Maksimilian Voloshin

Tree Articles on the Theatre

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Faces and Masks

When one happens to see works from the French theatre on the Russian stage, then no matter how well they are produced, translated, and played, a tormenting feeling of deep and inescapable disharmony always remains.

No French play can slip into the forms of the Russian stage so that these forms fit it completely, like a case for a geodesic instrument, the way they fit Gogol's, Ostrovsky's and Chekhov's plays.

Whereas the Russian stage finds authentic and well-defined forms for the German Hauptmann, for the Belgian Maeterlinck, and for the Pole Przybyszewski, at times even more successfully than the stages of their homelands, the least complex French comedies, which enjoy wild success in Paris, lose their lustre and wither; their witticisms fall flat and their subtleties seem banal.

The very same thing happens when a French theatre attempts to put on a Russian play or a German one. The productions of Hauptmann and Tolstoi in the theatre of Antoine 1, despite all the efforts of this talented director and the relative elasticity of the material he had available, were complete failures. And in these failures one senses not an accidental, conceptual error but a deeply rooted historical impossibility.

The French theatre is a musical instrument, organically formed and therefore extremely complex, very precise, and not at all flexible. It corresponds so mathematically precisely to the style of

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French drama that it cannot submit and bend to the forms of a foreign art. And, because of the strength of its age-old past, it bends and in its own fashion reshapes works of newly arrived art.

A true national art cannot be pliable and elastic. Changes are made to it from the inside and come to the surface with difficulty and slowly. One can explain our extremely nervous, anxious, and whimsical searches for new scenic forms only by the impoverishment of Russian drama, which after Chekhov has created nothing that is new.

The French theatre, on the other hand, is truly national and indissolubly tied to the forms of its stage, as a mollusk is to the ribs of its shell.

French fashionable plays, created with such unparalleled ease by witty Parisian dramatists, are refined whimsical flowers, which can bloom only in one spot on the globe and no other. They need the cramped, slightly shabby, but brightly illuminated hall of the theatre, beyond whose walls the idle, well-dressed crowd of the grand boulevards murmurs. They need that refined understanding together with the naive perceptiveness that makes the Parisian such a grateful spectator of all kinds of spectacles.

If the spectator lacks completely the spontaneous, creative power of an imagination that is perceptive and can generalize, then no matter how great the stature of the author and the actors, the dream vision, which is the only reality generated by the scenic action, can not arise.

As the character and the growth of a plant are wholly regulated by the soil and climate of the location in which it grows, so the character of the theatre depends wholly on the spectator.

Muscovites, who in comparison with the inhabitants of St. Petersburg have an expansive and naive character, slightly Eastern and slightly Southern, offer an incomparably more worthwhile soil for the creation of theatre. And we see that the theatre of Ostrovsky, just like the theatre of Chekhov, was created in Moscow.

Thus the development and the character of Parisian theatres are almost wholly defined by the characteristics and features of the people of Paris.

Without knowing closely the Parisian, so unconsciously free in his manners in the Southern manner and, at the same time, so severely rigorous and timid in all his moral convictions and theories, it is impossible to understand French comedies, in which free manners are discussed with such openness and, at the same time, the most naive moral theses are defended with such total conviction and incomprehensible passion. Freedom of manners and slavery to morality are what characterize the French of the last century.

II

Our spiritual shamelessness staggers the French most of all.

Not one Frenchman, of course, defines in this way that disturbing but attractive impressio that Russians make on him, but it is true.

That a Russian begins to talk with the first stranger he encounters about what is most important and most intimate, that he questions with such insatiable curiosity and tells about the secret movements of his soul seem to a Frenchman, at one and the same time, as barbaric and savage and attractively shameless as nudity at a public ball.

To the basic traits of the Russian character belongs this irresistible desire to bare oneself open-heartedly before the first person met.

How many people there are who cannot sit in a railway car without beginning to tell a traveling companion about his entire life, revealing the most secret details of stories about his family life and his love life.

One has only to recall all the conversations on trains in Russian literature: the beginning of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, the first chapter of *The Idiot*, several scenes from *Anna Karenina*, and many of the stories by Gleb Uspensky.

And if you were to add the outpourings, always touching on what is most shameful, ignominious, and hidden, that occur in Russian taverns under the influence of drink, then what strikes the French about the Russians becomes absolutely clear, as does why

Jules Lemaître [[instead of Lemaitre]], analyzing Ostrovsky's *The Thunderstorm*, wrote the following:

“And what happened later you can well imagine, since in Russia every husband who has suffocated his child (*The Power of Darkness*), every student who has killed a pawnbroker (*Crime and Punishment*), and every wife who has been unfaithful to her husband (*The Thunderstorm*) awaits only the appropriate moment, coming out onto the public square, to fall on one's knees and tell everyone about one's crime.”

This daring generalization by Jules Lemaître ceases to look naive, if one penetrates more deeply and imagines more broadly the basic features of the French spirit, so diametrically opposed to the Slavic spirit.

We are ashamed of our gestures and actions; we fear that they look unexpected and inexplicable to those around us. And therefore we attempt as soon as possible to let observers into their inner meaning.

Whereas the French, being only a little abashed by that which relates to action, deeds, and all forms of life, are insuperably bashful at the uncovering of secret, psychological motives, feelings, and complex internal experiences.

The psychology of the French novelists, despite its refinement, seems shallow, because it is always an analysis of action rather than the internal reasons for it.

The French are wildly bashful of everything that concerns experiences. The most calm and balanced conceal bashfulness behind a mask of society civility; others who are more expansive hide behind a gibe, a joke, behind the French *blague*.

One can always distinguish people susceptible to a special kind of sensuality and immediacy of impressions by a certain cynicism, a certain superficial flippancy and gaiety, which become, towards the end, a mask that has merged organically with the face.

The French are not ashamed of revealing their body, but in them has been placed an invincible shame of revealing the spirit, which we will never be able to understand fully.

Their spirit therefore is always confined in strict and finished forms, in life as in art, for form is the true clothing of the spirit

In life, however, the bashfulness felt by the spirit leads to the creation of masks.

III

If, when walking along Parisian streets, you follow for a long time the flow of eyes, faces, and figures, then you soon begin to notice a certain rhythmic repetition of faces.

What had formerly seemed a human face, consummate in its individuality, turns out to be only a general formula, one of the masks of Paris.

In the crowded homes and narrow streets, flooded with light and extended by mirrors, there is so much seething that to look at one another's bare faces, on which everything was written, would be too frightening.

In Paris the face deprived of the mask gives one a shameful feeling of nakedness, and by this nakedness of face the Parisians know foreigners, provincials, and, especially, Russians.

Here live people dressed in masks from head to foot; Parisians put on a face just as they do a dress, a hat, a tie, and gloves.

And the mask is worn not only on the face. It is expressed in a gesture, a voice, a certain turn of phrase, an intonation, a repeated sentence, the tune of a fashionable song, the curve of a waist-in everything that can conceal personality.

But having concealed, it can in part reveal, just like a Parisian woman who, wearing a dress, displays the nakedness of her body; with an adroitly selected and closely fitted skirt she allows us to see the whole line of her hip, leg, and knee.

The mask of a city is the natural consequence of bashfulness and self-preservation.

People, who have gathered here for a life that is stimulating, keen, and gripping, must preserve their living face from prostitution with a mask.

And the mask adheres so tightly to them that they forget about their face.

The formation of the mask—this is a profound moment in the formation of the human face and personality. The mask is the sacred achievement of the spirit's individuality; it is *Habeas corpus* 2, the right of the inviolability of one's intimate feelings, which are concealed behind a generally accepted formula.

The mask and fashion are tightly bound together. The introduction of new masks follows the same complex paths by which a new fashion is introduced.

The introduction of a new fashion involves a complex system that has been developed by an age-old tradition. There are almost no revolutions, violent upheavals, or *coups d'état* here. Fashion flows slowly, with each season introducing a new detail in the style, carefully altering the combination of colours, and returning periodically to the contemporary scene old models of long ago outworn fashions.

A tailor in Paris must be an archaeologist, an historian, and a painter. He has to work in the Print Gallery of the Bibliotheque Nationale and follow attentively all the colourful novelties and experiments at exhibitions of paintings.

One who is unaware precisely of the historical significance of the paintings of the Impressionists and Neo-Impressionists, the colour tones of Gaugin, Cezanne, and Matisse, can not be a tailor for Parisian women.

But the significance of the clothes created by Paris lies not at all in concealing and clothing the body; on the contrary, they only reveal, undress, and outline it. The purpose of the French toilette is to conceal and dress the spirit, but definitely not the body.

And just as new types of clothes are being created in the workshops of the large, fashionable stores. So in precisely the same way new masks of the spirit, new masks for the face, are being created in the workshops of the theatres with the clandestine collaboration of the dramatist, actor, and costume designer.

For a new human mask to receive the civil right to walk the streets of Paris, it must appear on the stage and be officially established on a poster and in a caricature.

IV

Parisians do not go to the theatre to see the complex, frightening, naked human face woven from the grey spider webs of life, which we, entering the theatre, look for; they go to look at, study, and select new masks.

And nowhere does theatre so correspond with the demands of the audience and nowhere does it merge so completely with its spectators as in Paris.

French dramatists are adroit cutters, learned tailors who do not go beyond the limits of the stage's traditional formulas. In Paris drama and comedy take on the same correctly finished formulas as do tails, a frock-coat, or dinner-jacket. And the dramatic clothes are sewn with amazing skill and perfect craftsmanship according to the model provided by the actor.

The plays written by Rostand and Sardou for Sara Bernhardt and Réjane, by Maurice Donnay for Mlle. Brandès, by Jules Renard for Suzanne Deprès, by Willy for Paulaire, and by de Flers and Caillavet for Eva Levallière are all dresses ordered from a first-class tailor 3.

Only on ancient roots and foundations can all that is truly refined in art grow.

In a French play the entire dramatic action, the intrigue, the denouements, collisions, and situations featuring the lovers have such ancient and petrified roots. This territory is known with such mathematical certainty and precision, and in it all the conceivable combinations of scenic situations have been exhausted.

But the life, the nerves, and the quickening of a play are the new masks of the actors and the infinite variety of a dialogue shot through with snakelike scales, a dialogue which clothes the dead scheme of the play in the vibrant clothing of words and gives the theatre the quiver of life.

In its scenic mechanism the French theatre has almost become a mathematical scheme. But when, in no matter what the art, a series of canonic forms are created, from which imagination has no right to stray, the powers of observation and the depth of vision are increased tenfold.

The narrower the area of choice, the more art is tightly and intimately bound to the life of its time.

Therefore French plays are inseparable from their Parisian spectators and from the cries of the boulevards that murmur beyond the doors of the theatre.

The audience and the actors divide into numberless, kaleidoscopic reflections of each other and create a moment of aesthetic pleasure that, like a legendary flower, can bloom only at a certain nighttime hour, only at a particular place on earth.

It's understandable, therefore, why among the sixty theatres of Paris there is not a single one that would be able to put on Tolstoi, Ibsen, Hauptmann, or Chekhov—[[instead of —]] these northern, cruel plays that shamelessly tear the mask from the human face and reveal all its horror.

Also understandable is the profound absurdity of French plays transported to the Russian stage. A dress from a foreign shoulder, reshaped by clumsy and uncomprehending hands, fits badly, like tails on a Hottentot, and only restricts movement.

Even plays performed by French actors in Russia lose their sense, so that they remain not so much incomprehensible as unnecessary to the spectators.

A Russian is organically incapable of understanding that it is not at all shameful to bare one's body on stage, but insurmountably shameful to bare one's soul. And the Russian style of acting on stage with one's whole being, to the ultimate baring of the spirit, would seem to a French spectator as nothing but barbarian shamelessness.

Thus one must take the French theatre in the following manner: it does not descend into any of the inmost recesses of the human heart in search of terrifying secrets, but reflects and creates only new clothes for life and new masks for the spirit.

Behind its external freedom there is a bashfulness, which for us today is still completely incomprehensible, but will someday become imperative. This will happen when we taste the apple of the knowledge of forms and, after that fall, become ashamed of the nakedness of our spirit.

NOTES

The essay translated here appeared first in a collection entitled *Teatral'naja Rossija* (11 December 1904).

1. Voloshin is referring to the productions of Tolstoi's *The Power of Darkness* and Hauptmann's *The Weavers* in 1888 and 1893, respectively, at Antoine's Théâtre Libre.

2. The Habeas Corpus Act passed by the English Parliament in 1679 requires that the "body" of a person arrested or deprived of liberty be produced before a court so that the legality of the detention may be determined.

3. For Sarah Bernhardt Rostand wrote *La Samaritaine* and *La Princesse lointaine*. Sardou wrote *Madame Sans-Gêne* for Réjane. Marthe Brandès appeared in Donnay's *L'Escalad*e. Jules Renard created for S. Deprès the play *Poil de Carotte*, and Willy wrote *Claudine à Paris* for Polaire—the play, by the way, was based on a novel that Willy wrote with his then wife Colette. R. Pellene de La Motte-Ango, marquis de Flers and G. A. de Caillavet created a series of plays for Eve Lavallière, including *Miquette et sa mère* and *Le Roi.*

Theatre — A Dream Vision

This year all theatrical groups in Russia are seized by feverish anxiety and expectations. All are looking, undertaking, and preparing for something new, something that is coming.

It's as if all the political anxiety of last year has been carried over this year into this world of conventional and abstract prototypes of life.

The Moscow Art Theatre, which sought and continues to seek for a detailed—[[instead of —]] a most minutely detailed—[[instead of —]] transmission of life, has begun to speak of simplification, of stylization.

Stanislavsky does not want to reconcile himself with the honourable and fine role, which has fallen to his lot, of carrying the realist stage through to its highest point.

Having created the theatre of Chekhov, he now dreams of creating the theatre of Maeterlinck.

Through the corridors and the dressing rooms of the Moscow Art Theatre runs a shiver of delight about Maeterlinck's new play, *The Bluebird*, a play not yet published in French that was sent by the author to the Moscow Art Theatre 1.

Stanislavsky wants no actor, on whose lips the words of Chekhov's plays sounded, to take part in this new production.

The same feverish activity is taking place in Petersburg at Komissarzhevskaja's theatre.

These novelties, which are so sought after and which are promised to us, demand an answer to the question: what exactly is theatrical illusion?

The recently deceased French writer, Marcel Schwob, told of the following incident, while speaking of the conventions of the stage 2.

An old tragedy of one of Shakespeare's contemporaries was being played, in which the hero exited in one scene carrying on the point of his sword the bloody heart of his lover, whom he had just slain.

"Wanting to make this scene more frighteningly realistic," Marcel Schwob said, "we got the real heart of a just slaughtered ram at a local butcher shop. But this black, formless lump of meat, when seen from the auditorium aroused only laughter and bewilderment. But when, at the next rehearsal, a large, fake heart cut out of red flannel was fastened to the end of the sword, then all present trembled in fear."

The object on stage and the object in real life are not one and the same. A real object from everyday life becomes unreal when carried onto the stage.

A real, bloody heart carried onto the stage conveys no idea of reality whatsoever. But a symbolic heart, cut out of red flannel, conveys the whole terror of real life.

In life, some things are real; on stage, other things are real.

On stage, what are [[instead of is]]real are not objects, but the ideas of objects.

And if we follow attentively all the sensations of our dreams and our relationship to objects and setting [[intead of the objects and the setting]] when we sleep, then we will notice that there we are also dealing just with the ideas of objects, and not with their reality. Therefore, the unexpected changes and disappearances of forms, which would have shaken us to the bottom of our soul if we were awake, seem completely natural when we sleep.

There is a special logic to the dream, completely different from the logic of our daytime consciousness, but nevertheless fully rigorous and consonant with some basic but little-known properties of our brain.

And the logic of the dream is identical to the logic of the stage.

On the other side of the transparent, fiery shroud rising above the footlights, a new consciousness of reality begins for the spectator—[[instead of -]] a dream-state consciousness of reality: a world of things in themselves, the external forms of which can change arbitrarily without arousing any bewilderment whatsoever.

The stage is this dream-state consciousness of life, and the origin of this phenomenon lies in the very history of tragedy's birth.

There was a time when man was an animal. For this animal to give birth to a clear, mathematical consciousness, that is, a human consciousness, a profound intellectual shock—[[instead of -]] the beast's lunacy—[[instead of -]] was required.

The ape went mad and became a man, according to the striking expression of Vjacheslav Ivanov 3.

When man was an animal, he lived in the midst of the same impressions of reality he has now, and they came to him through the same organs of perception that he has now, but they passed through the brain differently, transfigured, magnified, sharpened as in a dream vision.

Analyzing our dreams, we can restore approximately the nature of the perceptions of the human being of those times.

I sleep. I dream of a long and coherent story. Someone insults me. I challenge him to a duel. Lengthy preparations follow. And I experience feelings[[instead of the feelings]] of agitation, fear, and expectation. The seconds give the signal. I hear the shot of my opponent and, because of the sound of his gun, I awake.

Then I see that a chair has fallen.

The sound of the falling chair reaching my consciousness through the fog of a dream, which exaggerates the shapes and sizes of objects, stimulated in my brain this long, dramatic story.

In a fantastic dream I hear the ponderous steps of approaching giants and, having opened my eyes, catch the clatter of a horse moving off into the distance.

The basic features of a dream are exaggeration and a dramatic quality.

Legends, myths, folk epics—[[instead of -]]these are the remnants of humanity's ancient, dream-state consciousness, tales of the real events of those times that have passed through the prism of the dream 4. The ancient dream-state consciousness, though at first it can seem distant, is far from alien to us today. During each intense emotional action we find ourselves wholly within the dream state, and in these moments our relationship to things is exactly that of ancient man. Only when the element of contemplation intrudes into the realm of action does our mathematical consciousness—[[instead of -]]the ability to estimate and reckon—[[instead of -]]awaken.

The history of the orgiastic cults of ancient Greece, expounded in such detail in the articles of V. Ivanov titled “The Hellenistic Religion of the Suffering God,” gives us a picture of the tragic insanity of ancient humanity while concluding its passage from a dream state to a daytime state of consciousness.

The intense craziness of the ape led to holy frenzy, to orgiastic dances, to human sacrifices.

According to ancient religions, wine was sent into the world to lock man within the gates of the dream-state consciousness.

History describes this period of the man-beast's insanity at the very end, when insanity took on the religious-ritualistic forms of Dionysian worship. From this, tragic theatre arises as the carrier of the ancient dream-state consciousness of humanity, which has already been pierced by the first lightning strike of mathematical lunacy.

From its beginnings theatre was the cradle of our dream-state consciousness, and it remains so even in our time, while passing through all the inflexions of literary and theatrical forms. Therefore, the stage takes from dramatic literary works and gives back only action and heartfelt emotions.

The rest that remains in a literary work is superfluous for the theatre.

Antique theatre was a dream-like action, but theatre in our day is a dream-like vision.

Antique theatre was a collective dream, but our theatre is a dream for each individual spectator.

The forms of the stage and the forms of a production play an important role in the mystery of the dream that springs up between the spectator and the actors. In this realm the dramatic intention of the author has the same significance as the sound of the falling chair or the clatter of the running horse.

It is only fundamental reality that has reached the consciousness of the spectator through the stage's dream vision unfolding before him.

The dream-like action is created by actors and spectators together, since in this sphere only creation in symbols is possible.

And symbols need to be, above all, universally recognized, since they are perceived not by reason but by our ancient dream-state consciousness, which became what we call the unconscious or, to be more precise, the subconscious.

A symbol adopted [[instead of taken up]] by reason will not be a symbol but an allegory. All true symbols are subordinate to the logic of our dream-state consciousness and senseless before the logic of our mathematical consciousness.

From this it becomes clear why a heart cut out of red flannel in the shape of the card suit of hearts compels us to tremble in horror when it appears on stage, whereas a genuine, anatomical heart arouses laughter.

The stage is a place where we contemplate things in themselves, and their features become visible only when they are essential. Therefore, that which we call a realistic production with its minute details impedes the free flow of the dream—[[instead of —]] and Meyerhold's idea to remove from the stage setting all that is unnecessary and to retain only those objects that have an immediate and vital relationship with the action is profoundly right.

In our theatrical dreams there were too many realistic shackles, and it is difficult to predict what new illusion will arise when the shackles are removed from us.

But behind the feverish search for new forms of scenic action something different is sensed, which has great significance for the current historical moment.

The searchers are preparing a cradle for an infant.

But where is the infant?

For what kind of new dream are they preparing a cradle?

In the meantime into these new forms old people and foreigners are fit and placed: Maeterlinck, Ibsen, Przybyszewski. Why here, in a land shaken by the fever of revolution, are new stages prepared with such enthusiasm and haste for the tragic conditions of the European soul, which caused such a fuss with its springtime gusts some fifteen to twenty years ago?

Theatrical fundamentals and traditions were not redesigned for them in their homelands. That means that they are not compelling the Russian stage to a total reconstruction.

The Russian spirit, itself, has become pregnant with a new type of tragedy, the new lunacy of a dream-state consciousness.

The consciousness of the dream state has never dimmed in anyone. The ancient consciousness has become the unconscious, but it is alive in each person. And the stage is its standard, its criterion.

At present, the change occurring in the dream-state consciousness of the people has not yet found its embodiment in the literary forms of tragedy, but the theatre, which is connected to this consciousness through fine, unbreakable nerve-fibres, is already preparing to accept new forms.

The forms of tragedy are closely dependent on the forms of social life.

They are like the arrow on decimal scales; onto the scales are thrown tens of weights, but the arrow advances only one indicator line.

A hurricane can rage on the surface of the sea, raising gigantic waves, but several fathoms lower, in the depths, there is total silence. Such a storm does not affect the forms of tragedy.

Thus it was during the French Revolution.

The political storm was reflected only in the smoky cloak of the words, in which the ancient body of tragedy was garbed, but the forms of tragedy did not change.

This was an indication that the core of the French spirit remained unchanged, which was true, since the Revolution was a categorical affirmation of a revolutionary change that had already been accomplished.

The arrow quavered only in the age of Romanticism and moved upwards one fine line; this indicated that something changed in the dream-state consciousness of the European spirit. A border between the past and the present was established.

Currently in Russia, the arrow, which indicates the alteration in dramatic forms, moves with unprecedented impetuosity, leaping across many indicator lines.

This is a sign that despite the gust of a political storm, which raised the foaming crests of the waves last year and then flew past, the seething is now beginning within.

The depths of the sea seethe, but its surface is calm.

Organic changes in the very depths of the nation's dream-state consciousness are taking place. Bombs, political murders, and executions are signs of the tense inner work of the dream-state consciousness, which in similar eras always placed the spirit in terrifying proximity to the mystery of death and the mystery of bloodletting.

The feverish quest in the realm of theatrical forms serves us as a joyful and prophetic token of the great rebirth taking place [[instead of happening]] in the depths of the Russian spirit.

Notes

This article was first printed in *Rus'*, N. 71 (9 December 1906).

1. Maeterlinck's play was presented by the Moscow Art Theatre in the fall of 1908.

2. Further on, Voloshin recounts Schwob's acticle “Annabella and Giovanni,” which deals with John Ford's *Annabella*, a tragedy produced in Paris in 1894.

3. In a letter to A. M. Petrova Voloshin wrote, “Vjach. Ivanov and I converse daily for several hours. He told me: 'Yes, I acknowledge the ape. First the ape and

then an unexpected ascent: the sunrise, paradise, the divinity of the human being. Something unique in history is being accomplished: an animal seized by lunacy. The ape went insane and became a human being. And the highest thing in life, tragedy, was born.'" (IRLI, f. 562, op. 3, ed. xr. 93).

4. These notions are in keeping with the work of Sigmund Freud and his followers. In similar fashion K. Abragam advances an analogy linking the child's imagination with myth and with dreams (See K. Abragam, Son i mif, Moscow, 1912).

The Contemporary French Theatre

I Basic Trends

Indicating the illuminated facade of a theatre, Théophile Gautier said to the Goncourt brothers, with whom he was walking arm in arm, the following:

"I love the theatre in this way: from the outside. Right now three women, who will tell me everything, are sitting in my loge. Fournier, the director of the theatre, is a genius who will not harm a new play. Every two or three years he revives *Le Pied du mouton* . Red scenery he redoes in blue, and blue in red; he introduces a new stunt or English women dancers... Truly, to everything pertaining to the theatre it would pay to act in this way. One needs to have only one vaudeville and to make small changes in it from time to time. Theatre is such a vile art...a crude art..."

Such speeches were made in the 1850s by the most brilliant of France's drama critics.

Several years ago, the academician Emile Faguet, the *Prince des critiques* as he was proclaimed by a survey conducted by *Comoedia*,[1] wrote:

"Contemporary French theatre astounds us with its monotony; one may justly say that each evening in all the theatres of Paris one and the same play is given under different titles.

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[1] This is a translation of the article as it was first published in *Ezhegodnik imperatorskix teatrov* in the first (pp. 56-81) and third (pp. 60—94) numbers of 1910.

Voloshin has in mind *Comedia illustré*, a newspaper devoted to the arts that was founded in 1908 and came out twice a month in Paris.

How can a nation, considered lively and impatient, delight over the span of a year in thirty plays written on the same theme? Adultery can have something piquant in it the first time it was committed and the first time it was told...

A husband, a wife, a lover—these are the three unities of contemporary theatre, and the law of these three unities is as inviolable as the old one. The French love strict laws in literature."

Quite recently Paul Gsell wrote of the crisis in the theatre (*L'Usine théâtrale*):

"Theatre in our day has become a large factory, and each of our playwrights a factory owner, a manufacturer.

The horrible poverty of the theatre is due to the fact that those who write successful plays receive such large amounts of money. From all sides one hears only about the dizzying profits attained by the victors of the stage world.

One receives annually a million from two or three plays, whose success continues. Another builds himself a palace on the income brought in by one play. In our day people become playwrights in exactly the same way that they become manufacturers of footwear... And for one and the other one and the same means suffice. The only difference is that one has to measure the brain and the other the foot of the consumer—both operations are closer than is supposed... And then there remains the cutting of the pieces of leather or dialogue according to the usual patterns and, most important of all, to the fashion of the day.

One can observe young people around twenty or twenty-two years old who, wanting to acquire an income quickly and having the phrenological bump indicating practical quickwittedness, dedicate themselves to the manufacture of new plays. They have not yet seen anything, observed anything, learned anything... They studied the usual formulas of famous theatre directors, they apply them, and they will succeed splendidly.

Each flings himself on the theatre as on booty. The novelists say, 'Let's abandon the novel, which brings in so little; let's do plays!'

A few years back a critic (Georges Polti), having read in the *Conversations of Goethe with Eckerman* that the great German poet had, without spelling them out, counted up 36 dramatic situations, attempted to find this number of theatrical combinations in the plays of the world and of its peoples. He easily reached the desired number. If he had attempted the same operation on contemporary plays, he scarcely would have been able to discover more than four basic dramatic situations: 1) will they be happy or not? 2) will they be unfaithful or not? 3) will they separate or not? 4) will they forgive or not?

And, in truth, these four situations can easily be reduced to one: will they be happy?"

These three unanimous opinions, collected at various points over the last half-century, testify to the indisputable, steady flowering of French theatre. We will not be embarrassed by the irritated intonation and the negative paradoxes of these three unequal, critical minds. Beneath the curses of Varlaam[2] are often hidden, unintended blessings. The affirmations showing through negative statements acquire a more convincing force.

When Théophile Gautier speaks ironically about the existence of one vaudeville, in which some changes are from time to time made, and when, forty years later, Faguet testifies that this vaudeville exists, that "every evening in all the Parisian theatres the same play is given under different names," and when Paul Gsell affirms that this play can be written by anyone with a practical bent, who is able to use the available dramatic formulas and can accurately take the measure of the minds of his contemporaries, then we receive a finished picture of a broad, organic evolution of theatre, which has become a nationwide art (or continues to be just that, since this disposition of things has lasted in France for four centuries).

All three opinions speak, of course, not about the heights of art, not about the flowering of creativity, but about the mass total of artistic production, that is, about the basic components of artistic skill. The availability and feasibility of the dramatic works, about which Paul Gsell speaks, indicate that we are dealing with a nutritious substratum of art, favourable for the greatest works. We recall Taine's words that in the age of Pericles any Athenian could sculpt a decent statue, in the time of Shakespeare any Englishman could write a fair drama, and in our time everyone can write a decent newspaper article, when the opportunity presents itself.

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[2] Varlaam was a soothsayer whom the Moabites asked to bring perdition on the Israelites. Instead of curses, however, blessings sounded from his lips, thanks to divine suggestion.

This is the opinion of an art historian to whom a retrospective glance at works of art is available. But critics speaking about the current day call this substratum banal, mediocre, platitudinous, because it is precisely these figures who define clearly the relationship of artists to the organic processes of art that are interpreted as creativity. This is the relationship of the flower to the root of the plant.

Pliny the Younger spoke the same words about works of paintings[3] of an epoch, from which all we have left is the works of the Pompeian artisans, and the same speeches would have been possible on the lips of any of Pericles's contemporaries on the subject of the terracotta figurines of Tanagra.[4]

And in both the one and the other we read about the collective genius of the people.

Critics, whose duty is to follow day in day out the development of art, inevitably lose the sense of exact correlations. The great works, thanks to the conditions allowing for critical perspective, become visible among the surrounding trivia only after a certain period of time. At the moment of their appearance they are inevitably inconspicuous among works of a mediocre quality. This "mediocre quality" for a weekly critic becomes in the course of time intolerable. For him it becomes worse than bad, because to create a truly bad work of art, it is nonetheless necessary to possess real talent.

Bad art irritates, disturbs, stirs up outraged taste. And by this it occasionally comes close to art that is good but too new and unusual. The first impressions of both one and the other occasionally coincide, so that an extended period of time is needed to analyze the reason for the irritation of one's taste and to find in oneself a definitive verdict. The first contact with new beauty too often is accompanied by an instinctive protest against it. Therefore the irritation of the public always accompanies the appearance of true and great works of art.

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[3] This is an error by Voloshin. It's possible that he had a mind a judgement about pictorial art from Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*.

[4] Tanagra was a city in Greece (Boetia) famous for the terracotta statuettes made there. As a result of their fame all Greek terracotta of any period came to be called Tanagran.

Art that is mediocre harbours more dangerous poisons for the individual consciousness of the critic. It lulls the critic; it is able please the passive regions of our taste. It can imperceptibly diminish our exacting demands.

Therefore in such artists like Théophile Gautier, whose thought was bound by monetary chains to the wheelbarrow of the feuilleton, a just protest against mediocre art is born. They are forced to deal daily and hourly with this mediocre art, and it is no wonder therefore that they are inclined to expel real, valuable, major works of art from the borders of their epoch, and examine them not as the fruit of the current day, but as a belated gift of the past or an ovary of the future.

This happened to all the critics who day in day out follow current scene.

If we open Belinsky's[5] annual reviews of Russian literature in the 1840s, then we will see that he, too, complained of the decline in Russian literature, when, by the way, it was in precisely these years that the great works of Pushkin, Lermontov, and Gogol appeared. And the critic himself marked the first appearances of Turgenev, Dostoevskii, and Goncharov.

This is the way it always is: an apprehensive taste, depressed by an inundation of mediocre literature, forgets about the existence of high art and, when it is encountered, isolates it from the present moment.

This is understandable psychologically, although erroneous from the historical point of view. The broad development, flowering, and success of mediocre art can indicate only the possibility and proximity of the great realizations and accomplishments that we call works of genius.

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[5] In his articles on the Russian literature of this period, Belinsky complained not of the decline of literature but of its impoverished state.

What we call “banal” is but a sign of the profound and organic evolution of art; only on the foundation of the banal can true subtlety, the necessary precision of nuances, appear. Mediocre literature is the canonical foundation, on which individual distinctiveness can become firmly established and stand steadfastly. And, most often of all, this movement of support has the look of negation.

The same Paul Gsell at the end of his merciless article about the situation of the contemporary French theatre singles out a dozen names of true masters of the drama, such as Paul Hervieu, Mirbeau, Courteline, Lemaître, Bataille, Fabre, and so on.

There are about a dozen names of real, truly artistic playwrights, and that’s a lot!

The same situation is verified by Faguet.

“At all times theater,” he says, “has, on the one hand, technical reserves that have been built in accord with the formulas of the age, and, on the other hand, an artistic realm, the only one worth counting. The latter is created by the individualized conceptions of individual literary artists. In other words, theatre at all times has its stores of ready-made clothes and, next door to them, its artist-tailors.

Thanks to the formula of the time, theatre in the seventeenth century meant all the classical tragedies of a whole group of second-rate dramatists who copied one another; and behind them was the original theatre created by Corneille, Molière, and Racine, which did not respond to the demands of daily consumption but answered only to the intellectual tastes of the public.

In the eighteenth century, the traditional theatre again consisted of classical tragedies and comedies called „characters,” which La Bruyère put them into dialogue form. The theatre that was artistic and original was that of Marivaux, Lesage, Piron, Gresset.

In the nineteenth century there was the production-line theatre; all the comedies were in the manner of Scribe, and endless vaudevilles were constructed on a *qui pro quo*. The original theatre, on the one hand, featured the plays of Victor Hugo and, on the other, those of Augier, Dumas… In our time, for everyday consumption there are comedies of cuckoldry (*Comédie cocuestre*), with which art has nothing to do. The comedy of cuckoldry replaced the comedy of intrigue, which fell out of fashion, and obsolete vaudeville. The comedy of cuckoldry is our store of ready-made clothes."

But where is the true nerve centre of dramatic art in the France of our time? Who are the creators of the artistic drama of the nineteenth century? Let's give the same Faguet the floor:

"One should pay attention to the fact that the dramatists of our time are blazing new paths in all directions beyond adultery with more success, perhaps, than in any other epoch. Without speaking of historical drama, which is a genre eternally debated and yet eternally alive, a genre in which playwrights like Richepin, Rostand and Catulle Mendès have given us if not masterpieces then works of great style, without touching on short, trenchant satirical comedy, in which Courteline, the great-grandson of Molière, has no peers, our dramatists and writers of comedy, who have come from the school of Augier, Dumas, Sardou, have displayed in the last twenty years much initiative, much inventiveness, and much talent in their initiatives and inventiveness. What did they not use in the way of research and new observations? We have political comedy in *Les Rois* and *Le Député Leveau* by Jules Lemaître, the judicial world in the amazing*La Robe rou*ge by Brieux, the world of medicine in *L'Évasion*, by the same Brieux. We have the world of the clergy and its conflicts with the secular world in *Le Duel* by Lavedan; the world of financiers in *Les Affaires sont les Affaires* by Octave Mirbeau; the race question in *Le Retour de Jérusalem* by Donnay; the world of the law, presented both in its own right and in its reflection in manners by the insightful Hervieu, whether in *Les Tenailles* or *La Loi de l'Homme*.

Only posterity can be the judge of these talents and assign the ranks to which they belong; it alone can decide to what extent the attempts in question were achieved. But we can affirm that French theatre was *never* so varied, so preoccupied with the observation of realia, so animated by a more restless and searching quest for lifelikeness."[6]

Faguet's opinion is valuable to us because he successfully embodies in himself the ordinary dramatic taste of contemporary France. There is in him neither the self-satisfied, good-natured banality of Sardou, nor the too demanding aristocratism of the dramatic criticism of Barbey d'Aurevilly, nor the troubling rockets of the wit of Jules Lemaître. Faguet loves to systematize and will never lower himself and his sympathies to a compromisingly low position, and will not look for his favourites in the realm of efforts that are too new and not yet acceptable by the stage. He remains in the realm of basic theatre, theatre that is theatrical, theatre that is scenic.

He does not mention the theatre of Van Lerberghe, Verhaeren and Maeterlinck, which is fair, since the theatre created by the Flemish geniuses, finds itself "outside the evolution" of French drama. On the other hand, he refers neither to the works of Claudel, nor Suarez, nor André Gide, nor Moréas, nor Péladan nor Herold because their art goes beyond the limits acceptable to his history of the French stage.

Faguet's opinion gives us the middlebrow evaluation of a middlebrow critic, that is, the precise norm and the constant temperature of this time of year. With him we will not overshoot in any direction the boundaries of current French theatre.

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From the above one can judge on what a different level of understanding about theatre and drama we stand at the present time in Russia.

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[6] This is a quotation from Faguet's article, „On Contemporary Theatre." In it he mentions the comedies of J.Lemaître (*Les Rois* [1893], *Le Député Leveau* [1890], the plays of E. Brieux (*La Robe rouge*[1900], *L'Évasion*[1896]), the comedy by A Lavedan (*Le Duel'* [1905]), O. Mirbeau's play (*Les Affaires son les affaires*[1903]), M. Donnay's play (*Vozvrashchenie iz Ierusalima* [1904], and the plays of P. Hervieu (*Les Tenailles* [1895] and *La Loi de l'Homme*[1897]).

In France the whole apparatus of the stage—the acting, the directorial work, the scenery—is something that is given absolutely, inherited from many centuries of intensive theatrical culture. The system responds to change with difficulty and, like every very complex instrument, one should touch it carefully. The plays written by French dramatists are written specially for this apparatus, with its demands and possibilities strictly in mind.

In Russia the stage is in a period of total revolution; everything is being destroyed, everything is changing, and everything that exists is open to doubt both by the public and by the dramatists.

Therefore the mediocre playwrights have no one to write for. They do not know which scenic formulas they should comply with, whereas the writers are creating their own theatre as they do their own literature, not bearing in mind scenic feasibility and leaving the stage to its own devices to acquire what is needed for the theatrical realizations of their plays.

When the greatest drama revolution in France, the replacement of classicism by romanticism, was carried out, this transition was in no way reflected on the stage. The *Comédie-Française*, which thrived exclusively on the classical repertory, took in and carried on its shoulders the drama of Victor Hugo. The caprices of M-lle George[7] were those of her personal, literary taste, and not at all a scenic protest. The scenic apparatus proved to be completely suitable both for *Antony*[8] and for *Hernani*[9]and for their successors, the plays of Ponsard[10] and for the plays of Dumas *fils* and for Mirbeau's *Les Affaires sont les affaires*.

Meanwhile, when in our country Chekhov followed immediately after Ostrovsky (whose differences were in no way greater than those between Hugo with Dumas *fils*), the classical Russian theatre, which interpreted Ostrovsky brilliantly, suddenly seemed totally unconvincing, and the creation of the new stage of the Moscow Art Theatre was needed.

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[7] Mlle George was the stage name of a famous French actress, Marguerite Joséphine. J. Weimer (1787—1867). She makes a brief appearance in Tolstoi's *War and Peace*.

[8] *Antony* (1831) is a romantic drama by A. Dumas *père*.

[9] *Hernani* (1830) is an historical drama by V. Hugo.

[10] With his plays F. Ponsard revived classical tragedy on the French stage.

But now we are experiencing one of the most paradoxical epochs in the history of theatre: a revolution on stage in the total absence of dramaturgy. We are preparing a cradle, a gigantic cradle, for which an infant-God has not yet been born. And we are trying in the meantime to put into it the plays of other nations—Przebyszewski, Maeterlinck, Ibsen... Something unbelievable is occurring: the evolution of the stage by itself, outside the realm of drama.

The French stage is the diametrical opposite of ours. It is not a cradle but a Procrustean bed that compels authors to submit to its standard and its laws.

This is important for our understanding of French art. Our goals in art are opposed. They are a nation of artists-implementers, and their art is one of the most precise embodiments and of the most subtle nuances. Therefore, what to the French is the highest accomplishment in art is for us almost ineluctible, often completely inaccessible as something being realized in another sphere of consciousness. Even if we understand the sense of a given dramatic realization, the whole precision of its subtlety, the exertion of its creative force, the efficiency with which it surmounted difficulties completely escape us. Thus we almost cannot judge the creativity of the French theatre. But, on the other hand, the possibility of a clear understanding and a just evaluation of the organic foundation of the French theatre—an objective relation which is barely accessible to the French themselves—appears before us.

It is the same as traveling in a country whose language you do not know. Then in the railway cars, on the streets, and in the restaurants you catch not senseless fragments of banal phrases, but the gestures of the race, the intonation of the very language, the sound of the whole country's voice. All the normal words acquire an historical sense. The same thing happens when you read poetry in a half-known language. The genius of the language sounds in all its force, muffling the inventions of the individual's creativity. Normal cliches acquire the ancient strength of brilliant discoveries. In the words there is none of the clicheishness of a well-known language. In an unsubstantial work, accidently encountered, one can obtain an insight at times into the ancient soul of the race.

As a result of all these conditions of our historical differences, middlebrow theatre, the theatre "of one play, in which from time to time some changes are made," can be especially instructive and interesting for us. It is precisely here that we can understand and define the elements of true, nationwide art—lively, flourishing, and contemporary.

In the new "three unities" of French theatre, husband, wife, and lover, about which Faguet was so sarcastic, in the desperate theme of adultery, on which the contemporary stage is grounded, the whole history of love, the whole history of the family over the last century, is concealed.

The moral questions of adultery in French drama are reduced to the following four: 1) should the adulterer be punished?; 2) does the insulted husband have the right to carry out the verdict of justice?; 3) does the guilty husband deserve indulgence?; and 4) is the guilt of a man committing adultery greater than the guilt of a woman?

For us Russians these questions can seem naive. Thanks to our divine and primitive youth, thanks to the unstable freedom of our social forms we stand outside these—to us, scholastic—issues. Our moral perplexities lie far deeper, far closer to the sources of passion and duty. Our life is so little constrained by things and forms that it is easy for us to get to the very root of things. Here is the very frightening and disturbing freedom of the Slavic spirit that is so alluring to the French.

But already the fact that questions about love in such a strictly limited, almost judicial form compose the single theme of French theatre in the past half-century indicates with what severe, firm, and fundamental forms of everyday life the French dealt with, and the character of the viewers who shivered and were disturbed by one or another resolution of these questions.

The idea of crime because of love, which took French theatre captive, began in the epoch of romanticism. In romantic theatre the crime of passion appeared in primitive forms, exaggerated and coarse. To us now, the theatrical humanity of that time seems prehistoric and possessed by evil spirits.

Heroes and heroines burst onto the stage in a state of tragic frenzy. Their passion struck suddenly, like a thunder-clap. It ejected them from the sphere of human laws. Thanks to passion, they were in an exceptional, superhuman situation, which justified their crimes in the province of adultery on the grounds of passion. A romantic drama demanded without fail a bloody conclusion. If the play did not to end with the violent death of the heroes, it seemed insincere to the public. And for such heroes a special world, not resembling the ordinary one, was demanded. This world was created for them in the forms of melodrama.

Théophile Gautier describes the “intimate world” in which romantic heroes live as follows:

“Everything is mixed up. Testaments are given, taken, torn and burned. Birth certificates are lost and then recovered. Steps, ladders, the unexpected, treachery, treachery and the unexpected repeated over and over again, poisons and antidotes. Here there certainly is something to lose one's mind over. Don't turn away from the stage for a single moment, don't look for your handkerchief in your pocket, don't wipe the lens of your opera glasses, don't glance at your pretty neighbour. In that short interval of time can happen more unbelievable events than in the entire life of a biblical patriarch or in twenty-six scenes of a play in mime, and you will no longer be able to understand what happens later, so much does the author know how not to allow your attention to be distracted for a single moment. Neither development nor explanation nor sentences nor dialogue. Facts, facts, nothing but facts, and what kind of facts they are! O, great Gods! they are true wonders. But they seem very simple and natural to all the *dramatis personae*. The poetics can be summed up in the following example: 'You here? How did you get here? Didn't you die eighteen months ago?' 'Hush... it's a secret that I will carry with me into the grave,' answers the one interrogated. Such an explanation is sufficient, and the action continues on its course.” This is how Théophile Gautier characterized the melodramas of Bouchardy, but the caricature is also applicable to the theatre of Hugo and Alexandre Dumas. This genre of romantic drama was retained in the form of melodrama even to our day, and on the boards of the Ambigue[11] it now reduces the apaches, the last romantics of Paris, to rapture and tears.

The theatre of Dumas *père* that created the style and model of romantic plays has its natural and historical continuation in the theatre of his son, who gradually begins to mollify the absurd features of the romantic heroes and makes them resemble more his contemporaries of the Second Empire. The theme, *Crime passionné,* remains unchanged. A huge step towards realism is taken. But Dumas *fils* has to search for moral justifications for murder because of love and passion, when in the theatre of his father they were justified in and of themselves. All these cries of "Kill her!"[12] or "Kill him!" offer the start of a more serious type of psychology, a search for various outlets for passion or for a moral emotion. The primitive romantic heroes and heroines come to life, and for their manners substantiation has to be found. A restoration of the rights of the deceived husband is beginning.

"Declare yourself judge and executioner. She is not at all your wife; she is not even a woman. She is a spawn of the country of Nod. She is a female Cain: kill her! The law of man will not be violated." Affirming the right of the husband to punish an act of adultery, Dumas *fils* states that Christ did not at all forgive the woman accused of adultery, who was brought to him for trial: "It was not forgiveness, and it wasn't even justification; it was only an instruction about judicial inconsistency on the basis of the tribunal's incompetence." In this way the primitive people of romantic drama begin to get used to communal living and form a society with Draconian and bloody laws, but nonetheless laws that are quite different from the pure explosion of passion. They create their own code of laws, which does not yet correspond with the state's code, and yet theatrical heroes refer to it.

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[11] To be more precise, the *Ambigue-Comique* was a Parisian theatre founded by the actor Odino in 1769 as a centre for puppet theatre.

[12] Voloshin has in mind the statement by Dumas *fils* that a husband has the right to kill an unfaithful wife, which was expressed in a number of his published works.

"I have been coping with the law and have been asking what means it can grant to me: I have the right to kill both her and you." (*Le Supplice d'une femme*[13])

In *Diane de Lys*[14] the husband refuses to fight a duel with the lover: "Why should I fight with you, when I have the right to kill you?"

The reaction against the bloody laws instituted on stage arose under the influence of Russian literature and, proclaimed first of all in the novel, was reflected later in drama. The ideas of Dumas *fils* died out. And there appeared the tendecy to regard the woman, who had committed adultery, not as criminal but as sick. But this sensitive reaction did not find sufficient sympathy in French society. At the start of the reevaluation process came the question of who made the husband the judge. In order to have the right to forgive, one must first have the right to judge. The landmark of this aspect of the problem was Jules Lemaître's play *LePardon*, in which the husband forgives the wife in the first act but in the second commits the very same sin. The thought that the adultery of the husband is the same sort of crime against the family as the wife's adultery Dumas *fils* dared to utter only once, in his foreword to *Francillon*, as an incredible paradox, while all the time fearing his own daring. In Lemaître's time this thought was brought out onto the boards and indicated thus the extent of the distance covered. This ended on stage with the struggle of the woman for equal rights in the province of love. In the plays of Hervieu the woman stands beside her lover or her husband as an equal among equals.

This is the end of romantic and sentimental theatre. Drama completely approaches life, and its bloody morality begins to merge with and turn into the complex morality that is in the process of being created by current life. Dramatic situations featuring adultery begin to be drawn broadly and freely from quotidian life. Drama becomes primarily psychological. It studies all the combinations and permutations of love *à trois* in rigorous conformity with the character types and the individuality of the figures involved.

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[13] *Le Supplice d'une femme*, a play by E. de Girardin (1864), was at the author's request extensively reworked by Dumas *fils*.

[14] *Diane de Lys* (1853) is a play by A. Dumas *fils*.

The models of this contemporary treatment of the drama of adultery are *L'Affranchie* by Maurice Donnay, *Maman Colibri* by Bataille, *La Déserteuse* by Brieux, and *Le Bercail* by Bernstein. All these plays are grounded on sharp analysis of the contemporary soul. Everywhere the right of the man and the woman to love is recognized as equal. Even recognized as legal is that the wife, having fallen in love with another, can leave and abandon her family. But together with this, the severest demands for sincerity are made of the woman (but only of the woman, not of the man). If she lacks the courage to admit openly her love and she, having been unfaithful, remains within the family, maintaining her former duties of mother and wife, then French theatre condemns her and considers equality to have been violated. Thus, for the present, women are given equality only in conditions of moral heroism. The right to lie and to be weak is not yet given her. This is the level of middlebrow morality at which French theatre has stopped at present.

With the history of adultery in the French theatre is tied the question of divorce. The evolution of this theme is determined by the Naquet law (the French law on divorce),[15] which divides all plays of this type into plays about divorce prior to the existence of the possibility of divorce, and plays after the ratification of the law.

The struggle for the right to a divorce appeared in the plays of Dumas *fils* and Augier. In part, they gave rise to the Naquet law. Dumas *fils* thought that the right to a divorce would be a way out of all the evils of adultery, When the law was ratified, a whole series of new dramatic combinations was the result.

The complete antithesis to the theatre of Dumas is the theatre of Paul Hervieu. Possessing the analytical skills of a casuist of civic affairs, Hervieu made it his goal to try to find dramatic situations in which the new law is impotent.

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[15] The law is named afer the French chemist and politician Alfred Naquet (1834—1916), who was largely responsible for the passing of the law.

In the first act of *Les Tenailles* he offered a picture of a family, in which both husband and wife were irreproachable, in the formal sense of the word, but could not bear one another. And for them there is no way out through a divorce since it is the solution only for those who have transgressed against their marriage. In the following acts, which are set off from the first by ten years, the question about their child comes up. The husband learns the child is not his. But now the wife refuses him a divorce, and they again remain squeezed by the same pressures, since according to the law both spouses have to agree to a divorce.

Introducing to the theatre his dry, restrained psychological analysis, Hervieu dramatically transfers the nerve-centre of drama from questions of morality to questions about law. Dumas *fils* created his theatre in the area of emotion and social opinion. Paul Hervieu creates his in the area of law. Stendhal advised that before beginning to write one should read through several pages of the code of laws in order to find the correct tone for one's writing. Hervieu employs the code of laws even more extensively. For him it serves as a source for themes and for dramatic situations. He breaks down drama as if it were an extraordinary judicial case. Dumas *fils* appeared as both defense attorney and prosecutor. Hervieu always remains a legal adviser.

In *La Loi de l'Homme* he already moves away from the divorce question and treats the law in general as a code created by men and directed at the exploitation of women.

Thus the Naquet law, depriving the theatre of the theme on which the plays of Dumas *fils* were constructed, unearthed a whole mine of new situations. It gave, by the way, a new significance to a dramatic character, who had long played an important role in French theatre, the child. Now the child acquires significance as a new dramatic center. His presence eliminates all the beneficial results of the law about divorce; the former tragic desperation of one's external ties is transferred into the realm of parental feelings, and this gives a new richness to dramatic complications. Augier has already in *Madame Caverlet* advanced the child as the dramatic focus. In *Les Tenailles* the child does not yet have primary significance, but in *La Loi de l'Homme* the entire interest of the play is already focused on the child. In *Le Dédale* Hervieu subordinates the life of the parents to that of the life being born.

Thus the centre of a domestic drama gradually shifted from the law to more vital, more fundamental soil.

The child serves as the center of Brieux's *Le Berceau* and *La Déserteuse*, Maurice Donnay's *Le Torrent*, Bernstein's *Le Bercail*¸, Bataille's *Maman Colibri*, and the Margueritte brothers'*Le Coeur et la Loi*. The last play comes out directly against the existing law on divorce and demands its reexamination and the removal of the paragraph on the mutual consent of both partners.

"What a way we've come from those romantic plays featuring enraged husbands, the killers of their wives, and the women's lovers, who crossed the stage with shouts of vengeance," exclaims Jules Bertaut.

Here then is an approximate and short scheme of the changes undergone by the basic, staple play about adultery that at first glance is taking over French theatre. We've touched only the most sensitive nerve endings, the quivering of which passes along the whole immense and obscure body of the contemporary French repertoire.

All these *pièces à thèse*,[16] constructed with the skillful logic of a Catholic sermon and of a lawyer's plea and converted into the characters' dialogue, would not have been able to have artistic significance in and of themselves, had they not been bound to the finished, perfected body of the French stage, to the creative quest of the French actor, and to the urgent expectations and demands of the audience.

True theatre, vital theatre, demands from the playwright the basic theme of the era; the logic of action, the logic of lifelike situations, the logic of passion, the logic of characters, the logic of events—logic, logic, nothing but dramatic logic. And the stage creates on this foundation the whole palpitation of life. The playwright offers only general human types (that is, the pure logic of individuality), and the actor creates the character and the whole irrational complexity of that which is life.

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[16] A. Dumas *fils* is considered the founder of the *pièce à thèse* or problem play.

Therefore together with the evolution of theatrical themes evolves entire dynasties of actors, who are the living embodiments of their contemporary generation. They pour into the types they portray their own personality. They merge with their roles to such an extent that the artistic meaning of the plays is lost when the actors leave the stage. French theatre is an extremely complex phenomenon and is grounded on the encounter of actor, poet, and viewer, and the equilibrium of their aspirations.

The plays marked by the greatest and most profound success may not themselves have literary significance; the greatest actors perish outside their repertoire, outside their author. And, in the end, both one and the other make sense only in front of a Parisian audience from a specific historical epoch.

The three real unities, on which French theatre so firmly stands, are the playwright, the actor, and the audience. If just one of them is removed, then meaning is lost. Their union is the sign of the lofty perfection and consummate quality of art.

The comparison of a theatrical play with a deftly sewn dress, which has slipped into the writings of Faguet and Paul Gsell, is at bottom deeply true. In France, at all times, a play was the clothing for one actor or another. This clothing is, of course, purchased in stores selling ready-made goods, but for the major actors it was always made to order by first-class theatrical tailors. According to the tight cohesion among actor, author, and audience that exists in French theatre, there is nothing offensive about this, and for art there is nothing unnatural in this. At first the actor discovered himself in an already existing play, as Bocage found himself in *Antony* and Réjane in *Amoureuse*,[17] but once he was acclaimed as the focal point of all the highly strung forces of his generation, then quite naturally new plays were cut and sewn according to his model. Thus is achieved the tight, absolute merger of actor and dramatic work, when theatre stops being a reflection of life and becomes its prototype. What is created on stage enters into life. The character type who is acclaimed on the stage multiplies on the boulevard and on the street. Theatre in Paris always was a seller of masks. This is its urgent, vital significance.

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[17] *Amoureuse* (1891) is a play by Georges Porto-Riche.

The thought that art influences life more than life art seemed to Oscar Wilde a new, daring paradox. But in France this same idea seemed natural much earlier. Here is what Sainte-Beuve wrote forty years before Oscar Wilde:

"We live in an epoch when society imitates the theatre far more than the theatre imitates society. What could have been observed in those scandalous and ludicrous scenes which followed the February Revolution? A repetition on the streets of what had already been played in the theatre. The street seriously imitated the stage. 'Here passes my history of the revolution,' said one historian, when beneath his window one of the revolutionary parodies played itself out. Another might have said just as truthfully, 'Here my drama is playing itself out.' One feature struck me among everything in these amazing events, the significance of which I wish in no way to diminish: it is the quality of imitation, and, what is more, a literary imitation that is visible throughout. One sensed that the literary word came first. Usually, it would appear, literature and theatre use the great historical events in order to praise them and to convey them; now, however, living history has begun to imitate literature. In a word, it is clear that many things are done only because the Parisian population has seen on Sunday on the boulevards a particular play or heard some story recited aloud in the shops."

Each of the epochs of French theatre brought onto the stage a hero or heroine in love, who became the models for whole generations. The Don Juan type, the "ladykiller" type, the type of a hero irresistible to women, changed with each generation. He reflected the ideal of "charm" in his day as he was creating it. Together with him, consistently in accordance with him, the character of the *Grande amoureuse*[18] changed. This was the constant work of eternally vibrant masks that move evenly with their time; it was an exchange between life and art, in which each equally empowered the other.

Beneath the Don Juan type was the conventional "first lover," an operatic stereotype that never changed. Above him was the greater tragic hero, who changed his appearance but slowly, since he reflected not the real ideals of sensual life but the abstract ideals of pathos. The rungs of the ladder are Talma, Frédérick Lemaître, Munes-Sully and, on the other side, M-lle George, Rachel, Sarah Bernhardt.

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[18] This is a type of theatrical heroine described by Bertaut and Séché.

Both the above types have been going beyond the borders of analytical and living art. Whereas *L'homme à femmes* and *La grande amoureuse* always answered the quiverings of the given moment, of the urgent demand for a gesture of the given moment.

For romantic theatre the actors of such types were Bocage and Marie Dorval.

With his pale, thin, bony face, with thick eyebrows, flashing eyes, and long, black hair, Bocage, *Le beau ténébreux*, was the living embodiment of Byronic romanticism, a genuinely tragic lover. He created *Antony* or, more accurately, in this play he created himself for the first time. And then all the new plays of Dumas *père* were based on this type, and the whole romantic theatre was cut according to his figure. Other contemporaries of his, like Firmane, who created the title role in *Hernani,* could only be poor copies of him.

The ideal of the romantic heroine found its complete realization in Marie Dorval. These romantic actors gave to the stage not only their art but their entire selves. Marie Dorval, it is said, experienced every time with her whole being all the collisions of romantic drama and cried such genuine tears that Frédérick Lemaître, who was acting with her, could not restrain himself from really crying. For romantic drama such acting was essential. In itself such drama was so conventional and its passions larger than life that not art but a living human being was needed to fill its emptiness, to give life and emotions to its forms. In that generation there were such actors, and this attests that the romantic theatre was all the same in accordance with the realia of life. But romantic theatre literally killed those who incarnated it and it died with them by 1848.

The graceful and elegant theatre of Musset succeeded romantic theatre. Brindeau and Bressant, who became the models of elegance for the society of their day, embodied its heroes. "No other actor," said Legouvé, "was able to fling himself on his knees before a woman with greater passion. Bressant in *Par Droit de conquête*, making his declaration to M-me Madeleine Brohan, accompanied it with a genuflection full of fire and grace. When Fèbvre took this role a few years later, he told me he couldn't imitate Bressant, that he would not be able to do it, that he would feel ridiculous at that moment. And he was right. Tastes changed. The theatre of Musset was too subtle to have a deep and vital significance. The actor Delauney is establishing a link between the theatre of Musset and that of Pailleron, Scribe and Augier. In it there is a decline in elegance, but a movement toward the new realism, toward the moralistic and cruder theatre of Dumas *fils*."

The vitality of the theatre of Dumas *fils* was strengthened by a number of outstanding, spirited women. With this theatre the names of Croizette, Doche[Eugénie Doche Irish by birth], and Desclée are indissolubly linked.

Madame Doche did for *La Dame aux camélias* what Bocage in his day did for *Antony*. It's interesting to track in this famous play the interaction of life and the stage. The moral theme that lies at the heart of the dramatic complication of *La Dame aux camélias* is the same as in the story of Manon Lescaut and the chevalier Des Grieux.[19] In this way it is closely linked to the basic moral issues in French literature.

For Dumas the immediate impression, which stimulated first the novel and then the play of the same name, was the figure, fate, and, most importantly, the appearance of Marie Duplessis, a well-known courtesan of the Second Empire.

"Once having seen that face," relates Paul de Saint-Victor, "it was impossible to forget it: oval and white like a perfect pearl, the pale freshness, the mouth childlike and pious, the eyelashes thin and light like the features of a shadow. Her large dark eyes, without innocence, were the only features that protested against the purity of this maidenly face and, still more perhaps, the quivering movement of her nostrils, which were open, as if inhaling scent. Subtly nuanced by these puzzling contrasts, this figure, angelic and sensual, attracted others by her mystery."

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[19] These are, of course, the leading characters in Abbé Prévost's novel *Manon Lescaut*.

Marie Duplessis died of consumption slowly and beautifully before the eyes of all of Paris. At the auction following her death her property was bought up as souvenirs at exorbitant prices. The combination of the image of a fallen seraph with the theme of *Manon Lescaut* created Dumas's play. But the appearance of M-me Doche, up to then a good but mediocre actor, was needed to make of Marguerite Gautier the ideal of femininity that would for a long time define the pattern of love in French society. The new beauty, created by M-me Doche, was a true discovery for people of that time. "Never had **Ari Scheffer**," Théophile Gautier wrote, "laid on a lace pillow a head more ideally pale and illuminated by the soul. This heart-rending grace, this mournful enchantment brings on ecstasy and becomes painful. At its height it is the equivalent of the agony of Clarissa Harlowe and Adrienne Lecouvreur, if it does not surpass theirs."

Dumas himself wrote, „I might have made only one remark to M-me Doche. It was that she play the role as if she herself had written it. Such an actress is no longer a performer…" Thus with this one role M-me Doche designated the nature of feminine charm for several decades. At a time when declarations and the external pose of passion still played a very important role in the theatre, she was the forerunner of that intimate and simple style of acting, which we valued only in Eléonora Duse.

Of Desclée, the other performer who personified his theatre, Dumas left the following portrait:

"It was an amazing combination of cunning, naivete, and a kind of knavishness. At first she had no talent whatsoever. She played in *Le demi-monde* flatly, apathetically, colourlessly—God knows whom, God knows what. Then she went abroad and disappeared. I found her again in Brussels. I was stunned. I forced them to engage her. She played in *Diane de Lys*, *La Princesse George*, *Une Visite de noces*, and suddenly she had lead parts; she was in her element. Was she ecstatic? Not at all! What was terrible in Desclée was that she had no love for her art. She was a dead creature, and one had to call her back from the world beyond. They dragged her from the grave and led her onto the stage. If she revived, then it was with some kind of eerie frenzy; she was a galvanized corpse.

If she did not revive, then she gave nothing, absolutely nothing. She was either wonderful or nothing. Do you remember her? Greenish, olive-green, bloodless, insensitive to the cold—as if she were in her grave. She would exit the stage in a total sweat, would recover in the dressing-room, and in the middle of winter would open wide the window, undress, and remain half-naked in the icy draught. She was told, 'You've gone mad. You are killing yourself!' 'Killing me,' she replied, 'ah, I've done that a long time ago!' And she was right. She was not alive. She was some kind of Etruscan. She died four thousand years ago." There exists a mysterious correspondence between Marie Dorval, who initiated romantic theatre, and Desclée, who ended it. But at the same time there is something portentous of the new decadent demonism in Desclée.

Sophie Croizette, an aristocrat who devoted herself to the stage for several years, embodied the third aspect of the theatre of Dumas. She always played only herself. And in her the Parisians learned to value not the actress but the woman.

The 1870s were a difficult, not fully formed period for French art in all areas. Only towards the beginning of the 1880s were the traces of the catastrophe of the Second Empire effaced, and new movements in art began. The actor who facilitated the transition from the theatre of Dumas-Augier to that of Hervieu was Le Bargy.

"Le Bargy created on stage," Larroumet says, "the type of lover who transfers the sceptical irony and laconic egoism of the eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century. On the day when he had in his hands the role written by Hervieu, he had to have experienced the intense joy of an artist who found at last something he could perform splendidly. The lovers he enacted had a frigid mind and an unruffled serenity of heart. For them love is a duel, to which they don't have to bring much passion, to give theselves up to it wholly. Before them so many phrases were uttered, that they, wanting to avoid ridicule, preferred to speak precisely and sharply. Outwardly, they were elegant and restrained. A cold cruelty in sensuality, a refinement in love, a cutting irony in passion, a terrible clarity of mind at times which, apparently, should have been moments of selflessness. This character type rose out of the dry and cutting logic of Dumas *fils*. It was a step towards the universal type of Don Juan." Le Bargy's triumph, similar to the creation of Marguerite Gautier by Madame Doche and Bocage's Antony, was in Lavedan's *Marquis de Priole*, retouched by the writer specially for the figure of Le Bargy.

The restrained, passionate, aristocratic female type of the *Grande amoureuse*, the female character corresponding to Le Bargy's character, was created by M-me **Bartet**.

Already on the very threshold of present-day French theatre stands the huge figure of Réjane. She was the first to give French theatre not a heroine, but a complete woman, a real, nervous, fickle, contemporary Parisian lady.

Her influence on the contemporary French stage is immense. Her creation of the *Amoureuse* by Porto-Riche was a revelation.

"Before *Amoureuse* Réjanewas no more than a sexy, character actress. In *Amoureuse* she created the real character of a Parisian of the boulevards, even one from the suburbs. Before her this type appeared on the French stage only in light sketches. Réjane won a place for this type. At the core of this new character lay refinement and wit. Externally she has daring, a light elegance, a taste for a love intrigue, at times an ability to feel passion, The language of the character is banteringly ironic, with a wealth of Parisian jargon and slang. She is very feminine. With thrilling words she covers a caustic irony; she is able to say the most staggering things mockingly, able to smile while melting into tears, able to give shades of melancholy to the clearest tints of her laughter. She sounds the whole range of desire, the whole glittering and tragic tonality of great passions on an unceasing theme of immodest frivolity." (A. Séché)

Today the French theatre has already created new masks. The serious character of the Parisian woman with just a touch of someone rent by bitterness arises in the acting of Marthe Brandè**s**. Something still more tragic and restless is heard in Suzanne Després. She is even able to make comprehensible the heroines of Ibsen, which would earlier have been totally impossible for a French actress. Everything about her is serious and profound, and is not lit up with a smile. **M-me Le Bargy** was the embodiment of the willful and intelligent heroines of Bernstein, and **Berthe Bady** embodied the nervous dreaminess and involuntary instinctuality of Bataille's heroines. And alongside them, in the realm of more frivolous theatre, though perhaps closer to current life, **Paulaire** and Eve Lavallière created new character types. The schoolgirl Claudine,[20] throbbing with noble impulses though seemingly perverted, intelligent and caustic, and the new, purely street type of sentimental simpleton—these stereotypical characters are the necessities of life for today's Parisian woman.

The male stereotype of the contemporary lover is created by Lucien Guitry, Tarride, and sketched by Grand and Brulé. Guitry assigned the greatest importance to it:

"At first glance he is almost antipathetic. He is fat, oppressive, at times vulgar. He must have unwieldy thoughts. His gestures are abrupt. It seems that thought has withdrawn into him so as not to ever show itself. Meanwhile, observing him from close-up, it is impossible not to feel a strange sensation of strength and obstinacy issuing from his entire being. Women divine his rude strength, his ability to order them about, and at the same time they sense him to be too well brought up to resort to it. All this allows them to quiver in his presence while conscious of their safety. They feel that once he takes them, they will give themselves up to him completely and forever. In the tragic turmoil of his love life he acquired a great intellectual power, and on this rests his great strength. He acquired a simplicity of manners and a frankness of speech which impress the most inveterate liars and stop the lie in their throats." (A. Séché).

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This is the long road taken by French theatre for half a century from the theatre of Hugo to that of Hervieu, from Bocage to Lucien Guitry, from Marie Dorval to Réjane. The extremities stand very far away from one another, and the transformation seems to have been completed with unusual speed. Meanwhile, as we saw, the journey was accomplished sequentially, one stage following another, and not one link in the chain was omitted.

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[20] Claudine is the hero of four novels by the French writer Colette and of the play *Claudine à Paris*.

From the extreme idealistic conceptions of love, never deviating from the current moods and changing fashions of their epochs, the French theatre achieved a completely accurate observation of its society and an organic fusion with its life.

Whatever were the tendencies of drama and whatever theses were defended on the rostrum of the theatrical stages, the syncretic work of theatre, supported equally by the actor and the author and the audience, proceeded steadily on its course, which was the course taken by genuine, nation-wide, national art.

And, truly, the entire French theatre consisted of one and the same play, in which from time to time various insignificant changes were made, as Théophile Gautier once complained.

II Dramatists and the Crowd

In the first part I attempted to draw a general picture of French theatre in the last three quarters of the century, to note the journey of drama from romanticism to our day, to discover the nerve-centres that make French theatre an art so connected to life that all the important questions of morality and customary law almost inevitably pass through the alchemical retort of theatrical action.

Sketching the evolution of French theatre, I took into account only what had been implemented rather than its potentialities, rather than what ought to have happened.

From this perspective French theatre looks like a cheap bazaar of ideals accessible to all. In this comparison there is nothing demeaning, if one approaches theatre not with the demands of eternal art but examines it as characteristic of the moral and aesthetic needs of society.

What can give a fuller notion of a city than an exhibit of shopping bazaars and the subjects of illustrated postcards? The object with its price above it is a specific symbol of desire together with the number that defines its intensity. The price, reduced to its psychological foundation, is an indicator of public taste. In Paris they ask about a new play, "'Ça fera-t-il de l'argent?', 'Is this theatrical action implementable or realizable?'

Setting as our task the characterization of a feasible theatre, we accept as a criterion the plays that 'make money.' Evaluating in this way the French theatre from the point of view of the audience, we have been omitting two other possible views of theatre, the perspective of the author and that of the actor.

Let's try, then, to look at French theatre from the perspective of the dramatist.

From this angle all the previously drawn lines of perspective must change and the other notions shift, except for the point towards which all the forces of which theatre is composed, that is, the moment when author, actor, and viewer merge, are directed.

When all parts of the theatrical organism, which distinguishes French theatre, are in balance, when there is a huge demand for new dramatic scenarios to be realized and quickly exhausted by the 50 theatres of Paris, there is one goal before the dramatists: to subdue by any means whatsoever the mysterious, omnipotent, capricious, and unanticipated monster that is the audience.

To do this one has to find the answers to two questions (to which, by their very essence, there can be no answer): Who is this audience? How can one satisfy its tastes?

A half-century ago, in the days of the successes of Dumas *fils*, the fate of a dramatic work was decided at their openings by a referendum of "all of Paris."

"*Tout Paris* is, in reality, two hundred... well, let's assume, in order not to insult anyone, three hundred people," stated Dumas.

"With these three hundred, who during the whole winter go from one theatre to another but attend only the opening nights, we dramatists must reckon. They form what is called public opinion or, rather, the taste of Paris and hence of all France.

This group of peremptory judges is composed of the most diverse elements, absolutely uncoordinated either in spirit or, even worse, in manners and mores and social position. They are litterateurs, society people, actors, foreigners, stock brokers, bureaucrats, distinguished women, store salesmen, virtuous women and frivolous women. All these women and men know each another by sight, at times by name. Never have they entered into conversation with one another, but they are sure beforehand that they will meet at the premieres.

How can such diverse people, whom are invited en masse only to the theatres in order to formulate together their opinion on a common question, how do they find it possible to come to an agreement, and to agree so well? This is what is inexplicable even for a Parisian. Like a dream, a migraine, hypochondria, or cholera it concerns the unsolved forces of nature. I am stating a fact, the reasons for which I utterly do not understand.

This ability to evaluate—an evaluation, moreover, that is always just—does not depend at all on a high degree of education; among these people who decide the destinies are those who have never read any book, not even a single theatrical play, who do not know apparently who is the author of one or another dramatic masterpiece in previous eras. Nevertheless their judgment is infallible. This is a matter of natural taste and acquired experience. They weigh a comedy or drama in the same way that an attendant in a bath-house takes the temperature of the water, that is, simply putting his hand in it, in the way that a bank member of an artel counts out a thousand francs in gold, throwing the coins from one hand to the other several times.

Specialists in theatre, colleagues in the dramatic trade—questions of jealousy or sympathy apart—honest and exacting critics can err and frequently make mistakes about the future career of a new play. But these three hundred never are mistaken.

A play can enjoy great success on its opening night. But if one of the three hundred will tell you, 'This is no success. You will see that at the fortieth performance the bad features will be noticeable,' then they will truly be noticeable. But don't think that these three hundred will clearly express their opinion during the performance and that they will compromise themselves by the severity, impatience, or the excessive precision of their impressions.

They do not applaud, they do not whistle, they do not yawn—just what do you take them for? They don't leave before the end of the play, they don't laugh excessively, they will not cry, and if you don't come to understand them, then I guarantee then you will never come to learn their opinions from any of their physical indications.

One glance exchanged with a friend or, even—and this is what is amazing in the Masonic language of Paris—a slight movement of an eyebrow, inquiring of one of the other two hundred and ninety-nine, with whom one is not acquainted, and the play is judged. All these devotees, magnetically drawn to each other by means of an impression, become in the course of the evening friends and confidantes.

The author is in the nets of these merciless bird-catchers. He can try to break loose to his heart's content but he is caught. By the way, he knows very well this biased public. And though the whole hall can burst out, 'Bravo,' if the 'holy battalion' is silent, then he feels his success lacks something, his play lacks something. And at the time all are congratulating him, he recalls the half-smile, the narrowed eye, the lorgnette raised with a certain gesture, the nose rubbed in a certain way, because he, the unfortunate one, has let nothing pass.

But if it were suggested to the author to exclude these three hundred from the opening performance, he would not agree. A play not witnessed by them is not a play and will never be one."

In order to have the courage to appear over and over again as a defendant with his works, the dramatist must invariably establish for himself the doctrine of the public's infallibility. Dumas *fils*, who loved to theorize about the theatrical public, established two doctrines: the first related to the moral referendum carried out by the public at large about questions pertaining to the dramatic conflicts, and the other related to the prediction of success or failure on the part of the "three hundred" who constituted "all Paris."

He gave to the last phenomenon a quasi-miraculous character and called it "the sixth sense," the "sense of a Parisian."

Here are some different types of their prophecies:

'Well, how do you like today's play?' — 'Pfff...Pfff...Pfff...' — 'Is it bad? ' — 'There is one act in it...one scene...' — 'Will it play to full houses?'

The devotee answers "Yes" or "No," and that's the verdict.

There are other variants: 'Today's play?' — 'Very remarkable.' — Will it play to full houses?' — 'No.' — 'Why?' — “I don't know.' — 'Do they act poorly?' — 'It's superbly done.' — 'So...' — 'It won't play to full houses — that's all I can tell you.'

He can't delineate the reasons, but he guesses them. Thus speaks the sixth sense—the sense of a Parisian.

Here is another variant: 'Well? About today's play?' — 'Such idiocy...' — 'Does that mean it's a failure.' — 'A tremendous success.' — 'Is it not worth going to?' — 'On the contrary, go, one must see it!' — 'Why?' — 'I don't know why. But it's imperative to see it.'

This was written by Alexandre Dumas in the last years of the Second Empire, when he initiated foreigners who came for the World's Exhibition of 1868 into the mysteries of Paris society. But at that time Paris was even more “Paris” than it is today. The dramatic writing of our day does not believe in the doctrine of the “infallible three hundred,” who like the *garçon de bain* lower their hands into warm water and errorlessly determine the temperature of success, that is, the gate receipts. In Dumas's representation it is as if there is a group of representatives from all classes of society, unremovable and never mistaken, naïve and wise, ignorant and subtle—in a word, “the blind, the demigods, the prophets.”

Today the audience at opening-night performances has changed, and dramatists are more interested in the question “What exactly is the *audience-at-large*? and are turning chiefly to it.

“From the point of view of a naturalist,” asks Tristan Bernard in his book *Auteurs,Acteurs,Spectateurs*, “what exactly is this monstrous and mysterious beast that is called the audience-at-large? Many imagine that they know it. How many times I have happened to hear from old theatre-people the authoritative words: ‘You do not know the audience.’ Some of these gentlemen imagine that they know the audience because they were born in a low milieu and never left it. And since they themselves are completely ignorant, they readily say that the audience will not understand this or that.

But occasionally it happens that the regular theatre-goer announces honestly that he no longer knows the audience. By this he means that he is too experienced and has lost his original naïveté.

Then he forces on us not his own opinion but that of one of those close to him, his old mother, his young sister-in-law, or the former nurse of his children. The latter understand nothing of this, but they are *very much of the public*.

Once the person in question offered a prophecy, which events seconded. From that minute on she has worked as a clairvoyant. She is brought to a rehearsal, and after the curtain falls, they listen to this oracle. Unfortunately, this clairvoyant was corrupted on the very day that she was consulted for the first time. She prepares her revelations in advance, clothes them in literary form, and no longer plays the oracle in an upright manner. What a wonderful but dangerous anecdote is the story about Molière reading his plays to the maidservant LaForêt! In the course of two centuries many authors, who were not the equal of Molière, read their plays to maids who, perhaps, were the equal of Laforêt. Laforêt the maidservant was an implacable critic. Today the one like her has become a pedant of her own ignorance."

This view is almost the opposite of the one uttered by Alexandre Dumas. But the conclusion is the same: to have the audience understand is the goal of all dramatic attempts. Its understanding is in the middle; it is the standard, it is essential, and it spells triumph.

"I announce here before all of Europe that I have never seen an audience that is unjust, malicious or stupid. Those attributes are directed at it by those who do not enjoy its favour. Where the audience goes there is always something either in the intention of the work or in its performance that deserves attention. Where, on the other hand, it does not wish to go, you will always find valid reasons for this."

Alexandre Dumas *fils* says this. And this is how Tristan Bernard says the same:

"To affirm that the audience is stupid and uncultured is absurd. What it is like no one knows. It is tangible but ineluctable, and submissive and demanding and reasonable and capricious. What is sure is only that it is stronger than we are. And that is precisely why we have before us such an opponent, and a dramatic sport, very risky, which is at times a noble sport."

By the confidence in the supreme justice of the verdict, which distinguishes the remarks of Alexandre Dumas, one can divine a dramatist who enjoyed great, invariable success, who discovered a rich vein in the mine and worked it all his life with invariable good fortune. For him the proof of the audience's taste was the success of his own plays. Therefore we find in him an apology for the taste of the Parisian crowd that is almost fair and almost crooked:

"One often happens to hear people criticizing the bad taste of the audience. There is bad taste, but is it the audience's? That the crowd goes a hundred and fifty or two hundred times to a banal play, which a man with taste would not want either to see or rea — does it follow from this that the crowd has bad taste? No. From this follows only that the authors who write these plays write bad things, and the Parisian audience, for whom theatre is a necessity, is at times satisfied with what it is given, It did not select a light, slight genre; the author found it easier to exploit this genre. Why doesn't the audience want to see *Phèdre*¸ or *Britannicus* instead of this or another farce? Allow *Britannicus* or *Phèdre* to be performed by actors who for these masterpieces would be the equal of Mr. Dupuy and M-lle Schneider in *La Belle Hélène* or *Le Barbe-Bleue*,[21] and the crowd will come to the plays of the masters exactly as they go now to buffonades. Because *what the audience wants is the highest possible perfection in the genre that is offered them*, and it prefers, which I wholeheartedly approve, a farce reaching for the greatest beauty in its genre to the high style sinking to farce, thanks to the manner it in which it is performed."

Thus, the audience values the highest degree of perfection offered it. This formula is arbitrary, but more useful than destructive for art. If it does not give an accurate notion of the taste of the Parisian crowd, it does characterize what Parisian art aspires to. "The audience demands perfection." With such a fiction any art can only flourish.

Tristan Bernard approaches the audience in a more analytical fashion:

"At each of the general rehearsals I am present in the hall for the first contact of my work with the public... This is a pleasure, at times very painful but a pleasure nonetheless. As soon as you mix with the audience, something strange happens; a little later you begin to wonder if your words will have an impact or not. Thus, the pretty habit of giving the audiences an argument against yourself takes hold. *Because the audience is always right. If it does not like you, it is always your own fault*, or that of your performers. I say this not at all to advise any concessions; there are never any concessions... And, besides, it is very difficult to know what kind of concessions should be made."

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[21] Two popular operettas by J. Offenbach are mentioned here.

Again, the same affirmation: "the audience is always right." This affirmation is essentially inevitable and does not depend on the tastes and subtlety of understanding of the viewers. "The audience is always right," because theatre begins only at the moment when the work of art is understood and accepted by the audience. The dramatist must use his intuition to grasp in which forms his ideas can be comprehensible and within which limits he can be free. This position precludes any possibility of conceding to the taste of the audience. What concessions are possible, when the tastes of the crowd are constructed at the moment of understanding?

All this shows on what sound realistic principles French theatre is grounded, and how much of a purely aesthetic impulse there is in the question, "Ça fera-t-il de l'argent," when it is correctly and profoundly understood.

Regarding the Masonic agreement of the audience, to which A. Dumas attached such significance, Tristan Bernard holds a different opinion:

"It is important for the audience not to submit to any influence other than that of the author. Therefore a one-act play, with which you hold the viewer by the button of his coat, is a hundred times easier than a three-act play, between the acts of which you let this inconstant, frivolous audience out into the corridors. In these dangerous places it will twist its impression, trying to express it. This is what you realize when you look at your plays from the hall. Here you can notice your mistakes and no longer repeat them the next time. But, on the other hand, you will make new mistakes—of this there is no doubt since the number of them is so extensive."

In a word, it is not the judgment of the audience that is important, but the constant self-testing in relation to it. In his interesting, witty, and diverse book Tristan Bernard gives tens of examples, and sketches the many ways the understanding of the audience can be deflected from what is important and can lead to a inaccurate evaluation.

Only the next generation can judge whether the audience was right or wrong about works that did not enjoy success. For the theatrical audiences of the past centuries we can place on exhibit many errors, which today look flagrant. Before us is the small note by Remy de Gourmont *"Les grands succès de théâtre au XVII siècle,"* which he begins with the question, "In the age of classicism what relationship exists between the true worth of a play and its success with the audience?"

"The audience of the XVII century was a circle more limited and restricted than the one we encounter today," he said, answering his own question, "but it expressed its opinion on posterity very badly. One has only to search out in specialist publications several numbers and names. This can offer more useful material for contemplation than a large treatise on the arbitrariness of human opinions." The greatest success of that great century, that alone reminds us of our democratic successes, was Thomas Corneille's tragedy *Timocrate*, borrowed from the story of Alcmene in La **Calprenède's** [[??]] novel *Cléopâtre*. It had eighty performances, the equivalent of three to four hundred performances today. *Timocrate*, rather accurately from all points of view, even from the decadent perspective, is considered a precursor of *Cyrano de Bergerac*.. Boursault's comedy *Le Mercure galant* enjoyed "almost the same success."

Molière's *Le Malade imaginaire, Sganarelle,* and *L'Ecoles des femmes* achieved barely half the success of the plays mentioned above. Still less, more doubtful success were enjoyed by Racine's *Andromaque* and *Alexandre le Grand* , Pierre Corneille's *Le Cid* , and Molière's *Amphitryon,* though their success was rather quickly established thanks to later revised productions.

The plays that completely failed and went unrecognized in their own day were Molière's *L'Avare, Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme,* *Les Femmes savantes*, and *Le Misanthrope*; Racine's *Bajazet*, *Britannicus*, *Phèdre et Hippolyte*; and Pierre Corneille's *Don Sanche d' Aragon.*

This proves that the doctrine, “the audience is always right,” has a deep, practical significance for the creation of drama, but the audience's historical correctness is doubtful.

But nonetheless it would be interesting to see on the stage today *Timocrate* and *Le Mercure galant* ... If they were not satisfying artistically, then we probably would find in them something that would tell us more about the style and tastes of the XVII century than we would find in Molière and Racine.

Thus, the question about what exactly the audience values remains unclarified for French playwrights. Despite all the subtle observations and theories of interested parties, the artist's intuition plays the main role. The one who bears within himself the flickering of contemporaniety is the one who finds his way to an understanding of the audience. There is a profound truth hidden in this, since it is not those works, which outstrip their time, that become universal and eternal, but those works that express their epoch with the most completeness. Only in the latter is that human depth, which allows the readers of other ages, who have glanced into them, to see an unclear image of their own faces. And does not the whole mystery of comprehension reside in this: to come to know oneself in a work of art?

In any case, the insolubility of the question about the taste of the Parisian audience is fruitful for dramatic art, since otherwise it would be doomed to desperate cliches. of which there are more than enough in French theatre.

But does the audience like what is new and unexpected? Tristan Bernard answers this question delicately and wittily:

“The audience wants the unexpected, but of a sort that they expect. Of course, from time to time innovative dramatists give it something new in order to replenish the stock. But this new addition does not enter immediately into circulation. In order to be successful, the new thing frequently has to be altered by other dramatic cutters, who perfect it and make it a little less new.”

III Theatrical Typology

The means of the cutters... We again run up against a term that we looked into at the beginning of the first article concerning Paul Gsell's words that “people become dramatists in our time in exactly the same way that people become shoemakers.” At the disposal of any dramatist are hundreds of readymade masks that have already been seen and approved by the audience. One has to know how to select them and combine them. The pattern of the play is not difficult, since in this realm fashion changes slowly, and the well-known styles are worn for decades. A play with intrigue was replaced by a psychological drama: some alterations occurred in the manner of complicating and resolving the action; the finales of the acts tried to be “as in life”; and the curtain was lowered in the middle of a sentence. More interesting is the selection of the already prepared masks at the disposal of the dramatists. These masks are numerous and dear to the general public.

Let's assume that characters are needed for a tragedy about the beginnings of Christianity (this type of play flourished in Paris up until the triumphant arrival of *Quo vadis*, [22] which was its crowning achievement).

“A Christian tragedy, the action of which takes place in one of the first three centuries of the Empire, in the time from Nero to Diocletian, brings in its wake a series of inevitable characters (Jules Lemaître says this); here we invariably find a Christian slave, a stoic philosopher, and an Epicurean, sceptical and yet tolerant, a Roman dignitary, and, chiefly, a deeply discontented patrician woman, modelled on Horaces's **Lefkonia [[??]]**, who questions all the gods in order to find the best one—she finally becomes a Christian because of her romantic nature. Then there is inevitable some 'local colour,' some unbearable Roman local colour, which is, by the way, no better than the Spanish colour in *Ruy Blas* or the Renaissance colour in *Henri III et sa cour*. The colour is everywhere woven into the dialogue in various details about food, dress, and properties. The result is a clumsy mosaic, which makes conversations resemble the stylistic tasks assigned by inventive teachers of literature, in which one is required to use inappropriate words. It turns out as if people are suffering from some sort of verbal incontinence and at certain moments experience an uncontrollable urge to name and describe to each other various essential objects and things that were normally paid no attention in ordinary life. At times it seems that the characters of these plays experience the sensations of a three-year old child and that they, at first stunned and then enchanted, are discovering the civilization in which they are living.

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[22] *Quo Vadis* is a novel by the Polish writer, Henryk Sienkiewicz.

Well, I forgot the Gaul—our forefather—the good slave or gladiator whom no author will forget to stick into one of the dark corners of the play and to whom an honorable role is assigned, so as to flatter our patriotism. Moreover, he has a presentiment about the destiny of France and foresees at times not only the revolution of 1789 but also the catastrophe of 1870.

As regards the action, it consists always of the love of a pagan woman for a Christian (or the reverse) and her efforts to convert him to her faith. If he is a slave of a patrician woman (or the reverse), then everything, of course, moves smoothly. In the fifth act the beautiful pagan is touched by grace and ritualistically mixes her blood with that of her beloved. Thus everything ends splendidly. By the way, to resolve the situation somehow differently is very hard. To find another resolution, to create an illusion and depth, to express the soul of a Christian of the first three centuries without sinking into banality, for all that the soul and genius of a Lev Tolstoi are needed.”

As if parallel to the preceding, Tristan Bernard characterizes the cliches of contemporary psychological drama as follows:

“I cannot bear it when in the last act there appears somebody who arranges everything, who persuades the young woman (or young man) that she (or he) should forgive. I know all too well that after the familiar conflict, the length of which is known in advance, this organizer of fates will receive the woman's agreement and will tell her, 'So, shall I bring him in now... He is below in the carriage.' And he is always there, below in the carriage, because it is essential to bring him in immediately—the hour is late and audience will not wait... And I hate even more the appearance of this gentleman from the carriage, who stands silently for several moments at the back of the stage and then says in a weak voice, 'Emmeline, we are poor children... neither you nor I intended to act badly but we caused each other pain...' And those who fall into each other's embrace... I am no longer able to bear this spectacle... When I sense that they will now fall, I shut my eyes, like the viewers who plug their ears when shooting begins... Above all, the kissing, painstakingly rehearsed, proceeds much too well. Each of the pair raises his or her right hand and lowers the left so that the embrace takes place without a hitch... But formerly—fortunately it is no longer done this way—at a meeting of two brothers the elder, having embraced the younger, would run his palms the length of the younger's arms and, after taking him by the hand, would say, '*Hein, c'est bien toi…fidèle compagnon…*' And here would be scenes between the gentleman and the lady, who talk of their petty affairs, but the author usually felt the need to raise the tone. Then instead of saying, 'I am trustful,' the man would proclaim without hesitation, 'We men are trustful,' and the lady answers, 'We women...'"

In one chapter of their *L'Evolution du Théâtre Contemporain*, Bertaut and Séché compiled an index of the masks in general use in contemporary serious comedy. Their characterizations are so valuable, that I want to dwell on them in more detail.

"Fixed characters in the theatre are immortal," says Bertaut and Séché. "They represent the logical evolution of dramatic art, which is diametrically opposed to the evolution of society. As they develop, they grow cold and die, but dramatists find them so practical, so convenient for the development of the action and so acceptable to the audience that they part with them only in cases of extreme need. They are too lazy to find new masks, and this compels them to become so fervently attached to the old ones that the protest of the same audience, who is finally bored of seeing puppets not corresponding to any kind of reality on the stage, is necessary to commit the theatrical directors to new achievements."

Such is the general fate of theatrical masks; at first they are vibrant figures endowed with an imagined lifelikeness, if they are not taken from life. But after excessive use they begin to fade, to become abstract symbols, caricatures. Their scenic liveliness is explained always by some kind of moral, didactic, or technical convenience connected with them.

Thus, quite recently in the comedy of manners in search of a moral homily, the *raisonneur* was an essential character. Naturally he rules in the theatre of Dumas *fils*. Dumas dresses him in all possible costumes in order to make him look natural. In *L'Étrangère* Rémonin is a scholarly "chemist of souls, the most profound of psychologists and the most pedantic of moralists." In *L'Ami des femmes* this is de Ryons's role. In *La Visite de noces* it is **Lebonnard's [[??]]**. In the most recent theatre the *raisonneur* appeared for the last time in the character of Morins in Maurice Donnay's *Le Torrent*. Morins is a writer-psychologist and a lay confessor. "Mr Abbé," he says to his spiritual confessor, Père Bloquin, "we are like two augurs; we cannot look at each other without laughing."

"In reality, if we turn to his sources, the *raisonneur* is nothing but the eternal and essential chorus of antique tragedy. When he illuminates the movements of the characters' souls and offers information about contemporary manners, what is he doing if not fulfilling the responsibility of the ancient chorus? Does he not follow, just as the chorus does, step by step every character's evolution? The *raisonneur* is the creation not of one generation, but it can be maintained that not one of the other fixed roles was more necessary and more exploited in the generation of dramatists that preceded the contemporary one. The last incarnation of the *raisonneur* is a specialist-psychologist or a writer—an analyst of human souls who wormed his way, God knows how, into the literature written between 1885 and 1900—who today is already so unfashionable that he arouses a smile. If this role seems to us so hateful, it is because it is inherently conventional. Theatre lives by action. It must show and not explain. The *raisonneur*, however, is mainly a person who explains, one who hinders the action at each step. All the deftness of Dumas was needed to save this character, and it took several centuries of theatre to reveal all of this character's lack of artistic merit. But as much as he is disagreeable to the viewer, so is he convenient for the author. **Montade** in Lavedan's *Le Prince d'Aurec* reads an entire lecture in the first act; Hector Tessier in Prévost's *Les Demi-Vierges* sets forth a theory about the failure of shame. But theatre no longer needs these *diables boiteux* in tailcoats and white gloves, who reveal the secrets of various lives with regrets or with philosophizing. Contemporary theatre can get along without them. The *raisonneur*-type has no more right to exist in the literature of our epoch." (Bertaut and Séché)

Various national masks are less essential but no less worn. During the Restoration the mask of the Englishman with red side-whiskers and hair amused the audience with his „Aoh! Yes!"and with idiotic replies. This Englishman can still be seen occasionally even now in suburban theatres on the outskirts of Paris. During the Second Empire the Brazilian covered in diamonds and gold, who came to Paris to have a good time and to love, was popular. He has not yet made his way out of the repertoire of the *Théâtres des quartiers*.

A fixed role in great demand in the contemporary theatre is the American Yankee. He is a positive type in moralistic theatre. His significance is reminiscent of the significance of Shtolz in *Oblomov*.

Étienne Rey devoted an article to the development of this mask, which indicates that this conventional type was contrived with all its details and attributes exclusively for the convenience of dramatists who needed a moralist, a noble character, a virtuous *Deus ex machina*. He is a doer, a millionaire; he appears as a representative of new energy and of a new culture in order to stand opposed to the corrupt mores and weakness of old Europe. He is the world champion of morality.

Dumas first invented this type with all his basic traits in the figure of Clarkson in *L'Étrangère*. In one month Clarkson builds a city: "The first trains are bringing me a hotel, a restaurant, a school, a printing house, and a church; in a month this camp is being transformed into a city with a palace in its centre." This man is an original, with feelings that are direct and strong; he is a little coarse but frank. He struggles against the corruption of Paris. „We marry only for love…and we love only those who are able to work."

This American figure was used by Henry Becque in *La Parisienne*, by **Abel** Hermant in *Les Transatlantiques*, and by Paul Hervieu in *La Course du Flambeau*. Everywhere his distinguishing features are his speed of movement, colossal fortune, athletic strength, simplicity of taste, common sense, confidence, simplicity, and honesty. Stangy (in Hervieu's play) flings about millions „in the grand style characteristic of the New World." "From your drawing-room Stangy is immediately leaving for Louisiana in his white tie and tails. He is not dropping in at home to change his outfit. In his travelling bag he will find his usual clothes and will change, when there is time."

Besides these national masks there is also the "Russian revolutionary." This is a new acquisition, but one not yet allowed into serious comedy. In the meantime he is only the monopoly of the theatre of horrors. But the success of shows like *Grand soir* and *Les Oiseaux de passage*, where the silhouette of Bakunin was successfully presented, offers more possibilities for dramatists.

To the mask of the Jew in the French theatre Abraham Dreyfus devoted a lecture in 1886, and there was a large article by Rene de Chavannes in *Mercure de France*.

In French theatre of the eighteenth century the Jew as a type did not exist at all. In the nineteenth century the fixed role is created.

"It is accepted, that the Jew must be funny," says Dumas in the foreword to *Francillon*.

"On the stage the Jew must be repulsive," says Henneri. Why? "It is theatrical," answers Sarcey.

As the sole exceptions to this rule, one can point to the rabbi in Erckmann-Chatrian's *L'ami Fritz* and the rabbi in Catulle Mendès's *Les Mères ennemies.*

If the male Jews depicted on stage are repulsive, then Jewish women are so enchanting, gifted with all the moral perfections and with incomparable beauty, that they inspire unconquerable passion in Christian youths.

"The Jewish woman in the theatre can inspire passion only in Christians, because the Jewish men in this world are all ugly, dirty, and old. Up to the last few years a young Jewish man has not appeared on stage. But why does the Jewish woman have exclusive rights to beauty in the theatre? Chateaubriand assured us that Jewish women, because they did not participate in the mockery of

Christ, are illuminated by a ray of heavenly grace. But Chateaubriand frivolously managed these rays of grace." (Rene de Chavannes)

In the contemporary theatre the Jew appears as a millionaire, which at times relates him to the "American."

The prototype of this mask is Baron de Horn (in *Le Prince d'Aurec* by Lavedan), about whom Jules Lemaître wrote, "But we will not forget that not all Jews are bankers and that among them there are even those who are not millionaires. But on the stage a banker can never be entirely a banker, if he is not a Jew."

Therefore Lemaître himself attempted to create on stage a millionaire-character who is not a Jew. This mask turned out to be convenient, and thus it is met in Maurice Donnay and in Romain Coolus and in **Abel** Hermant. And in Octave Mirbeau's *Les Affaires sont les affaires* the type receives the final tap of the chisel in the figure of Isidore Lechat .

The dramatic situation of these millionaires is always identical: they have acquired immense wealth through personal effort, but their life is shattered by either a family crisis or an unexpected financial catastrophe. This type, just now finishing its process of crystallization, has a great future in contemporary theatre.

The type of the *honest, upright man* was widespread in the theatre of the middle of the nineteenth century. In Balzac's time he was a notary, who with his experience helped flighty youth. At times he was a good curé who "saved a soul and the play" in the fifth act. In the theatre of Dumas he was an old friend, a true comrade, a consoler during the trying moments of life, and a moralist; occasionally he was a doctor or a doctor of souls, "whose morality is one form of hygiene." But all these masks are more or less compromised, and they have all retired into the background before the type of the "*virtuous engineer*," who has rendered the dramatists innumerable services. His genealogy was recounted by Francisque Sarcey in the context of Legouvé's play *Par Droit de Conquête*:

"It is usually assumed that characters brought onto the stage by the dramatist are copied from reality. One has to convince people that, on the contrary, this is extremely rare; that only at times does a brilliant dramatist succeed at introducing real types into the theatre and thus compels the audience, who for the most part refuses to recognize these characters as natural, to accept them.

The Scribes of all ages never gave the viewers the image of what exists, but only images of what should exist, and that is an entirely different matter. They do not create their characters according to the models they see before their eyes; they take them and construct them in accordance to existing representations. They are artificial beings, whom the audience values and applauds because it finds in them features devised by it, because it recognizes itself in them, and it admires itself precisely in that realm, which is dearer than all others, the realm of its own prejudices.

Which of the preconceived notions ruled in the last years? The notion that a person's greatest merit is to conquer the powers of nature, to force them to serve him: to fill up the valleys, to blow up mountains, to control steam, water, the wind, and to direct them according to one's own will and needs; to build bridges, to dig tunnels, to arm ships—in a word, to conquer nature. This is the ideal of the current generation.

This ideal is incarnated in a man, in a student of a polytechnical school, in an *engineer*. He is the representative of true science, and since it is assumed there is in the world no progress other than the subjugation of the forces of nature, the dramatists have made of this character someone who is simultaneously a missionary and an apostle of such progress.

He became, principally, a hero. All eyes are turned on him, and little by little a bias formed that he ought to be endowed with all the virtues and crowned with all the wreaths. The theatre finally appropriated him and gave him, naturally, the best role, that of first lover."

Bertaut and Séché add to this description: the engineer serves to contrast the position acquired through honest labour to the position obtained by the right of inheritance. He is the symbol of a new social class. This is the salute given to science by dramatists and bourgeois-spectators, who are naïve, ignorant and dazzled by the wonders of current discoveries. He is the graphic proof of the axiom, that labour strengthens the soul and the body, that labour ennobles, that labour elevates the personality, that labour is the certified proof of all virtues and all heroism. In addition, he represents praise for the triumphant bourgeoisie, and at the time when this type was devised by Émile Augier (the figure of André **Lagarde** in *La Contagion*), he was a great novelty, since also in real life the role of the engineer is not more than half a century old.

André **Lagarde**, the forefather of the type, lives with workers, works together with them in factories, works for ten months as a machinist, "day and night with his face to the fire and his back to the cold wind." "How proud I was of the first money I sent to my mother…It was used for her funeral… That poor, holy woman!" He is a patriot planning a canal which will break the power of the English at Gibraltar. He exposes the machinations of the English, he saves the honor of his sister, he arranges a wonderful match for himself, and in the last act he gets married.

"For twenty five years he has flooded the stage with his virtuous presence. He has been the promised fiancé of all the ingénues, the son-in-law of noble fathers who is treated by them with affection. Not one happy marriage is concluded without his participation, and not one happy family can do without his presence. For twenty five years these qualities of the virtuous engineer have so hypnotized dramatists that, thanks to him, they have completely forgotten about other professions."

At present the traveler-explorer of new lands competes with the engineer. He, too, is an ideal of national energy and one of the heroes of will. He is so useful that not one of the contemporary writers could do without him.

Roger de Céran from Pailleron's *Le Monde où l'on s'ennuie* is one of the forefathers of this type and travels in Asia Minor: "Imagine a land completely unexplored, this is a genuine goldmine for a scholar, a poet, and an artist." Chambray in Jules Lemaître's *L'Âge difficile* is „the first European who climbed to the source of the river Niger…" He says what's on his mind boldly to everyone. Paul Moncel in *La Fille sauvage* „visits the fiercest tribes"; „his eyes are so deep that it's as if his glance falls from a great height." Michel Prinson in *Le Coup d'aile* "was somewhat like a king in the Congo", and "he has the soul of a mutineer." This type also appears in Maurice Donnay's *L'Autre Danger* and in Hervieu's *Le Dédale*. Dumas says about him: "He goes through life with one hand full of pardons and the other full of retribution, eradicating rebellion, understanding the weakness and the passion of the moment." "They are people from other times," says Augier, and Hervieu speaks „of a special kind of chivalry, which they have acquired in their daring undertakings."

"These are heroes of legends, standing opposed to the baseness and banality of our century," Bertaut and Séché say. "They belong to one of the most repulsive fixed roles that exist in our theatre, because not once in its existence did this type have the face of a living human being. He was an artificial being from the very first day of his existence. And it is all the more sad that among living travelers there are amazingly interesting characters, who appear not at all as models of goodness and disinterestness. Meanwhile the traveler in the theatre always has all the merits and the virtues. He, like the engineer, is always a model son, a wonderful husband, and a fiery patriot. As for a "a simple, strong, and open nature," the traveler rivals the "American" and, like his predecessor, is a critic of manners and the saviour of the last act.

Fixed types, as we see, are grouped and created largely according to their functions. In the majority of cases they are masculine types. Women, who are treated by dramatists almost exclusively from the perspective of emotion, are less given to the generalizations embedded in types. The old repertoire had several feminine masks, which have become almost farcical today, like "the fatal woman" or "the mother-in-law" or "the spirited woman" who can't see a young man without shrieking, "handsome fellow… good-looking officer." But still surviving are the "*bonne*" (formerly the soubrette), who "for money gives explanations essential for moving forward the play," and "the old nurse who brought up the hero of the drama."

The single female type created by the theatre over the last years, for whom a future is in store, is the "woman rebel," who protests against the inertia of her parents or the narrowness of her husband. This mask has already been developed in the novel but has not as often penetrated the stage. It is the type in Jules Lemaître's *Révoltée*.

Noted above were several of the fixed roles and costumes from the vast store of properties, which are always ready to serve beginning playwrights. Of course, they have greatly increased, these marionettes of the theatre, with all their nuances, variations, and combinations. I have attempted to give them the characteristics of the French themselves, because the eye of a foreigner, more able to catch what the French overlook, can never detect the subtlest shades of banality, which are discernible to the eye of a French theatre critic "chained to the wheelbarrow of the feuilleton."

So, this is the material. But where is the method for combining them? Where is the machinery of the play? And the strings, that jerk the clowns?

These questions are not so easy to answer. The laws of movement in French drama, their types, and the influence of fashion on them demand a separate and more detailed study.

But regarding the possible, here are two contrasting methods of preparing a play. One is for those who work with ready-made types, and the other is for those who prefer artistic observation of life.

Feydeau, the author of the famous *La Dame de chez Maxime*, says: "While devising various things that will cause the audience to rejoice, I do not enjoy myself but instead maintain the seriousness and the coldbloodedness of a chemist who is preparing medicine. I put into my pill one gram of confusion, one gram of impropriety, one gram of observation… then I mix all these elements for as long as possible and as well as possible. And I know almost certainly what effect they will produce. Experience has taught me to distinguish the good grasses from the weeds. And I rarely make a mistake in what is produced."

And François de Curel, the refined and reserved author of *L'Envers d'une sainte*, *L'Invitée*, and *Le Repas du lion*, says:

"To define the aesthetics of the stage, in harmony with my ideal, is very difficult… Perhaps, I can give to neophytes the following method, much like a recipe in cooking books: take any *fait divers*..., make for it a garnish of your thoughts, the more the better, and serve it hot. And you will get a good play, which both the simple-minded and the sophisticated will like; and it will be a whole, because movement, which is the basis of drama, and philosophy, which supplies the nobility of drama, have gone into it."

IV New Trends

We have made a general review of the storehouses of old decorations and costumes that are still acceptable to the audience and useful for dramatists. These theatre cellars are spacious, and to dig to their bottom is not so easy , which cannot be otherwise in a land with a vibrant, intensive theatrical life extending over many centuries. By themselves, these storehouses of fixed characters, masks, and clichés do not of course amount to theatrical wealth, but the presence of these things is one of the sure signs of richness. They are cinders from the furnace of theatrical success. They are the manure piles before the entrances to palaces, which in the times of Homer served as a sign of wealth and well-being.

Those dramatists who use what is at hand, like the just mentioned writer of vaudevilles Feydeau, act with certainty; they create theatre not from life but from the prejudices of their audience. The success of dramatists, such as de Curel, who seek new realia and a new vital truth, is far from indisputable and easy.

The French stage based on traditions that are centuries old admits changes into its structure with great difficulty and demonstrates a profound, passionate, and organic resistance to every novelty.

This resistance testifies not to the inertia of the theatre but only to its past evolution and to its serious, historical traditions. Only those who have nothing in their past can change immediately, because each novelty, in order to be accepted organically, must be recognized, as it were, by each moment of the historical past.

During the last decades of French theatre, however, many significant changes have taken place, and new elements were introduced. A turn in favour of realism was accompanied, on the part of the dramatists, by a significant sharpening of their analysis of life and, on the part of the directors, by an introduction of new devices, and by a partial alteration in the general tendencies of the stage.

For this partial revolution the French stage was obliged to the energy and talent of one person, André Antoine.

It was in the middle of the 1880s. French theatre was in decline during these years. The old celebrities of dramaturgy stopped writing around this time: Dumas and Pailleron and Augier. The stage found itself in the hands of a syndicate of third-rate dramatists, whose names are now forgotten (Albert **Millana**, Jules **Prével**, Gondinet, W. Busnach, Albert Wolff). They did not allow any of the younger people into the theatre.

Antoine, who was indifferent to the theatre until he found himself by chance at the head of a small circle of amateurs, had the idea of turning to younger writers for his repertoire. The Théâtre en liberté, which later became the Théâtre libre, arose out of the *Cercle Gaulois*. In the course of five years the Théâtre libre re-created French drama. It was a true revolution and as such was distinguished by its strength, crudity, and excesses. New authors attempted to liberate themselves from all the fixed characters and present „life" on the stage. Their realism took bitter and cynical forms. Antoine was able to create something out of this Parisian fashion and, exploiting the trend that had emerged, brought Tolstoi and Ibsen, who had formerly been inconceivable in the French theatre, onto the French stage.

Tristan Bernard told the following picturesque fable about Antoine:

"About twenty years ago, when the theatres, at least some of them, were still lit by gas, one of the employees of the Gas Company[23] met on the boards with two of the nine immortal sisters, with severe Melpomene and sweet Thalia. He hadn't managed to glance at the two sisiters, when he acquired some kind of magical power over them. Without any formaility he took them by the hand with his usual energy and said, 'You will do me the pleasure of going up to your dressing-room, and you will wash all the makeup off your faces.'

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[23] Voloshin noted at the bottom of his page of text that Antoine worked for such a company before he became involved in the theatre.

The faces of Thalia and Melpomene were really disappearing under a thick layer of rouge and whitening. Their features were totally obliterated, and their facial muscles hardly moved. *Neither Melpomene nor Thalia had a human face any more*. But because they dawdled, even though they were inclined to obey, he took them by the shoulders, lead them under the fire hose, and he himself washed their faces, as if they were young, dirty girls. Insulted, indignant but subjugated, they let out cries, which were genuine shouts.

Then Antoine kissed them and said, 'Enchanting sisters, I love you more then all the rest. But I want you not to forget that you are demi-goddesses. And as demi-goddesses you are worth much more than goddesses, because with regal grace you combine the purely human weaknesses of women!… I cannot hinder you from being naturally beautiful. But be on guard , o you demi-goddesses, against allowing yourself the slightest affectation.'"

"And you assert," Tristan Bernard continues his apologia of Antoine by turning to an imagined defender of the old traditions, "that he has not thought of anything new, and that some other prson and someone else were doing the same things before he arrived… But if we are surprised, then it's not that he does things, which you have been unable to do, but that he ceased doing what you have been doing. Yes, he invented nothing, but truth is not made up. Without qualification of any kind, I affirm that almost all the dramatists of the current generation would never have become a shadow of what they now are, if Antoine had never existed. Of course, in the times when Antoine did not live, there were many more 'well-made' plays. That is due, probably, to the fact that it is much more difficult to construct a 'well-made' play when people want it made profoundly human and just. It's not as easy to control the movements of a living human being as to control the movements of a doll… What concerns me is that everytime I am in Antoine's company, I receive the strange awareness that I am speaking with a historically significant figure. There are many people to whom is said, 'You will live in the memory of people; posterity will receive you.' Perhaps, these men will be admitted into history, but we will know nothing about it. But Antoine can be assured; he already has his reserved seat there."

We would have digressed from our theme, if we had been engaged in a general history of the theatrical revolution tied to the name of Antoine. But in order to show how new elements are brought into the everyday life of the theatre, it is enough to trace the history of the "crowd" on the French stage.

In Brussels in 1888, at the very beginning of his theatrical activity, Antoine saw for the first time the Meiningen troupe, and this produced such a great impression on him that he immediately wrote a letter to the highest judge of theatrical issues at that time, Francisque Sarcey.

"From the time I began attending theatre," he wrote, "our extras aroused my ire. If we exclude *La Haine* and the circus scene in *Théodora*,[24] I have never seen anything that would have given me the illusion of a crowd... So then ... I saw it, that is, the crowd, yesterday at the performance by the Meiningen company. Do you know what the difference is? It is that their artists are not collected for a general rehearsal from off the street, like ours who absolutely do not know how to wear their costumes, which are unwonted and constricting when they are historically accurate. The extras in our theatres are advised first and foremost to stand still, whereas in the Meiningen company the extras act; they are given facial expressions. And don't think that they overdo it and draw attention away from the protagonists; no, the entire picture maintains its wholeness, and wherever your gaze rests, it will rest on details that characterize and underline the situation. This generates at certain moments an incomparable power. Why not replace our intolerable theatrical conventions with these innovations that are so logical and no longer cost so much?"

This letter was published in *Temps*[25] and inspired a sympathetic letter by Oppenheim also addressed to Sarcey: "I must admit that the behaviour of extras recalling servants waiting at the dinnertable of their lord, in which Antoine cleverly sees respect being shown to the *sociétaires* of the *Comédie -Française*, shocked me to the greatest extent. Look at *Oedipus the King*. In the last act three warriors with spears stand by the right wings. When Oedipus appears with bloodied eyes and stumbles down the palace steps, at the time when I the viewer am in a state of great emotion, at a time when the extras on the left retreat with similar gestures expressing rhythmic horror, these three dolts stand motionless with their spears, as if the king had come out to breathe the fresh air."

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[24] *La Haine* (1874) and *Théodora* (1884) are plays by V. Sardou.

[25] *Le Temps* was a daily evening newspaper founded in Paris in 1861 by A. **Neftser [[??]]**.

Sarcey, the personification of the French theatre's common sense and the preserver of the stage's traditions, answered these protests in this way:

"Mr. Oppenheim is angry at these three soldiers, who stand on watch motionlessly and indifferently at the time when Oedipus comes out with bloodied eyes. But they are right a hundred times over!... They do not exist, they must not exist for the viewer. They are placed there to fill out, once the curtain rises, the scenery, which, while enchanting our gaze, compels at the same time our imagination to be more attentive, transporting it to the country and the time in which the action takes place. Note that they can be completely dispensed with; if the tragedy is presented in the provinces, where theatres have neither extras nor spacious stages available, they will simply be thrown away, and Sophocles's work will not suffer in any way... The three soldiers in the *Comédie-Française*, of whom Oppenheim speaks, do what they must do, that is, they do nothing. Their single purpose is to be decorative.

On the left... Ah, on the left it is a different story. Why do the extras retreat with gestures of grief? Is it really so that I should see how well they communicate this emotion? No, it is done simply to warn me that I will now see Oedipus in a very pitiful state.

They stand at the proscenium on the left; they see him coming out from the columns of his palace with bloodied eyes. They retreat, frightened and shocked, not to construct a spectacle for me but so as to direct my eyes to the one, who has evoked movement from them and who is the main figure.

As soon as Oedipus is onstage, they can do whatever they feel like doing. To everyone else I am totally indifferent.

Mr. Oppenheim charmingly scoffs at the extras of the *Comédie-Française*, who retreat with similar gestures expressing rhythmical horror. But they are more right than he is... Yes, they must depict the same horror, the horror of the crowd, a horror that is brief, because they do not at all interest me, for their horror is subordinate to what is more central to the drama, namely, the appearance of Oedipus. As soon as he arrives, as soon as I see him descending gropingly with unsure steps down the stairs of the palace, the many-bodied character, who has done his business, no longer is important to me. He compels me to look left...and exists no longer. Now Oedipus alone speaks I listen to Oedipus alone, and the single obligation of the crowd is to create more favourable conditions for my perception."

Antoine was without doubt right in his demands and later demonstrated their complete correctness. But when now, a quarter of a century later, we read this polemic, then all his words seem old and too familiar, while the thoughts uttered by Sarcey, which made him for the present generation a caricatured representative of healthy conservatism, seem far from antiquated. In these immobile figures and in their similar gestures we recognize the latest word in stylization, and we recall the principles of Mr. Meyerhold and the production of *Tristan*.[26] For us during the past quarter of a century the spiral of evolution has gone in reverse; what existed as one of the unconscious consequences of the whole structure of classical theatre and was, thanks to the accident of this polemic, so successfully formulated by Sarcey is now elevated into a new principle, into a new ideology of theatre which revolted against naturalistic principles, whose apostle in France was Antoine. But, transferring the Parisian debate of 1888 to Petersburg in 1910, we, of course, are doing some inexcusable shuffling.

At the time Sarcey was technically right in regard to dramas based on the interplay of antagonists, and such were all French dramas beginning with classical tragedy of the seventeenth century. Only in the era of romanticism does the crowd appear on the stage to create an effective and picturesque background. It is composed of mannequins and is part of the scenery. In the theatre of Augier and Dumas *fils* the crowd was completely absent. And in the historical melodramas of Sardou it was one of the dramatic circumstances, a strong scenic effect; it did not have its own life or will. Therefore Sarcey was logically right to demand that extras be colourful and empty of personality. But Antoine, who had insight into the potential of a drama in which the crowd would be alive, a willing and active member of the *dramatis personae*, was still more correct and proved how correct he was on stage. Because of his conviction he brought this type of drama into existence, The crowd as an independent individual entity, this was new for the stage but already it was on line and waiting; it was in the literary air at the end of the 1880s. Zola, continuing the logical development of romanticism, made more lively his picturesque and decorative backgrounds and established the psychology of the crowd in *Germinal* while preparing *La Débâcle*.[27]

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[26] The production of Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, to which Voloshin alludes, was directed by Mejerkhol'd for the Mariiinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg in 1909.

René Doumic formulated the ideas of that time in the following way:

"A group of people—no matter who they are, whether a crowd or an audience, a meeting or an institution, representatives of the provinces or of a nation—has its own soul, which is not at all the sum of all the separate souls comprising it but is rather their consequence. This soul has its perfections and imperfections, its noble surges and its cruel ones; it has its moments of great élan and enthusiasm as well as its periods of depression and insanity. It has its laws of origin and evolution since it is also defined by the moment and by the milieu. It is subject to the double pressure of external influences and internal ones...There exists a separate psychology for revolutionary France, for imperial France, for monarchical France and for republican France. France is a personality that has its own genius, its distinctive sensitivity, its own manner of action, and therefore it can be brought out onto the stage as a dramatic character; it can be described and analyzed as a character in a novel. An army has its unique psychology, as does a parliament."

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[27] Voloshin refers here to two novels by E. Zola, *Germinal* (1885) and *Le Débâcle* (1892).

Paris was always a city of popular movements, a city of the crowd. Therefore when they began to seek a gesture for the crowd that one could depict on stage as an experiment for the very first time, then it was natural that attention was drawn first of all to the revolutionary tremors of Paris. What other moment from revolutionary days could win over a theatrical public, biased from the beginning against such a novelty, if not the taking of the Bastille—a moment canonized by the national pride of Paris? No appropriate French play existed, and therefore Schnitzler's *Green Cockatoo* served Antoine as a touchstone. Its production enjoyed great success immediately. And this success was based not on the artificial interweaving of fact and fiction, which charmed its Russian readers, but on the fact that the action of the play takes place on July fourteenth. Under this shield the democratic pride of Antoine first risked depicting the crowd as a character on the Parisian stage.

Also under the protection of the Bastille the first French plays depicting the drama of the crowd appeared. They were Romain Rolland's *Le 14 Juillet*, produced by **Gémier**, then Paul Hervieu's *Théroigne* **de** *Méricourt***,** and finally Lavedan and Le Nô**tre**'s *La Varenne*. In all these plays the same crowd of the Great Revolution was seen: in Rolland's play it is seized by the first surge of revolutionary enthusiasm; in Lavedan's play it is quiet and threatening; and in Hervieu savage and insane. The understanding, analysis, and scenic treatment were new, but the character of the crowd remained the old one, familiar from the dramas of the romantics and from Sardou's plays. And while Antoine displayed his powers and gave clear lessons to dramatists through his depictions of the revolutionary crowd and his treatment of the ancient crowds in *Timon d’Athène* by Émile Fabre and in the most recent production of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* at the Odéon, new analyses , this time of the contemporary crowd, appeared in the dramatic literature. These plays by Émile Fabrewere *La Vie publique* and*Les Ventres dorés*.

The theatre of Émile Fabre has to do with a type of drama new to the French stage: political comedy. It is true that the French stage was always close to politics, but it only foamed on the crest of a dramatic wave, manifest in words, allusions, and intonations but never penetrating deeper than the dialogue.

"Politics walked with drama only side by side; it did not interfer in drama and did not control it. At the moment when Gustave was ready to throw himself at Caroline's feet, the author suddenly suspended the action, and the actors assumed a diplomatic mien appropriate to the circumstances. One of them opened his mouth and proclaimed a dithyramb in honour of progress, civilization, or some other elevated notion; others answered him purely for the pleasure of being disgraced; all got slightly excited in the heat of the quarrel; and then the drama continued in its usual manner, with a clean conscience and satisfied with itself." Thus did Sarcey, who was waiting impatiently for the rise of genuine political comedy and wanted to see it in *Les Efrontés* and *Le Fils de Giboyer* by Émile Augier, characterize the political element in comedy during he Second Empire. But the prohibitions of censorship did not allow it to be born.

Within ten years after Augier, in 1872, immediately after the Commune, Sardou in his comedy *Rabagas* made an attempt to offer the collective type of a political activist. But even Sarcey, fully supporting Sardou, admitted the experiment failed.

"His *Rabagas*," Sarcey wrote, "is made of hurriedly sewn together scraps of the latest events. He is not a character, logically grounded, but a caricature, in whom the lips of Émile Ollivier are attached to the nose of Gambetta, and all of it is exaggerated, ludicrous, and blatant."

The country's disquieting discord did not permit the rise of political comedy and turned the play into a pamphlet. The first steps towards a contemporary political comedy based on a calm and artistic analysis of political manners were *Monsieur le Ministre* by Jules Claretie and, in part *Cabotins* by Pailleron and *Le Député Leveau* by Jules Lemaître.

Dramatists have still not dared to structure all the action exclusively on political passion and consider it essential to thread politics on a love intrigue. The character of the love intrigue is the same in all these political plays.

"One can claim," say Bertaut and Séché, "that on the day when dramatists decided to use a political spring for their plays, to all of them simultaneously appeared one and the same type of man, a man of the people who, on the strength of a general vote, is positioned close to power or strives towards it. Unexpectedly flung into a conservative milieu pervaded by the spirit of the past, he is captivated by some young maiden or experienced woman. From here springs the love intrigue, which step by step follows after the political intrigue and ends by swallowing it. In *Les effrontés* there is **Vernouillet** who gets the hand of Charrier**'s** daughter; in *Le Fils de Giboyer* there is the republican Gérard who, entering into the Maréchal's family, yields to the enchantment of the daughter of the house; and the same situation recurs in *Monsieur le Ministre*, in *Rabagas*, and in *Le Député Leveau*."

A genuine political comedy, whose spring of action is found not in love but in politicial and social passion, has appeared only in the last decade, and in connection with the abolition of the censorship of drama in France.

Brieux's *L'Engrenage* and Émile Fabre's *La Vie publique* are the first to approach political issues not from the perspective of a political partyline, but from the perspective of a psychological approach to individual personalities as well as to the masses. And at the same time these plays bring onto the stage for the first time a contemporary crowd, marking its face, its character, and its will. In *La Vie politique* Émile Fabre develops on stage a large-scale picture of an election campaign and builds his drama out of these political passions

Together with Mirbeau's social drama *Les Mauvais Bergers* and *Les Ventres dorés* by the same Fabre, which offers a picture of a great financial crash, these plays establish a true political theatre, which until this time was unknown on the French stage,

In the following years a whole series of plays based on political and social passion have appeared. Of them one can name *Le Repas du lion* by François de Curel, which is the tragedy of an aristocrat raised in the upper bourgeoisie who comes to the defense of the working class; *Sous l'Epaulette* by Arthur Bernède, which deals with the issue of politics in the army and leans on current political events; *Une Journée parlamentaire* by Maurice Barrès which offers a picture of the Panama Canal scandal and is, in the author's own words, "a tragedy in tails compressed into eighteen hours, in which one can see to what degree of frenzy the emotion of fear can lead."

This has been a brief review of the path by which the political crowd from the streets penetrated the French stage and became established on it as one of the new trends in dramatic art, all of which is directly connected to the growth of French democracy and the entire psychological history of the various classes in the country. In this one can see the vitality of French theatre, which yields to the external pressure of innovation slowly and with great resistance, but once having taken a new direction, it moves consciously, decisively, and undeviatingly, adhering firmly to the boundaries of genuine and serious art.

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Summing up all that has been said, we can acknowledge that French theatre possesses all the conditions necessary for its flowering, and French dramatists find themselves in excellent conditions for work.

They deeply value the opinion of their audience and at the same time they are deprived of the possibility of imitating its taste, since none of them (except for writers of vaudevilles like Feydeau) can define precisely its tastes. Thus, they can constantly search, observe, and invent something new.

The vastness of the stores of theatrical masks and conventional parts indicate how quickly they change in the theatre and how comparatively shortly types artificially created for the convenience of the dramatists can last on the stage. The vigilance and causticity of the drama criticism, which exposes them, as we have seen, without any pity for the authority of the authors, guarantees their brief existence.

Finally, in the resistance shown toward innovations in the theatre, a resistance that is neither blind nor sluggish, but based on the artistic depth of the theatrical traditions—as we have seen in the example of the enlightening polemic between Antoine and Sarcey—there is a tremendously vital force, one that stimulates all the new trends. Opposition fosters innovators.

Thus, in spite of all the age-old conventions with which it is surrounded, the theatre is bound by the living roots of observation and analysis with the current social life of France, and at each moment a truthful transformation of reality is reconstructed on the stage.