

lished in some form or other. We shall require to have some form of 'best room' in which we emphasize the necessary artificiality of social civilization. Somehow or other we shall have to keep up our standard of manners, and to keep it up without definite rules is too difficult.

We shall have to return to formal dinners, however meagre; hospitality, however simple; and arranged-for meetings, however dull. The fewer forms you insist on the more grace you require. Social informality makes too great a demand upon the wits of the shy. The Englishman tends to be shy, even if he lives in the exact *milieu* in which he was born, and one man in five is painfully shy if he enters any rank of life as a recruit. Suppose the ordinary person were suddenly called

upon to sustain a long interview with a royal personage and told that, while he must at his peril show every possible deference, there were no rules whatever to help him out. Many a man would reply that, whatever his failure to appear might cost him, he simply could not go. It is perfectly easy to conform to a ritual with visible signs. It is nearly impossible to invent one in conformity to an invisible spirit. Absolute informality must always be the privilege of those who know the art of life through and through, and that belongs almost exclusively to those who were born where it was known. If the middle class flouts the forms of social life it will have no distinctive social life at all, and that means it will be merged, or, in other words, will die out.

THE POSITION IN THE THEATRE

BY EDWARD SHANKS

[Mr. Shanks is assistant editor of the London Mercury as well as a well-known English poet and critic of the arts.]

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THE phrases 'commercial drama' and 'artistic drama' beg a good many questions and institute an offensive comparison. But they do at least correspond to a certain reality, and they indicate the existence of that strange cleavage which is the most curious feature of the modern English theatre. . . .

In the theatre, as nowhere else in the arts, action and reaction are embodied, are recognizably separated one from the other. On the one side we have the

'West End' theatres with their provincial allies, whither 'West End' successes are sent on tour. On the other are such bodies as the Stage Society and the Phoenix Society, and, both in London and in the provinces, the Repertory Theatres. The gulf is not impassable. Plays are sometimes staged in the West End for other reasons than because a manager thinks them likely to run three hundred nights: a few can be seen which, for whatever reasons they were staged,

and however they have succeeded, seem to have been written, at least, with an admixture of other motives. And we have all seen Repertory Theatres hastily throwing over the principle of their existence when a run of three hundred nights appeared to offer itself. But the gulf is there, and it is a gulf which is not to be found elsewhere. There are 'commercial' novels and 'artistic' novels; but they often come from the same publisher and sometimes from the same author. The 'artistic' novel, at any rate, is not published in a limited edition for subscribers only. No: the cleavage in the theatre is a unique thing, and the investigation of its origin and meaning leads one into the history of the English drama during the last thirty years.

For it was about thirty years ago that this phenomenon first arose. If one wanted a precise date, none better could be chosen than that of the foundation of the Independent Theatre by Mr. J. T. Grein. Mr. Grein's first production was *Ghosts*; and in 1892 he produced Mr. Shaw's *Widowers' Houses*, a piece laid aside by its author seven years before because it was manifestly impossible that the ordinary stage should ever have any use for it. But the significance of the new departure escapes us if we forget what made it necessary. The English theatre, during the nineteenth century, had fallen into an almost unparalleled state of degradation. Before it reached that desert tract which somehow, parched and footsore, it yet succeeded in crossing, it had always made its best writers also popular writers. Shakespeare and Jonson, Congreve and Sheridan, were not totally unsuccessful dramatists: no private subscription performances were required for *King Lear* or *Love for Love*. But in the middle of the nineteenth century there were no Shakespeares, no Sheridans. There was at best a Robert-

son, and below him an abyss into which it is pleasanter not to look. When the 'artistic' drama was again revived it had ceased to be 'commercial'; and the operation was performed by a strait and almost fanatical sect, which, with a few exceptions, has remained strait and fanatical ever since. True enough, Mr. Shaw has become an enormously successful dramatist, and Mr. Galsworthy is sometimes 'put on for a run.' Mr. Bennett occupies a rather ambiguous position between the two worlds, though he has not yet written the decisive play we have a right to expect from him. Mr. Somerset Maugham, who is nothing if not one of the main supports of the 'commercial' drama, has written at least one comedy, *The Circle*, of surprising 'artistic' quality. But the cleavage remains, deep and unmistakable.

The recapitulation of these facts may seem superfluous, for they are well known to everyone who takes the slightest interest in the English theatre. But what I have called the cleavage exercises a deep influence not only on the present, but also on the future of our drama; and I do not think that any attempt, however humble and elementary, to elucidate its meaning can be wholly in vain. It is, indeed, a somewhat surprising fact that it should still exist. When Mr. Shaw and Mr. Grein, and others, set up their standard in the 'nineties, their intention, I suppose, was to conquer or to die. They have lived and prospered, but they have not conquered. What they have achieved is the setting-up of an independent and fairly durable second state by the side of the first. The new drama, to be sure, influences its commercial brother, keeps it more or less up-to-date, and supplies it with ideas which may be converted to its own use. But it no longer hopes to drive the commercial drama from the field or even to influence it very

profoundly, nor is it itself any longer in real fear of its own life. . . .

The 'new drama,' which, to some extent, all over Europe but particularly in England is definitely a recent creation, has been dominated from the first by the principle of realism. This is made not less but more obvious by the fact that the reaction against realism began almost at once, and has never until the last few years shown any signs of establishing itself. Ibsen was the first great master; and the modern movement in the theatre has never yet escaped from his influence. Of course, when we call him a realist we must do so with innumerable reservations and qualifications. But his tendency, and even more that of his disciples, was in the direction of removing unreal conventions from the stage. Like so many literary revolutions, that which he performed was most easily obvious and most easily imitable in the matter of technique. He abolished soliloquies, he abolished asides, he abolished lucky coincidences. What he presented on his stage might be life refined to an essence, but it was so refined only by careful selection, not by any invention outside the data ordinarily given by life. Thus he was able to present symbolic and mystical conceptions in a perfectly natural manner. *The Wild Duck* and *The Master Builder* are far beyond being merely pictures or even criticisms of life as it is lived (as are, for example, *A Doll's House* and *An Enemy of the People*), yet old Ekdal and Solness are observed and natural persons, credible on the ordinary plane, not creatures of the poetic imagination.

His disciples, however, adopted a sterner and more arid form of realism. Of course, the whole question of 'realism' or 'naturalism' is an admirable subject for the process called 'dissociation of ideas'; and only from an intelligence as dispassionate and patient as

that of Remy de Gourmont could we hope for an analysis of the irrelevant details which form the common notions designated by these terms. But realism in the theatre meant, and still means, roughly, the adoption of Ibsen's natural technique, the portrayal of ordinary life as lived by large classes of the population, and, for some reason, an atmosphere of gloom intensified to a degree which is far from realistic. The German Naturalists considered that the artist should paint life precisely as it is — without selection, without purpose. Hauptmann's *Vor Sonnenaufgang* was almost a perfect exemplification of this theory — almost, because a perfect exemplification could hardly survive on any stage to the last fall of the curtain. And Mr. Galsworthy in more than one play has reproduced scenes from ordinary life, scenes in courts of justice or the auction room, exactly in every detail as they happen in ordinary life. He even makes his characters speak exactly the language of ordinary life — a method which is said to be as heartbreaking for the actor as it is tedious for the audience.

We shall do well, however, to dismiss from consideration any definition of realism which represents it to be an aimless, unselective reproduction of everyday existence. It is only in the rarest instances that an artist can efface himself and his own sympathies without effacing also his power to interest an audience; and this applies as much to the dramatist as to any other artist. Realism consists not in reproducing reality, but in producing the illusion of reality, and, by that means, making a comment or conveying a feeling. *A Doll's House* makes a comment: it is a criticism of society — none the less valid at this moment because Helmer's 'squirrel' and 'lark' need to be translated into more modern terms of endearment. But Nora and Helmer, for

all that they are displayed for this purpose, are normal, credible persons; they are such persons as call on one when one moves into a new house. It is by selection and presentment that the dramatist has made them say for him what *he* desires to say. So, too, with Solness: if one has not met him, it is an accident, though what Ibsen says through him is more than a criticism on modern society. These characters, all the characters of Ibsen's later plays, exist on a different plane from the Hamlets and the Hernanis.

It was, in a sense, the corruption of the Hernanis and the Hamlets against which Ibsen and his almost unknown coadjutor, Henri Becque, and their disciples revolted. The nineteenth-century drama, especially in England, much resembled one of the characters which drama has always delighted in exploiting — the worn-out and foolish descendant of a noble race. At this moment any Londoner can see what the Elizabethan drama has come to. As I write, Sir Martin Harvey is playing in *The Only Way* at the Lyceum; and this piece, grotesque as the connection may seem, is the degenerate descendant of the great plays of blood and violence which three centuries ago pleased the London mob by their violence and their poetry. There were, in the nineteenth century, other survivals of greater days, descendants of Congreve and Sheridan and Molière, no less abased than the descendants of Shakespeare and Webster. The exponents of the new drama set their hands to the removal of all this decaying matter; and who will say that they did wrong?

Ibsen, if it were only by his technical improvements, opened a new epoch; but that epoch was not long to endure. Perhaps it is true that realism, even in its most attenuated sense, is a spirit not very congenial to the desires of humanity: perhaps the realist method, acid

and critical as it is, can never give humanity what it demands from the arts. At all events, the reaction began almost without an interval. The creations of Maeterlinck did not pretend to be real. And soon, in England, Ibsen's greatest disciple and propagandist began to develop on his own lines.

Mr. Shaw has a bifurcated personality, and consequently his own views on himself, his views expressed in the capacity of critic, are little to be trusted. He has an admirable debating brain and, when he elects to exercise it, a cool and arid intellect. But he himself has declared for 'the melting moment' on the stage, and no one knows better than he how to induce the melting moment. He must be judged by his own best achievements rather than by his cooler declarations. And his own best achievements are no more realistic than Hamlet or Coriolanus. To come no later down in his career, Cæsar and Bluntschli and Brassbound and John Tanner are pure figures of romance. No doubt the figures of an earlier romance exhibited their prowess in a different way. That remarkable survival, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, pinked his enemy to the tune of extremely acrobatic versifying. Mr. Shaw's heroes pink their opponents intellectually amid a shower of dazzling debating points. They are heroes of the intellect, perhaps, but they are romantic heroes none the less. They are neither conceived nor executed in a realistic attitude of mind. Mr. Shaw, it should be noted, is not, like Ibsen, an innovating genius in technique; and, technique being so obvious and so important, this helps to conceal the magnitude of the revolution he has effected. Ibsen's novelties were of the simple kind of which only a great revolutionary is capable. Mr. Shaw is simply one of the greatest writers for the stage that ever lived. Liszt invented no new method of using the piano; but he un-

derstood better than any other composer how to make the technical resources of the piano effective. There is no definite method of using the stage to be set to Mr. Shaw's credit; but no dramatist has ever used the scene and the actors with greater effect. He has made such dazzling use of Ibsen's reformed technique as almost to conceal the fact that he is moving in a quite contrary direction. We are too prone to judge all artists by their personal confessions; and when a dramatist, of all artists, comes into the open and proclaims his own intentions, say in a preface, we are far too ready to rank such a declaration above the ambiguous utterances of the characters for whom he cannot be held responsible. But we must remember that an artist is more truly, though less consciously, himself in his creations than in his explanations. Despite all the admirable commonsense of Mr. Shaw's prefaces, we must agree that Peter Keegan is the real man, not Larry Doyle.

Mr. Shaw's development in the direction of romanticism has been less obvious, but not less potent, than that of his great contemporary, Dr. Gerhart Hauptmann. But, while both of these writers were attached in one way or another to the original realist movement, there were younger authors who had no such attachments and whose earliest efforts were in the direction of an uncompromising revolt against realism. First among these comes Herr Hugo von Hofmannsthal, who might be described comprehensively as the greatest disappointment the modern drama has known. For Herr von Hofmannsthal, who began at an amazingly early age to write plays of great competence in very mellifluous verse, has never redeemed his too precocious promise. His *Der Abenteurer und die Sangerin* marks the height of his powers. It has to a great degree characterization, and

a sense of the stage combined with a genuine and singular understanding of the manner in which a display of poetic eloquence can be used with dramatic effect. And this last quality is essential if, instead of proceeding from the point marked by Ibsen's reforms, we are in any manner to return to the great masters of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They had an audience which appreciated poetry in its proper place. Our modern audiences seem not to appreciate poetry; but that may be because they never get it in its proper place. Herr von Hofmannsthal might have been expected to give us a lead in this direction. He took, instead, to writing librettos for Dr. Richard Strauss and to making adaptations from Sophocles, Otway, and Calderon. A certain atrophy of the creative power seems to have overtaken him. He can execute, but he can no longer conceive.

After this disappointment the question is, whether the theatre must move on Ibsen's lines and gradually expand the radius measured out by him, or whether it must take some more drastic step. And this question is not so idle and meaningless as at first sight it may seem. For the theatre is, less than any other branch of the arts, a matter of individuals. The painter and the poet may go their own ways and do what they please. The painter needs canvas and colors, the poet pen, paper, and ink: neither of them needs any more to create masterpieces. But the dramatist does need more than pen, paper, and ink: he must have a complicated organization behind him before his masterpieces can take recognizable form. The manuscript of a novel is the novel. Whatever may prevent its publication, the work exists in final shape; and such lessons as the novelist can learn from its composition he has already learnt. But a play does not, in a proper sense, exist until it has been put on the stage by the

concerted efforts of some dozen or more persons. And these dozen persons will not exert themselves unless they feel the certainty that somewhere a far larger number exists which will support them. The drama began, according to our latest theorists, in the mass feeling of the worshipers of Dionysus, or of those who worshiped the dead. The occasion of the mass feeling may have changed: its necessity remains.

We must therefore consider whether the methods of realism imposed by Ibsen and his disciples on the theatre correspond to what humanity asks from the theatre. Certainly these methods have proved to be astonishingly elastic. Mr. Shaw, that marvelous though un-inventive juggler, has managed within them to write *Heartbreak House*, and Mr. Granville-Barker has managed to write *The Marrying of Anne Leete*, which remains his best, though not his most nearly perfect, play. But the methods of realism are methods devised for the presentation of the ordinary; and the fact that they can be used for other purposes does not answer the question whether other methods ought not to be devised. If I am clever enough to put a sufficiently good edge on it, I can shave with a carving knife; but probably I should do better to buy a razor. What need have we of the conventions of the old poetic drama?

The poetic drama does not present people as they are nor yet an illusion of people as they are. It does not give the literal transcript from reality, which is the special gift of Mr. Galsworthy, nor the abridged and modified transcript by which Ibsen creates his illusion. It shows such persons as never existed talking as no human being ever talked; and, whether they talk in verse like the persons of Webster and Shakespeare or in heavily rhythmical prose like the persons of M. Claudel, the effect is the same. They are removed from ordinary

life: they are idealizations of what is important in it. Mr. Shaw, hard-driven to account for one of the characters in *Man and Superman*, said: 'Every woman is not Anne, but Anne is Everywoman.' It may have been a pity he did not make Anne, and the rest of the abstractions who surrounded her, talk in verse. For verse is a method, and a method commonly understood, of proclaiming that one's representations are ideally, not literally, true to life. Thus the adoption of verse, or of some equivalent of it, is a matter of the first importance, of far more than merely technical importance. A preponderance at any time, or even a large number, of plays in verse is a certain indication that at that time realism is not the prevailing spirit.

Now, is it fanciful to suppose that a revival of the poetic drama might conquer the commercial theatre and reform it throughout as the drama of Ibsen has failed to do? We have seen that the revolution of the 'nineties was successful in so far as it established a secure place for itself. It did so much because it appealed immediately to intelligent persons who liked the theatre, but were driven away from it by the corruption of greater days, which was all that it could find there. Yet it remained strictly unpopular; and does one not feel, with the art of the drama, that what is unpopular is proportionately unsatisfactory? And is this not because its realistic basis, which the new drama has often transcended but never forgotten, is too narrow for genuine public appreciation? Is the modern public quite incapable of appreciating good art in the theatre, or is it merely not moved by the particular form of good art at present offered to it? In this connection we ought to observe that among those productions which have recently attained, by more or less common consent, both artistic and

commercial success are *The Beggar's Opera* and the Russian Ballet. These have received popular support in a measure denied to works which have been, perhaps, equally good, but in a different way.

Of the possibilities and probabilities of such an extensive movement there is at present little to say. Verse is not an essential, though it is hard to believe that were a revival of the essentially poetic drama to take place it would not bring verse with it. But verse has its drawbacks as well as its merits. Our common dramatic blank verse is haunted. For a long time hardly anyone has

been able to use it without producing a million reverberating echoes which blur what he himself has to say; and no one has yet evolved any formal rhythm which can satisfactorily take its place.

But speculations on such details as these are, no doubt, out of place and unprofitable. What we have to consider is whether the 'artistic' drama was not limited at the outset in its range and its appeal by the circumstances in which it received its new life; whether it is not, in virtue of these limitations, a thing only for the few, not a thing which only a few as yet enjoy, though all should do so.

IN THIS DESERTED GARDEN

BY SYLVIA LYND

[*The Nation and the Athenæum*]

In this deserted garden was song ever sung?
 Did ever the blossom of April put light on the bough?
 Did leaves move softly once? At night was there hung
 A moon in the depths of the branches where clouds hang now?

Stood I by the willow listening, with indrawn breath,
 To hear, from the echoing night, from the mist-white vale —
 Leaves overhead and the moon, and grass beneath —
 The first wild song of the newly come nightingale?