

# DRAMATIC ART AND THE GREAT SOCIETY

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THE term The Great Society is appropriated from Graham Wallas's stimulating book \* recently published, as a title by which to denominate the wide and yet complex substance of the modern world state. The Great Society, to use Mr. Wallas's words, is in process of formation out of the breaking up of past organization into new formulas, whereby "men find themselves working and thinking and feeling in relation to an environment which, both in its world-wide extension, and its intimate connection with all sides of human existence, is without precedent in the history of the world." One of the first characteristics of the Great Society is that in its organization it ignores national lines of cleavage in the creation of the solid structure of a more balanced society. Of the possibilities of this new society President Wilson speaks when he writes, "We live for our own age—an age like Shakespeare's, when an old world is passing away, a new world coming in—an age of new speculation and every new adventure of the mind; a full stage, an intricate plot, a universal play of passion, an outcome no man can foresee."

To the eye of the historian the gradual emergence of the Great Society above and through the jangle of jealous claims is a clearly marked progress. It has been implicit in all the processes, whether of struggle or of peaceful readjustment, by which the modern era has been prepared. And the movement has gone far enough to show some of its results in philosophy, literature and the arts, as well as in government. Quite as interesting as the expanding boundary lines of human understanding are the increasing complexities of relationship between the individual and his world. For if change has come about it has not been only in the affairs of the large magnitudes. The individual himself has become a different thing, in sensibilities, in responsibilities, in quick and subtle reflection of his expanding environment. In so far as a price has had to be paid for the coming

\* *The Great Society*, by Graham Wallas. (Macmillan, 1914.)

of the new order, it is a price paid by the individual. Yet so far he is almost without a voice. He is the mute creator and participant in a large unfolding he does not understand, the changes of which have left him stunned and inarticulate. Is he to remain forever voiceless? If not, what is the instrument which shall give him speech? It is to answer this question, to point out the means by which, it is believed, the individual is already securing self expression in the working out of the larger destinies, that this paper is written.

Wallas sees modern society as the result of the restless interplay of the individual dispositions of men, too often baulking each other and causing unrest. Against the waste and frustration of dispositions there are set up in society the functions of organization. Of these Wallas mentions two, the Will organization, and the Thought organization. These are directed to securing the ends of social economy, which is on the other side the economy of individual happiness. So far the nice balance between the whole and the part seems to be maintained, until one remembers that there are other activities of the individual disposition that are not represented by will and thought, and are not accessible to the mechanics of their organization. These are the emotional and æsthetic activities, which, when set in motion by organization, become social art.

It is the theory of this paper that dramatic art goes very deeply to the heart of the social phenomena of any time; that it is more than a reflection of forces. It is an initiating force by means of whose concreteness and lucidity the issues of the age are clarified. In other words it is the theory that drama is a form of the emotion organization which is doing its share in the realization of the Great Society.

Of all the arts whose function it is to reflect the phenomena of society, dramatic art is the most immediately sensitive to an expression of society as a whole. In fact, drama is created of the substance of society signified in a refined and pointed epitome. It deals with men in groups and as parts of groups, and the individual must be shown in all his intricate adaptation to a social design. It is the fortune of dramatic art that it must be social, and at the same time it must be individual. A law of

being of drama is that its individuals shall be clear—not merely as clear as life under the imperfect observation of every day, but seen clearly as if under a magnifying glass. Rostand indicates this requirement when he speaks, in the Prologue to *Chantecler*, of the proscenium as a great convex glass between the audience and the play.

These laws of drama are of some importance, for they reflect the law of social man himself—that he is whole and at the same time part. The readiness of dramatic art to express this duality of function gives it a great opportunity in expounding present-day social conditions. It raises dramatic art to a favorable position beside the social sciences, and in the judgment of some carries it even beyond sociology and psychology in keenness and quickness of apprehension. For it is the ever-present danger of the sciences of humanity that they become purely theoretical, fail to see the man for men, and miss entirely the individual in his hair-spring balances. But an art cannot so fail and remain. It is in all times the business of the dramatist to study the trees whereby he is to come to know the forest, to study the world in the microcosm of the man, nay more, as Meredith has said, from some slight hint of the straws to feel the winds of March when they do not blow.

To the opportunities of this art the dramatists of the last two generations have not been slow to rise. Unrecognized experts, because experts only in art and not in practical affairs, they have still created for us models of the new world ere this has appeared, and have sought in the hearts of individual men for the simple tragedies, the poignant pains that foretold a new social birth. Pressed on by the imperatives of their art, they have for years been writing plays about a new-world patriotism that has not yet thrilled the heart of the average citizen, for which, before a duller world had felt the need, they had heard the call and registered the promise.

Long before peace tribunals had even been heard of between nations, men of the theatre were jumping the fences at national boundaries to sell their own or secure their neighbors' wares. The particular way in which this was done may not have added to the comity of nations, but there was something in the free

give and take of the artist that showed that to him national boundaries were of little concern. The minstrels wandered from nation to nation before the different "nations" were established at the universities of Europe. The travelling players of Shakespeare's time in Germany were the commercial travellers of a dramatic impulse that was in two centuries to encircle the world. It has always been considered proper to steal another nation's amusement or another nation's art when national prejudice or national ethics would not permit this with other wares. England was appropriating French dramatic ideas and the plots of Voltaire at the time when Goldsmith's Follower was well expressing the English attitude toward the French in his "*Damn the French, the *parle-vous*."*

During the nineteenth century Germany was the source of much of the melodrama of England and America, as well as of hundreds of farces appropriated bodily. Out of France came so many plays of the mid-nineteenth century that Paris became the dramatic capital of the world and London and New York were her parasites. Now clearly such internationalism as this is inverted and paradoxical. For this was but brigandage, and brigandage which was made possible by the existence of national walls. Between nations a wall is as likely to be a retreat after a stealing foray, a safe vantage for plunder, as it is to be a place of defence. If the dramatist thought of it at all, he probably justified his actions on the theory that the foreigner should provide the art and amusement in the same way that he is called upon to pay our taxes. That the reasoning is false in both cases probably did not trouble him. The nation that pays its own taxes gets its own profits, and the nation that provides its own art draws deep breaths of life.

But like most paradoxes this one turns upon itself, and if you hold it up you find it not so astounding, its showing not so reprehensible. For these men were doing just what would be done if national lines and all other self-defeating divisions were swept away. They were laying channels of ideas across the world. It is foolish to lay an embargo on ideas, foolish because futile. These men of the theatre were acting according to that common sense that lies at the basis of all art. They

were using one false system to outwit and combat another false system. They recognized as men always have and always will that art belongs to the first comer. And considerations of holding in fee simple hardly complicate the case. It is the hardest thing in the world to bolster up the theory of property into doing service in matters that are not property matters. Art is not property. Art is free. And the dramatist, hiding himself behind the wall of nationality, plucking off his neighbor's wares, is acting in the name of that larger freedom. We may not like the sound of the theory, and the neighbor may not have been educated to appreciate its practice. But whatever the neighbor may have thought, the wares did not suffer. Through the exchange of art the exchange of civilization was facilitated, and national lines became just so much dimmer on the slate.

For the time came when the sluice gates of ideas between nation and nation had to be opened, and dramatic art provided an ever deeper and wider channel. It was Hebbel who said that in the same sense that the idea is the substance of the modern State, so is the idea the centre of the play, "the primary condition of everything." As long as the play is restricted in technical requirements the play is dead. But once free the play to the expression of the idea, and it overleaps all boundaries, even the restrictions of national lines. So it is that an era that has been most marked with ideas in drama has been also marked with the demolition of national lines in the substance of dramatic art. The romanticism of the early part of the nineteenth century brought the nationalism of Hugo, and Kleist, and Oehlenschläger. The drama of ideas of the end of the century brought the internationalism, the Great Society, of Ibsen, Hauptmann, and Shaw.

The substance of recent drama has been almost entirely concerned with the reorganization of society in relations transcending national lines. When a play has been directed specifically to a national prejudice, as Du Maurier's *An Englishman's Home*, and certain pro-militaristic plays of France and Germany, its life has been a flare like a rocket, and a speedy extinction. It has not been found to be of use even in the passionate but clear-seeing days of war. But the plays on the larger issues, the

more fundamental social problems, have gone on and on to increasing power. Whether it be the unsolved enigma of industrial justice of *The Weavers*, and *Strife*; the call for more judicious self-evaluation in the light of one's larger responsibilities of Hervieu's *Connais-Toi*, or the panorama of the flowing generations in the same writer's *La Course du Flambeau*; whether it be the demand for the strong hand in the grasping of democracy's problems, which are the problems and obligations of the people themselves, as in Brieux's *Maternité* and *Les Avariés*; the call for the reconstruction of the State in behalf of social justice, as in *La Robe Rouge* and *Justice*; the plea of the individual to be permitted to live his life, which is a motive from Villiers de l'Isle Adam to Schnitzler, or the counter plea of the intellectual ascetic, as in Granville Barker's *Waste*; whether it be feminism, viewed sympathetically by Ibsen, with terror and loathing by Strindberg; the emphasis is all the same. It is of the Great Society rather than the nation, of the generations that move toward one event, rather than of the little groups that frustrate and retard. These are questions that are no more German than French; no more American than Japanese. The new drama is cosmopolitan in a sense quite unlike that of the predatory drama of the past, quite consciously concerned with men as social units rather than with men as Englishmen or Danes. This ignoring of national lines in dramatic art is no insignificant thing. It is a precipitation of the problems that the world is grappling with, while as yet unconscious of their larger implication. In treating them and illuminating them, dramatic art is making itself an agency in the "Will organization" and "Thought organization" which are already recreating society on more extensive foundations.

But it must not be thought that dramatic art is for this alone. If it stopped with this service, it could be considered only as an instrument of thought distribution like the newspaper and magazine. The dramatist is not willing to admit that his art has not a higher purpose. Unless we are mistaken, the real service of dramatic art will lie in revealing the hidden secrets of the "atomic change," if we may so speak, by which the Great Society is to be erected on the individual hearts of men. No

change comes without struggle, least of all the change that means the giving up of the immediate bulwark of narrow social support in class or nation for the larger and more intangible good. For these supports men will fight as for their lives. And they have been fighting and gradually giving away. There is no such thing as a generalized struggle. All struggle is immediate and individual, and social pain comes home to the man to suffer. He who would understand the process by which the Great Society comes about must study it in the lives of individual men, way-breakers, for the most part, who sum up in themselves the generalized contests. And for such understanding no science is adequate. There is required the discerning insight of an art, and it has been no accident that the art that has been most serviceable in this respect has been dramatic art. Hauptmann dedicates one of his plays to "those who have lived it," and there is no reason to think that the dedication was limited to a German audience.

It is not surprising that among the dramatists of the last generation the greatest have been those who in their own persons have reflected this conflict. The indispensable requirement of the great dramatist is that he should be dramatist second, that he should first be citizen. The substance of his art demands this. And the true dramatist has been so much a creature of his age that he has been incapable of permitting the means to be more important than the end, the part than the whole. Ibsen, Hauptmann, Tolstoy, Maeterlinck, even Synge, stand out as citizens of the world, overtopping their positions as dramatists. And some of these in their own persons paid the price of their world citizenship by the loss of position and prestige in the nation. Ibsen in exile in Rome joins with the older Hugo ostracised from Paris, and these join Zola and Tolstoy, lonely in their own homelands, and with them the strange, silent Irishman named Synge, who loved Ireland much but loved truth more and could not blind himself with the Gaelic illusion.

The struggle between the last hosts of nationalism and the coming order of the new State runs throughout modern drama. It is not always identified as such. It may be called the struggle against the party, the convention, or parochialism. "What



is it," Ibsen seems to have asked, "that is responsible for the struggle against the larger ideas, the conception of a nobler humanity?" It is local interest, the interest of party. "The people at home think parochially, feel parochially, and regard everything from the parochial point of view," he writes from Rome in 1873. It was his hatred of parochialism that so aroused Ibsen against Norway when Denmark was fighting Germany, and finally led to his exile. There the scorn for a narrow provincialism found expression in *Brand* and in the biting satire of *Peer Gynt*. And his plays were not so much campaigns for this reform or that, though many reformers have attached him to their cause, as pleas for the larger outlook, the outlook freed from the bigotry of class and caste and narrow patriotism. It is this that makes some dull critics consider Ibsen inconsistent. The dramatist will not play according to rule. He will strike out at friend and foe. No sooner is a cause nearly won than he turns his bitterest shafts on the hosts of the victorious. A dramatist who was essentially Norwegian, he seemed most bitter toward his own people. How could such things be?

But Ibsen was not inconsistent. As he himself said, "People believe that I have changed my views in the course of time. This is a great mistake. Every development has, as a matter of fact, been altogether consistent." He merely insisted on carrying his thought to a conclusion without outside let or hindrance. There was but one thing for his mind to be true to, and that was to its own processes. The greatest hindrances to thinking were party hindrances, and about the last one left of these is the barrier of race and nation. Controlled by these, the average man will not think his way to the conclusion of his ideas. He permits his thoughts to carry him only to the bounds of a narrow self-interest and then stops. This is particularly the case with the so-called progressive man, or the politician who wins favor by espousing a progressive cause. And so it happened that Ibsen, one of the most radical of real progressives, found himself in continual conflict with the incomplete progressivism of the politician. And he considered it more to his purpose to attack this than the consistent conservatism of



the Tory. It is the political-minded man who sees only in terms of the interests of his own neighbors, his own clan, his own division, who is attacked in *The Young Men's Union* and *The Wild Duck*. For Ibsen shows that by building walls around political ideals, by making social justice stop at the border, we poison the heart of the ideal itself, and make men forget how to think. Unless a man can think his way to the conclusion of his premises, though this conclusion may take him round the world, he becomes a demagogue and a politician. His ideals are of use only in securing his own advantage.

It was this line of thinking, and the prevalence of the stunted ideal of freedom, that made Ibsen even doubt the readiness of the world for democracy. While men were misled, or misled themselves, by narrow self-interest, ideals themselves were prostituted wares and patriotism was a cloak to cover pettiness and selfishness. To him the end of all the struggles, the successive ascents, would be spelled in terms of the larger nobility of humanity. A woman was not first and foremost wife and mother, a man was not first and foremost party-man or Norwegian; he was a free-born member of the new estate, a citizen of the world.

That this new estate would come only by struggle Ibsen knew, and he and other dramatists have made it their affair to study the struggles by which it comes about. And these are usually represented in terms of the individual man, keen seeing, free thinking, fearless in will, against the congregated hosts of those who cling to the narrower organization. For the spirit of self-interest fights to the last ditch for the benefits of class, and finds high-sounding phrases by which to denominate the struggle. Shakespeare showed in *Coriolanus* that the first fruits of high ideals improperly assimilated is mob spirit. The mob is the social demagogue, the social self-seeker, fed on the fine phrases of a liberty not swayed by intelligence. In our own times mob has become one of the chief forces in social phenomena, and as such has become one of the chief characters in drama. In one guise or another mob appears in a large percentage of the significant social plays of the present. It is either villain, or chorus, or malevolent destiny. Usually mob is a blind unreason-

ing force misled by good but local ideas. As such it appears in *An Enemy of the People*, Echégaray's *The Great Galeoto*, and Hervieu's *Les Paroles Restent*. What is this mob, and in what is its awful potency? Almost without fail, as the dramatists have it, it is the product of parochialism, of the narrow view. It is the outgrowth of thinking that starts right, and stops at some artificial boundary. The mob is the product of the sectionalized passion of freedom. It is a commonplace that the greatest enemy of real freedom is not intrenched aristocracy, but the people blinded and deceived by the promise of the profits of license. How often national interest means but this, how often the emancipated man finds himself in conflict with the evil genius of parochialism, how great the power of the mob in fomenting international misunderstanding the dramatists have not failed to show. Nor have they failed to reveal the particularly hard price the public man has to pay who stands out against their demands. "'Ware mob, More," says Mendip to the hero of Galsworthy's *The Mob*, and the outcome of More's idealistic defence of the larger citizenship shows how pertinent is the warning. A striking commentary on art and life and their interchangeable values comes in the tragic parallelism between the murder of Frithiof, the disciple of Peace in Zangwill's *The War God*, by a zealous revolutionist, fevered with the passion of the nation, and the recent murder of Jean Jaurès by a tragically misled patriot.

But recent drama has not altogether been concerned with the poignancy of the readjustments to the Great Society. There are some who are hardy enough to laugh at the little pretensions of the patriots. To Shaw what we call patriotism is but another kind of sentimentality, a little lower than personal sentimentality because so often profitable, but like all sentimentality a vice cloaked in virtue. Some one has said that it has been the effort of Shaw's life to conceal that he has a warm heart, on the theory, perhaps, that this implies a present "goodness" too often inconsistent with the far and lasting "Good." For the same reason Shaw tries to conceal that he is in his heart a sterling patriot in the very best meaning of that misused term. It has been Shaw's business to puncture not only the sentiment of love,

but as well the illusion of the dominant race, of the master-man, of Napoleon and Cæsar, of the courage of war, and the code of "my country right or wrong; always my country." Wit will accomplish what force leaves undone. Therefore Shaw has ventured far beyond the footsteps of Ibsen to withering scorn of the pretentiousness of isolation. When a nation is most vain-glorious, most self-righteous, his shaft will strike. Is the virtue but for home consumption? he asks. Then it is a sorry virtue. Perhaps it is spiritual penuriousness. Chesterton tells that when some one upheld the doctrine that as conquerors the English must be ruthless, Shaw answered, "What a light this principle throws on the defeat of the tender Dervish, the compassionate Zulu, and the morbidly humane Boxer at the hands of the hardy savages of England, France, and Germany." The parochialism that Ibsen vigorously combats, that Hauptmann ignores, Shaw punctures with scornful shafts of vision.

To-day the cause of international understanding has gone so far, in theory at least, that some dramatists have particularized the problem into a specific study of peace between nations. Zangwill's *The War God*, Galsworthy's *The Mob*, and many other less notable plays have made effective pleas for international patience and forbearance. It would be untrue to say that these plays have not had some influence. But it is a question, after all, whether they do not in the form in which the problem is presented conduce more to a sense of nationalism than of the social outlook of the larger units. As they stand they are pleas to the nation rather than effective instruments in an organization transcending the nation. Those plays which will do most for the cause of the Great Society are the ones which consider its problems as present and living problems, not necessarily identified with precise national relationships, but in magnitude and complexity rising to the higher estate. For the Great Society will not come by international enactment. It will come by the broadening and fusing of social interests over the world. It is safe to say that Ibsen and Maeterlinck in speaking a world language on the things of the spirit accomplished more for world understanding than such a specific document, epoch-making though it was, as Baroness von Suttner's *Lay Down Your Arms*.

It is the dramatist's business to see things a little more as they are than as they should be. The present is always the substance of his art. But there is always this to be remembered: In keeping his crises always fresh, in making his substance of the vital contests of forward-looking men, rather than of the outworn contests that have lost their force, he does much to show us the coming state. The writing of the true play is largely a process of demolition of safeguards, of conventions, of regulations, and must-nots. So closely must a play be knit that all that is formal and artificial must be destroyed. And one of the first lessons the dramatist learns of his art is that there are few, very few, psychological divisions by nations. To the extent that he gets to the heart of a man that man's nativity disappears. And dramatic art speaks the same messages in all languages and to all peoples. To-day Max Reinhardt comes to New York, Gordon Craig practises his art in Italy. Russia is teaching the world new lessons for its theatre. There are no boundary lines for dramatic art save those supplied by its own nature, the lines that are drawn by its inherent demand for truth and beauty. By the calls of his profession, as well as of his citizenship, the dramatist knows, as Shaw says, "that Man grows through the ages, he finds himself bolder by the growth of his spirit (if I may so name the unknown), and dares more and more to love and trust instead of to fear and fight."

## THE IRISH LITERARY MOVEMENT

PADRAIC COLUM

THE year 1840 dates the appearance of the first Anglo-Irish writers. Of course, Ireland had produced able writers of English before that time, and the names of Swift, Berkeley, Sterne, Goldsmith, Sheridan and Maria Edgeworth will come immediately to the mind. These, however, did not write out of an Irish consciousness. Moore wrote out of a national consciousness but without knowing anything of its depth or its intensity.\*

At the date mentioned the people were in the main Gaelic or Irish speakers. They possessed a literature that was very original and very distinct from English. But they were turning away from their native language and their native culture. The Catholic Séminary at Maynooth had been founded, and the Irish hierarchy had decided to make it a purely English-speaking institution. And then, following O'Connell, the people had been drawn into a political agitation that was conducted by English speakers. When the young intellectuals like Davis thought of an Irish national culture, it seemed natural to them that this distinctive culture should be in English. It was Davis who told the Irish people that they should realize their nationality in other forms than the political—"A nationality of the spirit as well as the letter—a nationality which may come to be stamped upon our manners, and literature, and our deeds." So he wrote in the prospectus of the first journal † that advocated

\* An English writer of Moore's time denounced as dangerous the song that begins "Avenging and Bright Fell the Swift Sword of Erin On those whom the brave Sons of Usna betrayed." At present one has to wonder what political incitement there was in alluding to an episode in Ireland's pre-Christian history. But the English writer was not wrong, for the people who heard Moore's song had been trained to know that the weapon and the deed were symbolic. "Avenging and bright," like several of Moore's other songs, is really a version of the "secret song" that persists through Gaelic and Anglo-Irish poetry—the song that whispers of the return of power to the defeated race. Moore's songs were written to music that is really national—the proud and sad traditional Irish music. And by following the rhythm of this music he reproduced in several instances the characteristics of Gaelic verse.

† *The Nation*, first issue, 1842.