

Eleonora Duse*

I.

Seeing's believing, so the ancient word
 Chills buds to shrivelled powder flecks, turns flax
 To smoky heaps of straw whose small flames wax
 Only to gasp and die. The thing's absurd!
 Have blind men ever seen or deaf men heard?
 What one beholds but measures what one lacks.
 Where is the prism to draw gold from blacks,
 Or flash the iris colors of a bird?
 Not in the eye, be sure, nor in the ear,
 Nor in an instrument of twisted glass,
 Yet there are sights I see and sounds I hear
 Which ripple me like water as they pass.
 This that I give you for a dear love's sake
 Is curling noise of waves marching along a lake.

II.

A letter or a poem—the words are set
 To either tune. Be careful how you slice
 The flap which is held down by this device
 Impressed upon it. In one moment met
 A cameo, intaglio, a fret
 Of workmanship, and I. Like melted ice
 I took the form and froze so, turned precise
 And brittle seal, a creed in silhouette.
 Seeing's believing? What then would you see?
 A chamfered dragon? Three spear-heads of steel?
 A motto done in flowered charactry?
 The thin outline of Mercury's winged heel?
 Look closer, do you see a name, a face,
 Or just a cloud dropped down before a holy place?

III.

Lady, to whose enchantment I took shape
 So long ago, though carven to your grace,
 Bearing, like quickened wood, your sweet sad face
 Cut in my flesh, yet may I not escape
 My limitations: words that jibe and gape
 After your loveliness and make grimace
 And travesty where they should interlace
 The weave of sun-spun ocean from a cape.
 Pictures then must contain you, this and more,
 The sigh of wind floating on ripe June hay,
 The desolate pulse of snow beyond a door,
 The grief of mornings seen as yesterday.

* This sonnet sequence was written several months ago, in contemplation of Signora Duse's proposed final appearances in New York, which were to have taken place early in May.

All that you are mingles as one sole cry
 To point a world aright which is so much awry.

IV.

If Beauty set her image on a stage
 And bid it mirror moments so intense
 With passion and swift largess of the sense
 To a divine exactness, stamp a page
 With mottoes of hot blood, and disengage
 No atom of mankind's experience,
 But lay the soul's complete incontinence
 Bare while it tills grief's gusty acreage—
 Doing this, you, spon-image to her needs,
 She picked to pierce, reveal, and soothe again,
 Shattering by means of you the tinsel creeds
 Offered as meat to the pinched hearts of men.
 So, sacrificing you, she fed those others
 Who bless you in their prayers even before their mothers.

V.

Life seized you with her iron hands and shook
 The fire of your boundless burning out
 To fall on us, poor little ragged rout
 Of common men, till like a flaming book
 We, letters of a message, flashed and took
 The fiery flare of prophecy, devout
 Torches to bear your oil, a dazzling shout,
 The liquid golden running of a brook.
 Who, being upborne on racing streams of light,
 Seeing new heavens sprung from dusty hells,
 Considered you, and what might be your plight,
 Robbed, plundered—since Life's cruel plan compels
 The perfect sacrifice of one great soul
 To make a myriad others even a whit more whole.

VI.

Seeing you stand once more before my eyes
 In your pale dignity and tenderness,
 Wearing your frailty like a misty dress
 Draped over the great glamour which denies
 To years their domination, all disguise
 Time can achieve is but to add a stress,
 A finer fineness, as though some caress
 Touched you a moment to a strange surprise.
 Seeing you after these long lengths of years,
 I only know the glory come again,
 A majesty bewildered by my tears,
 A golden sun spangling slant shafts of rain,
 Moonlight delaying by a sick man's bed,
 A rush of daffodils where wastes of dried leaves spread.

AMY LOWELL.

Masse Mensch

Man and the Masses, by Ernst Toller, translated by Louis Untermeyer. Garrick Theatre, April 14, 1924.

ONE may easily be grateful to the Theatre Guild for producing *Masse Mensch* and for following the general quality of the Berlin production. The name of the play has come often across the seas to us; and everyone has heard of the power of its success under Jürgen Fehling's direction at the theatre of the Volksbühne, the Berlin working-man's enormous theatrical organization. To see *Masse Mensch* tried out, then, on our stage, is a genuine privilege, however boring, for me at least, it turned out to be.

Out of this production at the Garrick there are moments that I recall as briefly exciting. The stock-exchange was good, with its red and black, its flicker and jerk of agitation in lights and in figures. The spot where Mr. Hughes's silver figure rose high in the air, in front of the woman's blue, had its incantation. And here and there a gesture, a line, a form passed into the tension of beauty. Ben-Ami's first movement was interesting, in spite of the sophomoric stuff that he was soon to say. His entrance with the concertina was stirring. Miss Yurka used a good tone and dignified postures, though I never felt that the part came from far within. Mr. Haupt showed a clean technical control and instinct for style, though imprisoned in a frigid sort of delicatessen accent. But how shocking all that comes to be, when we remember that Ernst Toller poured out into this drama a passion and fervor that keep him in prison still; and when we remember that *Masse Mensch* has been in its own land and under its own conditions a firebrand.

The story of the play begins with the Husband, who symbolizes the state, persuading the Woman to abandon her Communist leadership. A grotesque stock-exchange arises in the woman's mind. Her husband appears in this dream as the recorder of sales. There follows a Revolutionary meeting in which the Woman pleads for a bloodless strike, as against the Nameless One, who is the Mob, or Mass, crying for revolution against the people's wrongs. Another dream scene, in which the Nameless One leads the people in a macabre dance. Her Husband is led in to be shot, she intercedes. In the next scene the workers are making a last stand against defeat. Another dream scene follows. The woman suffers and takes on herself the pain of the world, and finally accuses God of guilt. The last scene is in the prison; the Husband comes to save the Woman, the Nameless One and the Priest come. She, standing for Pacifism as between War and Revolution, rejects aid. She is led out to be shot; and two starving workers snatch at her spoils, until the shots outside are heard.

The treatment of this material is expressionistic, its content under such a method must be revealed by means of short speeches and indications of reactions that explode the very centre of the matter. *Masse Mensch* is in fact a famous example of expressionism. But from it I decide once and for all what to me has seemed always true, which is that expressionism as a serious method has very little point and little that is new except a certain German obviousness of theory. In so far as these expressionistic speeches and images do anything of tragic importance they are merely the poetic method. In so far as the method appears patently and almost underscored, ex-

pressionism is merely an intrusion on serious revelation. It moves toward mannerism and contrariness and self-explanation; all of which may forward the development of art but cripple the work itself in which they persist. What professional expressionism is best adapted to achieve is satire, comedy; it can hit and punch and leap about and put edge on absurdity and wit; it can search into its material with speed and economy. The expressionism of *Masse Mensch* fills it with speeches that are at present only platitudes. To vitalize them and make them true they need either great poetic quality in the dramatist or great belief and passion in actor and audience.

Mr. Kenneth Macgowan in his *Continental Stagecraft* has a fine account of the production of *Masse Mensch* in Berlin. From that performance, before that audience of Continental working-men, and in the stress of the times, it is clear that a vast power arose. The play shook men and carried the mind toward magnificent surges of feeling and toward those vast abstractions that underlie all great moments in art. That was in Berlin.

Mr. Simonson's directing and his designing of *Masse Mensch* is full of care and skill and full of extraordinary coöperation and manipulation of the difficult elements and agencies involved in such an enterprise. What it all lacks is what could alone save the performance and give the piece a pressure of truth; what is lacking is the belief and urgency that might give the play life. The greatest art can stand either as pure art or as content, though in it both are indispensable and inseparable; such art more or less takes care of itself. But lower in the scale there are instances of artistic creation that have a quality or style which in itself will carry them through to a certain success. *Masse Mensch* is not one of these but at the other pole; without the heat of its content it grows tame. It cannot be taken as mere art—if there is such a thing as mere art. For it, lights, devices, actors straining and training over the stage, are only emptiness and mockery. *Masse Mensch* must be believed and presented in all its violence of soul and its tumult of wrong. It is communistic, revolutionary or whatever you like to call it, but it is not distilled into an art that can exist comparatively free of the impulse of a credo; to present it we must face the music; and without faith, or at least without the power or courage to give to it its full stride and impact, it is a mere spectacle and not a very interesting one at that.

To hear Miss Yurka in her blue dress saying that God is guilty might be moving if it arose out of the right cosmic passion, just as I might be moved to see the terror of a savage in front of a tree that had been blasted by lightning. But without that inner convulsion and payment, talking about God's guilt is only nonsense, contradiction in terms, and adolescent truism. And when the woman is at last led away to be shot and the two actresses struggle for her spoils and talk of the wrong men do, I listen, think their position in the centre of the stage and below the raised mass of shadow is very good, and feel little and care less. If the body of *Masse Mensch* were brought to me quivering and alive, I might take it or leave it, according to my interest and humanity at the moment; at the Garrick it comes to me almost always as artifice and platitude. To produce *Masse Mensch* and to appreciate it for whatever good is in it, we must pay the price, producers and audience, and that the Theatre Guild and none of us have done, not by a long sight; and none of us intend to do.

STARK YOUNG.