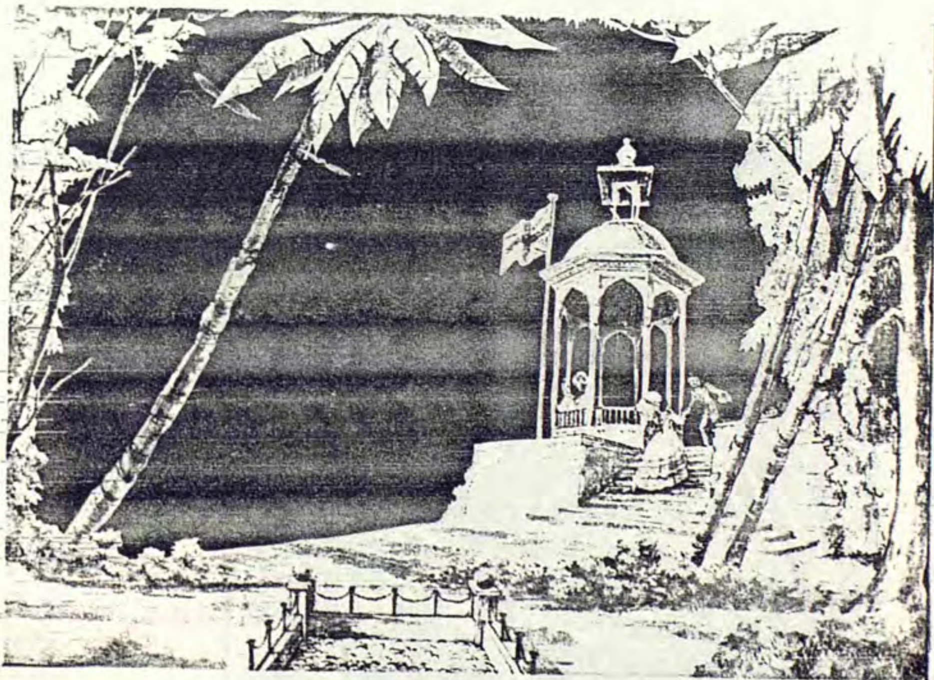
The backcloth.



First cut-out cloth.

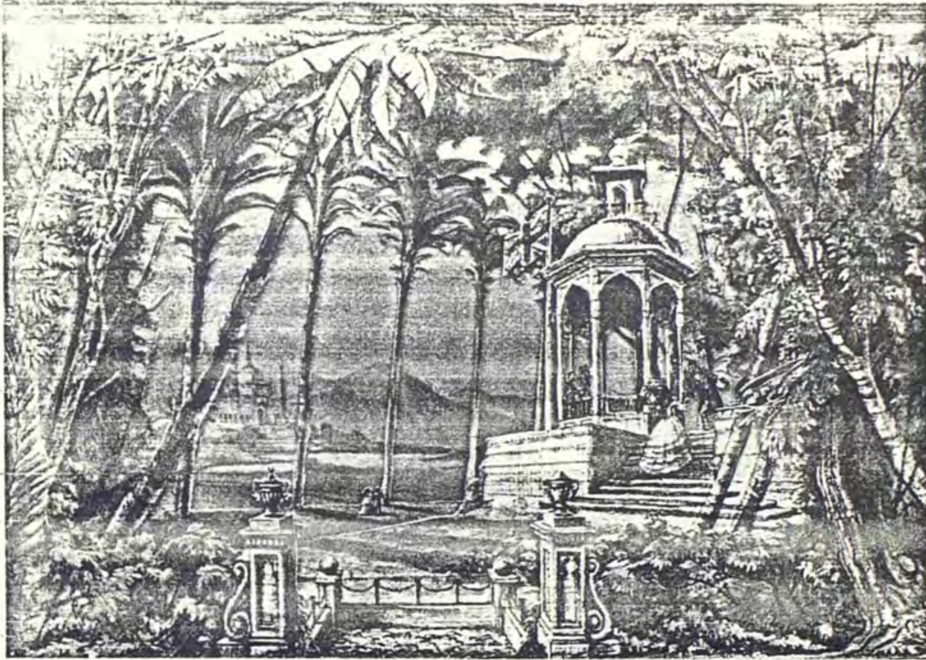


Second cut-out cloth.



Third cut-out cloth.

H. The Epilogue.



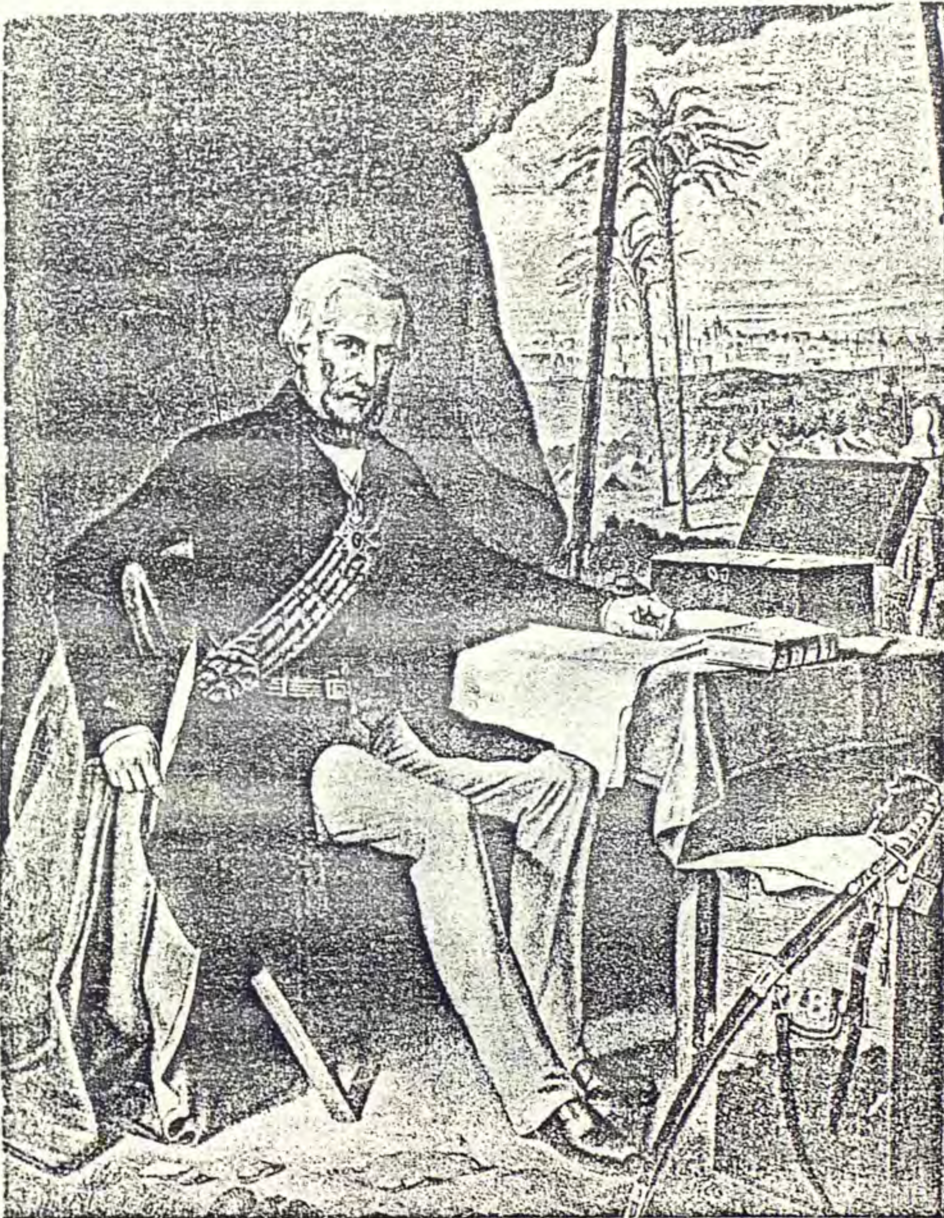
The total effect.

Mrs. Jones-Parry and Timothy.

H. The Epilogue.

Mrs. Jones Parry (Jane Wenham) and Timothy (Christopher Reynalds).

H. Havelock.



MAJOR-GENERAL SIR HENRY HAVELOCK, Bart, K.C.B.

(*From the print in the possession of Lady Havelock-Allan*)

The frontispiece of Cooper's book. (see p. 153).

H. Havelock.

The Forbes photograph (see p.153.).

H. Havelock.

The portrait of Havelock published in the National Theatre programme. The original is in the possession of the Somerset Light Infantry Museum, Taunton.

H. Havelock.

Robert Lang as Havelock.

CHAPTER V.

TURKISH TORTOISES AND AMERICAN EAGLES.
THE ARTIST/SOLDIER ON THE SET/BATTLEFIELD.

The unperformed screenplay of 'Flashman' was the final act in that phase of Wood's writing in which he had been obsessed with the idea of war as evil rather than necessary, and as the expression of a violent, oppressive society which needed radical change. As the failure of this film to reach even the shooting stage showed, the artistic freedom and extravagance Wood had enjoyed in his large-scale works of the late 1960s, particularly in the language and staging of H, was unable to survive the more austere world of the 1970s. The plays and films discussed in Chapter IV had, too, to a large extent used up Wood's burning contempt for the Army and all it stood for and, in any case, the immediacy of the horror of war was lessened by the ending of the Vietnam conflict which had been a continual backdrop to the works so far discussed, in 1972. It was necessary, therefore, for Wood, like several other of the post-1956 dramatists, and indeed those socialist writers influenced by the events of 1968, to reappraise his subject material, and to find new, more universally relevant, concerns, and more economical methods for their expression.

His output in the decade to 1980 continued unabated, and can be divided into three clear sections according to his chosen medium. His work in the cinema showed considerable diffusion in the development of a wide range of material. In this period, he wrote ten screenplays, which included an adaptation of Fr. Rolfe's book Hadrian the Seventh, which Peter Luke had turned into a successful stage play; and 'Cuba', a tough thriller set against the background of the Castro revolution, with some exploration of the relations between exploiters and exploited, corruption amidst ideals, and the impossibility of love. This film was another collaboration with Richard Lester, and starred Sean Connery. In complete contrast Wood, surprisingly, wrote a film version of Lehar's operetta The Merry Widow. Of these ten screenplays only one, 'Cuba', actually reached the screen, in 1979.

His television plays were much more successful in being shown, and included a trilogy 'A Bit of a Holiday' (1969), 'A Bit of Family Feeling' (1971), and 'A Bit of Vision' (1972). These plays were naturalistically-conceived comedies about the adventures of a family, very like Wood's own, in various situations. 'A Bit of a Holiday',

for example, is about the experiences of a writer who goes on location to Rome to do some writing for a film, taking his wife and children with him. Wood actually took his family to Rome to work on Skolimowski's film 'The Adventures of Gerard', but left after a week or so, unable to fit in with what he saw as the lunatic caperings of the international film set. The autobiographical element and the naturalistic form of these short plays look back to the conception of the earlier stage play Fill the Stage with Happy Hours, and forward to Veterans. John Russell Taylor thought 'A Bit of a Holiday'

certainly one of the best plays ever written about film-making. 1.

Autobiography and naturalism, underlaid with a rich vein of farce, are also important factors in the television series 'Don't Forget to Write' (1977/78), which consisted of twelve 50-minute episodes. These chronicled the adventures of Gordon Maple, a writer with a Trigorin-like obsession about writing, though he would far rather be in the garden. Gordon moves, as Wood had done, from a superior modern house in Bristol to a magnificent country mansion with a ballroom. Gordon suffers all the anxieties of the professional writer, and Wood shows himself to be eminently capable of controlling his material, and of shaping a deft, wry comedy, with occasional farcical moments, whose gentle satire is very reminiscent of Chekhov's short vaudevilles. The autobiographical elements are thinly disguised. Like Wood, Gordon has a wife and two teenage children, and several of the episodes feature Gordon's friendship with another, more commercially successful playwright, Tom Lawrence, who is clearly based on Wood's long-standing friend and fellow dramatist, Peter Nichols. There are many references to the plays and films, too. The third episode of the first series opens in a theatre where Gordon is watching a performance of his play 'Tortoise' on tour. As will be shown later, a tortoise is used metaphorically in Veterans. He also refers to his play 'Elephant' at the National, and says 'I did Gordon of Khartoum - called it 'G', obvious references to H; and tells a visitor 'I used drag in my play 'Dog'', which is, of course, Dingo. The recognition of these 'in-jokes' and oblique references, as with much of Wood's other work, adds interest but also obscures the real quality of these two television series which is concerned not with the 'drame à clef' aspect but with the insight they offer into the writer's problems, artistic and domestic, and particularly the writer's own view of the quality of his work. Thus, Gordon often comments perceptively on his dilemmas. The conflict between earning enough and the striving for high artistic standards is raised when he tells a friend:

> I have to do at least three things at once to survive, and if one of those takes more than three months, we don't. 2.

His concern with the ageing process, the fear of an artistic menopause, the sense of the passing of time without real achievement, are voiced by the writer when Gordon tells his wife that he has never been able to write tragedies, and that he is 'too old and too stupid to realise I could do something'. He gives a candid summing-up of his progress to date when he confesses:

> I used to be relevant, biting, new. Now all I can be is amusing. 4.

This is a particularly relevant comment when one considers the development in the period under consideration from the swingeing strictures of Dingo to the blander laughter of Has "Washington" Legs?. Gordon even composes his Trigorin-like epitaph:

> He shouted, but they didn't hear. They only walked away. 5.

If this frank, uncompromising self-deprecation is relevant in a survey of Wood's development as a dramatist it is doubly so when examined in the context of a poetically-conceived and executed diatribe on the role of television which Wood wrote in 1971. Couching an argument within the loose framework of a poetic monologue (a technique which presages the form of the rambling, purposefully incoherent views on aspects of cinema, and national characteristics, expressed by characters in Has "Washington" Legs?) enables the author to allow his thoughts to form in a fountain of consciousness rather than constructing a logical, developed sequence of reasoning. This unusual method still manages to state clearly his central concern which is that television should adopt its own role instead of becoming a pale imitation of cinema and theatre. There is some confusion in the ways he sees television achieving this but he, as a television writer, seeks firstly to break through the anaesthetising effect of the medium, and establish a dynamic, positive, and stimulating rapport with the audience. Indeed, his approach would have a creatively disruptive quality, for he says that his experiences of writing for television 'have been concerned with the practical objective of getting into a home and disturbing'.[6] As a television writer, he wants to use the medium to make:

> a poke at a recumbent mind, an appeal to compassion, persuasion for political aims, and the less obvious attack on public decency and inducement of fear. 7.

Although the early part of this statement has a neo-Brechtian quality, the mentions of attacks on public decency and the inducement of fear are more Artaudian, and he extends this emphasis by postulating a televisual drama of 'mystery, mood, magic, fearful ghosts',[8] whose function would consist of:

preparing us for
death, our own, the death of our children, our children
for our death. 9.

Even this leaves the audience as a passive entity, and Wood posits a television of participation and action in which the screen would act as a 'gigantic reflector telephone for transmission of emotion and sympathy',[10] a source of interaction in which the audience would change the face of the medium themselves through telephonic communication, making it a veritable 'tool for the people'.[11] Texts spoken by actors would be banished, and replaced by an 'uneasy blend of film, writing and journalism',[12] peopled by the faces of real characters, like the extras in Fellini's films (his own English adaptation of the film 'Fellini Satyricon' had been completed in 1969). The raw materials of this new art form would be 'not words but ideas and writing them then and there',[13] and there would be a dynamic, creative, uncontrolled quality, inspired by a new televisual superman, rather like a clone of Craig's man of the theatre, one

...with a talent and a compulsion to tell, tell, tell,
a belief that there is nothing, no art form other than
television and if he doesn't tell, tell, tell through
it he will never be anything but dumb. 14.

Wood, the visionary, however, gives way to Wood, the realist, whose own practical experience of writing for the medium has made him, like Gordon Maple, conformist and despondent:

But is
television the place for the writer, has it a place
for him, is he listened to?
watched? 15.

he asks, and glumly admits that he now concerns himself

...with writing plays for
the theatre of the 1940s for television in the 1970s. 16.

a statement which clarifies the reasons for his change of dramatic form in both theatre and television in the 1970s.

Pragmatism defeated Wood's aspirations in the 1970s. Although ideas, like the ones on television, teem, he is no longer able to manipulate a medium in quite the same brash, challenging fashion as he had attempted in his earlier extravangas. He even returned to the Army for material for a short television series in 1975, which consisted of three episodes, and was called 'Death or Glory Boys', but the form used was naturalistic, harking back to the early Army plays though lacking their surrealism. This series, too, had a strongly autobiographical bias, and explored the early experiences and tribal rituals of young Army recruits at Catterick, and it appears to have finally exorcised the Army as a source of subject matter in his work.

Between 1970 and 1978 Wood wrote five stage plays. 'Collier's Wood', and 'The Script' had short runs at the Bush Theatre in 1970, and the Hampstead Theatre Club in 1976, respectively, whilst 'Jingo', a play set in Singapore at the time of the Japanese invasion of 1942, had a limited showing at the Aldwych Theatre in 1975. As is the case with his television plays in this period, his stage plays revert to a more naturalistic form, which enables him to leave the great epic, public pronouncements on War and concentrate on his own private experience, which he then expands into public statements on the interaction between the disparate components of drama and cinema and their artistic and commercial dichotomies.

Two of the author's plays Veterans (1972) and Has "Washington" Legs? (which I shall subsequently refer to as "Washington") provide the major focus of this chapter. They are both comedies about film-making, and mesh with the television works 'A Bit of a Holiday', and 'Don't Forget to Write' in terms of their subject matter. Both examine the tedious, unglamorous, lonely, and often dangerous on-set lives of actors, directors and technicians, and, as with the War plays, depict frankly the blacker side, not of War, but of an art-form marketed (like War in Wood's opinion) by the powers-that-be, as romantic, fascinating, and exciting. I now propose to outline how Wood's theatrical method accommodates this shift from theatre with a factual basis to theatre built from close personal experience of events and people, and from real battlefields to the simulated battlefields which Wood's film sets inevitably become. I shall explore some of the major roles of these two plays to ascertain if there is any development in Wood's depiction of character, and use my own first-hand experience of observing rehearsals of the National Theatre production of "Washington" to chart the progress of Wood's play from page to stage. Finally, in a short concluding Chapter I shall take Gordon Maple's statement 'I used to be relevant, biting, new. Now all I can be is amusing' and try to assess how far it is true of Wood's work to date.

Veterans and "Washington" are both plays, like Fill the Stage, set in theatres. In the earliest of these three dramas the stage itself was an unseen, almost mystical, presence, and the action took place in the rabbit-warren backstage area, offices and bar of the down-at-heel Midlands playhouse. Veterans, on the other hand, is set in an ageless amphitheatre in Turkey, where two old men who have sacrificed their lives to theatre sit in modern deckchairs before the altar of Dionysus, Primus Motor of their calling. The white theatrical light signifies the overpowering heat of Turkish noon, and recalls the inimical Nature present

in Dingo's desert, whilst the indestructible plastic cups are part of the trappings of a modern technological society, epitomised by the film team, the detritus of an army on the march, and provide an uneasy tension between the ancient and the very new. The action of the first half of "Washington" occurs in the National Theatre, London, where the original production was presented. The stage directions are a poem (or possibly a hymn of hate) to the new building on the South Bank, and the curtain rises:

> On wet concrete,
> shining whiter than white concrete,
> great silver/grey/white slabs of it,
> towering and looming and jutting out
> over chairs of plastic and steel on
> thick pile carpet of brown wool; 17.

In this ultra-modern setting technology is apposite rather than destructively alien, and Wood skilfully incorporates all the media in his dramatic schema. In his imagination all the 'bastions, bagnoires, boulevards, battlements, bocages' have tiny television sets incorporated in them:

> In every Sony eye on every concrete
> prow, a flicker of black and white
> and sound of voices talking, talking, 18.

and from them issues a sound collage of the voices of all the famous Hollywood stars. Once again Wood had imagined a setting unrealisable on stage, and the actual production, in the promenade-style Cottesloe auditorium, gave a realistic impression of an ordinary committee room. There were no television sets, but the sound collage was an impressively-compiled collection of the voices and phrases specified in the script. The amphitheatre is also part of a film set; and the chairs and tables of the first part of "Washington" are imaginatively removed during the interval, and an actual film set is substituted. Both plays are about the battle that making a film inevitably becomes.

Wood dedicated Veterans to Richard Lester, a director who would understand very well the trials and tribulations of film-making, and in his Preface points out that he decided to suppose that he had been asked to write the screenplay of his stage play H. Since Gielgud, who played the major role of Sir Geoffrey Kendle, had also acted the role of Raglan in 'The Charge', and since that film was shot in Turkey, it is perhaps too easy to jump to the conclusion that Veterans grew from Wood's experience on location in Turkey where he became very friendly with Gielgud. He is at pains, however, to inform readers that all the films he had worked on had contributed to Veterans rather than any specific one, and he also forges links with Fill the Stage, making the important distinction that the earlier play was about 'the

failure of theatrical failure', whilst Veterans is about 'the failure of theatrical success'.[19] This cynicism, so apparent in Dingo, but seemingly modified in H, is again, as in Fill the Stage, based on intimate experience of actors who learn to survive, and, as in Veterans, even manipulate for their own ends the commercial and artistic immorality of the business tycoons who now take over the role of villains from politicians and officers. 'But', asks Wood, 'for what?',[20] and there is a nihilism in this question which carries over his often-mentioned pessimistic disillusionment with the theatre to the newer medium, cinema, which has both nurtured and destroyed his own talent, in common with that of many others.

If Dingo looked to continental experiment and H to Victorian popular theatre for their inspiration, Veterans is firmly set in the mainstream of the English comic theatrical tradition. The characters, effete, distanced, and privileged, seem to be descendants of those of Wilde and Coward, and the theatrical techniques - brittle, inconsequential, polished dialogue, the use of props to build sequences of action, the comic surprise created by offstage happenings, the use of costume as disguise to change role and identity - are in the idiom of the well-made play. Yet Wood is never content to remain trapped within the confines of a genre, nor to be a pale carbon copy of another dramatist, and, in Veterans, the film constantly bursts into the stage action, forcing the audience to readjust to the notion of watching actors in a play acting actors in a play about a film, an alienatory device which Katharine Worth describes as:

> the Pirandellian recessions of illusion suggested by the sight of John Gielgud playing himself preparing to play a part in a film he had actually played in. 21.

"Washington", too, has a similar pedigree, but its style reaches back beyond Wilde and Coward to the school of Sheridan. It is a modern comedy of manners (which are often conspicuous by their absence), and after the stasis and consciously-contrived verbosity of the first act, actually has periwig-pated fellows making loquacious speeches. The second act setting for the film of the American Revolution, with its toy ships and trompe-l'oeil scenic effects, irresistibly recalls the strictures on the extravagant contemporary theatre of Mr. Puff in The Critic. There is no attempt to confine the action within a proscenium arch, however, and Geoffrey Reeves, the director, created a dynamic relationship with the Cottesloe audience by having Albert Finney, as John Bean the great film director, using them as (static) actors in his shots as he compiled them.

In contrast to Wood's earlier works, then, both plays are comedies,

and although _Veterans_ has a blackness stemming from Wood's love/hate relationship with theatre and cinema, and _"Washington"_ sets out to demolish the Hollywood myth, neither has the anger of _Dingo_ nor the richness of _H_. The emphasis in the later plays is no longer on the hierarchical gradations of the class system, though there is certainly a chain of command which starts at the top with commercial backers, then descends via directors and actors to the technicians, though the implicit social comment in this structure (the actual workers at the bottom) is nullified by the enormous earnings the technicians make. Instead, both plays focus on the middle-aged and/or the middle class. Sir Geoffrey Kendle, the actor, in _Veterans_, and Sir Flute Parsons, the writer, in _"Washington"_, are both self-satisfied Englishmen who have worked within the commercial system controlling theatre and/or cinema, adapted to it, and, by their comparative success, become inured to it, and cushioned by it, their artistic pretensions subjugated to a desire for ease and comfort. Wood de-centralises these characters, however, by providing each with a dramatic foil. Sir Laurence d'Orsay is as brash, physical, and bombastic, as Sir Geoffrey is mild and gentlemanly, whilst Sir Flute is as overwhelmed by the huge presence of John Bean as everyone else. Actors are at the heart of _Veterans_, and the director and technicians are eerie offstage presences (rather like the unseen 'character' kicking down dust in _Spare_), except when they obtrude for brief moments into the action. In "Washington" Wood first shows the in-fighting, bickering, and ineptitude of the 'art-by-committee' panel of so-called 'experts' who attempt to plan a film of the American Revolution for the bicentennial. They are like Generals, away from the battlefield, whose internal tensions and dissensions make them linguistically incoherent, and hopelessly stalemated. Fortunately, their impasse is overcome by the entrance of a real man of action, large in body, mind, and generosity of spirit. John Bean is a Superdirector who plunges into the action, his decisions already made and unalterable, a parody of a deus ex machina (an impression reinforced by the way he is carried aloft on a camera jib to make his shots) who actually fails to put everything right.

Although Wood is casting a jaundiced and satirical eye on the manoeuvrings and machinations of all concerned in the cinematic process, he is also concerned with its likeness to warfare. The switch of setting from committee room to Ireland/Bunker Hill in "Washington" is highly reminiscent of that from the Globe to France/Ireland/Agincourt in Olivier's film of _Henry V_, and there is another echo of Shakespeare (and imminent battle), echoing _Henry V_, in a scene

where Bean goes incognito to the technicians' quarters during the night before the first day of shooting. In both plays, the actors work and fight on the battleground of the set, rather like the officers in the War plays (though more fully characterised on the whole), sandwiched between the commercial pressures and politics on the one hand, and the foul-mouthed revolutionary technicians and drunken focus-pullers on the other. There are echoes of a belligerent British colonial past, too, in the way the British behave on location. Sir Flute Parsons has an innate sense of superiority in his dealings with the American entrepreneurs which mirrors the attitude of his predecessors of 1776, and the film makers of "Washington" annex the Irish fields without demur. In the same way, the British of Veterans behave as overlords in Turkey, usurping everything they need, even the Turkish Army, and desecrating the country's ancient culture by their greed and cupidity. Film-making, like War, according to Wood, breeds an aridity of the soul, achievement, and surroundings, which sets the artist no higher than the low-ranking soldier, despite his infinitely superior social status.

Having now outlined those of Wood's thematic concerns which are common to both plays, I shall now examine Veterans as an exposé of the artist's true nature. Wood himself, in his Preface to the printed version of the play, says that it

> ...is concerned with deceit, exploitation and treachery within an empire/industry run by gangsters, funny in their pretensions, vicious in their actions, showing a pathetic regard for skills and talent, and how these gangsters can be used by talented people who have acquired other talents like deceit, treachery, and the ability to be totally selfish yet remain on the best of terms with everyone, but for what? 22.

The equation of the film industry with an empire is relevant in terms of its portentous treatment of 'inferiors', and the fact that it is run by 'gangsters' recalls the worst features of Fascism. Yet it is still unable to defeat its most important component, the artist, for, in Wood's eyes, the seemingly successful actor accepts the system, succumbs to it, and becomes part of it, then bends its seeming inflexibility to his own egotistical needs. In Veterans Wood gives a sour portrait of the artist, using the theatre almost as he might a piece of fly-paper to lure him, catch him, and pull off his glittering wings to reveal the ordinary filth beneath. Real flies do buzz around the set and other animals such as horses and elephants are often mentioned as part of the film action. There is a lizard, too, which is able to cast off its old skin and change its ways, unlike the characters in this play, but Wood uses two different animals very specifically to show the gulf between the actor's aspirations and the

reality of his achievement.

Penelope, wife of Sir Laurence d'Orsay (Dottie), and the only woman with a speaking part in the play, raises her eyes to the heavens as she enters, and sees what she thinks is an eagle soaring there. Unlike the actor/poet Peer Gynt, who sees the eagle as a symbol of freedom offering the possibility of escape from a worldly existence, Sir Geoffrey Kendle squints into the firmament but is unwilling, or unable, even to see it. His sacrifice to Dionysus has entailed no purification, nor spiritual enlightenment, and he soon dispels any mystical significance in the eagle's soaring flight as a metaphor for the artist's aspirations:

> Like that eagle, poor
> old bird, get close to him you'll probably
> find his feathers are dropping out, 23.

an apt, if cynical, summing-up of the reality of the actor's attainment, stripped of its glamorous trappings. Wood finds a more appropriate metaphor for the failure of artistic success in the humble tortoise, a creature introduced by Sir Geoffrey, as he eventually sees the eagle:

> Now I see your precious eagle, isn't he
> large! Oh I am glad not to be a tortoise. 24.

and a real tortoise is brought into the action just before the end of the play. The two old men in deckchairs watch it idly until one of them picks it up and notices that it belongs to the electricians because it has 'Sparks' written on its back. Sir Laurence muses on the creature and asks:

> Is it upsetting, this
> poor tortoise marked for life?

and Sir Geoffrey replies:

> I think so. Don't you? 25.

Clearly, Wood sees these two old actors as tortoises, marked for life as belonging to the masters of their calling, rather than as eagles. They had already been questioning the validity of their existence when Sir Geoffrey asked:

> I mean there doesn't
> seem to be anything there, do we develop
> as people do you think? I can't see us
> being anything more than two old men in
> deckchairs can you? 26.

At the end of the play they sit on their chairs, just as they had at the beginning, having achieved nothing of human value. In the silence before the earthquake, alone in the timeless temple of their art, their slowness and thick-skinned egotism are reflected in the tortoise. There is an ageless quality in the tortoise, too, and, in the play's final sequence Wood juxtaposes this, and the venerability of the two actors, with the indestructibility of the plastic cups, exposing still

further the characters' insensitivity in the closing lines and action. Sir Geoffrey, aware of the silence and absence of movement (and here the time-scale of the play moves into a kind of limbo, stretching beyond the mundane present into eternity), asks if they should clear away the plastic cups which litter, pollute, and desecrate, to which Dottie's response is firmly negative, and is accompanied by a wantonly dismissive gesture as he throws his cup onto the other pile. This action and reaction of utter negativity sums up the actor's total selfishness and unwillingness to do anything of positive benefit to culture or society, and shows him as Wood believes he really is - pampered, privileged, and desensitised, amoral and aloof.

Whilst Wood uses metaphor much more in this play than in any other (including the opening and closing sequences of 'Traitor in a Steel Helmet') he again uses the theatre as a means of making strong and imaginative visual statements, and there is once more, as in H, the sense of a giant theatrical hand at work, manipulating all the resources of the stage, and extending it to accommodate film, to enhance the play's textual themes. This fascinating mixture of media is brought into the theatre from the very start of the play. In the first five minutes of action the curtain, the pre-Brechtian dividing line between the audience's sense of reality and the 'magic' of the theatre, is brought up and down three times. It first reveals two old men sitting in deckchairs, then the same two old men in nineteenth-century uniform, a woman (apparently) masturbating, and then one of the old men indecently exposing himself, alone. This short series of strong theatrical images makes immediate and striking visual statements on the actor's loneliness and isolation, and his woeful inability to make relationships, and Wood uses the theatre itself to strip away its own magical connotations and become nightmarishly revelatory. The acts of masturbation and indecent exposure, extraordinarily unexpected in a comedy, become metaphors which reveal the barrenness of the actor's private life, and, as the play develops, the author introduces the distasteful subjects of homosexuality, rape, and the failure of marriages, to further underline the personal inadequacy of the seemingly great, and to update comic subject-matter for a disturbing age. When the curtain is lowered, the rushes of the film that is being made offstage spill across it in vast epic scale, with its cacophony of noise and welter of effects, and when characters leave the stage for their film call they cross another dividing line, from the relatively safe area of boredom and waiting, and enter the dangerously exposed world of work. There is a magnificently effective theatrical moment in Act 1 sc.4 where Dottie is revealed performing his

obscene act, and freezes in horror, willing the curtain to descend to cover his embarrassment, as Sir Geoffrey re-enters from the film set:

> bloodied
> bowed, dusty, tattered and exhausted,
> not at all pleased to find the curtain
> where it is. 27.

The nightmarish quality of this device for uncovering nakedness, or causing the eagle's feathers to drop out, is developed in the second part of the play. In Act 2 sc.1 when the curtain rises the stage has become part of the film set, and a scaffolding tower, festooned with lights and cables stretches skywards. Its top is invisible, and although none of the lights are actually switched on, the sun casts its white glare on the stage. The overall effect is of a purgatorial void where the actor is little more than a speck of dust, totally at the mercy of whoever is above, but unable to communicate with anyone except by carrying out the disembodied orders conveyed by a megaphone or radio. By the end of the scene Sir Geoffrey is to make his most important speech for the film, seated incongruously on a box. The lights flash on in blazing arcs, and the sense of nightmare increases when a distant rumble of noise and a far-off shout of panic is heard, whether real or as part of the film's sound track is not stipulated. Sir Geoffrey has a moment of absolute panic himself, for he is left totally alone, without instructions, the epitome of vulnerable man, left to his own devices at the whim of 'sportive gods', and forced to face the responsibility he has always tried to avoid. As he eventually begins his speech (the pre-Cawnpore speech by Havelock already mentioned in Chapter IV) the curtain comes down to:

> Noise, noise, noise and light of horse,
> foot and elephant engaged in the walls
> of the auditorium in wide-screen colours. 28.

When the curtain rises again, allowing the audience itself some respite, the lights on the tower are out, and Sir Geoffrey sits on the box, looking in vain for someone to talk to, though he appears to be alone in the void. Soon the curtain descends again, seemingly to hide his exposure, but only, cruelly, to show on film his puny efforts to get off the box, while a voice eerily tries to fit cue words to the screen action. All this is accompanied by a desolate howl of wind, and then Sir Geoffrey repeats the whole of the speech, according to the stage directions 'coldly, and in full, in darkness', a stunning coup de théâtre which fuses nightmare and reality, theatre and film, and turns from black comedy to a revelation of stark, existential tragic isolation in Havelock, Sir Geoffrey Kendle, and even Gielgud himself, the actor/artist. Sir Geoffrey/Gielgud is the focus of Wood's probe into the artist's psyche, and this effect is the culmination of the moments of

stark reality in H and 'The Charge' where 'theatricality' is stripped away to reveal the frailty of the human being underneath.

As in his earlier works, Wood's major concern in this play is to expose ineptitude in the so-called or would-be great, and this task is seen to be of some magnitude when the actor chosen to play Sir Geoffrey was actually the person on whom the character was based. Ronald Eyre, the director, saw this casting as a difficulty, and as a possible weakness in the play's construction:

> One oddity of the piece is that the man who says all the words - the part played by Gielgud - is in a way not the leading part. And that was a problem. When you read it you do get a slightly out-of-focus feeling from the text because you think a great deal of care and love and observation is being lavished on somebody whose predicament doesn't exist, because he's entirely complacent. 29.

and he identified another problem for rehearsals:

> It is also very difficult to direct an actor playing a character based on himself. Are other things about the person in life relevant as background to the character in the play? With what authority - and within what limits of authority - does an actor play himself? 30.

The second problem seems to have been satisfactorily resolved by what Wood regarded as Eyre's 'sensitive, exact production', and the apparently harmonious collaboration between director, actor, and author, during the rehearsal period. As Wood points out in his Preface:

> Characters on the stage are the result of author come to actor and actor come back to author, inevitably; even a perfectly tailored suit rarely fits snug the first fitting. 31.

and Eyre saw this harmonious creativity developing through Wood's language:

> He types it like free verse on the page, guiding the director in matters of stressing and shaping. He does it too, I think, in order to indicate that rapid rewrites or paraphrases which are nearly right aren't right enough. I know nobody like him; his words are really pebbled and it's absolutely what he has chosen to say, what he wishes. He seems to have to mint the inflection as well as the sense of the language. He rewrites extremely readily if he has to, and he also rewrites extremely fast, but he wouldn't like lines invented by actors or directors to be written in. 32.

The first problem raised by Eyre will now be considered by an examination of Sir Geoffrey's role and function in the play, followed by a shorter survey of the contribution by Sir Laurence d'Orsay, the other 'veteran' of the title.

Sir Geoffrey is one of Wood's inadequates, an artist whose skill and artistry lie concealed beneath the nebulous entity who avoids responsibility, leans on others wherever possible, and offers nothing of himself in return; the epitome of self-absorption and, to use

Eyre's word, complacency. This negative side of the character is one that Wood repeatedly stresses, but he avoids flatness or stereotyping by showing Sir Geoffrey to be frank and self-deprecating, not over-conceited, nor unaware of his own failings. Withdrawal from the harshness of the world has been his means of self-defence, and has enabled him to survive in the jungle of profit-making disguised as Art. He too is used by others as he uses them. He is cheap to hire as an actor, and his acquaintances take advantage of his indifference, as he discovers when he walks off the set in anger and dismay (emotions revealed for the only time in the play by the scene on the horse) at his treatment, and realises that his four homes, in London, New York, the country, and Languedoc, are already occupied:

> I can't go anywhere. I do wish friends
> would not take invitations so literally
> leaving me nowhere to live. 33.

There is a sense of Brechtian irony and wry detachment in having Gielgud comment on his own failings whilst standing outside himself in another role, but the duality in both the play and the characterisation enables the author to stretch the context far beyond the actor, Turkey, and the filming of H/'The Charge', and reach the audience's more universal concerns as he reveals that Sir Geoffrey has no real sense of his own identity, nor the faintest idea of what he is, relying only on other acquaintances to make his essential loneliness bearable. As Irving Wardle pointed out:

> However private its sources, the result is a large-scale public work, extracting some marvellous comedy from the interplay of character and situation and touching on issues much beyond its immediate circumstances. 34.

A large-scale public work dealing with the interplay of character and situation, and having universal significance, suggests a potentially explosive mixture of Chekhovian understatement and Stanislavskian identification with role, coupled uneasily with Brechtian alienation from role, and Beckettian overtones of existential suffering. The choice of Gielgud provided an interesting fusion of the seemingly irreconcilable Stanislavskian and Brechtian elements, and Wood developed a stylistic unity by including the film as a Brechtian device which constantly disrupts the naturalistic Chekhovian interplay of characters in their Beckettian limbo as they wait for a release from their purgatorial existence. Deft Chekhovian touches (the camp Rodney, a cartoon homosexual, likens Sir Geoffrey to Uncle Vanya, adding 'Chekhov to the T, Tchekhov?'[35]) are incorporated, Stanislavski-style, to point up the character's inadequacy - the constant attempt to borrow cigarettes from someone else, the boiled sweets he pops

into his mouth Gaev-like - and he shows his petulance when he insists on having his own chair which noone else must sit in.

Despite his considerable personal defects, he is a cultured man, whose paperback reading during long periods of waiting is a volume of Herodotus, and Orwell's Decline of the English Murder, and his conversation is sprinkled with allusions to the classics and Shakespeare. He often reminisces about the theatre, but his words are generally more full of gossip than art, and he knows that this is a constant failing:

I'm always doing it...said a dreadful thing. 36.

Unlike the other central characters in Wood's plays, Sir Geoffrey remains the same throughout, unmoved in his tenuous security and unchanged despite the trial of external events and actions. He and Dottie, for example, have been friends for forty years, but their liaison appears simply to have happened, quite fortuitously, and then continued, without developing, for the whole of that period. As Sir Geoffrey says, 'We're only chums because we always have been chums'. He actually goes out of his way to avoid forming relationships:

relationships, you can't know the brown
grey-haired flannel-suited earnest hours
I've skirted every possible relationship. 37.

though he does inform us that he was once married, to an American lady. His natural meekness and mildness, and his fear of extending his boundaries beyond the safe and known, led to the failure of the marriage. In a long speech towards the end of the play he relates the story of an occasion in America. His wife and her American friends

... half-naked
swimming about like the Tarzans they
resembled and eventually tested for 38.

swam gaily in a pool whilst he, a non-swimmer, teetered timidly on the edge, the weakness of his own masculinity revealed to the virile young denizens of the New World. They laughed at his feebleness, and he, unable to face the challenge, left. Viewed metaphorically, this tale is a comment on his own lack of drive and ambition, and fear of physical activity, and is echoed by his fear of stretching his own artistic boundaries at the suggestion by Trevor, the film director, that he might learn to sing and dance. He remains cocooned now in a sexless existence which is rarely ruffled, and he is the only character in the play who seems unaffected by the fear of diminishing virility. The other males judge their own masculinity and that of others by their ability to ride difficult horses, but Sir Geoffrey has a genuine terror of them, and is totally unwilling to be involved in physical

action of any kind. This bland equanimity is shaken only once, when Penelope jokingly suggests marriage and his horns are drawn quickly into his protective shell, where he remains securely time's eunuch.

His occasional emergences from this protective covering invariably result in fresh withdrawal. When told of the death of his friend Carole (they were, says Dottie, 'like David and Jonathan')[39] he makes token murmurings which seem to preface some positive action, but they soon evaporate in a surrealistic exchange of dialogue with the others, and he lapses back into inertia. He tries to hide from Rodney who embarrasses him, is cowed by technicians ('they might well decide to make me look a fool')[40] is terrified of Penelope's overblown sexuality, but at least goes through the motions of acting as an intermediary for Dottie, who has been banished from the set for his indecent act. In fact, he does show kindness towards Dottie, but only so that he can denigrate him at the same time, and the essence of his inability to come to terms with others is shown when he replies irritably to Trevor, the director:

> Don't keep calling him
> my friend,
> it puts such a responsibility on one. 41.

At the end of the play he sits with Dottie, in the sequence already described, and laments his own singularity:

> I really don't have anywhere to
> go where I won't be a nuisance. 42.

but, with all his failings he shows himself not to be devoid of self-knowledge. As a portrait of the man behind the mask it is a powerful indictment of loneliness and inadequacy masquerading as glamour, though the mask itself is an object of derision rather than awe. Wood is unwilling to allow art a lofty and uplifting quality, and he purposely squashes the development of any references to Gielgud as the greatest Hamlet of his age, or as an actor who appears to have bridged most successfully the chasm between the classics and the most modern of works across the media. Yet, in his review of the production, Ronald Bryden thought the play was a paeon of praise for Gielgud's art, on the same lines as Shaw's celebration of Ellen Terry in Captain Brassbound's Conversion. He saw Sir Geoffrey as a kind of actor-saint. If so, he is of the plaster variety for, radiantly successful in the role though Gielgud was, he accurately conveyed the underlying misanthropy and sense of failure.

The words used by Ronald Eyre to sum up Wood's attitude to Sir Geoffrey, however, were 'care, love, and observation', which suggest a compassionate understanding of one who has been stripped of everything rather than a vindictive character assassination. The director also

saw Sir Geoffrey's role as being 'out-of-focus', and he went on to explain the reason for this:

> Whereas there is another man alongside him very much aware of what he is as an actor and where he's going and how far he's fallen, a sort of Lucifer character, who is comparatively unexplored. 43.

The mention of a Lucifer figure, a fallen angel who now skulks in Hell, makes the bright light against which everyone is forced to shield his eyes an emanation of the infernal furnaces. These characters are lost souls who have committed the sin, not of hubris for which they are too apathetic, but of total self-absorption, and pass their time in oblivion rather than expiation, a state of total negativity which is punctuated from time to time by the Hell-like torture of film-making.

Dotty's very name, Mr. Laurence d'Orsay, is obviously a parody of Olivier's, and he has a little of Olivier's dash and elan, besides a harsh, aggressive physicality which contrasts strongly with Sir Geoffrey's passivity. From the clues liberally sprinkled around the text, however, it becomes clear that Dotty is a composite character, made up from several real people. Like Trevor Howard, who played Cardigan in 'The Charge', he is a well-known film actor who has played in:

> stiff upper lip things and station platform things with the girls early on. 44.

These references recall Howard's performances in Coward's Brief Encounter, and in various wartime films. Howard himself being unavailable, it was an inspired piece of casting to invite John Mills, a contemporary of Howard's, and a famous exponent of 'stiff upper lip' roles to play Laurence.

Unlike Sir Geoffrey, Dotty is quite expensive to hire, can sing and dance, and has a large following in America. Penelope is his third wife, and, according to Sir Geoffrey, 'He used his first two most shamefully'.[45] Penelope herself sports a black eye from him, and his neat and tidy appearance covers a seething anger at the world and everyone else. Their greeting kiss is merely a 'bumping together of jaw and teeth'.[46] His aggression stems from his fear of physical decline, and he partly blames Penelope for it because she refuses to have his children. He already has children from his previous marriages, but they are all 'in jail, transit or expensive sanatoria'.[47] He has always been well-off financially but this is no substitute for happiness, and his sad act at the beginning of the play is an expression of hopelessness. As a result of this action, he is dismissed from the film set, and although this is not the first time, (Sir Geoffrey comments

that 'he automatically flees to his/flies in time of stress',[48] and that he was arrested twice at Elsinore, and reminds him 'But Dotty you thrive/on being dropped from pictures'[49]), it is serious enough to prevent him finding work in the future. Sir Geoffrey fears that, under this strain, he will go to pieces, and even hints at the possibility that he might commit suicide. As he looks through the view-finder at him, Sir Geoffrey finds a new objectivity, and becomes aware of the human being under the harsh exterior, and notes the 'frail, childlike shoulders', seeing him shunned by everyone, and weary in his isolation. Like Sir Geoffrey, he finds it impossible to foster relationships, and has a bitter view of friendship:

> first lies, second lies, truth
> and then more lies similar to the first. 50.

He is tired, too, but refuses to break away from the actor's life, dull, repetitive, and unfulfilling as it is in his view, because the alternative is unthinkable:

> I need the life old son, money no
> but I do need the life. 51.

His final action in the play, tossing the everlasting plastic cup to join the others that litter the ancient site, is a gesture of derision at everything, and shows him to be irredeemable, unlike Sir Geoffrey, whose mild acquiescence could be turned to better use. It is particularly interesting that Eyre thought that Dotty might have been the more significant role:

> Now let's say Charles Wood were to be writing that play without having had the experience of working on the film 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', and therefore getting to know John Gielgud, I think possibly his balance would have shifted rather more in favour of Dotty, the character John Mills plays, and away from the Gielgud character. 52.

This diffusion of interest by Wood can be seen as a weakness in the play, as it was in the dissemination of major characters in H.

Three other characters require some mention before "Washington" is examined. Trevor Hollingshead, the director of the film, has an angelic, extra-terrestrial quality as he descends the ladder, sublimely happy, to converse with the mundane Sir Geoffrey, then returns to preside over his torment on the horse. His minion, Bernie the Volt, is one of Wood's grotesques, his fat, red, cockney face shining out under a shock of white hair. He uses the long screwdriver, kept in a pouch between his legs, as a phallus, and functions as a Dionysiac satyr, a comic whose sheer physicality has brought enormous material rewards. Unlike the crude lower-rankers of the Army plays, whom he most resembles, he has great wealth, owns the motion picture rights to a filmscript about Genghis Khan, drives a Rolls Royce, and has a Georgian house in Putney, though he still keeps his face averted in

in the presence of theatrical knights, as the ordinary soldiers of 'The Charge' were advised to do to their officers. Penelope is almost his female equivalent with her swirling georgette which reveals all from time to time, though she is an essentially middle-class lady. She is hardly the woman to whom a wanderer would want to return, and is a prototype Wood female, frothy and empty, a male sexual object, devoid of any other interest.

The author's main achievement in this play was to use the conventions of the well-made play, break them by a potentially thrilling use of cinematic technology, and weld the pieces together into a modern version of a morality play. Though it could be argued that the subject-matter is too esoteric, the links with Gielgud and 'The Charge' too overt, there are moments when the hell-mouth of the stage reveals a suffering more universal and common to all of us than perhaps any of his other plays has shown. Two moments stand out as being of particular interest. The sequence with Gielgud on the horse has been dealt with at some length. It is a point at which the most passive, inert, and complacent artist is faced with the ultimate in isolation, and jolted into the realisation of the possiblity of failure, a kind of artistic death. The other, the moment of silence before the final sequence of the play, offers an intriguing suggestion of possible future artistic development for Wood. All the other plays so far discussed were full of action, movement, noise, and cataracts of words mixed with striking visual images. Whilst the same is true to a certain extent of Veterans (though there is, on the whole, far less action and movement) it is in this play that Wood uses that most precious and revealing element of the modern dramatist's vocabulary, silence. Through it he reveals more than words can convey (as he had done already in H with a strong and consciously theatrical visual statement of Havelock's death, which is also silent), and in that calm moment of inaction we can meditate on the inevitable approach of death for these old actors, and not only anticipate the coming of the earthquake which actually occurred during the filming of 'The Charge' (though few of the audience are likely to be aware of that), but the ending of time itself. Ancient and modern can be destroyed by as trivial an action as Dottie's, and our own collective apathy and antipathy toward's life's problems will result, ultimately, in the oblivion of the mushroom-shaped cloud.

"Washington", written six years later, does not, however, seek to develop this ability to universalise. It is much more satirical in tone, pokes fun at the ignorance of commercial backers and artistic advisers, the veniality of writers, and the megalomaniacal ambitions

of directors. No backers were seen in Veterans, though the play purported to be about them, but in "Washington" they occupy the whole of the first half of the play. The second half is in the hands of director and technicians, and actors now become the peripheral presences, though they have no mystical aura. To portray these characters Wood reverts to the cartoon-like caricaturing of Dingo (Sir Flute Parsons is described as 'hinged at the knees'), but the dialogue, conceived in the American idiom, is much more naturalistic than that of Dingo, at least in the first half, and Wood's acute ear for rhythm and stress develops an interesting blend of dialogue and rambling monologue which adds to the prevailing air of insecurity and chaos.

I shall now examine "Washington", giving a brief outline of its progression and characters, a consideration of some important speeches on the artist's view of Theatre/Cinema, and American political and cultural influences, before outlining in more detail my own first-hand experience of the development of the play from page to stage, gained by watching rehearsals at the National Theatre.

The first act shows a planning session in progress between members of the Film Institutes of America and Britain, at Britain's new National Theatre. The planners, who are mostly American, with the considerable exception of Sir Flute Parsons, a famous English writer who is prepared to attend the meeting, but only for a fee, include a Yale historian, an expatriate film maker from New York, and two new-wave, hippy-style directors from the West Coast. They are all stupid, self-seeking, and incompetent, pasteboard conveyors of varying attitudes to cultural cinema, and the significance of this crucial moment (the Revolution of 1776) in the development of their own countries. No one is more incompetent than Joe Veriato, the dapper little American who convenes the meeting at Mel's instigation. Mel is a shadowy offstage presence, the erstwhile leader of the project, who has bolted into the obscurity of Utah, leaving Joe, whose few thoughts appear to be full of the cinematic past, totally unprepared, but determined to try to keep everyone happy. A series of contrasts and tensions is set up between characters like Sir Flute, and the rest. Sir Flute is a bored, rude, but successful English writer:

> who once wrote a very good play indeed and went through the Golden Gate with, once wrote a very bad film indeed which won all the prizes and became brilliant. 53.

At 53, pleading poverty, he appears to be the representative of a post-war England, penniless, and reliant on American financial support.

Pat Sligo and Mickey Boorman, the revolutionary film makers, seek a very different artistic experience from most of the others. Mickey, not surprisingly is against:

> goddam thee's and thou's and three-ways looking hats and Valley Forge and our Germans against their Germans and why do I have to go to war Pop, because we want to be free son, looking like Henry goddam Fonda? 54.

He wants 100 hours of film, no interference, and ten years to shoot it, whilst Pat has some confused artistic notions about:

> Buckminster Fuller and Joyce and you know music. 55.

The impossibility of any agreement between such disparate opinions leads to stalemate, which is broken by the entrance of John Bean, just as everyone is talking about George Washington. With his massive experience and presence, his infectious enthusiasm ('I am come here with a fever') he gives rise to a typically American overreaction, an unbridled sense of excitement. He envisages some of the shots, swooping up into the air on a camera boom, and his heady imagination inspires everyone. Ominously, however, he does demand 75% of the producers' profits.

When the second act opens on the vasty fields of Ireland the mood is more subdued, and there is a sense of impending doom. The view of Wesley, Veriato's assistant, of the screenplay Sir Flute has written is that:

> People are bored at this moment, at this very moment, people who haven't even read the script are bored. 56.

Bean's euphoria begins to evaporate at the horrendous scope of the task he has undertaken, and his insecurity is further undermined by the arrival of the Chief Technician, the Gaffer, on the film set. The Gaffer's foul language and insurrectionary, anti-establishment invective ('the workers will make this film') are a major disruptive influence, and the rumblings of an incipient modern revolution. Money is withdrawn from the project, but replaced at the instigation of a German, Heinrich Guttmeier, who lives in Hampstead and represents the British Film Institute. Guttmeier compounds this irony by suggesting that the film should be shown at the Royal Command Performance. The financial struggles, and squabbles over who will be allowed to finally edit (the final cut) the film occupy the closing stages, and the play/film reaches a dizzying climax after Bean has set up some of his shots using the audience. A film is projected onto a screen:

> THROUGH THIS on a screen at the back we are watching a piece of film of a dying MAN who lies held by his friends on the redoubt, the post sync lines cross and cross and he says something which we don't hear. The dying man DOCTOR WARREN. A bevy of ragged buckskin clad, shirt and breeches clad, homespun clad PATRIOTS kneel at his side. As the death of Wolfe at Quebec. 57.

At the height of his enthusiasm Bean accidentally receives an extra's bayonet in his stomach, and his real actions on stage now mirror those of the film actor (who, of course, is Bean himself). This mingling of the 'real' happenings on stage and the illusion of film is sustained when, as the film loop continues its inexorable cycle, Bean looks at his own real blood oozing from his very real wound and complains that it is not realistic enough, calling for more props blood to supplement it. He expires as Joe tells him that he is to be given 'final cut'. The play ends on a highly farcical note, rejecting any serious emphasis on grim reality in the midst of illusion, with the only female arriving on the set for the finale, loudly complaining that her tunic is too small to accommodate her ample bosoms, as Sir Flute, wired up to several special effects, is struck by a mock arrow and his chest appears to explode. Unlike Bean's, however, his death is not real, and he ends, as he began, asking for money. Finally:

> The post sync loop goes on over the curtain and words are thrown at it, all miss. 58.

Many of Wood's earlier themes can be detected in this work - the incompetence of those in authority, artistic failure, the predatory quality of those with commercial interests, the revelation of inadequacy beneath a seemingly strong exterior, the battleground of artistic endeavour, and a total lack of care and consideration by the characters for others. In this play, though, he treats them more amiably and blandly, and the trenchant observations of his earlier plays are not so evident. In "Washington" the characters are amusing despite their defects in a way that Sir Geoffrey and Dottie could never be. "Washington" is undoubtedly the funniest play he has written, a hilarious pantomime which lacks the cutting edge of Dingo , and the bleak universality of Veterans.

Again, however, generalisations about Wood's work need to be qualified by closer scrutiny of the text. Some of the longer speeches in "Washington" are reminiscent of Wood's tirade on the inefficacy of television as an artistic medium, and make interesting comments on many aspects of an artist's endeavour. Sir Flute, the writer, and'

John Bean, the director, have long monologues in the second act on the battlefield of the set. Sir Flute delivers what he calls a 'Pastiche' on the role and responsibility of a film director, a man he sees as holding the artistic destiny of all his actors firmly in his hands. Sir Geoffrey on the horse faced the idea of an artistic death before the all-seeing camera, and it is interesting to see Sir Flute's development of this through the impersonality of film technology. He tells of actors whose reputations can be ruined by an uncaring director and become:

> discard,
> cut, coils on the floor, snicks and clips,
> half a performance here
> a line there. 59.

Apart from losing his livelihood as a result of a poor performance, and possibly destroying his marriage (though Wood wickedly adds 'to his newest wife'), the actor can always be pursued by the memory of his poor performance, 'rashly offered in later years on television', and his children will be forced to share his shame. This artistic suffering has a similar effect to the endless circling of the post sync loop and:

> the death of an actor follows on the
> first showing and the showing and the
> late night showing, though he himself
> died that day he dies again a thousand
> times on the showing... 60.

Sir Flute puts the onus on the director to ensure that the actor's performance is the best possible for posterity, but he sounds a note of caution when, after apparently arousing sympathy for the actor, he poses the question:

> how can they be charitably viewed
> who die in battle when money was the
> argument? 61.

In his monologue, which immediately follows Sir Flute's, Bean, disguised so that he can gain solace, Henry V style, from the unsolicited comments of all concerned with the film, naturally takes the director's side. He reminds Sir Flute of the number of occasions when, as a director, by means of technical tricks-of-the-trade, he has managed to cover the incompetence or sheer irresponsibility of the actor. His language takes on an almost biblical rhetoric as he thunders:

> Let them answer to God and the front
> office, and if they die, let them not
> blame him... 62.

He regards the responsibility for success or failure as a shared one, and demands that actors should come to the shooting purged of drunkenness, sexual demands, and love of money, so that he can direct them properly, adding a strong suggestion to the Gaffer that there should be

no strikes by technicians to hinder the project, nor 'petty squabbles as to hours'. Later in the play Bean affirms that he has more to lose, artistically and financially, than anyone else, and rejects any suggestion of personal ambition.

The language of these speeches has strong overtones of a catechism for the artist but Wood has purposely, as in many of the earlier plays and films discussed, caused incoherence to creep in. The strong categorical statements become blurred and out-of-focus, a linguistic convention which shows the internal muddle of the artists' minds in the midst of external chaos. The same muddled, stream-of-consciousness technique is used in another of Sir Flute's soliloquies which, in fact, precedes the previously-quoted monologue. This speech is considerably longer, and its subject is the attitudes of the English of Sir Flute's class and generation to the Americans. He sees the essence of America as:

> The secret of eternal youth I mean,
> spotty,
> vicious, but often gentle and sometimes kind. 63.

and adds to this patronising view the platitude that the American Revolution was 'so much nicer than everybody else's'. In his opinion the results of this event were positive for America. Unlike the English, the Americans learned from their mistakes and began to stress the freedom of the individual. As Sir Flute points out:

> you said all that pretentious rights
> of man nonsense and then went and
> did it. 64.

Later in the speech he appears to change his mind:

> the marvellous thing about your excuse
> for a Revolution is that it wasn't one
> at all...hardly noticed when all was
> said and done, hard-headed business
> men who very sensibly used what they
> needed
> and then got on with it as freemen, 65.

and moves away from the more idealistic concerns to a consideration of the relationship between the two countries as that between whore and client, the British taking money and giving little in return. Money is again uppermost in his thoughts, and he demands his fee 'in cash, in a suitcase, in dollars' so that he may go:

> off with a clear
> conscience having done all that I've
> been asked without embarrassment,
> without
> shame, without argument, without
> conviction. 66.

His artistic sterility is matched only by the total lack of understanding between the two cultures in what should be a momentous and fruitful

artistic collaboration, but serves only to bring deep-seated resentments to the surface.

Bean, too, has a long speech, in the first act, about what he sees as the significance of the Revolution. He stresses the fact that it was a popular revolution 'brought about by real people with real urges', and full of sex and violence, ideal ingredients for the popular kind of film he envisages. Eighteenth-century America was, for Bean, a land of abundance, full of romantic youth:

> and they can get caught in the rain,
> and they can sport under waterfalls,
> and they can take a bath once in a while
> our romantic interest. 67.

and his film will stress the old de Mille, Hollywood-Epic-style nostalgia for an unsullied Eden-like past. Moreover, he is able to secure the release of a famous star to play Tom Paine, and, as he informed the Panel on his entrance, John Wayne had always wanted to play Washington.

A bored, selfish writer, and a misty-eyed Republican-minded director, provide a recipe for certain artistic disaster, but Bean, 'standing up there like Moses', and Sir Flute, 'like a butterfly', instigate and develop the play's action, and its metamorphosis into film.

Indeed, the play's action is its essence, and characters are subservient to the overwhelming technical demands of the making of a film on stage whilst the audience watches, and even assists. "Washington" is an essentially theatrical experience which is difficult to recreate from the flatness of the printed page. Since I was fortunate enough to be allowed to attend rehearsals of the production at the National Theatre in November, 1978, I shall now consider the play's transition from page to stage, outlining some of the practical problems encountered, and attempt to offer some insight into the workings of the creative process which resulted in the performance. All quotations and descriptions are from my notes taken at the time, except where otherwise stated.

Originally written for one of the larger National Theatre auditoria, it was finally decided by the National Theatre management that "Washington" should be presented in the smaller, promenade-style Cottesloe. The play's free-flowing action and experimental quality seem more naturally suited to this space, but, although Geoffrey Reeves, the director, was able to involve the audience in a very direct and exciting way, something of the potentially huge spectacular effect was lost in the smaller auditorium. With full

theatrical trappings in one of the larger theatres the production costs would have been prohibitive. Even so, the gantry setting for the camera which Bean uses to such spectacular effect cost £2,000 alone.

Other problems, besides finance, assailed the director. Safety for both cast and audience was a major consideration. The gantry setting required the construction of a set of rails in the theatre's roof, along which the crane tracked, moving forward as it rose into the air. Pulleys at the four corners added stability, but Albert Finney, playing the massively physical John Bean, encountered several difficulties during rehearsal in the manipulation of the relatively complicated piece of machinery. Exciting though it was to see the actor towering ten feet or more above the audience, there was also a circus-like feeling of awe mingled with imminent danger.

The play had a five-week rehearsal period, short enough for a large-scale work (though Reeves preferred this, arguing that the actors would perform better because they would be fresher), and the difficulties caused by this were added to by the Union ruling that actors should work only $7\frac{1}{2}$ hours per day. All of them were appearing in other National Theatre productions, and Finney himself was acting major roles in Macbeth and The Cherry Orchard as well as rehearsing and learning lines for John Bean, a stern test of even this strong actor's stamina. Reeves was also concerned with the composition of the prospective audience. He commented:

> if we were doing it in Nottingham we could assume that hardly anyone knew anything about the making of a film

but feared that, in London, many of the audience could be members of the Association of Cinematic and Theatrical Technicians who might be very knowledgeable about the technical intricacies of film making. Consequently, a great deal of time in rehearsal was spent by actors learning to use all the equipment in an assured professional manner, and the film shots had to be set up convincingly. Besides all this, the later rehearsals of the play were disrupted by a strike of the National Theatre's technicians, putting the schedule a day behind at a crucial time, and forcing Reeves to cancel one of the projected previews.

Perhaps because of the short rehearsal period, the problems caused by 'star' billing, and the heavy acting load of the cast, Reeves' directorial method in this production was less experimental and improvisatory than in the Dingo rehearsals, though the actual film shots were improvised by the cast, using their own dialogue, which Wood, who was present at many of the rehearsals, watched and listened to, then wrote a fixed, final version. Reeves generally'

kept a low profile, encouraging actors to adapt themselves to their roles, taking individuals aside to make quiet comments after a bout of activity.

It was particularly interesting to witness the growth of the performances of Robert Stephens as Sir Flute, and Albert Finney as John Bean. Stephens was concerned at a very early stage of rehearsals with the exact weighting and intonation of particular words in his speeches. He spent some time with Wood trying out various stresses of such words as 'wonderful', and 'awfully', and wanted to know how to make his entry into his long second-act monologue. Apart from these important technical points he also asked about Sir Flute's characterisation, wanting to know particularly how far he was capable of feeling any emotion. Wood's reply was that 'Flute means everything he says at the moment he says it', which suggests that everything comes off the top of his head rather than from the depths of his heart, and accounts for the intellectual confusion already noted in the long speeches. Reeves saw Sir Flute as being like a butterfly, and Wood added that 'Sir Flute starts with a twinkle, then becomes serious'. The author also filled in the non-textual background information that 'Sir Flute has about £2,000 in a Swiss bank, and is rather worried and quite excited about it'. A more general comment by Wood is of some interest, too, in view of the speeches already analysed:

> these characters are talking about what it is to be English or American.

and the essence of the relationship between Sir Flute and Bean, as with English and American, in the play, is that they eventually compromise rather than oppose, unlike their forbears.

From these hints, Stephens built a performance which John Barber of the Daily Telegraph described as being 'of Sitwellian sophistication',[68] and of which Francis King, in The Guardian, wrote:

> As the epicene English script-writer (some debate in the interval about his prototype), Robert Stephens puts over a long speech about the Americans with such consummate virtuosity that a passage of no particular distinction becomes the highlight of the evening. 69.

thus emphasising the limited scope of a specifically literary analysis of Wood's work.

Finney's approach was more direct, less questioning than Stephens', since his role was much more extrovert and clearly-defined, though Reeves made the important distinction that Bean must be a director rather than an actor, and the audience must only be aware of him in the former category. Although Finney's performance was full of vitality and energy, and Bean was portrayed as being larger than life, the actor

showed himself to be a master of silence and stillness too. In an early rehearsal he handled a musket and rapier during one of Sir Flute's long monologues with a consummate dignity and authority which recalled the controlled skill of Noh actors. Above all, his acting had an impressive dynamism whether in action or stasis, and he allied to this an excitingly imaginative quality during the rehearsals of the setting-up of the film shots (in which his extensive experience as a film actor and director was particularly valuable) as he led the other actors in improvisation. His comments on the text were astute. As he developed his own performance in terms of heightened contrasts in rhythm and action so he quickly realised that the play as a whole depended on this variety:

> Charlie's written anarchy, but he wants order.

a point which Reeves took up when directing the film shots, telling the cast:

> your object is to make a shot from the rag, tag and bobtail that's going on.

and the director built a rehearsal around the final shooting of the film in which the chaos and kaleidoscopic movement before the filming contrasted with the silence and concentration of the final shot.

Reeves saw Bean as 'a great director in full spate - ten feet tall until he dies', and as 'a man of vision with a sense of future developments'. Much attention was given to his visual presentation. Finney thought he should be 'leonine', and added that he thought 'his clothes appear casual but they're very carefully chosen'. His American accent was confidently delivered from the beginning of rehearsals, and the actor gradually worked on an ageing process, adding a breathy quality to his speech, though losing none of his dynamism. A highlight of rehearsals, and one of the most effective moments in the performance, was his delivery of Bean's second act speech beginning 'I call the shots'. This was considerably rewritten by Wood to enable Finney to build a dance-like sequence in which he was to assume (at Reeves' direction) that the 'Americans' were on one side of the audience, and the 'British' on the other. In the actual performance Bean singled out members of the audience, holding his fingers camera-style as he framed them. Thus, he would choose a male on one side for the line:

> CUT to British Officer, young man with
> blue eyes

and sweep to a female on the other for:

> CUT to close up, Mrs. Loring
> "I love you, kiss me hold me you make
> me feel so
> alive and I give not a fig for convention.

an action which caused as much mirth at the lady's amused discomfiture as at the actual lines.

In fact, as the first night drew nearer, Finney, because of his many other commitments, was still struggling with the words of his long and demanding role. He was not at all worried by this, saying that he needed a weekend free of other plays when he would be able to absorb the lines 'by osmosis', breaking the speeches into sections and developing them as narrative - 'I like to tell a story'. He was word-perfect for the final Dress Rehearsals despite all the pressures, and several rewrites by the author. His research for the role included a visit with Reeves to the BBC studios to see a film documentary on John Houston. Reeves, too, had been reading a book on moral ambiguity in Houston's films, which seems appropriate in view of Bean's own self-delusion, though Reeves did not press this point in rehearsals.

As he finally appeared, in dog-tooth jacket, grey trousers, yellowy-brown boots, with whitened hair, and smoking a long cigar, Finney made a strong impression on audience and critics. John Barber wrote that the play:

> provides Albert Finney with a joyously seized opportunity to depict a lion-haired and trumpet-voiced director of the Ford-Houston type, who galvanizes his team with that shameless audacity and charm that Jewish people call chutzpah. 70.

and Jack Tinker exulted:

> How long have I been crying - and in what wilderness! - that Albert Finney is our finest modern character actor?........It is a performance bursting with comic wit and novelty, exploding with megaton power. 71.

These two fine performances in the major roles dominated the play as Wood had intended them to, yet both actors were impressively concerned with the quality of the ensemble, giving advice and help to the less-experienced cast members, and making many constructive suggestions on the shape of the production without being obtrusive.

Reeves directed the two contrasting parts of the play deftly and skilfully. He and William Dudley, the designer, did not follow Wood's stage directions for the opening of the first act (the sound collage was played as the audience entered, with Joe Veriato seated at the table - the voices of Hollywood's past issued from his mind, echoes of the tradition from which he is unable to free himself imaginatively), and settled instead for two tables pushed together and surrounded by chairs. This seemed to me a bad mistake, and I wrote to Reeves following one of the previews:

> The set: What has happened to the 'chairs of plastic and steel on thick pile carpet of brown wool'? And the 'glass table with tubular steel legs'? We should see an air of plushness to

> contrast with the real working conditions in Act II. Surely, it's still possible to get something better or, at least, cover those two tatty tables with green baize or something. Shouldn't Wes. be setting out snazzy folders (Joe's speciality) to match the pencils etc? And plastic cups are really for Gaffers and lower orders on set. Good though the business of smashing one is, they didn't seem right to me.

The reason was, of course, financial, but the American executive style might have been aimed for, and could have succeeded within budget restrictions. However, in Reeves' production, Sy. Holmesbagger's slow seriousness contrasted with Veriato's neurosis, and Sir Flute sat away from the table, more of an onlooker, the outsider from the Old World. The style of playing was relaxed and naturalistic, and Reeves had told the actors to play to the audience's reactions to heighten the comedy, at the same time cueing their lines quickly (Stephens had complained at the slow pace in one rehearsal). Sy. was to be the only slow character, the others were to speak quickly and build the comedy. Interspersed with the dialogue was an interesting orchestration of the use of pencils, paper, plastic mugs, the moving of chairs, and a fluidity of movement around the table, with subtle and effective changes of rhythm. Again, the visual impact, this time of the characters themselves, seemed lacking in definition. My letter continued:

> The costumes: They don't look American enough - there isn't a bow tie in sight, and they're not 'posh' enough. Wesley's white collar doesn't look right somehow. The suit isn't really good enough for him to know how to wear. Carl should look much more like Brecht - even rimless spectacles would help. Pat and Mickey don't look right either. One should have a Western-style checked shirt and one should look like Manson, or at least have a long-haired wig and a beard, with hippy emblems sewn on the denim, or badges like 'I voted for McGovern' all over him.

The second act was much more complicated visually, and in terms of movement. At one end of the acting area a water tank about six feet high had been erected, and toy boats were sailing on it to make a simulated model of Boston Harbour. A one-in-four ramp had to be climbed to reach the top of the tank, and there was a stockade on either side of it, and at the rear. Several barrels had been set out, and planks were placed so that actors could reach the Diorama against which all this was set, and which twinkled with stars when the act opened. The floor was covered with plastic grass, complete with mud tracks. Cannons pointed towards the stockades, and a battery of lights, special effects, and props were set to the right of them for cinematic purposes. A one metre deep trapdoor was provided in front of this setting, and was used later by various technicians during the filming. All this had been set up in full view of the

audience by an army of stage-hands during the interval, while a trio, dressed and made up to look like the famous painting 'The Spirit of '76' played such airs as 'Yankee Doodle' and 'British Grenadiers' on fife and drums. These stage-hands, called 'grips' in film-making, play an increasingly important part in the development of this artistic venture into a violent battle between the real workers and practically everyone else.

In performance, the role of the Gaffer, a disruptive, foul-mouthed leader of these rank-and-file technicians, becomes much more clearly the pivot of the action between the uncommitted apathy of Sir Flute and the overbearing drive of Bean. As the act develops, more and more extras arrive, dressed in eighteenth-century costumes, and the floor becomes festooned with the ropes and cables of the technician army. When, just before the end of the play, Sy and Wesley arrive to stop the fighting and filming and the violent battle now raging between grips and actors, they too wear red coats over their everyday clothes, and provide an echo of the British Army arriving to stop the eighteenth-century renegades. Reeves found this hinting at historical events a major difficulty. His main concern was to clarify any abstraction or necessary historical reference, saying:

> Charles has written it abstract, e.g. Gaffer as Putnam, but that couldn't possibly happen. The audience needs to be clearly told about it.

Few vestiges remain of this 'abstraction' in the text, and Wood has tended to drop specific allusions to events in favour of more general statements and actions, such as the one just described. Reeves had already tackled the problem of clarifying the welter of factual information in H to make it accessible to an audience. The problem would have been insuperable in "Washington" since it is not just a play about certain events and their effects on personalities as H was, but a play about the making of a film about history, requiring, ideally, an audience well-versed in theatrical method, cinematic technique, and having a good grasp of history.

Apart from the long catechisms of Sir Flute and Bean, the Gaffer's violent and chaotic disruption of an uneasy sense of order, the gradual cluttering of the acting area, and Bean's 'Cut' speech, the main dramatic moment in this act is the fusion of film, Revolution, and play, in the climactic action. The bayonetting of Bean had caused some difficulties in rehearsal since Reeves had wanted a sense of impaling, but the bayonet actually supplied had to be used with a slashing action. Dudley had also called a halt to rehearsals in costume for this action because the use of stage blood would be

ruinous. Reeves arranged the tableau of Bean's death to resemble as far as possible the film loop (which was based on Trumbull's painting showing Major Pitcairn being carried from the field, mortally wounded, in the final action at Breed's Hill in 1776). The characters were asked to respond as actors to their director's death, but to continue to act so as to ensure that the film was as well shot as possible. I was never happy with the production's finale, and made these suggestions:

> There was far too much happening in the final scene. Bean should be moving up towards the Diorama and be between the stockades, isolated. The noise of the soldier's entry can make him turn round, and we could then all see the bayonet go in and come out, the soldier retreating, and Bean left majestically alone to do a 30-second stagger into his tableau position - preferably with everything else dimmed and Bean in a follow spot (we're watching an actor die in the theatre). It's a pity there isn't film of Albert dying on screen in the same way (alone) so that the film and theatrical images are one, and the audience is absolutely clear about what has happened. When he falls into the tableau, the film loop could then be projected, and everyone in the tableau could do a slow turn to register it, thus telling the audience that it is there. It was totally confusing to look at the film (difficult to see with lights on) and to link it with Bean's death. Then the lights could come back on the group and the point would be made very clearly. There needs to be a fanfare or something to point up Dan's entrance, and he should take up a prominent position where we're expecting a Saviour's wisdom but only get the pipe gag. Perhaps Bean could be carried out by a cortège led by the Gaffer (or a couple of St. John's Ambulance men) whilst all the deflatory lines are being said.

Perhaps, however, the last word should be given to Albert Finney, who emphasised the gulf between leisured theory and time-consuming practice when he cried out at an early rehearsal for the final tableau:

> To hell with Stanislavski, it's the end of the play.

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CHAPTER VI.

CONCLUSION.

'I used to be relevant, biting, new. Now all I can be is amusing.'

For the critic, Gordon Maple/Charles Wood's statement is attractively, but deceptively, simple. It would be an easy matter to agree with it since there does appear to be a swing away from the biting satire of Dingo to the amusing blandishments of "Washington". Complications arise, however, when the critic emerges from behind the (very necessary) defensive barrier of specialisation on a particular theme to consider the wider context of Wood's output across the media.

Appendix E (see p.232.) gives a chronological outline of the author's work, and a glance at it shows that the subject of war and soldiers, vast though it is, is but one facet of a complex and varied achievement. To be relevant, biting and new for one generation is often to be dull and obvious to another, and, interesting as the early Army plays and Dingo were, they are fast becoming signposts to a receding past. H bit occasionally, but not so sharply, its relevance to the late 60s was doubtful, and it was too Victorian in context to be new. By the time "Washington" appeared, Wood's satire was less controversial, and the overall effect was of buffoonery and farce rather than anger. To concentrate on these criteria alone, then, in order to assess the author's achievement is to ignore his most apparent virtues, which lie in his imaginative flair for making the fullest use of his chosen medium, and in his command of a rich variety of modes of language; and there have been other developments which, though less immediately spectacular and arresting, are longer-lasting and of greater relevance to the maturation of an important writer.

The television series 'Don't Forget to Write' (1977/78) had an ease and facility in the writing which made it appear to be a bland situation comedy but cloaked its real quality. Through the episodes Wood developed a probe into relationships within a family, and with friends and acquaintances of all kinds which explored a totally different kind of dramatic world from that of the plays and films studied here, a carefully-observed 'Comédie Humaine' taking the place of spectacular cataclysm, and gaining a new relevance in terms of an audience's intelligent response and identification rather than its shocked and bemused indignation. It is a subtle and allusive drama,

showing deep compassion for others, silly though many of them may be. Gordon is a relatively successful middle-aged writer who views the world and, like most of us tries, but generally fails, to understand its complexity, yet still manages to exist entertainingly despite his doubts and foibles. In these series, too, Wood has written his first role of real depth and insight for an actress. Mabel, Gordon's wife, is long-suffering, slightly dotty but attractively so, but she manages to cope despite all adversity, and is presented lovingly, as part of a deeply-felt relationship. These developments alone, which show the author in a surprisingly neo-Chekhovian context, demonstrate that he is often at his best when being amusing rather than striving to be consciously relevant and new, and turn Gordon's statement on its head.

It is further nullified by an examination of filmscripts as widely different as Wood's adaptation of Pierre Schoendoerffer's novel 'Farewell to the King'(1972) which captures a Douanier Rousseau, Robinson Crusoe-like world of exotic images in its presentation of the story of a mad red-haired Irishman who has set himself up as king of a large tract of the Borneo jungle at the end of the War, and his impressively imaginative cinematic treatment of Wagner's life and achievement in 'Wagner'(1977). At the time of writing (1982) this latter work is being filmed by Tony Palmer, and stars a rejuvenated Richard Burton. The first draft of this screenplay has no dialogue, but fills a whole book with vivid descriptions of episodes from Wagner's life embellished with Wood's full descriptive range. If we add to this another new direction for Wood's drama, which he is at present engaged in writing - the script for a community production at Sherborne, under the aegis of Ann Jellicoe, who has been experimenting in this idiom with other Dorset towns - it is clear that the major dramatic work he has always promised is still a distinct possibility.

Wood, the satirist, deflater of heroic myths, and exposer of human inadequacy, has, over the years, developed a wry, objective observation of human nature in a wide variety of situations. He has employed the techniques of the caricaturist and the oil painter, and, if the former were originally too black and white, he has now refined them into a deft, economic shorthand for conveying character, and, if the latter were perhaps too indulgently displayed, the screenplay of 'Wagner' whets the appetite for a new deployment of the kind of visual wealth of 'Flashman' in a more controlled, but no less exciting, way. With all this in mind, Gordon's statement seems to be less and less acceptable.

I should like to finish by quoting from an interview with Wood which

was recorded in 1979, at an early stage in the development of this thesis. It runs as follows:

DW. I know perfectly well that, having written quite a lot on your work now, that I've nowhere reached the core.
CW. Perhaps there isn't one.
DW. There's got to be.

I now know that there is.

APPENDIX E.

CHARLES WOOD: A CHRONOLOGY OF WORKS.

pre-1961.	'The Princess and the Rifle'.	unperformed play.
	'Arthur Had a Dream'.	" "
	'Plastic Igloo'.	" "
	'Step Short in Front'.	" "(TV).
1961.	'Traitor in a Steel Helmet'.	TV play.
1962.	Prisoner and Escort.	Radio.
	'Cowheel Jelly'.	"
	'Not at All'.	TV.
1963.	Cockade. New Arts Theatre, London. 16.10.63. dir: P.Dromgoole.	
1964.	Tie up the Ballcock. Bristol University Drama Dept. dir: A. Dossor.	
	'The Drill Pig'.	TV.
1965.	'Don't Make Me Laugh'. RSC. Aldwych Theatre, London. 4.2.65. dir. D.Jones.	
	'Meals on Wheels'. Royal Court Theatre, London. 19.5.65. dir: J.Osborne.	
	'The Knack'. Film. dir: R.Lester.	
	'Help'. Film. dir: R.Lester.	
1966.	Fill the Stage with Happy Hours. Nottingham Playhouse. 9.11.66. dir: P.Dromgoole.	
1967.	Dingo. Bristol Arts Centre. 28.4.67. Royal Court Theatre. 15.11.67. dir: G.Reeves.	
	'How I Won the War'. Film. dir: R.Lester.	
	'The Long Day's Dying'. Film. dir: P.Collinson.	
	'Drums Along the Avon'. TV.	
1968.	'Labour'. Bristol Arts Centre. 12.10.68. dir: D.Weeks.	
	'The Bed-Sitting Room'. Film. dir: R.Lester.	
	'The Charge of the Light Brigade'. Film. dir: T.Richardson.	
	'Petulia'. unperformed screenplay.	
1969.	H. National Theatre, London. 13.2.69. dir: G.Reeves.	
	'Flashman'. unperformed screenplays.	
	'Fellini Satyricon'. Film. English adaptation.	
	'A Bit of a Holiday'. TV.	
1970.	'The Emergence of Anthony Purdy Esq'. TV.	
1971.	'A Bit of Family Feeling'. TV.	
	'Collier's Wood'. King's Head. 10.8.71.	
	'Hadrian the Seventh'. unperformed screenplay.	

APPENDIX E. (cont.)

1972.	Veterans. Royal Court Theatre. 9.3.72. dir: Ronald Eyre.
	'Pocock and Pitt'. unperformed screenplay.
	'Farewell to the King'. unperformed screenplay.
	'A Bit of Vision'. TV.
	'Next to Being a Knight'. Radio.
1973.	'Foxes'. unperformed screenplay.
1974.	'A Bit of an Adventure'. TV.
	'Mutzen ab'. TV.
	'Death or Glory Boys'. TV.
	'The Merry Widow'. unperformed screenplay.
1975.	'Jingo'. RSC. Aldwych Theatre, London. 19.8.75. dir: Richard Eyre.
1976.	'The Script'. Hampstead Theatre Club.
	'Love Lies Bleeding'. TV.
	'No'. TV.
1977/78.	'Don't Forget to Write. TV.
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'Stick Man'.	Duplicated version. approx. 70p. card covers. undated.
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	First draft screenplay. card covers. 89p.
'How I Won the War'.	Duplicated version of 'A Film by Richard Lester, Screenplay by Charles Wood, From the Novel by Patrick Ryan. Copyright Petersham Films Ltd.' card covers, 1967.
'The Long Day's Dying'.	Duplicated version of 'Shooting Script, 7th November, 1967. From the Novel by Alan White. Junction Films Ltd. Twickenham.' card covers.
'The Bed-Sitting Room'.	Several loose duplicated versions of screenplay, including original screenplay by John Antrobus, and a touring version of the playscript.c.1968.
'The Charge of the Light Brigade'.	'Paste-Up script'. Duplicated, in card covers.
'Flashman'.	Duplicated. 'Flashman. 1st draft August, 1969, revised October, 1969.' card covers.
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7. Visual Materials.

Appendix A.

Information taken from 'The Playhouse Kidderminster: A Souvenir, 1946-68'. 32pp. in possession Mrs. V.Crofts.

Appendix B.

Information and photographs taken from 'A Souvenir Programme to commemorate the 5th Anniversary of the Playhouse, Kidderminster'. Nov. 19th, 1951. Cheshire & Sons, Printers, Kidderminster. in possession Mrs. V.Crofts.

Appendix C.

Dingo at Bristol Arts Centre. Photographs by Bromhead, Bristol. Other information on the production, including accounts, Author's Contract, and various letters are in a folder in the possession of Bristol Watershed.

Dingo at the Royal Court. Photographs from Plays and Players, January, 1968.

Appendix D.

'Last Stand at Gandamak'. from The British Empire, Vol.2. no.19. Orbis Publishing Co., London.
(see also Vol.2. no. 23 for pictures and information relating to the Indian Mutiny).

'Encampment of Horse Artillery near Balaclava', and 'Charge of the Light Cavalry Brigade' from 'The Crimean War' ed. Langdon-Davies. Jackdaw Series. No.11.

H.

Designs and research material kindly loaned by Michael Annals.

A full list of designs supplied is as follows:

1. Sepoys - 22nd Native Infantry. Colour.
2. Lt. Henry Havelock. (John McEnery). Costume design. Colour.
3. 'Peep Show' scenery designs:
   (a) Landscape.
   (b) Interior. (Havelock's tent).
   (c) House Roller Curtain.
   (d) Ruined House in Lucknow.
   (e) Field Hospital.
   (f) Battle.
   (g) Street in Lucknow.
4. Roller Blind Captions.
5. Mrs. Jones Parry and Timothy. Costume design. Colour.
6. Clouds cloth. Set 16.
7. Forestage flats and header.
8. Bibighur hanger and French flat.
   Cawnpore on the Ganges.
9. The Transformation scene. 4 paintings.

Production photographs by Zoe Dominic.

8. Miscellaneous.

Videotape of television showing of 'The Charge of the Light Brigade'. Bristol Polytechnic Library.

Cassette tape of a conversation with Charles Wood, Milton, 2.5.79. in possession D.F.Weeks.