

THE TREATMENT OF SOCIAL TYRANNY  
IN RECENT AMERICAN DRAMA

by

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## PREFACE

Although the literary value of much recent American drama is questionable, certain tendencies make it an interesting study, for in the drama one finds a reflection of new interpretations and new viewpoints of life.

To a noticeable extent, life is presented in its more unhappy phases, and the unhappy effects of social tyranny are given prominence. This is a natural result of social conditions that have developed, during the present century, certain complexities sufficiently prominent to merit reflection in the drama. Modern playwrights have taken advantage of the dramatic material offered by these conditions. Of less importance, there is, in addition, another influence giving rise to the prominent place the treatment of the oppression of society now holds in the drama; that of Ibsen and some of his European contemporaries. As a result of both influences --- the social and the literary --- there is an emphasis in recent American

drama upon social tyranny.

It has been my plan, in this particular study, to show something of the tendencies that gave rise to the present interest in social tyranny manifested in American drama, and to consider the resulting emphasis in its various forms of expression. The characters, in the plays chosen for the study, are, for the most part, those suffering from the pressure of tradition, of public opinion, of some psychological complex or phobia resulting from oppressive conditions of society, to such an extent that they are depressed. This study will consist of a consideration of the types of social tyranny, their effect upon the characters, and the possible means of escape, offered by writers, from the tyranny.

This is intended to be a general rather than a detailed study of the problem. Because of the vast scope of the subject, only those plays are dealt with which are especially significant in relation to this subject, and no more than enough to illustrate adequately the matter presented are considered.

To Professors Whitcomb, Burnham, and O'Leary, I wish to offer my sincere appreciation for criticism and valuable aid in the preparation of the manuscript.

July, 1929

M. H.

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THE TREATMENT OF SOCIAL TYRANNY  
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CHAPTER I

TENDENCIES GIVING RISE TO THE TREATMENT OF SOCIAL TYRANNY  
IN RECENT AMERICAN DRAMA

In drama there is always a conflict. It may be a conflict between individuals, a conflict between the individual and his own ideas, or a conflict between the individual and his environment. In the last instance, the environment may be natural or social. Playwrights have taken advantage of these several possibilities. Since drama is one of the forms of literature definitely dependent upon external conditions, the ideas expressed and the degree of emphasis given them vary as conditions change. Upon the basis of such generalizations as have just been made, it is logical to assume that social themes should find a place in the drama resulting from

the nineteenth century interest in humanitarianism, and later in science.

The drama is, in almost every case, vitally interested in the individual, so that the conflict so essential to drama, it is evident, is almost always that of the individual against some opposing force --- a force working against full self-expression. Throughout history, the conflicting force, of course, has changed, and a result of the change has been a development of emphasis upon social tyranny in recent American drama.

Social tyranny is an oppressive force exerted by society. It is a force which prevents the happiness of an individual, or a social group, by thwarting full expression. It is a result of certain traditions, conventions, and evils that are unavoidable in social life, and its effect is most frequently revealed in certain phobias and mental complexes. The individual or group affected may be controlled either by a more powerful group, or, by the more abstract conventions, traditions, and prejudices which have developed in society. In either instance, the result is unhappiness for the object of the tyranny.

Professor Quinn would describe the present status of social tyranny, thus:

The individual having won his political rights in the first half of the Nineteenth Century and his economic status in the second half, became concerned toward the close of that century with the salvation of his personality from the dangers that lay in the increasing complexities of social organization, in the standardization of life, in the prejudices and stupidities which prevent a full and free expression of each human soul. 1

To the student of sociology, or even to the more widely read layman, the problems and complexities of the Twentieth Century life are well-known. Repeatedly, both in magazines of controversy and in those of current history, the same discussions on the same subjects appear. A survey of the articles, which have appeared during the last decade, would lead one to believe that there has been a special attention to race problems, and economic difficulties; to marriage problems and the revolt of youth. There seems to be a new concern in the person involved in these problems --- the one who cannot fit into society because of non-conformity to convention. The idealist and the dreamer have always been of interest to the more matter-of-fact man. About the visionary group there has been an irresistible glamour of romance. Now, people are beginning to look at the less prosaic man in a different light.

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Quinn's History of American Drama from the Civil War to the Present Time, p. 7.

Occasionally, in the general history of humanity --- just as in the history of each generation, and of each individual --- there comes a time of revolt against convention. The revolt of the present period against traditions and conventions, which have been binding, has caused much comment, with the result, it would seem, that the non-conformist is considered in a more favorable light, by the general public. All of these problems appear reflected in the drama just about in proportion to the interest they create for people in general.

The mere existence of such problems, and even the interest in them, have not alone been sufficient to exalt the phase of social tyranny in American drama to its present position. There are literary influences to be considered. The Restoration period in the history of English literature is an example of what literary influence will do. Then, drama was chiefly reflective of the tea-drinking and love making that marked social life. The more vital problems of the period, under the pressure of French influence, were quite generally ignored. In other epochs, other literary styles have been dominant with comparable results. In consequence, it may be seen that under powerful leadership, literary influences have

developed, which emphasize first one and then another of man's fundamental concerns. Since this is true, one must consider the power of the influences at work, in order further to explain the present treatment of social tyranny in the drama.

Of all the literary forces which have affected modern drama, that of Ibsen is fundamental. Critics have quite universally agreed that he is an artist distinguished in the field of the drama, and would consider him the father of modern drama of social criticism. One student of the drama describes his position in these terms:

With all his limitations, however, Ibsen is distinguished as a thinker and an artist. He appeals to reason through the heart. He is a stimulator, an awakener, a prophet, not merely a reformer with a program. 2

Other critics have been just as willing to place him, with his wide influence, in the first rank of modern playwrights.

Nevertheless, it is for reasons in addition to his undoubted importance as an artist, that Ibsen is to be considered in tracing the development of the study of social tyranny in drama. Since his work marks the

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Chandler's Aspects of Modern Drama, p. 29.

convergence of the terminations of older movements and the beginnings of new trends and interests, certain modern phases can be accurately and conveniently traced from his work. Only about half of Ibsen's plays are plays of social study --- of criticisms of society, or studies of the individual's relation to society. Yet, within those twelve or fifteen plays especially concerned with society are motives and methods which have continued to exert a powerful influence over European and American drama.

In considering Ibsen's influence, it is well to note that he gives definite attention to the individual's place in social problems. The emphasis of his plays has been stated thus:

Though they satirize politics occasionally, they are less political than domestic, and less domestic than individual. It is upon individuals in conflict with institutions that they focus attention. 3

Although other dramatists have added modes of approach to social study in the drama, recent American dramatists, in the larger part, have followed Ibsen's model as described above. A study of Ibsen's plays proves the justice of Chandler's remarks, just quoted. Ibsen

takes up phase after phase of the problems of society, and in each one, the individual is found to be struggling with society.

There is Nora in "A Doll's House". She occupies the center of attention throughout the play. As Ibsen develops her reactions to her dilemma and presents her questionings, one sees the social problem involved. Ibsen never permits one to become so engrossed in the individual that the problem is lost. Nora is only the means by which the problem of marriage is presented. The reader is impressed with the social problem, and follows the criticism of marriage as Nora doubts and revolts. In this, Ibsen differs from Eugene O'Neill. In "Strange Interlude", for example, Nina is the center of attention just as Nora is in "A Doll's House". Nina, however, is the end of the presentation, rather than a means. Although there is a social problem, and society is studied --- it is even somewhat to blame for Nina's deviation from convention --- one never feels that society is directly responsible for the evil done. The evil motives for Nina's deeds are within herself. O'Neill permits one to forget society in the interest created in the individual; Ibsen's characters are entirely dependent upon the social evil they illustrate.

Ibsen treats problems other than marriage, but

always the individual stands out against the social evil. The moral strength of Dr. Stockmann, in "An Enemy of the People", is only interesting under the oppression of society's indifference and lack of responsibility. There is a contrast and a conflict between the individual and society which cause the individual to stand out vividly against a social evil.

Again in "Ghosts", the suffering is of primary importance only because it makes so sharp the outline of society's shortcomings. Ibsen could have chosen no more powerful means of expressing the suffering caused in one generation by the sins of the preceding one than by showing Mrs. Alving's realization that her son was following, through no fault of his own, his father's downward path.

One could go on describing in considerable detail each of Ibsen's dramas of social criticism, and in each case show how, through reaction or character development of an individual, a social problem is portrayed. However, some of his contemporaries have made their contributions which deserve attention also.

Bjørnson, also a Norwegian, differed from Ibsen in that he showed less interest in the individual. After reading his plays, one remembers the characters less than the problems presented. There is decided oppression resulting from conflict in "The Editor". In the hands

of Björnson, though, the play becomes a picture of a social evil in which individuals are secondary.

Harold, the oppressed radical, shows more courage and is quite as noble as Dr. Stockmann, in "An Enemy of the People", yet one is far less likely to remember him as an individual. In "The Editor", it is the tyrannical power of the press that is the all important thing. Ibsen selects an individual; Björnson describes the oppression of many by society.

Strindberg, a Swedish contemporary, wrote more in the naturalistic vein than either Ibsen or Björnson. His play, "The Father", impresses the horror of a social evil and the result of a conflict rather than the conflict itself. In his use of symbolism, he followed Ibsen more than Björnson. "Easter" is a study of oppressed souls, but one feels that their struggle, occasioned in part by society, is owing to a large extent to maladjustment. "Easter" is a peculiar mixture of symbolism and psychological analysis. It is much more symbolical than "Miss Julia". Miss Julia suffers intense remorse after she has forced one of her father's servants to seduce her. Nevertheless, one cannot blame society for her distress. Strindberg himself accounts for her disaster in this way:

In explanation of Miss Julia's sad fate, I have suggested many factors; her mother's fundamental instincts; her father's mistaken upbringing of the girl; her own nature, and the suggestive influence of her fiance on a weak and degenerate brain; furthermore and more directly; the festive mood of the Midsummer Eve; the absence of her father; her physical condition; her preoccupation with the animals; the excitation of the dance; the dusk of the night; the strongly aphrodisiacal influence of the flowers; and lastly the chance forcing the two of them together in a secluded room to which must be added the aggressiveness of the excited man. 4

Such a conglomeration of overwhelming forces as Strindberg offers is not directly traceable to society. Strindberg makes much the same psychological study that Eugene O'Neill makes in "Strange Interlude", wherein Nina's deviation is not directly traceable to society. In this, he, with O'Neill, differs from Ibsen and many dramatists under the Ibsen influence.

The three Scandinavian dramatists, Ibsen, Björnson, and Strindberg, have had an appreciable influence over drama of social tyranny in America. However, their following has not been limited to America. Their influence spread widely over Europe, and indeed, seems sometimes to have made a greater impression there than in America. In practically every country, having

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See the author's preface, p. 99 of August Strindberg's Plays, Second Series.

any notable dramatic productions in the later Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries, there are plays of social criticism. Russia has had many dramatists representing this phase of dramatic interest. In England, Galsworthy and Shaw have been chiefly interested in social criticism. German dramatists have stressed it less, but it has not been neglected by them, nor by French playwrights. Even Spain has made some contribution. One would scarcely need to go into the by-ways of dramatic production to find a lengthy list of plays showing some phase of social oppression. However, for the purposes of comparison in this study, a summary of the major productions of the more important European playwrights will be sufficient.

Russian dramatists have emphasized social tyranny from the time of Tolstoy, whose place in Russian drama may be briefly described thus:

Tolstoy in turning from art to life, was in duty bound to decry the drama, like Rousseau, his great forerunner, yet in time, he perceived that it might serve as a vehicle for the easy carriage of social doctrines. Late in life, accordingly, he began to make use of it, writing for the stage pieces marked by the seal of the propagandist and by the propagandist's indifference to the canons of art. 5

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Chandler's Aspects of Modern Drama, p. 337.

Gorky, Andreyev, and Tchekov, were, on the other hand, primarily dramatists. They had less of the reformer's spirit than Tolstoy. The plays of Gorky and Andreyev are marked by a distressing hopelessness. Tolstoy left a loop-hole for his characters, but Gorky and Andreyev buried their characters in the depths of poverty, sin, and indifference. In Gorky's one-act play, "Evil Spirits", Mamka, the mother, is hideously repulsive as she sprawls in a drunken sleep in the damp, clammy hall of a basement, which serves as a lodging for her and a crippled son. In "The Lower Depths", a congregation of outcasts exist through the acts of the play. Gorky pictures people who are little better than animals. They have no ambition, and are without pity for each other, or hope for themselves. He refuses to relieve the pallor by any brightness of humor or romance. All is utter misery and hopelessness. Tchekov, in his "Cherry Orchard", presents a different picture. He depicts a monotonous hopelessness of existence, but the individuals are not degenerate. They are of a higher class. Unfortunately, though, they too are crushed by society. They differ from the beast-like creatures of Gorky's presentation in that they realize their condition.

There is very little in American drama that has the utter hopelessness of these Russian plays. In

American drama, when the situation is irremediable, there is, in most instances, a compensating development of character, or, at least, the satisfaction of retribution.

The method of the English playwrights is unlike that of the Russian. It may be illustrated in the works of Galsworthy and Shaw. Galsworthy does not search into the depths of society for his oppression. The people of his plays are those whom one would expect to encounter in every-day life. His plays are realistic, but not naturalistic. They are more intellectual than emotional. One's fighting spirit --- one's sense of justice --- is more likely to be aroused than one's pity. It is easy to see the injustice in "The Silver Box": why should rich young Barthwick not be punished just as is the poor ignorant Jones? Both committed the same crime. Justice demands that both should be punished, but society would not have it so. One grows indignant because of the injustice, but one does not noticeably pity the unfortunate Jones.

There is nothing of passionate appeal in Galsworthy's plays. In "Escape", for instance, the ex-convict encounters person after person, and there are dramatic situations, yet, after all, it is a mere presentation of external circumstances. Galsworthy treats of

military oppression in "The Mob", charity in "The Pigeon", and economic oppression in "Strife" and "Justice", but always in an unemotional and matter-of-fact way.

Shaw, on the other hand, can scarcely be said to be a dramatist of social tyranny. He exhibits social folly, but there is never an element of pity for the individual. He resorts to satire in his comedies of social criticism. He holds society up to ridicule, and appeals strongly to the intellect, but there is no pity aroused. In "The Doctor's Dilemma", Louis Dubedat dies while the doctors disagree as <sup>to</sup> the treatment he needs. One might be sorry for one in such a situation; Shaw makes Louis Dubedat the victor. In another instance, Shaw satirizes marriage --- in "Man and Superman" --- but no one is particularly oppressed. Ann has her doubts and worries, yet there is something very self-sufficient about her. Shaw wrote drama of social criticism, but his plays had little of social tyranny in them.

In recent French drama, Eugene Brieux is an excellent representative of the dramatists of social criticism. In "The Red Robe", he criticizes the French system of justice. Bagret, a procureur, is never advanced, because he is too conscientious to waver from the truth. Even his wife fails to understand him.

Nevertheless, his conscience will not let him be free. The play gives a powerful picture of an individual quite unadapted to the conditions with which he must cope --- it is that ever dramatic situation in which standards of the individual are so rigid that they are broken in the conflict with society.

German drama is less than that of some of the other literatures concerned with social criticism.

Hauptmann's "Before Sunrise" has some social interest, as do several of his other plays. His treatment is not direct. Wedekind makes a study of the sex problem in the "Awakening of Spring", and in "Hidalla". In both, he emphasizes society's responsibility for unhappy and broken lives. There is an abnormality and an extravagance about his plays, which are two traits that the better American playwrights have avoided.

Spain offers one interesting study of social tyranny in "The Great Galeoto" (or, "The World and His Wife") by Jose Echegaray. It is a study of the oppression of public opinion. Teodora is unjustly accused of being unfaithful to her husband, Julian. Although she is innocent, the situation goes from bad to worse, and the developments could scarcely have been more disastrous had she been innocent. The characters are helpless in the hands of public opinion. Echegaray,

resorts, as does Shaw, to satire to drive home his lesson.

Such a cursory survey, as has just been given, of the European treatment of social tyranny in drama, gives some idea of its possibilities in America. It would be a mistake, nevertheless, to think of American drama as a mere imitation of European drama. Quinn would state the contrary, in fact:

Under the influence of Ibsen and Strindberg, European dramatists faced and revealed the cankers of life in their celebration of personal liberty, but our own drama has followed them infrequently although it has been affected somewhat in its technique.

The drama of revolt in America took a different direction, less direct and obvious in its searching out of disease and degradation, but quite as profound in its own way. 6

Mrs. Bellinger makes a very similar statement in her book:

The American drama is drawing life from conditions peculiar to itself; and its plot material, its pictures of life, its implied philosophy, to be healthy and sincere, must evolve from the national melting-pot. 7

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Quinn's History of American Drama from the Civil War to the Present Time, p. 7.

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Bellinger's Short History of the Drama, p. 369

In America, playwrights have found certain phases of social tyranny fundamental, and have emphasized these in their treatment of this type of the drama. These phases form the basic divisions under which the treatment of social tyranny in American drama has grouped itself in recent years.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ECONOMIC PHASE OF SOCIAL TYRANNY

As the structure of society becomes more complex, money is more and more interwoven into its vital parts. The savage can live contentedly with almost no concrete wealth. He is content to satisfy his wants. However, as the scale of civilization is ascended, man demands greater things for his satisfaction. From being happy with only the essentials of life, he rises to a desire for more than he needs, and finally longs for luxury and the sense of competency that comes with hoarded treasure. Our civilization has reached the stage where man's happiness and full expression of character is dependent upon financial standing.

In an economic way, the chief instrument of social tyranny is public opinion. That is the whip that goads the poor man and has driven the rich man in his frenzied and costly pursuit of wealth. For the sake of social approval, men will rise against one another, or will crush their fellows in industry. As a result, there

are three social classes of these economically oppressed: the poverty-stricken, the materially minded wealthy class, and those crushed in the industrial struggle.

Poverty has figured largely in American drama. Even though, in many plays, there are motives which one accounts for in a large measure by the many social evils that grow out of destitution, there are a number of dramas in which the overpowering oppression is in poverty itself.

American dramatists have considered poverty in various lights. It may at times be a source of comedy, but in the great majority of cases, want, in the drama becomes tragedy, or, at best, it is provocative of pessimism and, occasionally, of sin.

The great source of material for studies of penury in American drama is in the slum-districts of the cities --- those centers where society is at its lowest ebb; where ignorance and sin, nourished by lack of the necessities that money buys, crowd out ambition and the virtues, like weeds in a garden. Plays with such a setting have little hope to offer for unfortunate characters.

Bosworth Crocker has used a slum setting in his play, "The Last Straw". The immediate scene is the basement of a large apartment house in New York City,

and the chief character is Friedrich Bauer, a janitor. He has been an object of the condescension of the other people for so long that he is almost crazed. For some reason, he has never been able to adjust himself to his environment. Finally, overcome by his sense of inferiority, he commits suicide.

Charles Kenyon, in "Kindling", gives a more realistic, yet less abnormal picture of the slums than Crocker. Kenyon sets his play in an unwholesome tenement house. In it, there live a young man and his wife --- a good woman, but ignorant and weak. She is overcome by the thought that her child is to be born in such surroundings. She dreads to think of it coming into the world, with no chance for anything but a thin, weak body. An indifferent rich woman adds to her terror by indiscriminate conversation, until the foolish young wife, tempted by one of the evil influences of the house, steals for her baby. She is saved by the common sense of her husband, and by her friendship with a charity-worker. The play shows the power of the conflict, and the great strength demanded to overcome the weighty pressure of poverty.

Incidentally, it may be noted that Kenyon makes the outcome to the play happy. He provides an escape for this couple from the tyranny of poverty. However, he

does it largely by that which literary critics sometimes call happy coincidence --- that is, the occurrence of some rather improbable, yet very fortunate events that bring about a happy ending. The optimism of the play is in striking contrast to most of the very recent dramatic productions.

"Salvation Nell", by Edward Sheldon, is another study of the slums of the period of "Kindling".. Some idea of the play may be gained from this summarizing sentence: "'Salvation Nell' reproduced with fidelity scenes in the street life in New York City, and placed against a background of drunkenness and vice the work of the Salvation Army".<sup>8</sup>

There are, in addition to the slums, other backgrounds of poverty. For example, the plays of Paul Green portray the indigence of the South. They show the poorness of the poor whites and of the negroes. However, there are only a few in which money is the dominating force. One of these is "Old Wash Lucas", a character study of a mean miser. From his contact with society, he has gained nothing but an exaggerated and distorted sense of the value of money. His love for gold has warped his mind until his social obligations

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Quoted from Arthur Hobson Quinn's introduction to Sheldon's "The Boss" in Quinn's edition, Representative American Plays.

mean nothing to him. With no compunction, he could ruin his daughter's love and happiness; he could let his son die unaided. To the end he is a selfish, revengeful old man. The play is a tragedy of the bitter sort.

In the North and in the West, on the other hand, twentieth century American novelists and poets have made wide application of the resources afforded in the starkness of New England life and the barrenness of Middlewestern prairie existence, but few playwrights have taken advantage of the richness of the local color and of the plot material offered by these localities. Eugene O'Neill has shown what might be done with such material in his powerful and horribly repulsive "Desire Under the Elms". The setting of the play is in another century, but the inspiration must have been modern. Owen Davis has used the background of farm poverty in "Icebound" and in "The Detour". The distress in both is not fundamentally based on poverty, as was true, also, in "Desire Under the Elms", but it is a determining element.

"The Detour" is chiefly interesting in relation to social tyranny because the most important character has ambitions and ideals which her social position will not let her realize. She is oppressed and held down by the

immediate society that surrounds her. However, there are in the play, certain other social elements that tyrannize, and among these is poverty. One gets a vivid picture of a farmer, whose life is filled with work. In his long days of labor, he finds complete satisfaction --- satisfaction to the extent that he cannot see beyond the products of each day's petty round. Ideals and dreams of every kind have been crowded out of his life by his ambition for wealth. Poverty and work have robbed him of breadth and sympathy. There seems to be no escape offered him.

"Icebound", set in the bleakness of Maine, is an example of a similar narrowing experience. The Jordans sit and wait for their mother to die, with their minds revolving about the thought of her money and its disposal. They have lost the sense of adventure, and the imagination that makes life valuable. The starkness of their lives is pitiable. Ben expresses the emptiness of their existence in this way:

Oh, it don't take long for a man to get hungry --- it only takes a minute for a man to die --- you can burn down a barn quick enough --- or do a murder. It's just living and getting old that takes a lot of time. 9

The playwright saves the play from a tragic ending by introducing a saving love and sacrifice.

The few examples given show the playwrights' possibility of range in the treatment of poverty. The settings are varied by the use of many localities, and the types of people treated differ widely. Nevertheless, the emphasis is not placed upon moral degenerates, as is often the case in European drama. The composite picture of poverty that American dramatists present is tragic, but it is rarely morbid.

At any period in which the individual is in conflict with the social evil of poverty, there is likely to be the other extreme --- the evil of too great wealth. And too great wealth, just as poverty, may crush the individual and rob him of his spirituality.

Among recent dramas, perhaps no play illustrates the cost of riches and the devastation of materialism more directly than Channing Pollock's "Mr. Moneypenny". It is a play of types and exaggeration. It is didactic and somewhat sentimental, but it reflects the trend toward materialism. Furthermore, it shows with some clearness the cost the individual thinks would pay for the social approval given to the man of riches. Finally, in the very last act of the play, Jones, who has sacrificed everything dear to him in order that he might be a wealthy man in the eyes of his fellows,

realizes the cost of it all, and the following conversation takes place between him and Mr. Moneypenny, his tempter:

Jones: Will money buy dreams, knowledge, friendship?

Mr. Moneypenny: Last night your table was crowded!

Jones: I'm alone now! --- I'm old and broken! Will money buy youth?

In the case of riches, as of poverty, salvation comes through love and understanding.

Clyde Fitch has considered the problem of extreme wealth from a somewhat different angle in his play, "The City". In it, one sees the effect of the city upon a family who have been in a position of prominence in a small town. Because of their longing for greater financial and social power, they are lured to New York City, where they are almost crushed in their blind pursuit of their ambition. In the end, it is the city that redeems their souls. One of the characters makes, near the end, this statement:

Don't blame the City. It's not her fault! It's our own! What the City does is to bring out what's strongest in us. If at heart we're good, the good in us will win! If the bad is strongest, God help us! Don't blame the City. She gives the man his opportunity; it is up to him what he makes of it. A man can live in a small town all his

life, and deceive the whole place and himself into thinking he's got all the virtues, when at heart he's a hypocrite! But the village gives him no chance to find it out, to prove it to his fellows --- the small town is too easy! But the City!!! A man goes to the gates of the City and knocks! . . . 10

Another play showing the dire effects upon character of the city's emphasis upon money is Eugene Walter's "The Easiest Way". In this instance, it is the struggle of a beautiful woman against the forces of the city that would buy her youth and beauty with money. Laura Murdock, a New York actress, has experienced the hardness of life, but retained her youth and beauty. In return for it, Willard Brockton, a millionaire of questionable morality, is willing to give her every luxury. Their relationship is as honorable as such a one can be, and he has for her as much affection as he is capable of giving. All the time her happiness becomes more and more dependent upon the luxuries with which he provides her. When she meets a strong Westerner, she loves him, and they agree to live honorably henceforth. The odds are all against her. After a trying struggle, she falls back into her old habits, but with a growing distaste for them. Her

lover arrives only to learn the truth --- his faith in her is gone, and she is left alone with her tardy realization that money and the love of luxury, which she failed to resist, have ruined her life.

Besides these plays in which money is definitely the root of the evil, there are many, often in the form of melodrama, in which wealth is the implied evil influence. For instance, there is Anspacher's "The Unchastened Woman", in which a clever woman with unlimited means nearly ruins two homes and causes suffering to many. Another example is Rachel Crother's "Nice People". In it, the characters fall into unhappiness because of the over-indulgence that comes with much money. And these examples are only two of many that might be cited.

As may be readily seen, the dramatists in general consider riches one of the devastating forces of society. More characters are ruined by it than are saved.

In addition to the evils that crush people because of their lack of money, or as a result of the possession of too much, there is a struggle for riches, in which one class always oppresses another industrial group. Sometimes labor overcomes capitalism. Very often the laborer, vice versa, is made to suffer by capital. Finally, there are those drudges who are made slaves in

industry by the demands of society for luxury and refinement. From these three sources, one finds that most of those come whom society crushes in the endless struggle for money and social approval.

In the conflict between capital and labor, one usually thinks of labor as the chief sufferer. Playwrights have suggested so many times the drawn faces of the strikers, the starving children and women, and very often the futility of their intense distress. In much of the drama, the capitalist is portrayed as the oppressor, and, in almost every instance, it is for labor that the audience's sympathy is aroused. It is human nature to pity him whom we generally call the underdog. Take for example, a scene in which laborers make demands of capitalists in Channing Pollock's "The Fool", which is not primarily a capital and labor play. One's sympathy goes to the laborers. This is true time and time again, even though one's common sense may suggest that capital has difficulties, too. Dramatists, understanding human nature, and following the interests of the time, have taken advantage of the dramatic possibilities afforded for melodrama.

Possibly to satisfy the popular desire to see the stronger conquer, Charles Klein has written a play, "The Daughters of Men", in which labor brings capital to its own terms. In this play the owners of Millbank and

Crosby are not characterized as villainously cruel and grasping --- they are gentlemen --- yet, it is among the brotherhood that one finds the real hero. Klein brings affairs to this state by having the lovely daughter of the company owners fall in love with the radical of the brotherhood. She is contrasted with the women of her class who are selfish and indifferent to industrial problems. She breaks through the wall which society has built around her class and admits her love for her father's enemy. Such a situation shows the suffering imposed by society because of the great gulf between the two industrial factions. It is evident that the conflict between the two groups, with a beautiful woman struggling between loyalty and love, must have appealed to audiences who were just becoming accustomed to the independent woman, and were at the same time intensely interested in the struggle between labor and capital.

Edward Sheldon, also, in "The Boss", shows the conflict between two capitalists which tears the heart of a beautiful girl. Emily Griswold, the lovely daughter of a principled capitalist, sells herself to another capitalist who has gained his place by pugnacity and unscrupulous methods. She makes the sacrifice to save her father, and even more, perhaps, for the sake

of the poor alum-dwellers who have aroused her sympathy. Even her father and brother turn against her. The dramatist rather sentimentally pictures her persevering in her noble path until she has remade her husband. The play was written before the time when people were accustomed to pessimism in the drama, so the play ends happily.

Although both Sheldon and Klein call attention to social oppression in industry, and the suffering of those involved in a social conflict, the social problem is the background. It is the love affair in both the dramas summarised which gives them their interest. It would seem that the two playwrights were only making use of the rich resources of such a social problem to color and to give interest to their real theme. This is quite unlike the method of Galsworthy, who would teach his lesson first --- in his drama, the story being secondary and only a means of impressing his teachings.

While neither Galsworthy's style nor subject-matter is imitated, certain other playwrights have offered plays that are primarily pictures of a social evil. Two plays in this category, showing how society permits individuals to be crushed by industry, are "The Adding Machine", by Elmer L. Rice, and "The Hairy Ape", by Eugene O'Neill.

"The Adding Machine" is a fantastic production

showing the horrors of standardization which people so dreaded in the few years immediately following the Great War. Mr. Zero is a slave of industry. Day after day, he adds figures, until the task has become such a matter of habit and routine that his mind follows morbid, sensual trains of thought, which are the only escape society has provided for him from the deadly routine of his work.

"The Hairy Ape" is a study of an even lower level of society. Its characters are scarcely more than animals. Most of the men, who are physically misshapen and spiritually warped by their toil in the darkness and grime of the ship's engine room, are too stupid to resist the impositions society has forced upon them. When "Yank" is aroused to revolt, his fury is blind and half-crazed like that of an animal.

Both of the plays just commented upon, show the human waste upon which society climbs to luxury and refinement. They are studies of the objects and results of social tyranny rather than episodes in the process of it.

In conclusion, one might summarize certain tendencies and dominant notes. In the first place, society tyrannizes over three economic groups: the very poor, the very rich, and combatants in the industrial struggle. These objects of social oppression are tortured, in the

main, in their enslavement to social approval. Secondly, in most instances, playwrights have made use of these particular social problems because of the dramatic situations they present rather than as a means of presenting doctrines. It is further to be noted that the American dramatists treat social tyranny differently from the Europeans. And finally, the most recent studies are psychological, realistic, and pessimistic.

### CHAPTER III

#### RACE PREJUDICE AS AN AGENT OF SOCIAL TYRANNY

Of all the barriers which separate man from man, there is perhaps none quite so impregnable as that of race. The races of mankind have developed differences of constitution and attitude that only serve to widen the breach between them. And finally, to increase further the handicap, the races have reached varied levels of civilization, so that today there exist between them all the ill-feeling and misunderstanding that jealousy, inferiority or superiority can breed. Ordinarily, when the races were isolated from each other there was no conflict or oppression. This is no longer true, and the race in majority in a certain locality is almost sure to tyrannize over the other or others.

Because of the unusual mixing of the races in America, American dramatists have had unusual opportunities to sense the dramatic possibilities in the innumerable conflicts that are certain to arise. Probably in no

other place in the world have playwrights had the same chances to see the misery and the degradation that follow the mingling of the races. It is little wonder that the tyranny that one race exerts over another should have found greater and wider expression in American drama than in that of any other literature.

Since the negroes and the white people have, in the United States, the greatest populations of all the races gathered here, it is not remarkable that the drama should reflect in a majority of instances the struggles ensuing from the contacts of these two races.

There has been a changing treatment of the negro in American drama. Fifty years ago, the negro in the plays appeared as a servant --- a kindly, inefficient mammy type, a pert colored girl, or a man such as Zeke in Anna Mowatt Ritchie's "Fashion". In the drama of that period, the negro servants were pictured with some faults, such as petty thieving, but they were on the whole likable. They were agents of the comedy parts, and were not characterized as particularly oppressed, or at least they were unconscious of their oppression. There was no attempt on the part of writers to analyze them. This type continued into the twentieth century, then the position of the negro changed in the drama. Eugene O'Neill's "The Emperor Jones" was produced in

1920. The play itself is unreal and fanciful; however, it is an excellent study of some of the innate characteristics of the negro race. The emperor is pompous and boasting; he is highly superstitious and emotional. The whole play is keenly analytical. It is a study of the psychology of the primitive negro. Paul Green, in his "No 'Count Boy", has shown a different type of negro, or rather, one with different definitely negro traits emphasized. The negro of his play is imaginative and fond of music, but he is shiftless, lazy, and perfectly content with things as they are. Green and O'Neill have together given a rather good interpretation of the character of the negro. Such is the background for the numerous plays of negro life depicting social tyranny which have appeared in the last few years.

There are several ways in which society can tyrannize over the colored man. In the first place, when the negro is brought to America, he is put in an unnatural environment --- an environment for which nature has provided him no defenses. He stands unprotected against the evils with which society brings him in contact, and unless social institutions protect him, he falls. Such a situation is dramatized in Ernest Howard Culbertson's "Goat Alley". The following summary of it has been given:

A study of the human misery, ignorance, and poverty have bred in the negro section of Washington, D.C. Lucy Belle Dorsey, a hard-working colored girl trying to live decently and remain true to Sam Reed, is finally forced by circumstances she cannot control to "take up" with other men while Reed is in jail. ll

To Lucy Belle Dorsey, society gave no help; to Abraham McCranle in "In Abraham's Bosom", by Paul Green, it gave something but not enough. Society permitted him to have a white father and a colored mother, then placed him in an environment where every desire and craving, his by right of such an ancestry, could only be a source of conflict and pain. From the white race, he has intellect and ambitions; from the black, passion and vividness of imagination. With such a psychological constitution, he grows up in an environment where he is entirely misunderstood. Abe struggled for an education which he longed to use to raise his people. His people, though, they were content to live on as they had been; they were shiftless and could not understand his white man's mind. The white people, on the other hand, failed to sympathize with his negro passions. From neither could he hope for help. The end is inevitably tragic, yet there is a note of hope; Abe's life could

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Mantle's Best Plays of 1921-1922, p. 387.

not be saved, he could not live to see the realization of his dreams, but he died with the ideal for which he had so suffered still in his heart. With almost his last breath he says:

In the end it was so intended. And I  
 end here where I begun. Yet they're asleep,  
 asleep, and I can't wake 'em . . . . .  
 \* \* \* \* \*  
 But they'll wake --- a crack of thunder and  
 deep divided from deep --- a light! A  
 light, and it will be! We got to be free,  
 freedom of the soul and of the mind.  
 Ignorance means sin and sin means destruction.  
 Freedom! Freedom!

From "In Abraham's Bosom", one gets some idea of the suffering that follows when one race takes advantage of another. A very similar instance is cited in "White Dresses", also by Paul Green. Mary McLean, a very pretty colored girl, is loved by Jim Matthews, a very black negro. Her head has been turned, though, by the attentions of Hugh Morgan, the son of the white landlord. Finally, he has presented her with a white dress. Old Candace McLean, Mary's aunt, and Henry Morgan, the boy's father, of course, insist that the affair end at once. Mary is convinced that she had better marry Jim when Old Candace shows her the white dress that Henry Morgan had given her mother so long ago. The hopelessness that Mary feels is expressed very poignantly in one of her speeches:

They ain't no use trying to change it. I've tried and tried, but they ain't no use. I jus' as well do it. Yes, yes, I'll marry him, yes. I'll marry him, an' work, an' hoe an' wash, an' raise more children to go through it all like me, maybe other children that'll want to be white and can't. They ain't nobody can help me. But look at him. He's a nigger --- an' --- yes --- I'm a nigger, too.

There are times when society permits the legal marriage of individuals of the two races. Then, regardless of the original nobility of purpose, the two individuals are thwarted on every side by the unerring darts of prejudice, until they are utterly broken. They can only pull each other to degradation. Eugene O'Neill dramatized an attempt to make successful a mixed marriage in his social tragedy, "All God's Chillun Got Wings". Jim Harris and Ella Downey love each other as children. To them, the fact that he is black and she is white makes no difference. For her sake, he persists in studies that are hard for him. He even endures her scorn, and then befriends her after she has been misled by a worthless white man. They begin their marriage with Jim's noble thought that "all love is white", but in the end one can readily see that Jim's mother is right when she says: "De white and de black sho'ldn't mix dat close. Dere's one road where de black goes on alone ---". The playwright so presents

the action that one feels the antagonism of the black race toward the white intruder as well as the scorn of the white people for their member who has, in their eyes, degraded herself. The antagonism of the colored people is justified in the fact that any incentive Ella may have given Jim to work toward finer things is entirely overbalanced when she ruins his life later.

Edward Sheldon has shown the effect of social tyranny upon the offspring of a mixed marriage in his play, "The Nigger". F. W. Chandler describes it as a play in which "the hero who feels the strongest antipathy to the black race discovers that he himself is of negro blood".<sup>12</sup>

These few examples show the prominence in the drama given the social ostracism, scorn, and misery that must follow the close contacts of the two races. The younger dramatists have built their negro drama upon earlier studies of the innate character of the colored race. Whether the recent popular interest in the brotherhood of man, or only an appreciation of the dramatic intensity of the situation, has brought it about, at least there is a new interest in the negro among the younger of the better known American playwrights.

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Chandler's Aspects of Modern Drama, p. 355.

Besides the negroes, Americans have had contacts with the redman and with the yellow race. Both of which fields have been, for the most part, neglected in the drama. There have been occasional imitations of Chinese or Japanese drama that have found their way into the one-act play domain, but the antagonism for, or oppression, of the Orientals by the Americans, has not been reflected in the drama. "Madame Butterfly", which is more commonly known as an opera, is a tragedy of one thoughtless soldier's neglect of a Japanese wife. It is a play of the early years of the century, and possibly is an outcome of the American contacts in the Orient at that time. If it is a reflection of a practice that was at all common, it certainly reflects a form of social tyranny.

The American Indian has been equally neglected by playwrights. Motion picture producers have lately found that their pictures of the nobility of the redman, in spite of the white man's unjust oppression have met with approval. Novelists and poets have made use of the subject, but no prominent American dramatist has recently produced a play illustrating this phase of social tyranny. William De Mille has shown what might be done with the subject in his play, "Strongheart", written in 1909. It is a story of an Indian of

excellent character and attractive personality. He has heroically saved the life of a young white man. Because of this, he is accepted at the university on equal footing with the white men. He is utterly unselfish and honorable in every way, but his contemplated marriage with a white girl is thought shocking. She is willing to sacrifice the respect of her people for him, but his people refuse to have her in their tribe. The couple find the barrier of race impassible.

The Indian in late years has been confined, for the most part, in drama, to pageants and spectacular productions. It may be that this is to be accounted for in lack of interest. If not, the tyranny of the white man over the Indian should furnish new dramatic material.

Before concluding a survey of the social tyranny resulting from racial antagonism, it is well to give some attention to the prejudice existing between Jew and Gentile. European dramatists have made many applications of this conflict. Of this class are: "The Ghetto", by Heijermans, Henry Bernstein's "Israel", and "The Melting Pot" of Zangwill. The latter is a study of American immigrant life. The best American drama has nothing of this type to offer. The tyranny under which the Jew has lived in America is best shown by the fact that the Jew has been relegated to the comic

part of some of the more serious drama, for example the second-hand furniture dealer and his son in "The Detour". It is a position of about equal importance with that held by the negro in the drama until the last decade. The only late play revolving about the Jewish problem in America is Anne Nichol's "Abie's Irish Rose", which had long runs in all of the places in which it played. It is the happy story of a young couple's escape from the bonds of religious and social prejudices that have existed for centuries between their races. If it is to be included in a study of social tyranny, it may be given as one of the few plays of its kind with a happy ending.

It must be admitted that racial antagonism is a delicate subject to handle, but it is a subject rich in dramatic scenes and episodes. It is too rich a field to be overlooked by the dramatists --- and a study of recent drama shows that it has not been, especially in the case of the negro. Negro drama is almost purely an American contribution to the world of literature. The social tyranny resulting from the contact of Americans and Orientals, which is not so uniquely American, has been less used, and that of the American and Indian has been almost totally neglected by American dramatists. Furthermore, considering the number of Jews in America,

it is remarkable that dramatists have not given this field more attention. European playwrights have shown its rich dramatic resources. Such drama as has come from the inspiration of America as a great melting-pot, has been, for the most part, very serious and deeply concerned with man's most fundamental emotions.

## CHAPTER IV

### CLASS AND ITS RELATION TO SOCIAL TYRANNY

Society fulfills the fundamental laws of nature in that there is always in its midst a process of selection. Certain people fall into groups with others of their kind, and no amount of lofty sentiment of democracy, or the idea that all people are born free and equal, can make it otherwise. Furthermore, among these groups there is always struggle, with ultimately the survival of the fitter. This survival proclaims itself in the domineering of the stronger groups of society over the weaker. Drama has taken up this conflict in society, much as it has the conflicts within the individual, though perhaps with less frequency.

Modern drama has shown, by giving pictures from the life of certain classes, the result of the careless neglect of one group by a stronger group in society. Recent interest in the down-trodden, and those of the lower levels of society, as well as increased

opportunities for people of different levels to become acquainted, has undoubtedly influenced late playwrights, but the subject is not a new one in the drama. The outstanding trait of the plays of class today is their realism. That would suggest that playwrights, in all probability, have emphasized these themes as a result of their search for the novel, and in their desire to take refuge from the conventional in the use of local color. At any rate, class studies in American drama, like those plays dealing with the negro, are definitely American in substance and tone.

If one eliminates those classes which differ, in the main, only financially, and which have been considered under the economic division of social tyranny, there remain only those whose difference is based on heredity or environment. These classes furnish as much friction and as many dramatic incidents as those which may be divided economically. In the case of the classes to be considered in this chapter, the incentive to revolt is law. They are in a sense outlaw groups which are galled by the imposition of the laws that the rest of society consider essential. They are quite often composed of people susceptible to evil influences, either because of their lack of education, or because they are mentally inferior.

Dramatists have presented one group as living in the city and tormenting the law-abiding class by their indifference to law. Their inferior intellect gives them a craving for publicity, that lessens what little power the ineffectual methods have, that society has provided for their punishment. A play illustrating this condition is "Chicago", by Maurine Watkins. George Jean Nathan makes this comment upon it:

This "Chicago" may be described roughly as a burlesque show written by a satirically minded person. The burlesque note is constantly uppermost, though now and again one gets a hint of irony. 13

Nevertheless, it is an outstanding example of drama exhibiting one of the classes of which America should be ashamed. By the very nature of the play, one quickly forgets the characters. It is all exaggeration from the time the silly wife shoots her affinity till she is finally brought to trial. It is a study of a people exhibiting with every glimpse of their personality, a cheapness that can only repulse the better classes of society. They seem to have an inordinate appetite for everything cheap --- gaudy georgette, extravagant emotions, and glaring headlines.

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Quoted from the preface to the play in the Drama League Series.

Miss Watkins emphasizes the part society plays in increasing such an insatiable craving for common things by support of newspapers that give them publicity. (One has heard much recently about the tabloid evil.) In addition, by her handling of the subject, Miss Watkins suggests the difficulty of ever improving such people. They themselves are totally unaware of their situation. They are products of their environment.

Sometimes, in a play, there is one scene in which a criminal exerts tyranny over an individual, as the scene in William Vaughn Moody's "The Great Divide", in which Ruth is attacked by the three ruffians. Such an incident can scarcely be called social tyranny, but it shows a consciousness on the part of dramatists of the physical dominance of criminals over the law-abiding citizens.

Most of the really criminal class are limited to the cities. Paul Green's interest in folk-lore has led him to present an entirely different class. It consists of the white people of the Southern mountains, who have had, for generations, a back-woods environment. They have come of good stock, but their illiteracy has built up a barrier between them and the rest of society. Heredity has influenced them more than environment. To Paul Green, American literature owes the dramatic interpretation of the character of these people.

On one hand, he shows their rebellion against the law that society imposes upon them. A play of this group is "The Last of the Lowries" of 1922. The setting in time is 1874, and, in place, a swampy country in North Carolina. The general tone of the play is tragic throughout. The outlaws have one by one been taken by the officers, until their women are left alone. Cumba, the old mother, is ill, and her daughter and her son's widow do their best to shield her. Always they are dreading the coming of Henry Berry Lowrie, who is the last of their family. They know that the sherriff will take him if he ever dares return home. Finally, he comes, but it is the end. He shoots himself so that the sneriff's men may not have the satisfaction of taking him. In the earlier parts of the play, he is characterized as hopeless, fleeing like a hunted animal. He has a noticeable stoic quality that is also evident in the women. They are all worn by the struggle with social forces too strong for them, but it is only Mayno who permits herself even the weakness of bitterness.

Arthur Hopkins has offered a one-act play called "Moonshine" in which the same rebellion against law is shown --- also, the dogged resistance and persistence of the mountaineer. Luke Hazy tells the revenue officer of the feud with the Crosbys in this way:

Luke: They don't make 'em any braver --- they'd be first-rate folks if they waz't Crosbys.

Revenue Officer: If you feel that way why did you start fighting them?

Luke: I never started no fight. My granddad had some misunderstanding with their granddad. I don't know jes' what it wuz about but I reckon my granddad wuz right, and I'll see it through.

Revenue Officer: You must think a lot of your grandfather,

Luke: Never seen 'im, but it ain't no luck goin' agin your own kin.

This play is probably not as accurate as Paul Green's in its characterization, and it is not a play in which social tyranny is very evident --- or, at least, not the distressing side of it. It is, however, worthy of notice in that it is an interpretation of the characters that certain other dramas have shown as oppressed.

Such interpretations help one to understand Lula Vollmer's "Sun-Up". Rufe Cagle's father, a moonshiner, was shot in the back by the law, and Mrs. Cagle has never forgotten it. Finally, to their mountain farm, came news of the war in 1917. They had a notion that France was somewhere about forty miles to the other side of Asheville, and that the war had something to do with the Yankees. Yet, for all their illiteracy and the narrowness of their vision, they were innately fine. The older generation accepted moonshining and blockading

as legitimate business, but in all their dealings, they are fundamentally honorable. something of the chafing effect of the law upon them is shown in the conversation between Rufe and his mother:

Mrs. Cagle: What does Rufe or Bud owe the Guv'ment? The Guv'ment kept Bud's daddy in jail for twenty years 'cause he tried to make an honest livin' outen the corn he planted and raised. Whut did the Guv'ment do to Rufe's pap? Shot him dead. Shot him in the back while he was protectin' his own property. Fight? Well, I reckon if either one of them boys fights hit will be their own fight, and agin, not fer the Guv'ment.

Rufe: Mon, ye air right as far as ye go. Whut ye say is true, but Pap Todd, and my pap too, wuz a doin' what the Government told them not to do. They wuz a breakin' the law.

Mrs. Cagle: Whut right has the Guv'ment to tell us mountain folks whut to do or whut not to do? Air we beholdin' to them? Air they doin' anything fer us but runnin' up the price of bread and meat till hit's all we kin do to keep body and soul together! 15

Rufe went to war, though, and did not come back. The play is a tragedy, but the end is beautifully written. Mrs. Cagle thinks she hears her son say: "As long as thar air nate --- thar will be --- feuds. As long as thar air women --- thar will be --- sons. I ain't no 16 more to you --- than other mothers' sons --- air to them".

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Sun-Up, I.

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Ibid., III, 2.

Such is a doctrine that cynics never have, but even they must respect. It is so simply stated that it is not weakly sentimental. It gives a key to the situation and glorifies Mrs. Cagle's life. The play is a play of realism that is never on sordid levels, and it is noble in its glorification of man's finer qualities of honor, courage, unselfishness, and love.

Paul Green has, again, introduced another type of the downtrodden southern white people in "The Field God". In some ways it seems to be the southern dramatic counterpart of Edith Wharton's novel, "Ethan Frome". The farm of Hardy Gilchrist is just as unproductive as that of Ethan Frome and his wife, Etta, who is an invalid, too. Gilchrist, like Frome, falls in love with his wife's niece, and lives unhappily ever after. The characters are untaught, and hopelessly mired in a deadening routine. They have lost ambition, as well as all other interests save those centered in their own neighborhood. Lonie and Mag, the two old farm women, who go about from place to place as day laborers, and Jacob and Sion Alford have received about as much attention from society as those lowest in the industrial scale. Their lives are stark and monotonous, just like the nature that surrounds them. From society they have received no color to brighten their lives.

There is another aspect of class and of social tyranny: as soon as two social classes attempt to mix, society lifts the powerful instrument of discomfort --- public opinion. There is a suggestion of this in Edward Sheldon's "The Boss", when Emily Griswold marries Michael Regan, who is socially far lower than she. Sidney Howard has made use of such material in his play "Lucky Sam McCarver". It is summarized thus:

Sam McCarver having risen from lowly beginnings as a barkeeper and Turkish bath rubber, is now the proprietor of a society night club. A frequent visitor is Charlotte Ashe representing the frayed end of a family of American aristocrats. Carlotta is restless, Sam is in love with her and ambitious to complete his social climb. Carlotta marries Sam soon after he helps her out of a nasty mess her drunken party gets into in his club on New Year's Eve. But she finds she can't improve Sam much and he is soon disgusted with her set of parasites. They separate a year later and Carlotta sinks. She is being kept by a society bounder and dies of heart disease the night Sam calls to offer her an allowance. 17

This is a typical example of this type of play in American drama. American dramatists tend to show that even with the rapid rise to wealth of individuals of the lower classes, there is not a successful mingling with..

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Mantle's Best Plays of 1925-1926, p. 181

the higher classes. A marriage of individuals from two classes is quite certain to be a disappointment to one or the other. The percentage of success in such marriages is suggested by the playwrights as scarcely higher than in those between individuals of different races.

It is a little difficult to keep a retrospect of social tyranny of class in drama from being vague and incoherent. In the first place it is one of the elements which is an essential part of other social tyrannies such as those of industry and economy, or even family tyranny, and it is quite likely to figure in the tyranny of convention. Class is a distinct reality in one way, and very abstract and far-reaching in another. One may notice some attention paid to a kind of a fourth level in society --- to those people who are detriments to society --- and perhaps a little more to situations in which there is a mixture of classes, but the special emphasis in recent American drama has been upon the neglect<sup>ed</sup> "white" of the South. This may be accounted for by the interest that certain of the better American playwrights have taken in these people. In addition, the plays concerned with this class and their difficulties have been exceptionally well-written. To this they truly owe much of their

prestige. Whether this interest is a passion, a passing fancy, a mere fad, or something that will be imitated and further developed is an uncertainty just now. Regardless of what becomes of this phase of the development of social tyranny in the drama, at least the subject has brought forth some drama that will undoubtedly have a permanent place in American literature. Some of it is equal in quality and power to the Russian and the other studies of European peasantry.

## CHAPTER V

### SOCIAL TYRANNY WITHIN THE FAMILY

The family is the smallest of all the social units. Within it, the relationships between individuals are of the most binding and sacred nature. Around these relationships society has built up a solid wall of tradition. This mass of tradition, not being very flexible, has cracked to some extent under the pressure of the complex forces of modern life. The institution of the family has been affected so vitally that it has caused endless discussion. Out of the general turmoil and revolt, there has come a mass of drama concerned with the effort of individuals to adjust themselves to, or throw off the tyranny of the family.

Social tyranny within the family assumes two forms. The oppression may result from rigid conventions or traditions, or one member of the family may impose upon, or be imposed upon by the others. In either case, there is evident the unhappiness that is always characteristic of social tyranny whether in the larger

circle, or in the family --- the smallest of social units.

To any one familiar with the history of the drama, it must be evident that reaction to oppression of family life is not a modern development in drama. In the period of ancient Greek drama, Euripides' "Medea" is a tragedy of a cruel woman's revenge upon the husband, whom she suspects of having broken the bonds of family honor which society has placed upon him. And "Shakuntala", a Sanskrit drama of a somewhat later period (about 400-500 A.D.), has the universal theme of the suffering of a neglected wife. In later European drama, the subject has had its place, with increased emphasis after the time of Ibsen. So that the theme may be said to be neither distinctly American nor modern. Nevertheless, American dramatists have given it interesting new lights that are a definite development of certain conditions peculiar to the last few years.

Since almost prehistoric times, man has been considered the head of the family. Consequently, whenever a woman takes over the leadership, one of those abnormal situations is created which dramatists can use readily. Shakespeare made a comedy of his "The Taming of the Shrew"; most modern playwrights treat the subject

more seriously. On the other hand, the modern managing woman is subdued very frequently to the same docility that finally characterized the shrewish Kate.

Shakespeare made Kate a victim of her own willful character. The modern women of her type are both willful and over-efficient, if one accepts Lewis Beach's "The Square Peg" and George Kelley's "Craig's Wife" as representative. They are examples of the possible effect of the American craze for efficiency.

Mrs. Craig is a selfish woman. Both she and her home are in perfect taste. Her life is perfectly ordered. She has been humored by her husband until she is absolutely without consideration for anyone. She has become cold and heartless. At last the structure of her happiness, which she has founded without depth, is about to fall. She is saved by the strength of her husband which she has previously ignored.

Lewis Beach suggests a woman capable of the same disastrous meddling but narrow rather than selfish. Mrs. Huckins manages a remarkably smooth-running household, but it is an uncomfortable home --- the kind conducive to rebellion and deceit, rather than inspirational. Her blind dominance finally drives her husband to his death. She has escaped tyranny, but

at the cost of being herself a hopeless tyrant.

Dramatists in general suggest that woman in marriage must accept a position of sacrifice and unselfish service. There is over her, in marriage, the age-old tradition of man's dominance. Only by accepting it, can she be happy. Dramatists permit a woman to have her own way only when she rules a man by delicate feminine charm, as in Percy Mackaye's "Mater".

The increasing independence of woman has raised another problem in regard to marriage; what effect does a woman's career have upon marriage? Is she justified in letting it interfere with her home life? Can she, by any chance, have both? Just what ethical problems does woman's equality with man in the business world arouse?

As long ago as 1911, Rachel Crothers took up the discussion of the effect of a woman's career upon marriage in "He and She". She presents two types of woman. Both Ann Herford and Ruth Creel are women of talent; also, they have much feminine charm. They glory in their careers, and men to them are secondary. They are unwilling to undergo the sacrifices that make a home. Daisy Herford, on the other hand, has the appearance of a business woman, with a longing in her heart for a home. She longs for a man to depend upon.

Ann Herford excels her husband in his own art at the cost of his pride and almost the ruin of her daughter's life. The men in the play are the type that women have idealized. They are men who are humiliated by a woman's superiority. Possibly these men are the abstract creation of a woman's idealism. --- if not, the play would seem to suggest that marriage and career are not compatible.

Jesse Lynch Williams somewhat later wrote a comedy, "Why Marry?", upon the same theme, but with a slightly different viewpoint. In this instance a girl is about to be married. Her brother is determined that her husband shall be of his choosing. She has selected a poor professor. To him, she thinks she can be a real companion, since they have similar interests and she has worked side by side with him for so long. She silences the objections of her brothers and sisters by very frank, broad-minded comments on their own married life, and marries the man she wants without giving up her career. Since the play stops at that point, the author gives no suggestion as to the final outcome of such a situation. It would be interesting to know how successful the playwright would have made the marriage had he continued the story. Quite probably it would have been a happy one; at the period of the play, people had almost convinced themselves that woman was man's equal; that

she was to advance step by step with him. The distinctly feminine woman had, at that time, rather lost in favor.

Although one rarely thinks of it, a man's career, too, may be interrupted by marriage. Such is the situation in Philip Barry's "You and I". The father had given up an artistic career for a more lucrative one, and now, after his son is grown, he considers returning to his art. His son, though, is found to be in a place where he must make the decision that his father once made --- he loves a girl, but he cannot hope to marry her and continue his artistic career. The father, as a true father, sacrifices his art once more that his son may have a career and happiness, too. Barry suggests that one obeys the tyranny of the family or forfeits peace and true happiness.

"Welded", by Eugene O'Neill, is a study of marriage wherein both the husband and wife have careers. The central idea of the play is not concerned with the careers, but the play is an interesting attempt to show the modern apartment marriage. Even a marriage entered into by artists and founded upon artistic principles would seem to have bonds that bind.

People have sought more and more often to escape the tyrannical demands and obligations, that society has

imposed upon marriage, by divorce. There has been widely expressed public opinion on the subject, and, as one would expect, the controversy has made its way into the drama. And, as one would further expect, Rachel Crothers has entered this field of the drama. Her "Mary the Third" is an original treatment of the subject.

The play describes marriage through three generations. Mary of the third generation is contemplating marriage just as her mother and grandmother have done before her. Her mother is finding her own marriage very difficult, and is contemplating divorce. She is saved from the step when she overhears, by chance, her son and daughter expressing their opinions in regard to divorce. The realization that the complexity of marriage makes it a tyranny that is not easy to escape is impressed upon her. She describes that complexity when she says: "I mean that we were absolutely right in what we believed but we've got to be big enough not to hurt other people with it".

According to a late copy of the "Theatre Arts Monthly", Miss Crothers has only recently had another play upon this subject produced. It is called "Let Us Be Gay", and is commented upon in this manner;

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Mary the Third, III.

"Let Us Be Gay", thanks at least fifty percent to its extremely competent direction by the author herself, seemed one of the best of recent American social comedias. We have few enough of these, and as a rule those that we do have lack sparkle and surface smartness and civilized irresponsibility. Our comedies of week-ends, evening dresses, and boiled shirts are inclined to slide into farce at one end, and into serious discussion of "problems" at the other. Miss Crothers' highly diverting play keeps clear of farce, but it does, more than once, ring a little loud with its author's very positive convictions about love and marriage.

A divorced couple meet by accident on a week-end party, after years of silence but not forgetfulness. The hostess tells the wife to lure her husband away from a young girl, whose engagement, thanks to him, seems in danger. After some very amusing incidents and a great deal of pleasant talk, perhaps a little too much talk, the couple are reunited. 19

Jesse Lynch Williams wrote a companion piece for his "Why Marry?" and called it "Why Not?". The situation is possible, but not likely. A man and his wife find in another couple the sweethearts of their youth. By mutual agreement the two couples exchange husbands and wives. They find that because of their children, they cannot be happy. They, too, find that it is not easy to escape from the tyranny of marriage.

There have been a number of plays in recent years concerned with divorce, but they are, in the main, very

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Robert Littell's "'Journey's End' Broadway in Review", p. 330, Theatre Arts Monthly, May, 1929.

similar. Divorce, after all, is not a satisfactory escape. The chief reason that it fails is the complication introduced by the existence of children and the necessary consideration of their happiness and welfare.

Children are one of the complicating elements in marriage. In "You and I", for a son, the father gives up art; in "Why Not?", divorce fails because of children; in Lewis Beach's "The Goose Hangs High", the father and mother make every sacrifice for their children. Drama has considered rather carefully the tyranny developing from the relation of children to their parents.

Sometimes the situation is an unhappy one because one member of the family is helplessly under the control of the others. For instance, the youngest child is sometimes made dependent upon the others, much to his own detriment. Philip Barry has treated this humorously in his comedy, "The Youngest". Richard Winslow has been under the authority of the others who do not understand him for so long that he has become sullen and mildly rebellious. When a house-guest gives him confidence in himself, he suddenly shows his remarkable possibilities. When he escapes from the yoke of authority, his personality develops. The play is not problematical, but it is a good-natured portrayal of one

type of family oppression.

Of a more serious nature are those plays dealing with what is commonly called the revolt of youth, and which has recently taken almost as much space in periodicals as the divorce problem. Authorities suggest that it is a phenomenon common to each generation, and differs from time to time chiefly in the direction it takes. The present revolt is in the main against the Victorian conventions and ideals in which the older generation was steeped.

Arthur Richman has presented the problem from one angle in "Ambush". The father has settled in a narrow rut bounded by convention. He forces his daughter into disaster and unhappiness by his narrowness. After all, it resolves itself into the old problem of the child's revolt against excessive strictness in the home.

George Middleton suggests another possibility of the situation in a one-act play, "Tradition". George Cliphant loves his daughter dearly, but he does not understand her. She wishes to be an actress and to be independent. The play gives the story of the girl's rebellion against tradition, represented in her father, who firmly believes in an old-fashioned protection of women. She carries on a fight for art that her mother gave up. One rather expects the daughter to win.

Rachel Crothers, with her characteristic interest in social comedy, contributed to this phase of drama with "Nice People". It is a play of the years just following the Great War. Also, it is a play of those times in which youth was mad in its pursuit of thrills, giving a picture of a situation in which the pendulum swung too far. Balance and poise were lost in the blind rush. Miss Crothers lets a girl get into a compromising situation because of her unlimited financial resources. Then she would offer for her redemption hard, wholesome work. The play is not particularly strong or stirring, but it is an excellent example of the treatment of youth's revolt against the tyranny of filial obligation and the conventions that society has imposed.

And finally, is not Eugene O'Neill's "Strange Interlude", in one of its many lights, a message of youth's revolt carried on? Mina would cast aside convention, she would disregard marriage obligations. But did she find the satisfaction she sought? The play is an ultra-modern interpretation of the problem.

The drama has followed society into its family difficulties. It has caught the spirit of dissension in the family, the turmoil of divorce, and the revolt of youth. It has noted the possible means of escape

offered those who find themselves oppressed by the relationship in which they find themselves. For the most part, however, it can offer no permanent relief from the old-fashioned ideas of sacrifice and service in the home. Even Eugene O'Neill, who could certainly not be accused of sentimentality, fails to find a satisfactory escape. Drama may expose the ugliness of American home life, and the evils that find their way into the family relationship, but on the whole it shows the futility of attempts to escape the tyranny that society has set over the family.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONVENTION AND SOCIAL TYRANNY

Convention is a rule or usage based on general agreement. It is something of a standard of judgement by which character is determined and at the same time something of a prop for social morality. When convention is considered in relation to social tyranny, it is notable that the individual stands alone against society more than in almost any other variety of social tyranny. In the oppression of poverty and riches, of race, of class, and within the family, there is frequently one group against another, but in the case of convention, the conflict is that of one individual alone against society.

Drama has drawn its material from the unconventional more often than otherwise. In this it follows human nature, for after all, it is the man who is a little different who gives to life drama and romance. It is he who appeals to the sense of adventure that makes life colorful. People may not understand a dreamer --- they

may call him a fool, or be angry with him, but they are interested in him. The moral outcast is in much the same position; people may be repulsed by him, or they may consider him an outrage, but quite frequently there is a likeable trait that attracts them to him. It is this latter type of personality that dramatists have developed.

The individuals treated in drama concerned with the tyranny of social convention fall naturally into three classes. Those whose idealism is not accepted, by people in general, are in one group. A second consists of those whose morality has taken them beyond the bounds of convention. Finally, there are those who are, at the time of the drama, in the process of revolt against convention. In this last case, the playwright attempts to show the mental processes accompanying the ordeal.

The social tyranny that the individuals of each of these groups feel, comes as a result of lack of understanding. They are unable or unwilling to adapt themselves to the more narrow standards of society, and in consequence forego the sympathy that one man receives from another.

There have been some interesting studies in modern drama of the effect of society upon a man with an ideal. This is apparently a favorite theme of Channing Pollock,

and, furthermore, one with which he seems to have done his best work. His play, "The Enemy", is a war story, which, of course, gives it ample opportunity for dramatic scenes. The philosophic old professor has instilled his idealism into his daughter --- a beautiful girl with a remarkably beautiful character. They are vividly contrasted with the materially minded capitalist, who selfishly profits by the suffering of others. Through tragedy and hardship they cling to their doctrine of love, and no amount of privation can change their lives. Their suffering only makes their characters bigger and finer, and in the end they have poise and peace.

Some thing of the same philosophy is expressed in "The Fool", also by Pollock. It is a play centering around the much questioned possibility of a man, today, being able to live like Christ. When Daniel Gilchrist tried such an experiment, he was immediately labelled a fool. Even the people who liked him best could not see his viewpoint. Through everything, even the loss of the woman he loved, he remained true to what he thought was right. After a long time, those, who had deserted him, began to see that he was stronger than they were, and that he was in the right. They began to go to him for aid. In the end, he performed a spectacular miracle, and attained his place on a hero's pedestal. It makes

a vivid impression, but not a lasting one. There is something of artificiality and preachiness about the play. For instance, when Clare, the woman who once refused his love, sees her mistake, she asks, "Must I go on forever paying for one mistake?" Daniel answers, "Somebody must pay for our mistakes. That it was wrong to make a bargain doesn't make it right to break the bargain when we get tired of it." Such is a noble sentiment, but its manner of statement has not the subtlety of true art.

Channing Pollock needs offer no escape for his heroes, because they grow so strong under the tyranny that they either build a wall of peace around themselves, or they overcome the prejudice against them and win everyone to their way of thinking. There is a weakening didactic element in his plays. His men are so fine that one wishes they would fall just once. There is almost a smugness about the best of them. His plays have a tendency toward sentimentality.

William Vaughn Moody has made an interesting study of a religious idealist from the psychologist's point of view, in "The Faith Healer". Ulrich Michaelis has been a sheep-herder in New Mexico, but he has come as a faith-healer to a town in the Middle West. His faith leaves him after he has exerted his powers over the

invalid aunt of Rhoda, the girl he loves. Rhoda's love for him revives his faith in himself, and his interest in his mission. His ideal is saved from the attacks upon it by society through the love of a girl. The drama is peculiar in a way. While it is not realistic, neither is it sentimental. Perhaps it might best be called psychological.

Paul Green treats the matter in an entirely different light. "In Abraham's Bosom" shows his style in this connection. Abraham suffers intensely for his ambition. He never attains it, and dies because of it. Paul Green makes him the martyr that reality would have made him. It is a story of crudeness made beautiful by an ideal, but that ideal gave to Abraham only pain.

In another play, "The Lord's Will", Paul Green just as realistically pictures another kind of a dreamer. Lem Adams, a country preacher and tenant farmer, is so engrossed in the pursuit of his ideal that he has become narrow. For the protection of his ideal from the attacks of society, he has built around himself a shell of calm poise, which leaves him indifferent to the earnest pleading of his wife. Even the death of his little daughter cannot shake his fanaticism. At the end of the play he is as narrow as at the beginning. It is a character sketch perfectly true to the great

majority of dreamers and idealists.

Besides those men and women, strong and weak, who try to raise the level of a society, that does not want to be raised, by a devotion to an ideal or ambition, there are those beyond the pale of convention because their standards, morally, do not conform to what society demands. They have been either tolerant or weak to the extent that they have lost sight of the true and the good.

Eugene O'Neill's "Anna Christie" is a dramatic character study of a social outcast. She is an ultra-modern example of the wayward woman, in whom dramatists have been interested for so long. Her father, the captain of a coal barge, does not know that she has lived by the sale of her body, neither does Mat Burke, an Irish sailor who loves her. There is a powerful scene of disclosure, and much discussion of the double standard. The play shows the struggle of a girl to overcome all the environment she has ever known, and to recover from all the evils society has taught her. Some of the sinister aspect of the entire drama is contained in this constantly reiterated speech of the old captain: "Fog, fog, fog, all the bloody time! You can't see where you vas goin, no! Only that ole devil sea, she know." As in so many of O'Neill's plays, there is an appalling sense of futility.

Louis Kaufman Anspacher has presented another woman who would defy convention in "The Unchastened Woman". Caroline Knollys is characterized by her selfishness and her dominance. She would attain her ends, regardless of the feelings or rights of another, by her very cleverness. The playwright shows excellent skill in character study. To the end, Mrs. Knollys is unchastened. One might desire to see the good people win, but the playwright gives no sentimental ending. Caroline Knollys has defied convention and she will continue to do so. One does not like her --- she is maddening in her indifference to society's demands of a woman, but her indifference cannot be pierced.

Owen Davis has chosen to tell of another outlaw type in his "Icebound". Ben Jordan, the youngest in a family, has been forced to flee. It is well known that if he comes home, he will be arrested. His family distrust him. From society, he has no incentive to do good. When the family are gathering just before his mother's death, he comes in --- much to the disgust of the rest of the family. Afterward, he remains on the farm with Jane Crosby, who has been his mother's companion. Jane eventually makes a respected man of him through her love and understanding, and he is again accepted by society. Jane, as did Mrs. Jordan, his mother, saw within him a sincerity and depth which all

the other children lacked. After all, he was the most likable of the family.

Jack Brookfield, the professional gambler in Augustus Thomas' "The Witching Hour", is an example of a man in a way outside the law, and yet with the traits of a hero. He made his money gambling, but he had a sportsman's honor, a strong character, and a generous heart. In a crisis, the people of reputation accepted his ready aid, and he was able to relieve the situation because of his strength and experience. Then, in the end, he gave up his illicit business, just as people would expect him to, for the love of a lady, who righteously demanded it. Thomas has made him the hero of his play.

There is a tendency on the part of society to misjudge their heroes. Gilbert Emery has developed this conception in his play "The Hero". Andrew Lane is a commonplace man who lives in a careful, unassuming way. His wife, Hester, longs for romance, and Oswald, his brother, seems to her an embodiment of it. He has the name of hero because of the feats he had accomplished in moments of reckless daring. His whole life has been self-centered and useless, but colorful and romantic. He is immoral, but he dies in an heroic act, so people acclaim him a hero. They think of his brother, who

heroically lives his own unselfish, colorless life as best he can, as a ne'er-do-well. Such is the uncertainty of the favor of society. The play is, of course, an exaggeration of types, but it is a clever presentation of social reaction and its effect upon character.

The average person thinks that it would be easier to live by his own standards than by those set by society. There are a number of times when society's standard fails to make possible the expression of full character in an individual --- for better or for worse. However, he who finally breaks away from the convention accepted by society is almost always a very strong character or a very weak one. The average man finds it easier to cling to the support offered by convention. This being true, there comes a crisis in some lives at the point where a decision must be made. The nature of the situation makes it excellent material for drama and it has been used in a variety of ways by dramatists.

Early in the twentieth century, William Vaughn Moody wrote "The Great Divide". It is an example of a woman in such a situation. Ruth Jordan had been reared in surroundings of culture and refinement. She was of a noble nature and very resourceful. In her heart she felt stirrings of a rebellion against the traditions she knew. Rather unusual circumstances had taken her with

her brother to Arizona. In a crucial moment, she, to save her honor, gave herself to the one of three ruffians who would win the toss of a coin. Fortunately for her, the man, who won her, was a gentleman, but, after the transaction, she is confronted with the pride for which her New England ancestry is responsible. She finally leaves him and returns to Massachusetts. There her heart longs for him, but her pride is deeply rooted. There is a turmoil in her mind, but she, in the end, accepts her unconventional husband.

The play is a product of the over-emphasis upon tradition of the Victorians, and the awakening rebellion against it in the early years of the century. The girl of today might not have the mental discomfort that followed Ruth Jordan's rash act --- convention has relaxed, and lifted its tyranny some what. The play is undoubtedly true to the woman of its day, and to the demands of its audience in that day.

Several years later, Edward Sheldon put a man in somewhat the same situation in his play, "Romance". In this instance a young clergyman falls in love with an Italian opera singer who has a past. The clergyman's personality has been shaped by tradition, ideals of honor, and family pride. His future is a brilliant one if he will remain true to his past. No, fortunately,

arouses only the best in the girl, and she refuses to let him give up his career for her. He marries another girl, who is the perfect wife for a clergyman, and as a reward, he advances and prospers. In addition, his boyish passion has remade the hard-hearted, cynical gold-digger into a charitable woman. Sheldon is a trifle more sincere in his treatment of the subject than Moody. There is a hint of sadness in his happy ending that prevents it from seeming quite so forced. There is considerable technical strength in the final picture of the old bishop lost in reverie as he dreams of the one true love of which society robbed him through the pressure of convention.

Using Eugene O'Neill again as representative of outstanding recent playwrights, one finds an entirely different treatment of the situation. To return to his play, "Strange Interlude", one finds an example of a woman's gradual break from the standards of society. This is really not a case of social tyranny, because Nina is hindered only by standards which interfere with her alone. It is her own weakness which she has to blame rather than any too great expectation on the part of society. Such a play is, in connection with this study, interesting in that it shows the trend of the dramatists' presentation of the individual's attitude

toward society. By a series of careful calculations, the individual gradually casts off all the restraint and protection of convention, with logic --- true or false --- as a shield.

Such a treatment would suggest that dramatists are becoming far more concerned with picturing the full expression of character of the individual than any development that might result. They write for an audience that does not demand that the individual be redeemed and return to convention in the end. There is no attempt at a happy ending.

All in all, convention, as a form of social tyranny, offers to the dramatist many possibilities. The dreamer and idealist may grow to win honor, grow to be crushed in the end, or his life may become barren and narrow because of ambition or idealism. Of those, who depart from convention in a moral way, the dramatists have shown favor to that type which has likeable traits and attractive personality. The people of that type are characters of strength. In the end, they almost always permit themselves to be enclosed by convention again. Drama shows definitely the unrelenting force of convention.

## CONCLUSION

Social tyranny has made for itself a definite place in American drama. Its roots are buried deep in two powerful influences --- the social and the literary. From such soil it has branched and blossomed into something more artistic than didactic. The social background is a blend of nineteenth century humanitarianism, and twentieth century revolt. On the literary side, this phase of drama reaches back into the work of Ibsen and his European contemporaries. The result of the forces has been drama in America that has cosmopolitan glamor and range, but a distinctly American treatment.

European drama has given much to the American, but in many fundamental respects the two are widely different; American dramatists have rarely resorted to the pure satire and didacticism that characterize Shaw and Galsworthy. Neither have they dug into the sores and abnormalities of humanity, as one finds European dramatists --- Strindberg, Gorky, Tchekov --- so

frequently doing. Ibsen, with his emphasis upon the individual's part in the social problem, has been more closely adhered to. In general, it may be said that American dramatists have been more interested in the artistic than the reformative side of their literary productions, and have used the material of social tyranny only because of its wealth of dramatic episode and scene.

with such a background, and such an approach, as has been suggested, American playwrights have drawn their socially oppressed characters from within the family --- the smallest of social units --- with its partialities, and unrelenting traditions; from the city streets where poverty and riches rob life of its beauty, or industry crushes the soul; from the farms where endless labor and dull routine make life as barren and stark as its setting. They have depicted characters struggling with a convention or tradition which robs them of full expression. In so far as the evils of society continue to exert a relentless dominance in life, the drama reflects that dominance. American life in its very newness is rich in complex social situations that thwart development of the individual. One of these situations, which has been prominent and distinctly American in recent drama, is a result of the

relations of the negro and the white man. There are other relationships as rich in dramatic resource, which are yet to be utilized. The material for social tyranny is apparently unlimited for the American playwrights of today.

Considering the daring, in many respects, of modern life, one might expect the dramatist of recent years to offer daring escapes from the tyranny of society for his characters. These are, in general, not found. Again and again there are the age-old solutions of compensation in character development through love, patience, unselfishness, and the other universal virtues. There is, though, a modern fashion of leaving the characters unredeemed and unhappy to the end, which is growing in evidence. The playwright now creates for a people so trained in modern schools of psychology that they do not demand the happy ending. Pessimism has made its mark on modern dramatic literature, in the development of character.

American playwrights have created their plays with the opportunity of European imitation. They have definitely reflected the life of the period represented in that they have colored their work with the frankness that modern schools of psychology and sociology have lent; they have written to please an audience trained in

behaviorism, Freudianism, and naturalism --- an audience vitally interested in sociological problems and theories for the betterment of souls; and above all, they have made every possible use of those things which are distinctly American. The result is the emergence of a true American drama.

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