

End of Fashion  
Diploma

THEATRE OF THE IMAGE

by

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Foreword :

Theatre of the image is a form of performance that makes a direct appeal to the primal senses of the spectator. It is a return to the origins of performance, an attempt to rid theatre of its intellectual aura and make it accessible to a greater majority of people.

The term "Image Theatre" seems to have been coined originally during the last decade when theatre was at its most static and visually orientated. Now it has come to mean a form of theatre that balances all theatrical elements available to communicate an idea, characters or a series of events to the spectator.

In the following pages I have attempted to trace the development of the theatre of the image from the beginning of this century through to Ireland today, to show how this form of performance came about through a variety of experimental theatre forms that <sup>have</sup> marked the progress of theatre over the past eighty years.



"It felt like a new work, or like one that  
has showed us something anew"

Jim Nutt

Artforum, October 1984

speaking of the Pina Bausch production "I980"

Theatre is the moment the actor performs for the spectator. What goes beforehand, the work of directors, designers, writers, actors in rehearsal, is nothing without the performance.

The origins of theatre can be found in tribal gatherings where a group of people would gather together to celebrate some festival, religious or secular (fig.I). The basic elements necessary for theatre are already present - there is something to be communicated and people are aware of that fact. There is the opportunity for the individual or a select group to stand out before the others and say or do something that will communicate the meaning of the occasion. Perhaps during the celebration one person would take a leading role and orchestrate the proceedings, such as a high priestess or witch doctor.

Such ceremonies would be of great importance in the lives of primitive mankind. They were his way of communicating with the life force that surrounded him and a way in which he could attempt to control them. We see an example of this in the rain dance of the American Plains Indian. The participants would dance around a sacred tree while a priest poured water over them, repeating the dance until the God responded. The action was so important that if one

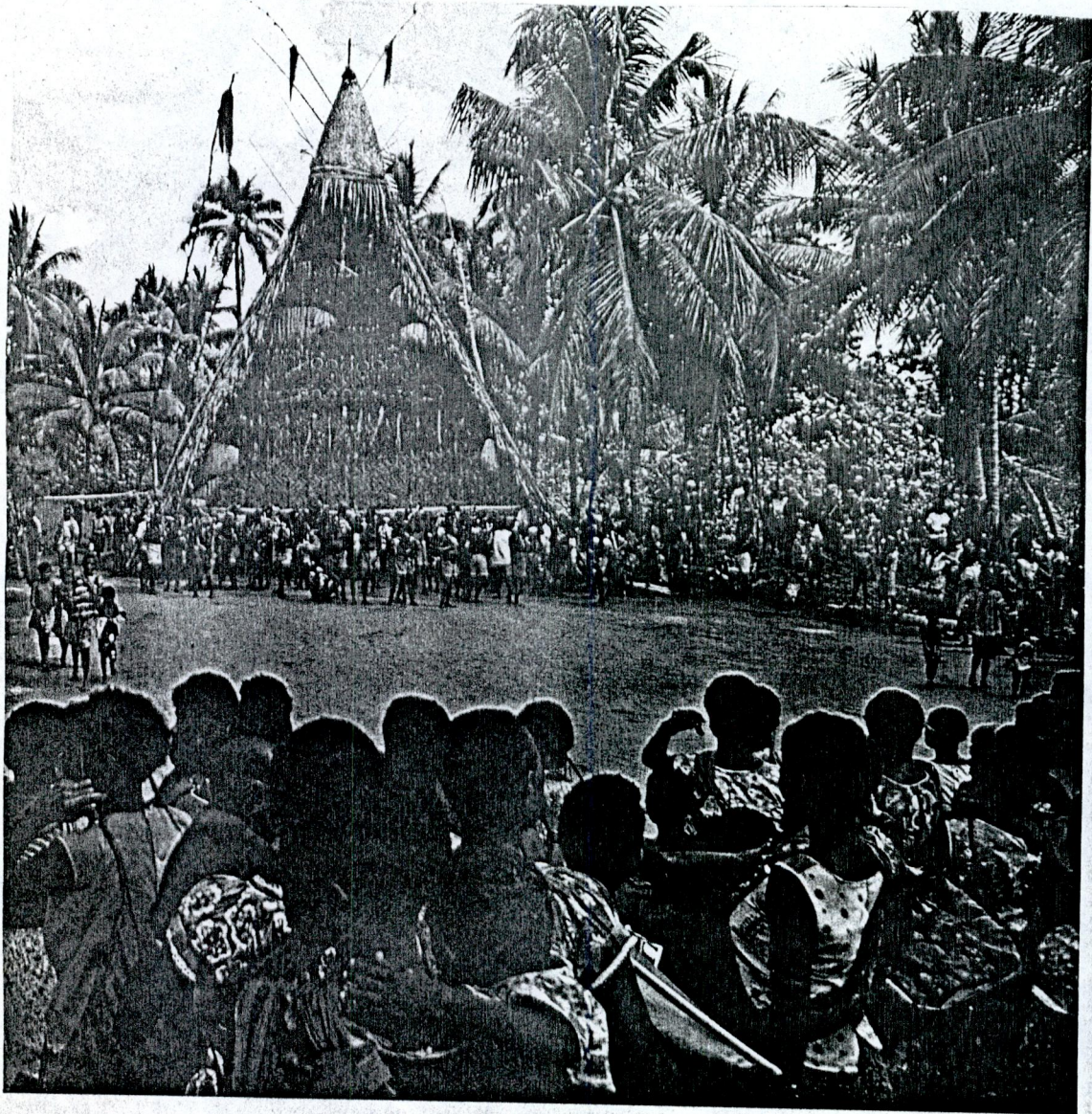


Fig. I

TRIBAL GATHERING IN  
NEW GUINEA

dancer made a mistake the dance would have to begin again. With this example the priest could be likened to the director, the dancers to the cast.

From these origins sprang a conscious theatre, where a ceremony would be marked by the performance of music or movement by certain individuals for the benefit of the rest. To separate themselves from the crowd, these performers would wear masks or costumes. This would, even more importantly, give them a different persona (fig. 2). With their mask or costume, the performer assumed an identity beyond the human individual; they became a shaman or godhead.

Now, these components that join to form the basis of performance are all appealing to the senses: the voice, the gesture, the appearance of the player, in short, the image he presents to the audience. Though all these elements must have had special significance when they were first conceived, they could not have been interpreted by all who were likely to see them, especially in large cultural centres like Greece or Rome where there was a variety of cultures present. Therefore the actors would have to communicate their basic ideas even to those who did not understand the meaning of the words and symbols employed. Even today, if we were to see a Japanese Noh play,



AMONG THE SEPIK OF NEW GUINEA  
MASKED TRIBESMEN ASSUME THE  
PERSONA OF SPIRITS, GUARDIANS  
OF SECRET RITES

Fig. 2





we would not be able to fully understand the symbolic value of the words, gestures and movements used (fig. 3). To do this one would have to be a Noh actor or scholar. However, appreciation of the play does not come from the intellect but

" from a rich sensibility which will allow you to take in directly and respond to the sentiments of the hero."

Kunio Komparu

The Noh Theatre - Principles and Perspectives

Komparu also states that Noh is

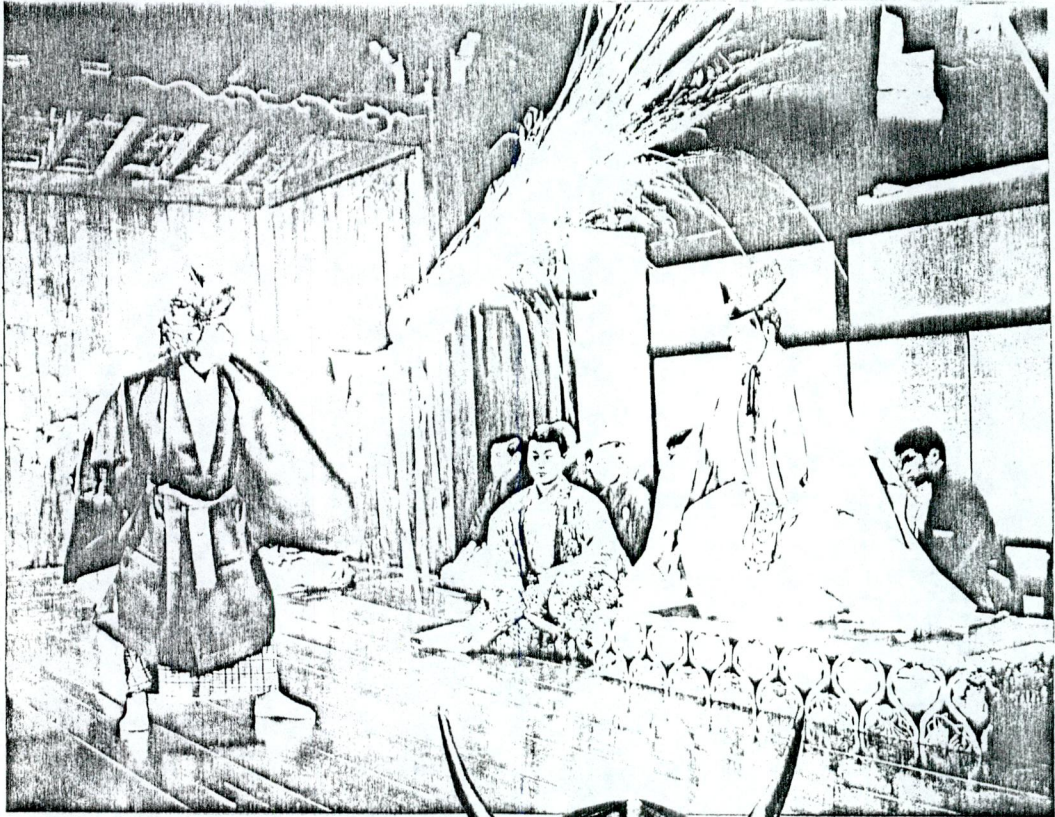
" a theatre of the heart, predicted on direct experience through feelings."

It is an ancient image theatre, intellectually complex but designed to appeal to anyone who is willing to respond. Noh theatre reached a state of refinement during the Muromachi period (1336 - 1568). It was around this time in Western Europe that theatrical form was developing from the religious pageant and mystery play format into a more secular theatre.

These mystery plays had been a direct development of a mixture of pagan rite and religion where the heroes had become the saints but the pageantry was still preserved as being the natural medium of communication with a largely illiterate public (fig. 4).

As Europe crawled out of the Dark Ages, drama became more and more secularised with a greater variety of

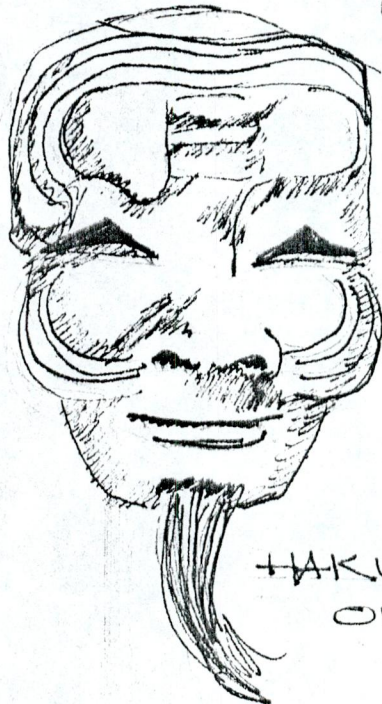
# A NOH PERFORMANCE



HANUYA -  
A FEMALE  
DEMON



NOH  
MASKS



HAKUSHIKI - JŌ  
OLD MAN

Fig. 3

themes and characters. Literature began to take over the drama and reached its zenith in the sixteenth, seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries with dramatists such as Shakespeare<sup>(19)</sup>, Ford<sup>(9)</sup>, Sheridan<sup>(20)</sup> and Congreve<sup>(5)</sup>. Language seemingly exhausted, the theatre turned its attention to gadgetry staging grand spectacles or attempting to place reality on the stage by reproducing everyday life faithfully.

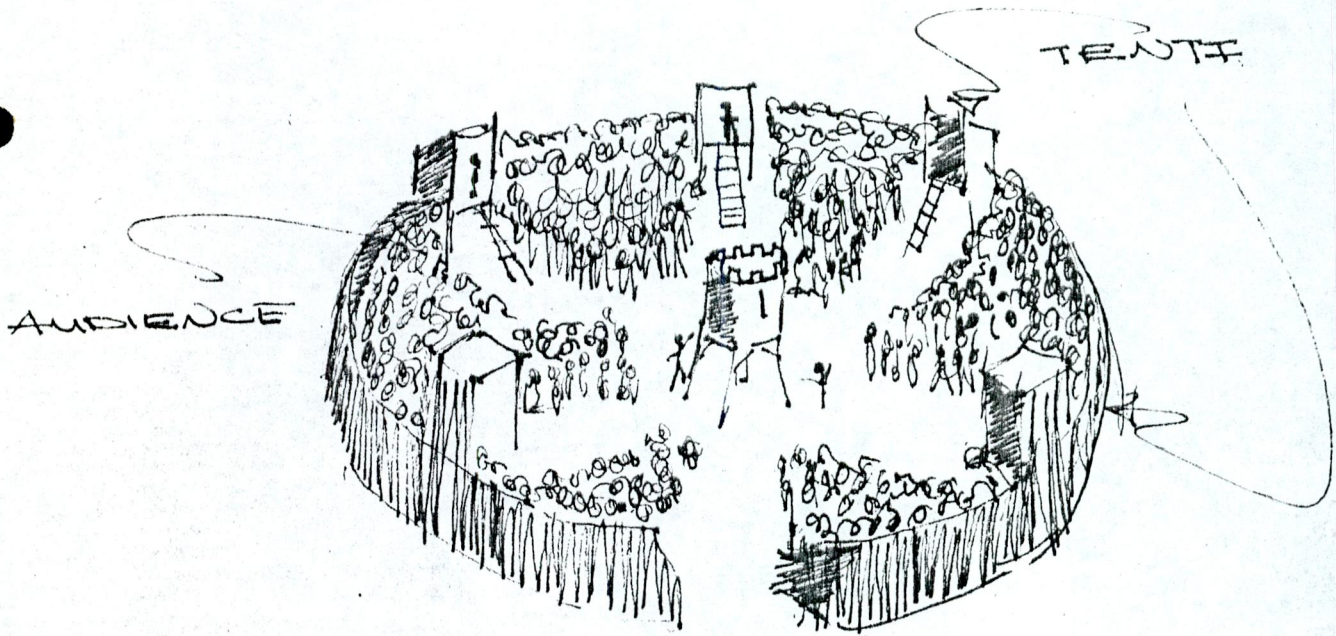
The twentieth century saw a reaction against this, an attempt to re-examine the art of the theatre, to find what it should be and do. The first years of the twentieth century were marked by a move towards Symbolism in theatre. Now the actor became the tool of the director. He moved, spoke, gestured as the director demanded so that like the design, the sound and the lighting, he would become part of a visual cohesive whole. In most of Europe, in the inter-war years, this developed into a form of "Epic Theatre" in which the theatre attempted to underline

" the elements which make prominent what is common to all men, the unindividual."

Meyerhold

Vsevoled Meyerhold (1874-1940) himself is an excellent example of a director in this type of theatre.

# MEDIEVAL MYSTERY PLAY



ACTING AREA SURROUNDED  
BY CIRCULAR EARTHEN HILL  
WITH FIVE 'TENTI' OR SCAFFOLDS  
AND A CENTRAL TOWER.

THE ACTION TAKES PLACE IN X  
AROUND THESE AREAS

Fig. 4

(II)

He worked in Russia, in Petersburg and Moscow during the first decades of the twentieth century. In the beginning he progressed away from realism through symbolism to a propagandist form of "Epic Theatre" where the move towards an image orientated theatre balancing all its elements found fruition for him. Here we see the first attempt at the realization of the "Uber-Marionette" extolled by Edward Gordon Craig<sup>(7)</sup> as the ideal actor - one who existed entirely as the director demanded.

It is interesting to note that Meyerhold's development from Symbolist to Epic Theatre coincided with the Russian Revolution in 1917. For him it seems to have been an active extension of his political beliefs and perhaps a response to the political enthusiasm of the time.

Meyerhold was one of the first directors to explore the possibilities of popular theatrical forms used in relation to formal theatre. In a production of Blok's<sup>(3)</sup> "The Fairground Booth" in 1907 at the Passage Theatre in Petersburg, many of the characters are borrowed from the Commedia dell'Arte and their actions are sometimes closer to those of the circus than the theatre. There were moments also when characters would address the audience directly, as

in music hall. Yet the plot concerned the constancy of human relationships and the coherence of personality. Meyerhold had also developed an interest in the performer/spectator relationship which he attempted to control initially by manipulation of the cast - placing them on a narrow strip of stage so that they were pushed out towards the audience (fig. 5) - and finally by manipulation of the audience: by involving them in the action using the settings and by sending actors among the audience.

Take for example "The Dawn". Staged in 1920, it is a play about the transformation of a capitalist war into an international proletarian uprising. The play was presented as a political meeting, with actors addressing their lines directly to the audience in a broken down theatre, largely reminiscent of a meeting hall. The feeling of political rally was further strengthened by the political slogans emblazoned on the walls and the actors who showered the audience with leaflets at regular intervals, thus the audience were drawn in to the production.

Further politically motivated productions are especially interesting in that they employ a style close to that of a medieval pageant or mystery play. For example, "Earth Rampant" (fig. 6), produced in 1923. Here,



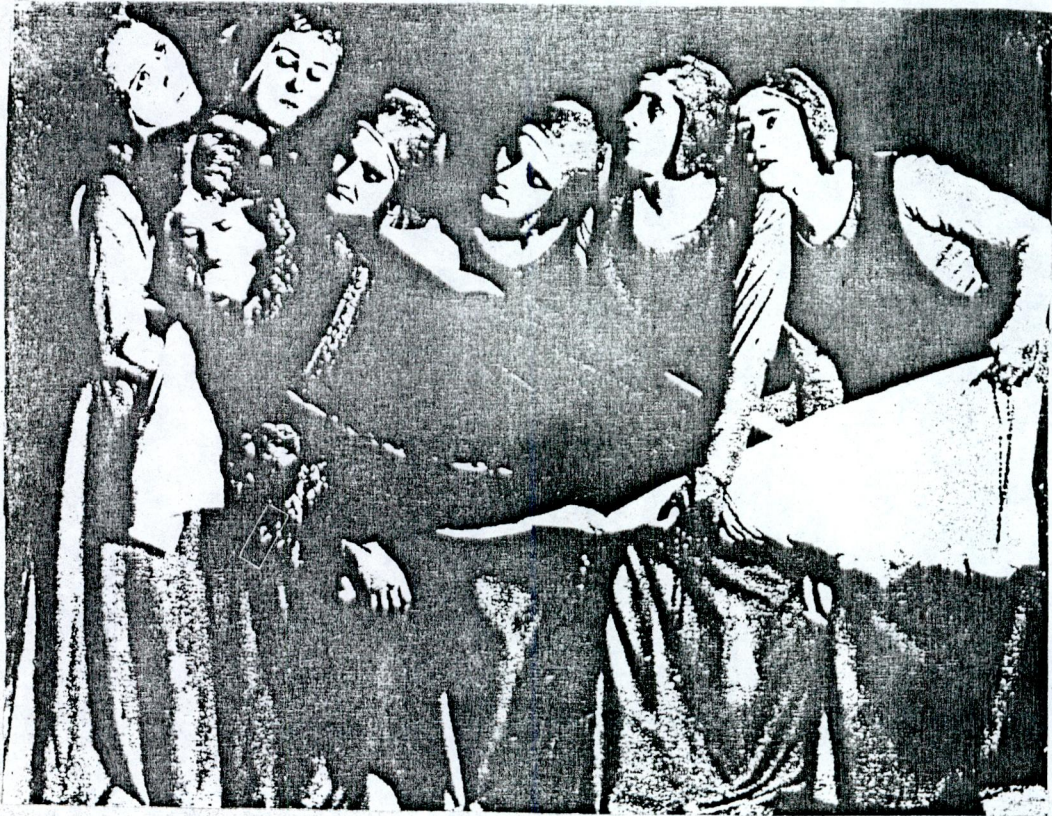


Fig. 5

• SISTER  
BEATRICE •

MEYERHOLD 1906

THE FRIEZE-LIKE EFFECT  
WAS ACHIEVED BY STAGING  
THE PRODUCTION ON A  
NARROW STRIP OF STAGE

Meyerhold extended his acting space right into the audience by way of a ramp connecting stage to auditorium. This was used for entrances and exits through the auditorium usually by platoons of soldiers or army vehicles. The use of current Red Army weaponry in the design brought the action even closer to the hearts of the audience, in the wake of the civil war. It was a mass spectacle designed to appeal to the patriotism of the audience. It pointed out with great simplicity and much exaggeration (reminiscent of circus or pantomime) the wonder of Socialism in the face of degenerate, laughable Capitalism. It was more effective in its imagery than any amount of rationalizing or soliloquizing could ever be.

Meyerhold continued in this vein, mounting productions as marked for their simplicity of idea as the elaborateness of their imagery. It wasn't until 1925 with "The Warrent" by Nikolai Erdman that Meyerhold applied his theatre of images to a more complex play. "The Warrent" was an observation of a section of society, the petit bourgeoisie waiting for the return of the Tsar and hanging on grimly to the vestiges of their former pomp. It was not a play about ideals but about people and as such was on a smaller scale but this did not detract from the strength of the images. Mime was used to great effect, the characters miming their

(15)

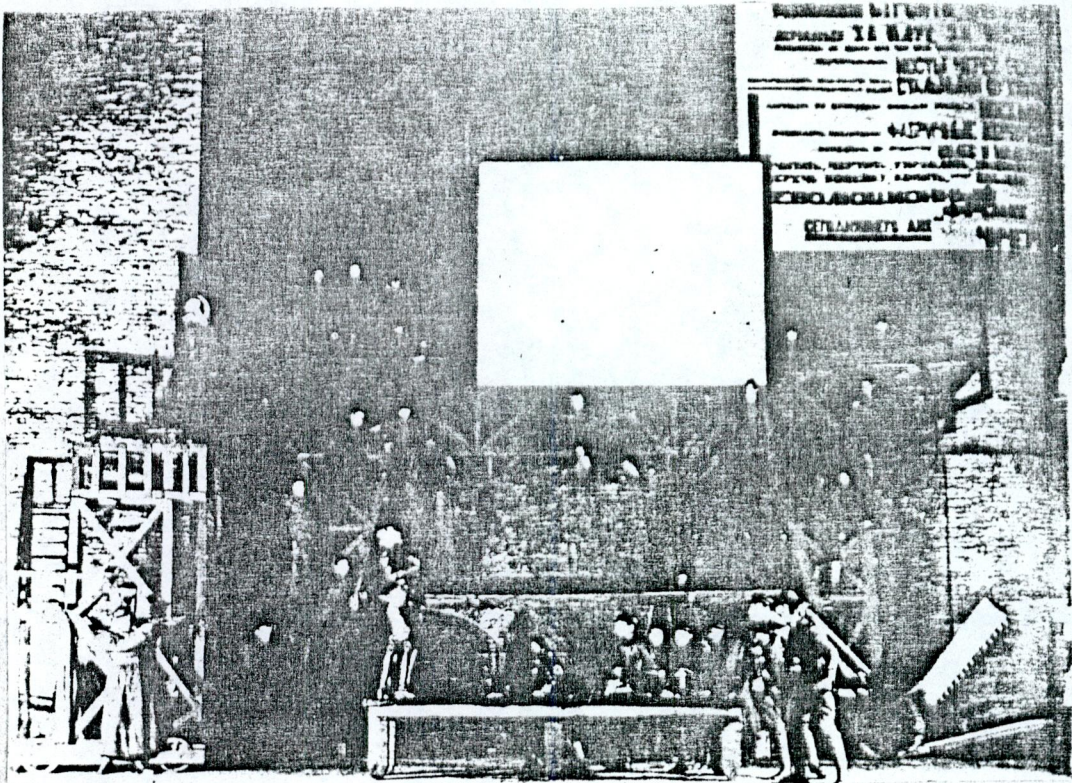


Fig. 6

• EARTH

— RAMPANT.

— MEYERHOLD 1923

intentions before speaking so that the audience could discern their attitude to what they were about to say. Bourgeois living was depicted on a circular revolving set holding

" a domestic altar complete with votive candle and horn-gramophone, a wrought-iron treadle sewing machine, a piano decorated with paper flowers a banquet table with epergne and candleabra."

Edward Braun

#### The Director and the Stage

The production showed no change in political attitude but an ability to show people as well as causes in his theatre of images.

This production, with "The Government Inspector" (fig.7) by Gogol<sup>(10)</sup> (produced 1927) marked the twin summits of Meyerhold's career. He left us with the idea that by abandoning pre-conceived notions of what different elements in theatre should do, the performance of a play is transformed into an event that confronts and challenges the spectators' safest assumptions.

Germany during the inter-war years also saw a move towards "Epic Theatre" by way of Expressionist drama. Through the work of Leopold Jessner<sup>(12)</sup> and Erwin Piscator<sup>(18)</sup> both staging and acting became stylized. These in their turn both greatly influenced Bertolt Brecht<sup>(4)</sup> whose theories of staging were to have enormous influence

(17)

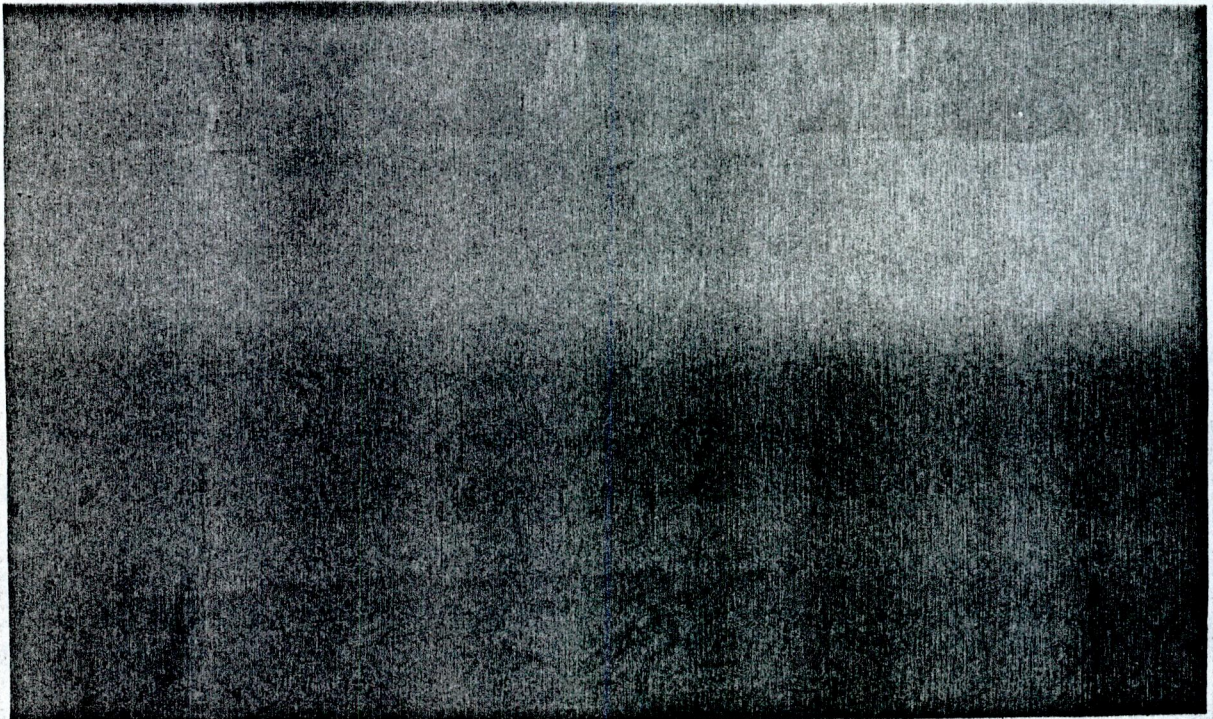
A SCENE FROM  
MEYERHOLD'S PRODUCTION  
OF

• THE

GOVERNMENT

INSPECTOR • *1 desk*

Fig. 7



on theatre world wide in the middle decades of this century.

Brecht was as violently opposed to illusive staging as Meyerhold, but whereas the latter wished to appeal to the emotions of the audience, Brechts theatre was one of argument, he wished to appeal to the spectator's mind.

In France during the Twenties, Antonin Artaud (fig. 8) founded his "Theatre of Cruelty". This involved a direct appeal to the audience's subconscious, forcing them to view themselves and their natures without the shield of civilization. This brings image theatre a step closer to the present day in that Artaud was appealing to the individual spectator - he was showing each individual himself as opposed to simply attempting to control the emotions of the audience as a group. He wished to draw each into the action and show them that life was a

" ceaseless, everlasting masquerade in which we are the involuntary actors."

Pirandello<sup>(17)</sup>

He was doing this, however, through the use of an Epic Theatre format.

In 1926 with Robert Aron and Roger Vitrac<sup>(23)</sup>, Artaud

founded the Alfred Jarry Theatre, conceived as a society for the presentation of occasional performances, of which there were a total of eight in two years. The plays presented in the first programme were written by Artaud ("Acid Stomach or the Mad Mother"), Aron ("Gigogne") and Vitrac ("The Secrets of Love") themselves. These plays concentrated on breaking down the barriers between illusion and reality both within the plays themselves and between the performance and the audience. For example, with "The Secrets of Love", the action took place in a series of complex multiple settings on the stage and in a box suspended above it. The action also involved various "members of the audience" and thus the spectators could not divorce the action from themselves - it was down there among them and they were forced to assimilate it. The objective was to produce a certain state of tension in the audience. Artaud tried another method of audience manipulation in "Victor or Power to the Children", the last production of the Alfred Jarry Theatre, where he suspended picture frames downstage of the action forcing the audience to become voyeurs watching the sordid goings-on in the Paumelle household.

Artaud spent most of the following six years in films and writing. It was during this time that he wrote the manifestos of the Theatre of Cruelty. The basic

idea behind this was that man should be forced to face his inner self by seeing it enacted on stage - according to Artaud , theatre should show us ourselves

" making the masks fall and divulging our worlds lies, aimlessness, meanness and even two-facedness."

Artaud

The Theatre of Cruelty (First Manifesto) 1932

As well as being influenced by his contemporary directors such as Meyerhold or Piscator and the Dada movement, Artaud was also greatly indebted to the Balinese dance-drama (fig.9) which he witnessed in Paris in 1931. It was this that made him seek a theatre that did not work from words but from an idea and where words would take second place to movement which should express an emotion more directly. His ambition was to put his accumulated theories into practice which he did on May 6th 1935 in a production of Shelley's "The Cenci" (fig. 10), a wordy play in the nature of a revenge tragedy. He replaced much dialogue with onstage action using formalised movement of the actors and abstract sound to create a mood which accompanied the remaining dialogue and implied that which was not said. Artaud based his entire approach to the production on the principle of engulfing the audience with a series of stunning sound and visual effects. There were speakers placed at four corners of the auditorium and the audience



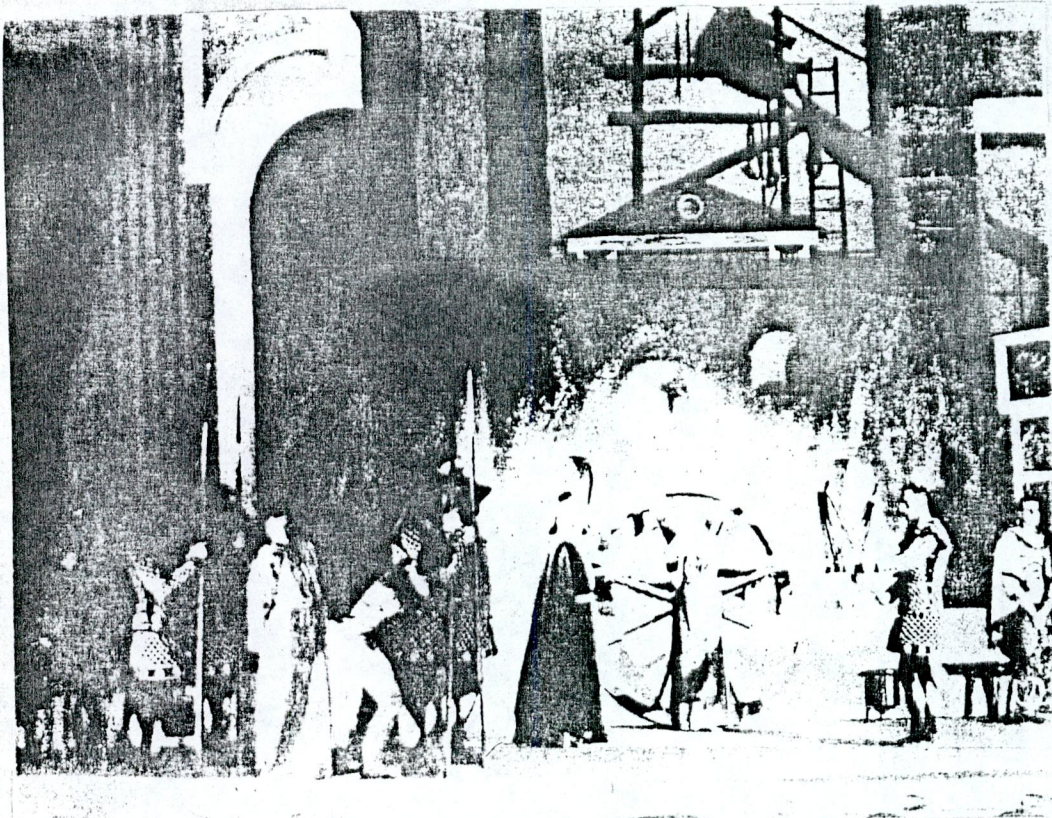
Fig. 8

ANTONIN ARTAUD



Fig. 9

BALINESE BARONG



THE CENCI.

1935

Fig. 10

were bombarded with tolling bells, metronomes, foot-steps, etc., often synchronised with lighting changes, blinding in their brilliance. The set also was a visual extension of the sound, described as being like " One of Pirenesi's gigantic palace prisons"

Pierre-Jean Jouve, Critic

It not only housed the action but its design hinted at the nature of the outcome of the play before it began.

The production was a daring one involving staging which, though brilliantly evocative, seemed to engulf the actor as well as the audience. The performance was not up to the standard of the production design. Artaud seems to have ignored the need for highly skilled actors to perform in such a production and to cope with the demands placed by it on their talents.

There was a further development in Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty in that the physical playing was more important than the texts performed. Thus, theatre of the image moved a step further with the idea that the actual "doing" was the most important element in theatre. However, he ignored the actor, thus ignoring the fact that theatre revolves around people and their relationship with each other both on stage and in a performer/spectator capacity.

Such great epic productions as staged by Meyerhold and Artaud though deeply expressive of ideas, seem to run roughshod over the individual performer. This was in some measure a response to the age in which their theatres existed. Theirs was a time of causes and ideals and movements. But the post war years saw a movement towards the individual which made theatre of the inter-war years seem as cluttered as that of the mid nineteenth century. The war had interrupted the progress of the theatre, scattering many of the giants of the inter war years. It wasn't until the late fifties and early sixties that the experiments of these directors were fully investigated and furthered. Bertolt Brecht was about the only one who weathered the war - he returned to Berlin in 1948 and founded his company, "The Berliner Ensemble" - but the experiment had gone from his work. What he advocated was no longer new and people had taken his ideas and begun to adapt them to their own situations and inspirations. For example, Joan Littlewood, who, like Brecht, started a theatre specifically aimed at the working class.

In 1945, in Manchester, Joan Littlewood founded the Theatre Workshop Company. In 1953 the company moved to the Theatre Royal, Stratford in London's East End. Her productions centred around people - she encouraged

her actors to improvise and demanded audience participation. Every production was the result of close cooperation between writer, actor and director. Take for example the play "Oh What A Lovely War" (fig. II) which came into being on the stage of the Theatre Royal on the 19th March 1963. The original idea was a compilation of songs and documents to chronicle the First World War. The whole team cooperated in the detailed research involved and in the further task of bringing their material to the stage. The result was a montage of action, film, sound, song, words and pictures, a collection of images that brought World War I to life in theatrical terms. It could also be seen in all Joan Littlewoods productions, how she borrowed techniques from the popular theatre as Brecht and Meyerhold had also done.

The idea of such a collective production was worked on extensively but to a different conclusion by Jerzy Grotowski in Poland during the late fifties and sixties.

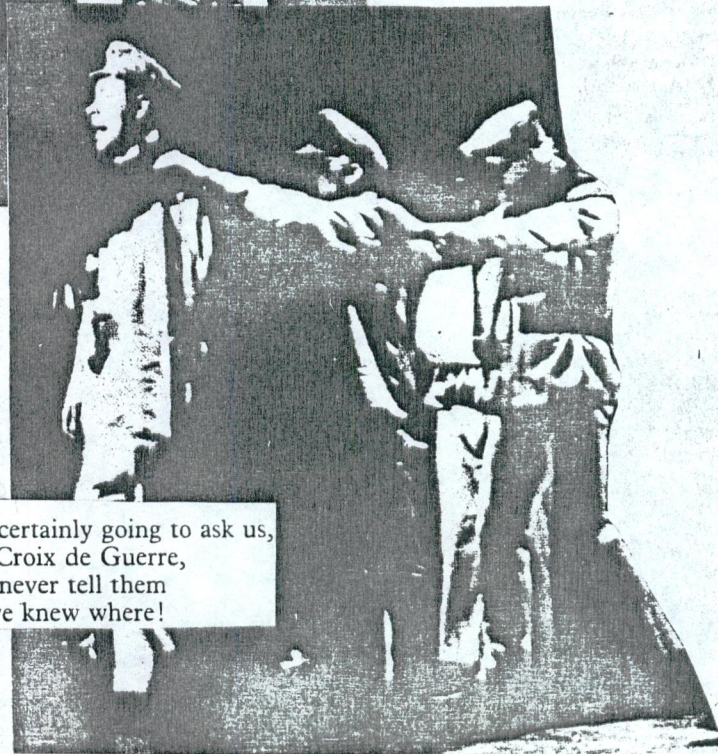
It was 1959 when Jerzy Grotowski established a small experimental theatre group, the Theatre of Thirteen Rows, in the provincial town of Opole. He was greatly influenced by Stanislavsky<sup>(21)</sup>, having studied at the Theatre Arts Institute in Moscow where the latter's "method" was taught, and by forms of Oriental and

Fig. II



SCENES FROM

OH, WHAT  
A LOVELY  
WAR.



And when they ask us, and they're certainly going to ask us,  
The reason why we didn't win the Croix de Guerre,  
Oh, we'll never tell them, oh, we'll never tell them  
There was a front, but damned if we knew where!

Asian theatre he had experienced in his travels. During the first three years the company produced over ten disparate experimental productions. It was not until Grotowski first made contact with the theatrical world in the West in 1962/63 that a definite direction of experiment is evident in his work. As the company began to stabilise they spent less time preparing a repertoire and more time experimenting and researching into the actor's craft. Grotowski felt that the core of theatre is the communion between actor and spectator and that by eliminating all superfluity (lighting, sound, make-up, decor, props) he was moving towards a true theatre - the concept which he called "Poor Theatre". For the actor this meant a preoccupation with technique and motivation which was germane to the work of Stanislavsky. Grotowski carried this much further than Stanislavsky had ever envisaged in that it brought him to question the ethical value of theatre to the end of a personal rejection of its confines by him.

Grotowski always emphasised that there was no "method" in training an actor, that the actor could choose or reject whatever idea or exercise helped him as a method should emanate from the actor himself. The world of theatre sees its debt to Grotowski centering on his work with the actor and his body which brought the

theatre back to its origins as centering round the individual performer.

It is perhaps ironic to note that the Laboratory Theatre's last production was in 1968 and that they have worked on no new production since. In this production, "Apocalypsis Cum Figuris" (fig. 12) the action took place in a large room with no auditorium and no stage space defined. The actors defined the stage space as the area in which they functioned and it therefore fluctuated with their movements. The occurrence was closer to a meeting than a performance - it was as far removed from theatrical performance as is possible within the conventions of the theatre. The next step for Grotowski was to step outside the convention of the actor/spectator relationship and into a sphere that was not theatre but a form of "collective activity" which has been termed "para-theatre" or "active culture". The energies of the group were devoted to this during the seventies. In this situation, both the actor and spectator shed their roles and the action of creation became the responsibility of both.

At the beginning of the seventies the figurative gesture ruled supreme on stage and the human body was at the centre of a tendency to involve the spectator. The emphasis had changed over the last five decades



Fig. 12

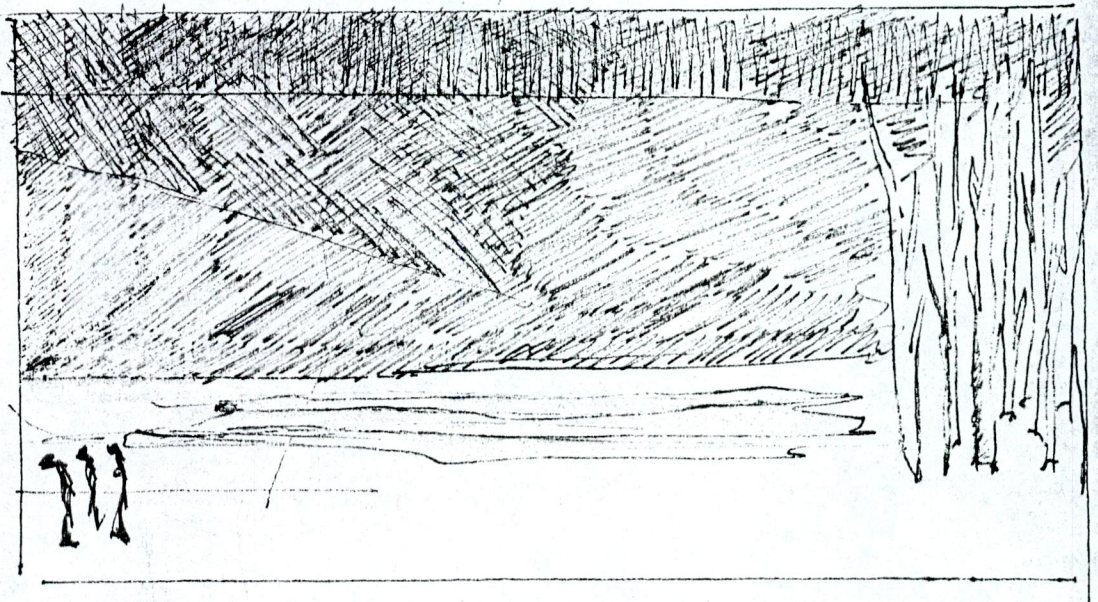
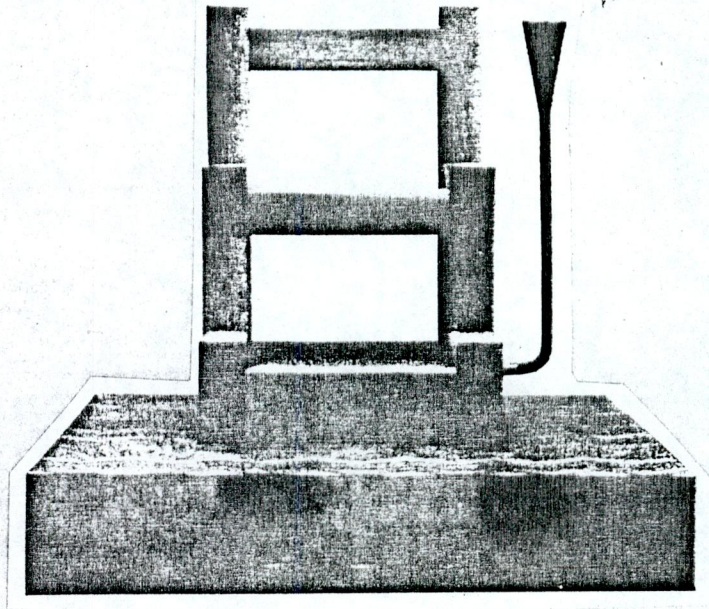
SCENE FROM  
· APOCALYPSIS ·  
CUM  
FIGURIS ·



from machine to man but the attack of theatre had been lost. During the seventies theatre became increasingly something to be looked at. Theatre directors such as Robert Wilson, an American director, began to play with theatrical elements of time and space, light and solid, stillness and movement. When Robert Wilson's work first appeared internationally at the beginning of the seventies, it was generally regarded as a form of image theatre. It was, however, a very visually orientated form. The dramatic narrative was usually based on a series of backdrops and a gradually unfolding tableau reminiscent of Meyerhold's early Symbolist productions such as "Sister Beatrice", for that reason. Take for example the Paris production of "Overture" (1972) which lasted twenty-four hours and was lacking in theatrical action almost totally. The setting (fig. 14) was an arrangement of horizontal strips with a lake at centre and a gilded forest of beeches suspended in mid air to the left. The movement on stage was caused by the gradual shutting off of the performance area with slowly moving scrims, coinciding with the movement of human figures on the stage. For example, an endless procession of old people took an entire hour to cross the stage. In his work Wilson seems chiefly concerned with the 'negative spaces' of theatre, stillness, silence, minutes stretched into hours

(30)

CHAIR FROM · OVERTURE ·



SCENE FROM · OVERTURE ·

1972

Fig. I4

instead of vice-versa.

Such concern with the visual overshadowed the spoken word in the image theatre of the seventies. The word, however has an incisive quality of its own which is being used more and more in image theatre of the 1980's. The first half of this decade has seen a strong movement of image theatre within the Irish theatre which is traditionally a naturalistic theatre with strong bias towards the writer and the actor.

There is a greater awareness in nearly all theatrical circles in Ireland today of the importance of the visual elements in a production. Whether this is simply in the attitude that design matters or in a conscious to work with the image as a medium of communication in theatre, it shows a greater awareness of what Irish theatre has in many cases been lacking during the past years.

The movements and ideas previously mentioned and which were rampant across Europe in the early part of the century had barely touched Ireland at that time. The beginning of this century was a time when the Irish were concerned with establishing their identity as a nation and anything that was not specifically

Irish was of very little use.

In 1904 the Abbey Theatre was founded by William Butler Yeats and opened with the first performance of his verse drama "On Baile's Strand". Yeats wrote largely symbolic drama, he was moving towards a fusion of symbolism and dance in his plays, for example, "The Dreaming on the Bones" where the movement which opens the play is clearly mapped out and sets the scene for the action which follows through the dialogue.

Yeats had a very romanticised view of Ireland and the Irish; he sought for a spirit that was 'Irishness' and tried to express it in his symbolic plays. Yeats' 'Celtic Twilight' indeed belonged to a twilight world of myths and heroes. To say that he was out of touch with reality is however untrue. He made concrete on stage the wishful thinking of an entire nation at a time of great optimism and nationalist feeling. Theatrically, he was open to modern influences from abroad such as those of Edward Gordon Craig, whose theory of the "Uber-marionette", an actor without initiative, was close to his own idea that the actor should be subservient to the play and the playwright. He was also very interested in the Japanese Noh drama, and enjoyed playing with the elements of time and space in his own plays. Yeats believed that simple

things became symbols through long and familiar association and so evoke images that become precise while at the same time remaining indefinable. The images that Yeats staged were symbols that appealed to the mind, however, though the movement/dance which he used in his plays was aimed at the perception.

Because of the enthusiasm for all things national, it was not until 1928 that Dublin got a professional theatre with an international policy. On the 4th October the Dublin Gate Theatre Studios opened with a performance of Peer Gynt by Ibsen. The theatre, founded by Hilton Edwards and Micheal MacLiammoir, was to be experimental. Both Edwards and MacLiammoir had their own particular ambitions, the former to put into practice new production methods and the latter to alert Irish audiences to the visual elements in drama. In his approach to design, MacLiammoir was greatly influenced by both Bakst<sup>(2)</sup> and Gordon Craig (fig. 15 (a) & (b)) - however he believed that a great set should

"provide an appropriate background for the players"

MacLiammoir

Lecture - "Designing for the Theatre" (1942)

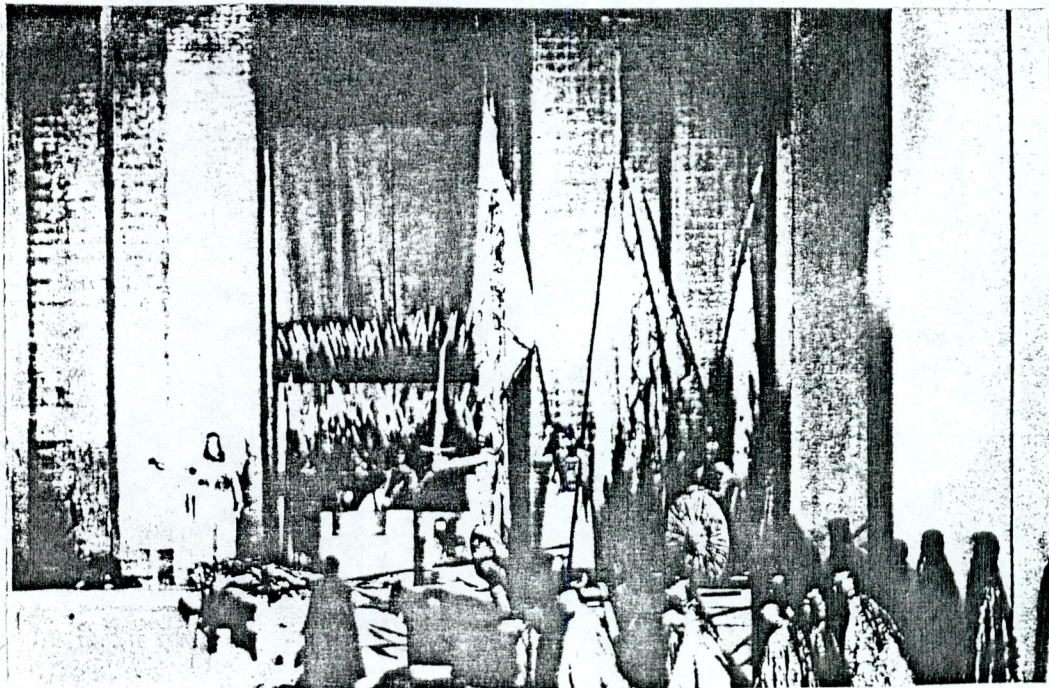
Hilton Edwards was a director with vision. He was aware of the importance of the actor and of actor training

Fig. I5a

LEON BAKST  
COSTUME  
DESIGN  
FOR  
SCHEHEREZADE



Fig. I5b



EDWARD GORDON CRAIG  
DESIGN FOR HAMLET 1912

DESIGN FOR

• DIARMUID AGUS GRÁINNE  
MICHEÁL MACLIAMMOIR

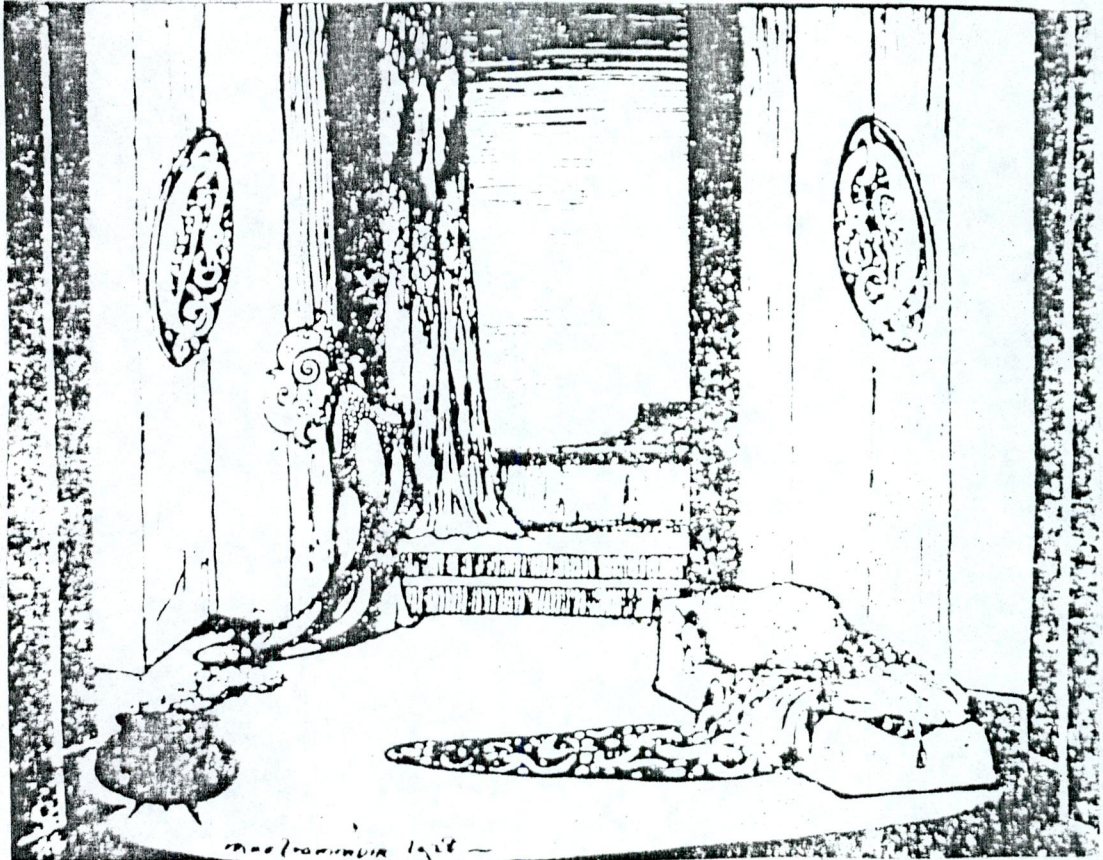


Fig. 15

THE INFLUENCE OF BOTH  
BAKST & GORDON CRAIG  
IS EVIDENT IN THIS  
DESIGN

about which there were many new theories at the time (Stanislavsky, Meyerhold). He was very aware of movement and gesture and their importance in character portrayal.

The internationalist range of the Gate's repertoire meant that they worked largely with translations and it was this, Edwards said, that led them to seek the essence of a play and attempt to portray this. Thus they went even further into non-representational and non-realistic production.

" This in its turn resulted in a process of elimination, of fining away, all but the essentials in structure and in physical statement. And, eventually, to a deeper concentration on words, the orchestration of speech patterns."

Hilton Edwards

So, right at the beginning of experimenting with the image, language played a very important part in the Irish theatre. Edwards hoped to free the author when writing the play from his dependence upon props, and so might make the actor the main vehicle for expression right from the beginning of the play-making process.

With the arrival of "Talking" pictures to the Dublin



cinemas, the partnership at the Gate found that realistic settings had become heavy and superfluous. They hoped that through their experiments they would find a form of theatre more evocative than literal. However, they found that to keep the theatre going they had to run much despised "Popular Successes" side by side with their experimental work.

The difference in development in the Abbey and the Gate in the inter-war years has its roots in their foundations. The Abbey was founded as a national theatre and thus immediately fettered with responsibility to the nation. The Gate on the contrary was an experimental institution which meant that socially speaking they had no obligation to think of the morrow. In the late fifties however, the Gate Theatre Productions ceased to function due to financial strictures. The years since then have been relatively dull with a few notable exceptions such as Tom Stoppard's "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead" (1969) or "Equus" (1977) by Peter Shaffer. There were a great many revivals of past triumphs in these years also.

During the fifties and sixties experimental theatre in Dublin was taken over to a great extent by the smaller theatres such as the Pike Theatre Club or the Project Arts Centre. The Pike Theatre Club was founded by Alan Simpson and Carolyn Swift in

1953. It introduced plays by playwrights such as Williams<sup>(24)</sup> and Ionesco<sup>(II)</sup> to Dublin and was responsible for the Irish premiere of "Waiting for Godot" (1955).

During recent years much of Dublin's experimental theatre has centred round the Project Arts Centre (founded by Colm O'Briain in 1967), the Peacock and Focus theatres. There have been isolated productions by other groups such as with John Arden's<sup>(I)</sup> and Margetta D'Arcy's<sup>(8)</sup> production "The Non-Stop Connolly Show" (1975) at Liberty Hall. The performances covered a period of six weeks. It involved the use of film, music, poetry as well as other theatrical elements to present an image of James Connolly<sup>(6)</sup> and all he represented. It was epic theatre in the tradition of Meyerhold.

More recently, such productions as "The Antigone" by Aidan C. Matthews<sup>(15)</sup> at the Project or "The Bearded Lady" by Tom McIntyre<sup>(16)</sup> at the Peacock have indicated the direction in which Irish experimental theatre is going. Both these productions are consciously image orientated in format. The production involves the playwright, director, actors and designers working closely together to produce the image on stage. It is however interesting to note that in Ireland although

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Fig. 16

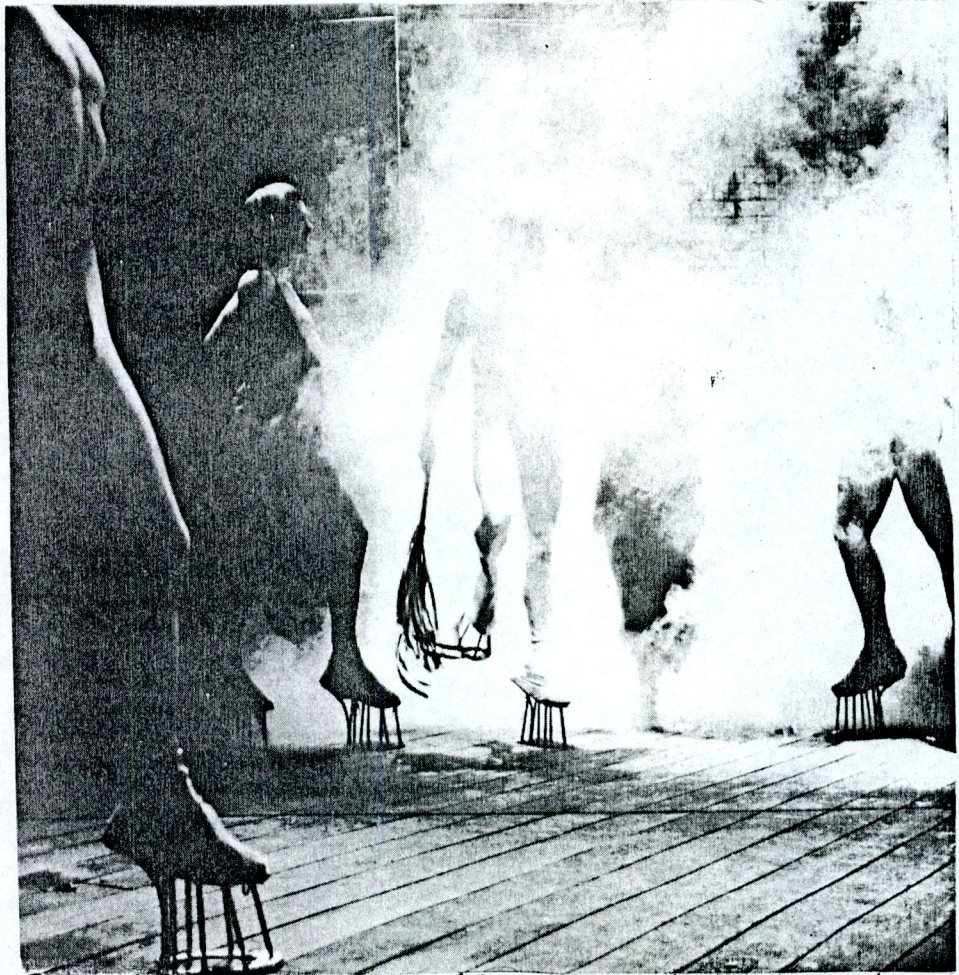
• THE  
GREAT  
HUNGER •



we seek to break the dominance of literature on our theatre, two of the most obviously image orientated plays in recent years have taken literary men as their subjects - "The Great Hunger" (Patrick Kavanagh<sup>(13)</sup>)(Fig. I6) and "The Bearded Lady" (Jonathon Swift<sup>(22)</sup>)(Fig. I7), both by Tom McIntyre. It was suggested during a discussion after a preview of the latter production that a knowledge of Jonathon Swift's life and works helped greatly in its understanding.

I was familiar with the writings of Swift but knew nothing of his life or influences and I found that it inhibited my experience of the play when a reference I understood appeared. It brought me back on an intellectual track and I started thinking about what was happening as opposed to simply experiencing it. The parts of the play that made reference to Swift's life I found easier to assimilate precisely because I lacked foreknowledge.

Seeing is the key to theatrical experience. The literary tradition in theatre since Shakespeare has transformed it from a seeing place into a hearing place. Since the beginning of this century there has been a concerted effort by many men and women of theatre to make the theatre a place for seeing again. This does not mean that theatre should become entirely visual -



• THE  
BEARDED  
LADY.

OR

• OUT OF HER  
DEPTH & INTO  
HER HAIR.

Fig. 17

the 'hearing' element is still there and has indeed been enhanced through music and new approaches to the use of language. Through the century we have seen many directors work to rid themselves of the dominance of the literary. The first part of the century was a time of 'isms' - Symbolism, Constructivism, Expressionism etc. All these contributed to the development of the image theatre in that they sought to break the mould of conventional staging. There were others who worked consciously with the image such as Meyerhold or Artaud. Their work was largely mechanically orientated, however with little emphasis on the player despite the fact that the performer is the strongest means of theatrical communication. He is the only living person in an area full of inanimate objects. No matter how interesting the visual effects, no matter how overwhelming the sound, the actor can command attention above all these simply by virtue of being a human being speaking to other human beings.

As the century progressed, the importance of the actor and the actor's body as a means of communication was realised through the work of such directors as Grotowski. The actor became the most important element in the production, not as a 'star' as in the late nineteenth century, but as the only living being among all the machinery of staging. During the late sixties and

early seventies there was a move towards a "Poor Theatre" which relied entirely on the actor/spectator relationship to stage a play. All other theatrical elements were dispensed with unless they were strictly necessary. Take for example Grotowski's production with the Laboratory Theatre "Apocalypsis Cum Figuris".

The emphasis on the actor as the sole means of dramatic communication was very strong in the seventies. indeed the borders between theatre and performance art grew very thin. Then the craft of acting reached new limits with actors testing their abilities as never before to convey whole worlds of ideas through their body movement. (Mime became very popular and was used in conjunction with many drama productions). Theatre in the eighties has taken this and allied it with the more mechanical elements of theatrical production which were so beloved of directors at the beginning of the century. The difference now, however, is that the actor is no longer obscured by these elements - he controls them and rises above them.

Because of the late arrival of an image orientated theatre to Ireland, we have learnt from the mistakes and discoveries of the past eighty years and productions tend to balance the elements of theatre more accurately than in earlier versions of theatre of the image



elsewhere. We have however a great literary tradition to contend with in theatre - Yeats' belief in the sacredness of the playwrights word has survived relatively unscathed since 1904. For many, theatre in Ireland revolves round the playwright, the content of the play - words that convey to our intellect what we are supposed to understand from what we see before us. The theatre of the image makes greater demands on everyone involved.

" The inner life... in the actor need not necessarily be as strong in ... the conventional theatre."

Tom Hickey

"In the Beginning was the Image" Theatre Ireland/6 ^  
An image theatre requires that the performer 'live through' the experience almost psychically so that he can communicate this to the audience. It is essential that to the same extent the spectator must see the experience in the play as his own experience. The play should take us out of ourselves so that we see ourselves a little better and leave the theatre with a greater sense of understanding.

The key to understanding a piece of image theatre is that we should not try to understand the meaning of what is unfolding before us.

" The image is primal and people's response

to it - provided it's compelling - is instinctive."

Patrick Mason

"In the Beginning was the Image" Theatre Ireland/6  
The biggest problem confronting theatre of the image is to get the spectator not to seek the meaning of what is happening but what it feels like. Many images have a symbolistic value also (fig.18) but in image theatre, while you consider one symbol the next dozen or so images have flashed by and you are lost because you tried to think instead of perceive.

Image theatre has the power to penetrate and move the spectator that a more literary theatre can never have. The key to understanding this type of theatre lies with the audience. We must learn to perceive intuitively instead of intellectually at least for the duration of a play. Though technically, image theatre must have a wider appeal because of the flexibility of its communication system, this is actually not so. In Ireland and possibly elsewhere, the problem is that theatregoers are afraid to switch off their intellects and let their more primal instincts take over for a while. Therefore, though image theatre will always exist in some form, I feel it will be a long time before it stops being trendy and begins to appeal to the majority. On the other hand there is no doubt

that the image in theatre has an immediacy denied any other form of communication and that it has opened the theatre to many people who did not have a tradition of theatre going. It represents a return to the roots of performance while at the same time keeping in touch with modern, 'Western' culture. It also heralds new possibilities for those working in theatre, breaking down barriers in production and allowing all involved greater scope for their talent.

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BIOGRAPHIES

- (1) John Arden (1930 - )

English playwright.

Though trained as an architect, he began to write plays that established him as a daring, anarchic but hardly unprecedented dramatist. His works include "Sergeant Musgrave's Dance" (1959) and "Armstrong's Last Goodnight" (1964) which show a debt to the plays of Brecht with their songs, verse and pessimism.

- (2) Leon Bakst (1866 - 1924)

Russian designer and painter.

Bakst is chiefly recognised for his work with Diaghchev's Ballet Russes which he joined in 1909. The strong oriental influence in his work amazed Western Europe and set many trends in the years previous to the First World War. His use of colour was exhilarating and he had a genius for making minute details of costume and scenery combine to create a stunning overall visual effect. His work includes designs for ballets such as Scheherazade (1910) and L'Après-Midi d'un Faune (1912), both for the Ballet Russes.





(3) Aleksandr Blok (1880 - 1921)

Russian poet and playwright.

Blok was a Symbolist whose poetry agonised over the spiritual destiny of his land. In charge of repertoire in the theatre section of the Commissariat of Enlightenment in 1918, he published a series of the world's dramatic classics and helped create a theatre for young people. Among his plays are "The Fairground Booth" and "The Song of Destiny".

(4) Bertolt Brecht (1898 - 1956)

German playwright and poet.

Brecht was a very politically motivated Marxist who aimed to change the theatre from a place for escapist entertainment to a centre for political education. He believed that audiences should be constantly reminded that they are watching a play (Verfremdungseffekt - Alienation Effect) so that they could become objective about humanity and believe it could be changed for the better. Brecht emigrated to the United States in 1941 but returned to found a state theatre in East Germany in 1948 - the Berliner Ensemble, based in Berlin. Among his plays are Mann ist Mann (Man Equals Man 1922), Die Dreigroschenoper (The Threepenny Opera 1928) and Der Kaukasische

Kreidekreiss (The Caucasian Chalk Circle).

(5) William Congreve (1670 - 1729)

English gentleman and playwright.

Congreve regarded writing as a gentlemanly accomplishment for a wit in Restoration society and consequently was not very prolific. His plays include "Love for Love" (1695) and "The Way of the World" (1700) - his last play. It was received with indifference so he retired from the profession.

(6) James Connolly (1870 - 1916)

Socialist and Republican leader.

Connolly was born in Ireland but his parents moved to Scotland when he was still a child. Because of extreme poverty he became a wage-earner at the age of 11 and educated himself by reading. He returned to Ireland as a Socialist organiser. He printed and edited the first Irish Socialist paper, "The Workers Republic". In 1903 he went to America where he stayed until 1910 as organiser for the "Independent Workers of the World" and founded an "Irish Socialist Federation" and edited "The Harp". On his return to Ireland, he became an active leader in the revolutionary movement until his execution in 1916.

(7) Edward Gordon Craig (1872 - 1966)

English designer, director and actor.

Craig designed fewer than ten plays during his life but his ideas have radically influenced modern theatre. He believed that theatre should be an overwhelming emotional experience composed equally of acting, words, line, colour and rhythm and that the director should have absolute control over all dramatic elements. His designs spurned realism and concentrated on atmosphere employing unprecedented lighting effects and abstract sets. He left England for Europe in 1904 where he wrote a number of books (for example: "On the Art of the Theatre"), edited his own magazine, "The Mask" (1908 - 1929) and exhibited stage designs. He also worked on productions with Stanislavsky (Hamlet 1912) and Eleonora Duse (Romersholm by Ibsen).

(8) Margaretta D'Arcy

Irish playwright, actor and director.

Margaretta D'Arcy has worked in theatre in Ireland and England since 1950. She has worked consistently with improvisational and group theatre techniques which went into productions such as "The Business of Good Government"(1960), The Hero Rises Up(1968) and "The Non-Stop Connolly Show" (1975) with Arden.

(9) John Ford (1586 - 1639)

English playwright.

Ford pursued his craft both jointly ("The Witch of Edmonton" (1621) with Thomas Dekker and William Rowley) and individually with "The Lover's Melancholy" (1628). Two of his subsequent tragedies, "The Broken Heart (c.1625 - 1633) and " 'Tis Pity She's a Whore" (c. 1629 - 1633) are among the greatest of Jacobean Tragedies.

(10) Nikolai Vasilyevitch Gogol (1809 - 1852)

Russian novelist and playwright.

A collection of Ukranian folk-tales established his reputation which reached its height with a performance of "The Government Inspector" before the Tsar in 1836. This play is regarded as one of the finest comedies of mistaken identity in any language. His other works include "Dead Souls", an epic comic novel, and "The Marriage" (1842).

(11) Eugene Ionesco (1912 - )

French playwright.

One of the chief exponents of the Theatre of the Absurd, Ionesco is regarded as the founding father of this so-called "anti-theatre". His work includes such one-act plays as "La Lecon"

("The Lesson" (1951)) and "Les Chaises" ("The Chairs" (1952)) and full length plays such as "Rhinoceros" (1959) which established his world-wide reputation.

(I2) Leopold Jessner (1878 - 1945)

German director.

Jessner's intense intellectual concentration on the text of a play was a reaction against both unimaginative traditionalism and the Romantic Impressionism of Max Reinhardt. In 1919 he became director of the Berlin Staatstheater where he encouraged such directors as Piscator and Brecht.

(I4) Patrick Mason

English director.

A former lecturer in Theatre Studies at Manchester University, Mason joined the Abbey Theatre as a director in 1977. His work there has included "Talbot's Box", "The Gigli Concert" (1983) and "The Cherry Orchard" (1984). Now a free-lance director, he divides his time between Ireland and Britain where he has directed "The Crucifer of Blood" at Bristol Old Vic and "Pratts Fall" for the Western Union Theatre Company.

(I5) Aidan C. Matthews (1956 - )

Irish poet and playwright.

Matthews first play "The Diamond Body" was

produced at the Project Theatre, Dublin in 1984.

Previously, he had published articles for "The

Crane Bag" and "The Spectator". Recent publications

include "Minding Ruth", his second collection

of poems and "Immediate Man - Cuimhne ar Chearbhaill

O Dalaigh".

(I6) Tom McIntyre

Irish playwright, poet and novelist.

McIntyre's work includes "The Charolais" (1969),

a novel, and "Blood Relations" (1972). His

plays include "The Great Hunger" (1981) and

"The Bearded Lady" (1984), both produced at

the Peacock Theatre, Dublin.

(I7) Luigi Pirandello (1867 - 1936)

Italian playwright, novelist and poet.

Pirandello is regarded as one of the great

masters of modern drama. He did not turn to

theatre as a medium until 1912 but was a

prolific playwright producing as many as nine

plays a year (1916). His works include "Cosi'e

- (Se vi Pare)" (1916) and Enrico IV (1922).

(18) Erwin Piscator (1893 - 1966)

German director.

Piscator was the first to put the Twentieth Century on stage, using film, slides, animated comic strips, placards and loudspeakers in his production. He believed in the absolute right of the director to use all the available material to express his own ideas. He cut and altered works so drastically that the classics were often unrecognisable. In 1927 he was installed in his own theatre, the Piscator-Bühne, where he produced such plays as "Die Abenteuer des braven Soldaten Schwejk" (1928). His influence was great in Europe, where he influenced such directors as Brecht and Joan Littlewood. As director of the Freie Volksbühne in Berlin during his latter years, he encouraged many new playwrights and directors.

(19) William Shakespeare (1564 - 1616)

English actor, poet and playwright of the Renaissance.

Shakespeare was joint founder of the Globe Theatre where his plays were performed. By the end of the Sixteenth Century he was undisputed master of the English stage whose plays were often chosen for performance before the court. As a playwright he never ceased to experiment during

Chaido 84?





twenty years of writing, developing his style continuously and mastering tragedy, comedy and historical drama.

(20) Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751 - 1816)

Playwright, theatre manager and politician.

Sheridan became manager of Drury Lane theatre in 1778 and a member of parliament in 1780.

His plays include "The Rivals" (1775) and "The School for Scandal" (1777).

(21) Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863 - 1938)

Russian actor, director and producer.

Stanislavsky founded the Moscow Art Theatre in 1898. He set out to find an acting style

more truthful than the histrionics that had prevailed throughout the nineteenth century.

The result was "Building a Character" and "Creating a Role", two textbooks in which he put down

on paper what he believed a young actor should

know. His acting method involved great attention

to ensemble playing and the subordination of

acting to the playwrights purpose.

(22) Jonathon Swift

Satirist and Dean of St. Patricks Cathedral, Dublin.

Swift was born in Dublin and educated at Kilkenny



and Trinity Colleges. The publication of "A Tale of a Tub" in 1704 marked him as one of the most controversial satirists of his age. He was appointed Dean of St. Patricks in 1713 and it was during his life in Dublin that he wrote his most well-known work, "Gullivers Travels".

(23) Roger Vitrac (1899 - 1952)

French playwright and poet.

As a pioneer of the Dadaist movement, Vitrac was a precursor of the theatres of Cruelty and the Absurd. His plays, such as "Victor ou les Enfants au Pouvoir" (1928) and "Les Mysteres de l'Amour" (1927) are macabre in content and have exerted great influence on playwrights such as Anouilh and Ionesco.

(24) Tennessee Williams (1911 - )

American playwright, novelist and poet.

From youth, Williams wrote tirelessly and continuously his apprentice plays winning attention and awards.

It was "The Glass Menagerie", a Broadway hit in 1945 that established him as a major dramatist.

His later plays, such as "A Streetcar Named

Desire" (1947) and "The Night of the Iguana"

are desperately intense, showing extreme situations representing the very extremes of reality.

*11 MacLiamoni  
Criteria  
is appendix?*

