A Historical Study of Gilmor Brown's Fairoaks Playbox: 1924-1927

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

In the seventeen years since the end of World War II during which central staging has become increasingly prevalent, two alternative approaches to play production have also been developing. Both share in the movement away from proscenium staging. These alternatives have been efforts to retain the actor-audience intimacy of central staging without the rigidity of the pure arena theatre. One of these approaches is horseshoe staging in which the audience surrounds the acting area on three sides making possible the use of scenery at the open end of the "horseshoe," The other approach includes within its province both central and horseshoe staging as well as other forms. This is the production concept called flexible staging,

In flexible staging no single arrangement is considered as permanent for a theatre. The space allotted to actors and audience is changed to suit the needs of each production. Thus the seating and acting areas may assume a number of configurations limited only by the potentialities of the theatre building.

While the concept of complete flexibility may be traced back to proposals made by Adolph Appia around 1921, flexible theatre as a general trend has acquired momentum principally in the past ten years. In 1953, Gassner pointed out the advantages of flexible staging for non-commercial and educational theatres interested in arena productions:

> Indeed the ideal solution for the 'little theatre' it has been proposed is flexible staging rather than invariable central staging; the stage could then b an arena when central staging seems most feasible, but could be played differently when a different type of production is deemed preferable.[1]

In the same publication, the experienced arena producer, Kelly Yeaton, affirmed that "the trend today seems to be toward the flexible policy, although most flexible theatres operate with their acting areas largely surrounded by audience." [2]

[1] John Gassner, Producing the Play, rev. ed., p, 538.

[2] Kelly Yeaton "Arena Production" in Gassner, op. cit., p. 544.

It is too early to discern whether adaptable structures will become the dominant mode of theatre architecture for the future, but there is no question of the importance of the concept at the present time. In the United States a recently constructed flexible theatre is the Harvard Drama Center which can be adjusted for central, horseshoe, or proscenium staging. One of the new theatres to be built for the Lincoln Center for Performing Arts in New York City

will be a flexible theatre. Furthermore, several of the designs for "ideal theatres" produced by the participating teams of leading stage designers and architects under a 1959 Ford Foundation grant have included provisions for flexibility. The George Izenour-Paul Schweikher plans call for

> . . . mechanical walls, and flexible ceiling lighting to allow a director to carve any desired shape room. By means of computer controls the room can change shape during the performance. The large theatre uses fixed sections of seats mounted partially on large movable platforms to transform the proscenium shape into three- or four-sided seating.[3]

Flexible theatres have also been built recently on a much more modest scale. Occidental College in Los Angeles, for example, has within the past three years opened its "Papermill Playhouse" which provides for central staging, end staging and other variants, without any elaborate equipment.

In England, interest has existed for some time in the "open stage," a horseshoe arrangement using a raised platform. Flexible staging, however, has also been pursued. According to Richard Southern, Southampton University was scheduled to construct an adaptable theatre in 1961. Ten years earlier Southern had designed one which was built for the University of Bristol.[4]

In Germany, a small theatre has been constructed at Mannheim which is a "very ingenious structure providing for at least six variations of seating and performance areas." [5]

As one looks backward, several theatres constructed in the United States in previous decades appear as landmarks in the development of flexibility. In 1951 Frederick Koch, Jr. opened his Ring Theatre at the University of Miami which combined peripheral revolving stages with a central arena. At the University of California in Los Angeles in 1942 Ralph Freud converted a basement room into a theatre which has used a great many staging arrangements.[6] In 1941, Paul Baker established his Studio Theatre at Baylor University with stages built around the sides of a room with the audience seated in swivel chairs.[7]

As the history of flexible staging is traced backwards in this country it finally comes to a stopping place. This point is in 1924 with the founding of Gilmor Brown's Playbox theatre within his home on Fairoaks Avenue in Pasadena. This extremely intimate theatre, according to all the presently available evidence, appears to have been the first flexible playhouse in the United States. The historians Macgowan and Melnitz have

[3]Leon G. Shiman, "Theatres for Tomorrow," Saturday Review, April 28, 1962, p. 45.
[4]Richard Southern, The Seven Ages of the Theatre, pp. 290-291.
[5]Theodore Hatlen, Orientation to the Theatre, p. 265.
[6]George Altman, et al.. Theatre Pictorial, item # 516.
[7]"The Technician's Workshop," Theatre Arts Monthly, July, 1941, P. 547.

credited it as the originator of the form in this country, pointing out that it preceded Okhlopkov's efforts in the Realistic Theatre by a number of years.[8]

Under Brown's direction. The Fairoaks Playbox and its successors achieved the greatest longevity of any American flexible theatre to date. The Playbox Theatre presented plays for thirty-three seasons, between 1924 and 1959. The Fairoaks Playbox was moreover an important early practitioner of central staging. As Indicated by Margo Jones in her survey of theatre-in-the-round, the first Playbox presented centrally staged productions approximately eight years before Glenn Hughes began his work in a Seattle Penthouse. Margo Jones found only two sources of central staging in the United States which preceded the Fairoaks Playbox, These were Azubah Latham and Milton Smith's productions at Columbia University dating from 1914, and T. Earl Pardoe's productions at Brigham Young University in 1922.[9]

Since the Fairoaks Playbox theatre has become recognized as the pioneering flexible playhouse in the United States and a significant contributor to the development of central staging, it might be expected that the student of theatre history would have access to a considerable amount of information concerning it. The reverse of this situation is actually the case. Pew details have been presented in generally available publications. More, but not a great deal, has been written about Brown's second Playbox theatre on Herkimer Street, which was constructed in 1930.

This study was undertaken to penetrate the obscurity which presently exists concerning the exact nature of the Fairoaks Playbox. The purpose was to give a detailed production history which would serve as a step toward more clearly defining the role of the Fairoaks Playbox in the development of central and flexible staging*

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study has two principal aspects:

1. What experiences and influences led Gilmor Brown to establish an intimate flexible theatre?
   (a) What was the nature of Brown's theatrical training and general background?
   (b) What was his previous experience in forms departing from conventional proscenium staging?
   (c) What specific influences stimulated Brown to found the Playbox?7
   (d) What was the relationship of the Playbox to the Pasadena Community Playhouse?
   (e) What was the nature of the physical plant selected by Brown for his intimate flexible theatre?
2. What was the production history of the Fairoaks Playbox?

   For each production the following inquiries were made:

[8]K. McGowan and W. Melnitz, *The Living Stage*, p. 501.
[9]Margo Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, p. 38

(a) Who directed the play?

(b) What was the nature of the play?

(c) How was the play staged?

  i. Where were the sets placed in the room?

  ii. Where did the audience sit?

  iii. What were the patterns of movement and grouping of actors?

(d) What were the characteristics of the scenery, properties, lighting, and special effects?

(e) What was the nature of the acting?

  i. To what extent was it representational or presentational?

  ii. What adjustments were made for the unusual intimacy of the theatre?

  iii. Who were the individual actors?

(f) How did audience members react to the performances?

  i. How did the general audience react?

  ii. How did the critics react?8

Definition of Terms

A number of specialized terms were used In this study. Some of them are commonly used by theatre historians, while others have been more recently added to our growing theatrical vocabulary, The following list includes those terms most prominently used, briefly defined within the context of this study.

Simultaneous Settings

A scheme in which individual settings, each representing a separate location, are put in place before a performance begins. The action then moves from set to set, avoiding the necessity for shifting scenery during the performance.

Formal Stage

A stage which employs permanent architectural elements as a basic scenic background.

Permanent, Adaptable Setting

A single basic setting which remains throughout a play, undergoing minor modifications to suggest changes of scenic locale.

Actor-Audience Intimacy

The attempt to bring the actors and the events of the play into a closer relationship to the audience, heightening the audience's sense of participation in the drama.

Intimate Theatre

A very small theatre in 'which audience members are physically close to the actors.

Presentational Acting

The presenting or showing of characters and the story to the audience, with the actors often playing directly to the audience, revealing their awareness of the presence of spectators.

Representational Acting

Acting in which the performers apparently assume the identity of the characters they are playing, attempt to hide awareness of the presence of spectators, and play entirely to the other characters in the drama.

Actualism

The attempt to create the impression that the events of a play are occurring as in real life.

Proscenium Staging

Staging in which the proscenium arch is considered as a definite line of demarcation between the world of the play and the world of the audience. The actors confine their performance to the area behind the arch.

Non-Proscenium Staging

Forms of staging in which a proscenium arch is either completely absent or is disregarded as a line of demarcation between the acting area and the audience area*

Flexible, or Adaptable, Theatre

A theatre in which it is possible to stage a play in a variety of forms, with no single arrangement considered as permanent for audience and acting areas.

Central Staging

Arena staging, circus staging, theatre-in-the- round.—The arrangement of the action of a play so that the audience sits around the actors on four sides.

Horseshoe Staging

An arrangement in which the audience Bits on three sides of the actors. On the aide unoccupied by the audience, it is possible to place a scenic background*

"Sandwich" Staging

The audience sits in two opposing sections with the acting area in between.

"L" Staging

The audience sits along two walls of the room, while the acting area extends along the other two walls.

End Staging

The audience sits opposite the acting area. This is the traditional audience placement in proscenium staging.

Opposite-end Staging, or "Turnabout" Staging

The use of acting areas at opposite ends of a room. The audience site between

them. The term ”turnabout” refers to the necessity for turning the audience’s seats to face in the opposite direction when the second acting area is used.[10]

Significance of the Study

This study was undertaken to give the first detailed account of Gilmor Brown’s first Playbox theatre which has been recognized as the earliest known flexible playhouse in the United States. Since there is now a growing interest in the flexible use of theatre space, additional knowledge concerning the American roots of the movement should be of value to students of theatre history. Furthermore those wishing to produce plays in intimate flexible theatres may find some practical assistance in studying the production record of the Fairoaks Playbox.

Along with the historical record and reconstruction of the staging at the Fairoaks Playbox, this study has brought forth a more precise and extensive account of Gilmor

Brown’s background than has hitherto been available. In addition to founding the Fairoaks Playbox, he was prominent as the founder and long-term Supervising Director of the Pasadena Playhouse. He was a leader in the non-commercial theatre in America.

Review of the Literature

Other than the four pages by Gilmor Brown contained in an autobiographical essay published in 1957, the specific literature dealing with the Fairoaks Playbox consists of brief references ranging from a few sentences up to a few paragraphs.

The first mention of the Fairoaks Playbox, other than references contained in purely local sources, apparently was made in *The Little Theatre News*, a nationally distributed publication of the New York Drama League. In January, 1925 the periodical described the Fairoaks Playbox as a tiny, intimate theatre presenting unusual plays.[11]

In 1928 Brown described the role of the Fairoaks Playbox within the comprehensive program of the Pasadena Community Playhouse, declaring that it was an experimental theatre. Its experiments, however, were more advanced than those of either the Workshop or Mainstage of the Playhouse.

It demanded a more advanced audience, he claimed, one ”rich in discrimination and free from popular bias.” [12]

In her Master’s thesis entitled ”A History of the Pasadena Community Playhouse,” May Rose Borum in the following year presented some significant general statements on the use of central staging in the Fairoaks Playbox and the use of various parts of the room for acting areas during a performance. She obtained her information from

[10]The Turnabout Theatre of Los Angeles, in existence during the 1940’s, had a puppet stage at one end of the theatre and a stage for live entertainers at the other. The audience sat in swivel chairs. At intermission time the chairs were turned so that the members of the audience faced in the opposite direction from which they formerly faced.

[11]*Little Theatre News*, January 26, 1925.

[12]Statements of Brown quoted by F. W. Hersey in “unusual Aspects of the Pasadena Community Playhouse,” Drama, 19:50, November, 1928.

interviews with Gilmor Brown. The thesis also contained a brief but important quotation of Brown's opinion of the acting technique required for the Fairoaks Playbox; the necessity for trained actors who had absolute control and concentration in their performances.[13]

Kenneth Macgowan, in his informative survey of American community theatres published in 19S9, very briefly referred to the experimental work of the Fairoaks Playbox. He noted that this intimate theatre was one in which the audience and the stage were confined in the same room.[14]

In an article in *Theatre Arts*, concerned primarily with the Herkimer Playbox, Harriet Green told of the first three seasons of the theatre In the Fairoaks studio. She indicated in a few sentences of description that the plays were given -without a stage, and with meticulous attention to "detail and finish of performance." She observed that a strong factor in the theatre's success had been the discovery by audiences that under favorable conditions illusion could be heightened rather than dispelled by close proximity to actors.[15]

In 1942 Glenn Hughes acknowledged that Brown had preceded him in staging productions "with the play intruding Itself into the audience, with the stage and auditorium merged." Hughes asserted, however, that the Pasadena producer had not "established and maintained an arena." [16]

The first of Brown's two significant descriptions of the work of the Fairoaks Playbox appeared in a 1945 article published in a Journal devoted to the interests of the non-commercial theatre and circulated mainly among its leaders. In "Confidential Theatre," Brown described the beginnings of the Fairoaks Playbox in a large room in his home, a room which had formerly been a painter's studio. He reported his discoveries concerning the technique of acting required for such an intimate theatre, as well as his theory on the "personalizing" and heightening of audience response to the situations of the play, He revealed that the Herkimer Playbox was built with a design embodying a number of the characteristics of the Fairoaks studio, but arranged to provide even greater flexibility.[17]

As national interest in central staging flared up following the success of Margo Jones' Theatre '47 in Dallas, a number of articles and books appeared which referred to the status of the Fairoaks Playbox in toe evolution of the arena theatre. Kenneth Macgowan wrote in an essay published in the Mew York Times in 1948, that Glenn Hughes had credited his idea of central staging to Macgowan and Jones' book *Continental Stagecraft*. It was the description of the Circus Medrano in Paris as a potential arena theatre which had impressed Hughes. Macgowan instated that the credit belonged rather to "the Playbox which Gilmor Brown and Ralph Freud created as an adjunct to the Pasadena Playhouse around 1925.[18]

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[13]May Rose Borum, "A History of the Pasadena Community Playhouse" (unpublished Master's thesis. The university of Southern California, Los Angeles, 1929), p. 104.

[14]Kenneth Macgowan, Footlights Across America, P. 152.

[15]Harriet Green, "Gilmor Brown's Playbox," Theatre Arts, July, 1935, p. 512.

[16]Glenn Hughes, The Penthouse Theatre, p. 12.

[17]Gilmor Brown, "Confidential Theatre," National Theatre Conference Bulletin, August, 1945, pp. 20–26".

[18]Kenneth Macgowan, "Theatre in the Round," New York Times, March 21, 1948.

In the same year, Freud contributed an article to a journal of college and high school dramatics, discussing his contact with central staging in the Fairoaks Playbox. Freud stressed, however, that the Playbox concept included more than just the central staging form. Intimacy and flexibility were the highly important features.[19]

Among a number of reports on arena theatre in the October, 1950 issue of *Theatre Arts,* one by Albert McCleery attributed the origin of central staging movement in the United States to Brown's 1924 Playbox theatre. McCleery averred that

> from that initial venture in fluid staging grew the Penthouse Theatre of Glenn Hughes, Margo Jones' Theatre- in-the-Round in Dallas, Ralph Freud's U.C.L.A. project, the arena I conducted at Fordham for some years, as well as dozens of other arena stages.[20]

In 1951 Margo Jones reviewed the modem development of central staging, referring to the Fairoaks Playbox as bringing more renown to the technique following earlier efforts at Columbia University and Brigham Young University.

She pointed out that the Fairoaks Playbox laid the groundwork for the flexible playhouse built by Brown in 1930.[21] She herself had wanted to establish a flexible theatre in Dallas instead of the pure arena form.[22]

In the 1953 revised edition of John Gassner's Producing the Play, Kelly Yea ton discussed the values of flexible staging. He referred to its use at the Pasadena Playbox and spoke of the Influence of the Playbox on other West Coast theatres.[23]

Frank M, Whiting in 1954 emphasized the fact that "Gilmor Brown's original Playbox was as revolutionary in its flexibility as in its intimacy." [24]

Joseph Golden's 1955 doctoral dissertation on the development of arena theatre credited the Fairoaks Playbox with being at its inception the meet important American experiment in non-proscenium staging which had thus far taken place. Although the study was very carefully written, Golden erred in his description of the interior of the Fairoaks Playbox. He had inadvertently described the interior of the Herkimer Playbox.[25]

Macgowan and Melnitz in 1955 pointed out that the variant form of arena theatre known as the flexible playhouse began to take shape in 1924 when the first Playbox was created in Pasadena. They stated that it was clearly a predecessor of the Russian Okhlokov's flexible Realistic Theatre founded in 1932.[26]

In 1956 the first book devoted to a detailed discussion of flexible staging techniques, as well as those of central staging appeared. This was Walden Boyle's Central and Flexible Staging, Boyle reiterated the pioneering status of the Fairoaks Playbox in his excellent, though brief, historical coverage.[27]

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[19]Ralph Freud, "Central Staging is Old Stuff," Players Magazine, December, 1948, p. 52.

[20]Albert McCleery, "An Invitation to Action," Theatre Arts, October, 1950, p, 48.

[21]Margo Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, p, 38.

[22]Ibid., pp. 58, 188.

[23]Kelly Yeaton, "Arena Production," in Gassner, *Producing the Play*, rev. ed., p. 544.

[24]Frank M. Whiting, An Introduction to the theatre (1954 ed.), p. 199.

[25]Joseph Golden, "The Position and Character of Theatre in the Round in the united States" (unpublished doctoral dissertation. The University of Illinois, 1955)

[26]Kenneth Macgowan and William Melnitz, The Living Stage, p. 501.

[27]Walden Boyle, Central and Flexible Staging, p. l6.

With so many general statements made about the significance of Brown's theatre but so few concrete details published, it was salutary that the founder himself attempted to provide more information for the public. In 1957, three years before his death. Brown wrote an essay on his life's work, in which he traced a few of the influences which inspired him to found the Fairoaks Playbox. He stated that he had become interested in central staging through reading Macgowan's suggestions concerning the Cirque Medrano, that he had practiced the technique in the Fairoaks Playbox, and that he had in turn suggested the form to Glenn Hughes as "suited to the planning of the intimate theatre that he was to have in a Seattle hotel." [28] Brown Indicated that the Playbox was not simply an arena theatre but stressed flexibility.

For the first time in the literature on the Playbox, Brown listed the actual repertory of his theatre, giving the names of fourteen plays produced during the first two seasons. He also provided a detailed quotation from the program of the first production explaining the purposes of the intimate theatre.

This unfortunately was the extent of the specific information given by Brown. The remainder of the material relating to the Fairoaks seasons was in the form of general statements concerning such aspects as the limited properties, the slight indications of locale, the "eavesdropping" reaction of the audience. Neither Brown nor any of the previously mentioned writers had described the actual size and architectural features of the Fairoaks Playbox, revealed which plays were centrally staged, or, for that matter, provided any detailed information on the variants of flexible staging used in any of the productions. The names of the directors and actors participating in the three pioneering seasons had not been mentioned.

After surveying this literature, one can conclude that the goals and historical significance of the Fairoaks Playbox have been reported in a number of significant publications, especially in recent years. It is evident, however, that the actual nature of the theatre has never been depicted In such a way that its productions can be visualized, The general absence of photographs has not helped in this regard. Here then is a theatre which has become famous while its work is really unknown.

Sources of Material

A large number of primary sources were consulted in this study. The purpose of this section is to describe the nature of the sources and their significance to the study.

The Fairoaks Playbox Building

While the Herkimer Playbox was torn down in 1958, the building at 251 South Fairoaks Avenue, in which Brown established the first Playbox, is by some happy quirk of fate still standing. In the summer of 1959 the present investigator had a series of photographs taken of its interior and exterior. At that time a email area had been partitioned off within the studio at the Fairoaks end, the walls had been covered with plaster board, and one fireplace had been removed. The covering over the rear porch had also been

[28] Gilmor Brown, "A Dream on a Dime," in David H. Stevens, Ten Talents in the American Theatre, p. 171.

removed, according to Maurice Wells. Except for these few changes the building was in very much the same state as at the time of its use as an intimate theatre*

Since 1959 the studio has undergone further remodeling with a celling installed which now hides the original exposed-rafter construction and cross beams. A partition extends completely across the width of the studio cutting off a section of the room near the Fairoaks end. With the studio In this state, this investigator made detailed measurements and drawings in the fall of 196l. Allowing for the modifications, he attempted to accurately reconstruct the original condition. The 1959 photographs were most helpful aids in this process.

Records of the City of Pasadena

Important sources of material for corroborating findings on some of the physical characteristics of the Fairoaks Playbox were the records of the Building Department of the City of Pasadena and the Office of the City and County Assessor.

Fairoaks Playbox Scripts

A very helpful source of information for the reconstruction of the staging was the collection of Fairoaks Playbox scripts containing stage directions, which the investigator was able to assemble. No one at the Pasadena Playhouse knew of the location of the scripts used in the Fairoaks productions. At one time, however. Brown had recorded the fact that he had donated Playbox scripts to the Playhouse. On the assumption that some of these may have been from the Fairoaks years, a persistent search was made throughout the Playhouse Library, which unfortunately was in the process of being completely re-catalogued. All individual copies of plays, and collections containing Playbox titles, on the regular shelves, on storage shelves, and in boxes were examined for evidence of connection with the 1924-27 productions. The result of this search VJBS the assemblage of ten scripts containing stage directions, diagrams, property lists, and other information relevant to the Fairoaks Playbox productions.

Scrapbooks

Three different sets of scrapbooks formed a major source of information. These books were immediately accessible as regularly classified portions of the Pasadena Playhouse historical source collection.

Two sets of scrapbooks had been assembled by Mademoiselle Jeanne Richert in 1948. She Informed the investigator that in 1948 she had found the material for the first set in boxes at Brown's house and with his permission and consultation had organized it into four separate volumes. These scrapbooks comprise the set relating to the life and work of Gilmor Brown. The first three volumes are referred to in abbreviated form in the footnotes of this study as GB1I, II, and III. The fourth volume is called "Gilmoriana" following the title given to it by Mademoiselle Richert.

The second set of scrapbooks contains the Playbox volumes from 1924 to 1950. The first volume covering 1924 to 1931, includes programs, a few photographs, and reviews and articles from newspapers and periodicals dealing with the Fairoaks Playbox

and the beginnings of the Herkimer Playbox. The Playbox scrapbooks are designated in the footnotes as PB I, II, III, and so forth.

The third set of scrapbooks used in this study was the enormous collection of material which constituted the Pasadena Community Playhouse volumes. These books were begun in 1919 and have been kept up until the present time. The scrapbooks contain newspaper clippings, magazine articles, and advertising matter related to all the activities and personnel of the organization. A great source of difficulty for this research study was the fact that Playbox items were generally mixed in without any separate identification among all the other clippings. The process of searching for the rare Playbox clippings was thus something like pearl diving. These Playhouse scrapbooks are referred to in the study by the abbreviations POP 1, 2, 3, and BO forth.

Playhouse Photograph Albums

A photographic record of the early efforts of the Pasadena Community Playhouse proved useful for an analysis of Brown's pre-Playbox staging techniques, especially in outdoor productions. These photographs were available in separate volumes, the first two being particularly pertinent to the content of this study.

Governing, Board Minutes

The two volumes of minutes of the meetings of the Governing Board of the Playhouse were significant sources of Information concerning the relationship of the Playbox to the Playhouse. They also provided valuable information pertaining to the Playbox directors.

Gilmor Brown' s Correspondence and Other Papers

The files of Gilmor Brown's correspondence, which could perhaps have been of great value, were disappointingly incomplete. Only a. few random items have been preserved from the years prior to 1930, almost none of which have any bearing on the Playbox. From 1930 to 1938 a slightly larger number of letters have been saved, while the entire file of letters from 1938-40 has been kept intact. The correspondence which had been on file in Brown's office during the years immediately preceding his death, approximately 1952 to 1959, was also preserver?. From these last years a number of letters pertinent to this study were found. In addition to the correspondence. Brown's financial papers, copies of his income tax returns from 1921 through 1958 and a group of documents relating to his ownership of various real estate properties, including the Fairoaks building, were preserved in the Playhouse collection of Brown's papers. From these items it was possible to obtain data concerning Brown's financial status, although there was an absence of information concerning the operating costs of the Fairoaks Playbox.

Interviews

Since the first Play-box closed its doors thirty-five years ago, this study was a race against time so far as some of the individuals associated with the theatre were concerned. The main emphasis in the interviewing was devoted to the producer and the directors of the Fairoaks Playbox. Gilmor Brown was still alive, and in spite of failing health granted the investigator a number of interviews between 1957 and 1959. He died in January, 1960. A range of topics was covered in the interviews with Brown, with especial attention paid to the producer's earlier years. While there were a number of areas in which Brown's memory could be of little help, he was surprisingly acute on other topics. A crucial area for this study toward which he could contribute few details, was the staging of specific productions at the Fairoaks Playbox.

In the case of Maurice Wells, the situation was quite different. Through a great stroke of fortune as far as this study was concerned. Wells had just returned to California from the East coast after an absence of thirty years, and had settled again in Pasadena. Since he was in his early twenties at the time of his connection with the Playbox as co-director, he was still under sixty years of age at the time he was interviewed. Furthermore he had an extremely accurate and detailed memory of the days of the Fairoaks Playbox, an appraisal which was reached through the repeated corroboration of his remarks by other evidence.

Ralph Freud, Brown's other directing associate, was also available for interviews and was close to the same age as Wells. Having had a greater concern with production processes and the direction of plays throughout his career, he provided a number of unique details concerning the Fairoaks Playbox performances.

In addition to the above directors fifteen other individuals were interviewed, some of whom gave information concerning Gilmor Brown, while others had contributions to make in regard to the Fairoaks Playbox. Among these were: Dr. Roger Stanton, Professor of English at the California Institute of Technology, who had been an actor at the Playbox during the 1925-26 season.; Dr. Fairfax P. Walkup, Vice- President of the Pasadena Playhouse and formerly Dean of the School of the Theatre, who had acted in a Playbox production in the 1924-25 season. Associate Professor Emeritus Cloyd Dalzell of the Department of Speech of the University of Southern California, spoke of several Playbox productions in which she had acted. The former "Star-Hews Critic," the play reviewer for the Pasadena newspaper, Mrs. Alice Haines Baskin, told of her years covering productions at the Playbox and the Playhouse. Film character actress Elisabeth Patterson revealed pertinent facts about Brown's days at drama school and his early years as a leading man and director of his own touring company, a period in which she was an active participant. Ruth Burdick, the retired Art Supervisor and stagecraft teacher in the Long Beach, California schools, told of her observation of Playbox productions as an audience member, and of her subsequent efforts in flexible staging in Long Beach, Mademoiselle Jeanne Richer!, the manager of the Herkimer Playbox for a twenty year period, provided many details concerning Gilmor Brown and the Playbox idea. Others who told of Brown's work and personality were Morris Ankrum, Thomas Browne Henry, Charles Lane, Julia Farnsworth, and Mary Greene. Of this last group only Morris Ankrum, however, had known and worked with Brown prior to 1929.

Methods

In conducting the research for this study, the usual methods of external and internal criticism of historical sources were used. To indicate some of the techniques employed, a few of the specific problems encountered and the steps taken to solve them are briefly discussed.

External Criticism: Verification of the Identity of Sources

Newspaper Articles, Reviews

In the Gilmor Brown scrapbooks and occasionally in the Playbox scrapbooks, newspaper clippings were pasted in without an indication of the name of the newspaper, the name of the drama critic, or the date. When it could be ascertained that the newspaper was one of two or three in a particular city, the printing style of each was compared with print in the slipping. From this evidence the newspaper could often be identified. When the date was not given on the clipping* references within the article often provided an approximate date,

In the reviews of the Fairoaks Playbox, a number of clippings from the *Pasadena Star-News* did not carry a by-line for the name of the reviewer. From interviews with Alice Haines Baskin and Maurice Wells, it was learned that Mrs. Baskin went by the title of the ”Star NCWB Critic,” while the other reviewer for the newspaper used his own name if any credit for the review appeared. The other critic was the Scottish-born Alexander Inglis. When neither the title of ”Star Hews Critic” or Inglis’ name appeared, it was necessary to determine the author ship through the style of writing and the frame of reference of the reviewer. In general the differences between the two writers was clear, making the identification not overly difficult. Inglis had a great Interest in England and English literature. In addition his writings revealed certain stylistic peculiarities. Mrs. Baskin was much more interested than Inglis in the technical aspects of production, and tended toward a lyrical mode of expression at times.

Fairoaks Playbox Scripts

The verification of the Identity of a script of a play as one which had been used at the Fairoaks Playbox was a most Important matter. Hot only did the script need to be validated for Its connection with the studio theatre, but the specific notations and diagrams within it had to be shown to be these for the Fairoaks production and not an earlier or later performance given elsewhere. Procedures used included the following:

1. Playbox director’s handwriting. In most of the scripts found this meant either the writing of Gilmor Brown or Maurice Wells. Known samples of each were carefully studied for identifiable characteristics, Brown in particular possessed a very distinctive style of handwriting.

2. writing was analysed for references to matters connected with the Playbox production or connected with other events occurring at the time of the production. For example, in Maurice Wells’ copy of Justice he made notations for the casting

of minor characters in Cyrano, which was in the final stages of rehearsal on the mainstage at the time Justice was being prepared for the Fairoaks Playbox.

3. were examined for their relationship to the structure of the Playbox theatre. Since the architectural features of the Fairoaks Playbox were quite different from other theatres, numerous diagrams conforming to the structure could not easily fit other productions. In the scripts of "Desire," Bernice and The Dragon there were highly unconventional ground plans which fitted the Fairoaks Playbox perfectly, but would have been very peculiar sets elsewhere.

4. The diagrams and stage directions in the scripts were also compared with the extant photos of Fairoaks Playbox productions. This was done with The Discovery and The Ship, where no contradictory facts emerged. When a script of The Truth About Blayds was compared with the photographs of the Fairoaks Playbox performance it became obvious that the setting and movements indicated in the script were not for that production.

5. To further rule out the possibility that a script may have been for a production given elsewhere by Brown or Wells, the records of the Playhouse were carefully examined for listings of such performances. All of the notations within the given script then had to be compared with the Information which could be obtained concerning the settings, the theatre, the staging for the non-Playbox performances. *The Tragedy of Man*, *The Discovery* and *The Ship* appear to have been given only at the Fairoaks Playbox. A number of other productions, however, were given at the Playhouse after the intimate theatre performances, Thus the scripts of *Anthony and Anna* and *Justice* had to be carefully examined in light of the known facts concerning the Playhouse productions. Xn the case of Justice there were photographs of the Mainstage performance which showed some discrepancies with the evidence in the script. At the same time there was material in the script which more closely matched the Fairoaks Playbox. Combined with other evidence the conclusion could be reached,with some assurance, that the particular script did indeed contain the director's notes for the Fairoaks Playbox performance.

Internal Criticism

Reconstruction of the Staging

An especially strong goal of this study was the reconstruction, so far as possible, of the manner of staging of the twenty-two productions given at the Fairoaks Playbox. To accomplish this purpose, even to a limited extent, a rather detailed procedure of internal criticism had to be followed. Among the steps taken were the following:

1. All of the plays given in the theatre were read with the exception of two which were not available: "The Trackwalker's Child" and "Song With Wings." [29] Both of these were original plays.

[29] In this study the titles of one-act plays and unpublished full-length plays are enclosed within quotation marks. The titles of published full-length plays are underlined.

The plays were analyzed for the basic staging demands required ”by the dramatic action. The playwright’s descriptions of settings and stage directions were also examined.

2. All of the contemporary descriptions of the Fairoaks Playbox performances were analyzed for the types of settings, the use of space, the movement of actors, and other aspects of the staging,

3. The small number of extant photographs were examined in detail for information concerning the part of the room used, the nature of the furniture groupings, the relationship of the set to the audience area, as well as for the subsidiary purpose of noting the identity of the actors, their costuming and makeup.

4. Scripts which met the tests of verification as copies used in the Fairoaks Playbox productions were studied in complete detail. Every notation was examined for its value as a clue to the staging process. These were then recorded in their entirety on separate cards and sheets of paper in order to more clearly observe the groupings and patterns of movement. Fitting together the mosaic of references to parts of the Fairoaks Playbox, ground plans of the settings, the dimensions of the acting and seating areas, were gradually reconstructed,

5. Individuals who had participated in the productions as directors or actors, and those who had seen the performances as audience members, v;ere interviewed for the evidence they could present concerning the staging. This information was then compared for consistency with the evidence from the contemporary records. Furthermore, when two or more persons interviewed presented information concerning the same production or staging technique, this evidence was examined for consistency among the individuals interrogated.

6. Conclusions regarding the settings were recorded in ground plans drawn to a one-quarter-inch-to-a-foot scale. The patterns of movement and groupings of actors were described in summarizing accounts for each production, accompanied where necessary by diagrams to clarify the finding.

“Reconstructions” of the Acting

The problem of reconstructing or evaluating the acting from the distance of thirty-five years by one who was not an eyewitness to the performances was* obviously., a difficult one* The best that could reasonably be done in such a situation was to record and interpret the descriptions and evaluations provided by the contemporary critics, as well as the evidence given now by the persons interviewed. To arrive at some satisfactory level in the conclusions drawn, these procedures were used:

1. Where more than one critic reviewed a Fairoaks Playbox production, the comments on the acting were compared for differences of opinion, and for insight into the level of frankness of each. It was especially useful to compare the comments of those who appeared to be ”supporters” of the Fairoaks Playbox and the Pasadena Playhouse, with those critics who seemed to be more neutral in their

attitudes. In general, the critics for the Pasadena Star-News, Alexander Inglis and Alice Baskin, wanted to encourage the efforts of the Pasadena Community Playhouse and its intimate theatre adjunct. This did not prevent them, however, from making very candid comments on the nature of the acting. They endeavored to phrase their remarks in tactful language. The general body of critics from outside Pasadena did not tend to be as concerned with diplomacy and therefore provided a useful basis of comparison*

2. Wherever there were reservations about the acting, no matter how politely worded, an attempt was made to penetrate the meaning of the observations. Since Inglis and Baskin tended to be ”supporters,” their negative comments took on extra significance.

3. Reviews of performances by Fairoaks Playbox actors in other theatres formed a supplementary background for interpreting the evaluations of their work in the Fairoaks Playbox, This broader range of comment was an aid in seeing through the veil of Journalistic diplomacy. Most of the Playbox performers appeared in productions of the Pasadena Community Playhouse, and were subject to reviews by critics from the greater Los Angeles area.

Chapter 2

GILMOR BROWN'S EXPERIENCE PRIOR TO ESTABLISHING THE FAIROAKS PLAYBOX

In this chapter the background of Gilmor Brown will be explored in order to reveal the general nature of his training and theatrical work prior to the founding of the Fairoaks Playbox, and the specific experiences which led him toward the founding of his flexible non-proscenium theatre. The early years of the Pasadena Community Playhouse will also be discussed.

Brown's Family Background and Early Years

Gilmor Brown was born into a family of business people, but at least two members had been connected with the theatre. His father, Orville Brown, born in 1845, had been stage struck as a young man and had become an actor in touring companies [1] much against the wishes of his parents, who considered the theatre hardly respectable.[2] For a while Orville even managed his own troupe.[3]' After his marriage in 1872 to Emma Augusta Gilmor, he abandoned hie theatrical career and entered a succession of business ventures, HiB half-brother, Burt Brown, reversed this pattern by beginning as a business man on New York's Wall Street and later entering the theatrical field as an associate of William A. Brady, the eminent producer.[4]

[1] Alma E. Riggle, "North Dakotans in California," *The Fargo [North Dakota] Forum*, December 30, 1934.
[2] Interview with Gilmor Brown, July 10, 1957.
[3] "Loved Woman of Theatre," Unidentified newspaper clipping, circa November 17, 1947. [Gilmoriana, p. 26.]
[4] Brown, *loc. cit.*

Although the Brown family were New Yorkers, Gilmor was born and raised in the midwest. His father had gone out to North Dakota on medical advice to bolster his health, a prescription the rationale of which Gilmor never quite understood[5] In sub-zero weather Orville maintained and developed his homestead and land near the tiny village of Mew Salem, He ultimately became the proprietor of a general store, an Indian trader, the operator of a grain elevator in Mandan, and the first county commissioner from his district.[6]

While Orville was thus attaining prominence in the community, his third son, George Gilmor Brown, was born. The date was June l6, 1886.[7] A son, Richard had died as a child, but another son, the now eleven year old Frank, was on hand to keep a brotherly eye on the new member of the family.

Gilmor (who was known as George until he was nineteen), went to school in Mandan, and soon began expressing hie theatrical impulses by organizing his schoolmates, both Indians and Caucasians, into a company of actors. In the Brown barn, the eight year old boy ran the children through performances of selections from the school readers, until his father discovered whet had happened to the family sheets. Under no circumstances was the young director to use them again as scenery.[8]

Shortly after this event, the family moved to Denver, Colorado. There Gilmor finished elementary school with no further attacks on the family linen, but with dramatics still a strong interest. As he often liked to recall in later years, his decision to devote his life to the theatre came to him in the eighth grade. The event that stirred him so deeply was hie opportunity in January, 1901, to watch the celebrated Mrs, Flake and her company perform In *Becky Sharp*, The performance seemed to him to have reached the peak of the actor's art and the ultimate in elegance of production. Years afterwards he enthused, "Oh! what a revelation that brought me on the possibilities of theatre. What a production! what a cast! what a revelation of subtle, magnificent acting.[9]

As a result of this experience, he immediately made plans to start up a company of child actors,[10] a step which was the beginning of a career as an actor-director which lasted almost sixty years. Gathering together as many neighborhood children as possible, he established an intimate theatre in the basement of his home. Perhaps this may be called the germination of the Fairoaks Playbox. Aa a youngster he developed the idea that one could create a theatre out of whatever facilities were at hand. Since the family lived in the vicinity of Tuxedo Place, Brown gave his company the rather debonair title of the Tuxedo Stock Company.

His approach to theatrical production at the age of fourteen bore at least one point of resemblance to his later practice. He enjoyed turning out a goodly number of plays and saw no reason why they could not quickly be made ready for public consumption.

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[5] *Ibid.*

[6] *New Salem [North Dakota] Journal*, July 27, 1934. (Gilmoriana, p. 27.]

[7] During his entire career in Pasadena, Gilmor Brown never publicly listed the year of his birth, although he admitted that his birthday was June l6. The present Investigator accumulated five pieces of evidence proving that the year was 1886. It is no longer necessary to present this evidence, since the recently acquired collection of Brown's personal papers at the Pasadena Playhouse contains United States census records from 1900 to 1910. These records show statements by Brown's parents that Gilmor was born in 1886.

[8] Higgle, *loc. cit.*

[9] Notes on Playbox program for *Vanity Fair*, November 5, 1956.

[10] Gilmor Brown, "A Dream on a Dime," in Stevens Ten Talents in the American Theatre, p. l62.

Serving as company playwright as well as director and leading actor, he employed great speed in writing scripts for his juvenile actors and equal rapidity in rehearsing the plays. *The Denver News* became interested in the Tuxedo Stock Company and reported Brown's methods; "The playwright spends a week writing a play and usually composes one act at a sitting. Then he takes a rest of a day or two and proceeds to another.[11]

Rehearsals of each play lasted no more than a week. A new production was given every month. Brown's audience consisted mainly of adults who could afford the onerous admission charge of five cents.

The type of play which the young producer preferred at this time was the romantic historical drama. Cardinal Wolsey and Alexander Borgia were his favorite characters. Xn addition he wrote sensation melodramas. *The Denver News* described one of them:

> The Wayland Robbery' has one thrilling character in it called "The Three Fingered Murderer,. and the whole plot bristles with situations calculated for hair misers.[12]

The basement theatre went its merry way until the firm voice of parental authority once more had to intervene. Neighbors had been coming to Mrs. Brown with complaints that their children had become so involved in their obligations to the Tuxedo Stock Company that they were neglecting their school work. Gilmor was forbidden the use of the cellar. If his parents thought that this would stop him from continuing his career as Denver's youngest theatrical producer, they were obviously mistaken. Gilmor found refuge in the church, more specifically in the basement of St. Mark's Episcopal Church, The conservative but kindly minister. Dr. Houghton, permitted Gilmor to produce his own version of that questionable play. The Belle of New York, but prayed all the while for the souls of these innocents.[13]

It was through St. Mark's that the youth came to meet a women who was to have a great influence upon him. The church operated a family camp, "St. Mark's in the Mountains." Here in the summer of 1901 or 1902, the teenager became acquainted with Mrs. Florence Adams, a woman who ran a fine drama school in Chicago. Dr. Houghton had asked her to be in charge of camp activities. When Gilmor informed her that he would like to present a play that he was in the process of writing that summer, she decided to make it a featured event.

Inspired by a particularly striking location near the camp, which seemed en excellent setting for a drama, Brown had embarked on the composition of his play, modelled after a Greek tragedy, The place where this sorrowful saga was to unfold was dominated by a majestic cliff with a flat area below it, and a stream running in front of this level terrain. The audience was to sit across the stream looking toward the hillside. Brown was already fascinated with the idea of finding places other than conventional theatres, to fit the needs of particular dramas. In this case, of course, he wrote hie play to fit the location.

When the performance night arrived, Gilmor and the three boys, who with him formed the cast, built bonfires, one at each side of the cliff, to illuminate the scene. A

[11] *Denver News* undated clipping, circa 1901. [OB I, P. 1.]
[12] *Ibid.*
[13] Interview with Gilmor Brown, July 10, 1957.

sizable audience "streaked in from everywhere." Great declamatory scenes took place at the top of the cliff, to which the actors could easily climb. A climactic point was reached with the death of the heroine, played by one of the boys.[14]

Although the performance was probably amateurish enough, Mrs. Adams was favorably impressed by Brown's potential. She encouraged his mother to have the boy acquire theatrical training, and indicated that she would be happy to accept him as e student whenever he was able to come to Chicago,

During the spring of 1903 the Brown a left Denver to resettle in North Dakota.[15] They moved to Glen Ullin, a town with a population of 350, where Orville operated a real estate office and served as Justice of the Peace.[16] Since there was no secondary school in the Immediate ares, and because Gilmor wanted to obtain regular tutelage in acting, his mother took him to Minneapolis in the fall. There he continued his high school education and supplemented it through attending classes in acting and oral interpretation at the Johnson School of Music, Oratory and Dramatic Art.[17]

Back in North Dakota in the summers of 1904 and 1905, he busied himself producing one act plays, and Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothing, in amateur benefit programs for organizations in the area. These were given in "town halls" with rudimentary facilities for theatrical performances.[18]

It was during the fall of 1904, that Brown's forms! education terminated. He had been working hard at his high school studies, but found mathematics, especially geometry, distressing. Furthermore, he had been longing to go to Chicago to train under Mrs. Adams. Thus when he "flunked miserably" in geometry examinations that fall, in his Junior year, [19] he decided to quit high school altogether and realize his dreams in the midwestern metropolis. Emma Brown accompanied her eighteen year old son to Chicago and established him in a rooming house, leaving him to the good graces of Florence Adams and her drama school.

Mrs. Adams' school proved to be a stimulating place for Gilmor, Through his teacher, he was able to usher at the Chicago Auditorium where he saw performances by such artists as Bernhardt, Duse, Rejane, and Caruso.[20] As the wife of the manager of the Auditorium, Mrs. Adams was able to bring to her studio a number of great theatrical and musical personalities of the era. The famous French actress, ReJane, spoke to the students while she was in Chicago on her American tour in December, 1904. Of significance as one of the influences which eventually produced the concept of the Fairoaks Playbox was a demonstration given by the actress. She showed how an entire drama could be staged on a tiny square platform.[21]

The training Gilmor received in the school stressed the classics and made little use of modem realistic plays.[22] Perhaps the roost Important aspect of the teaching was the

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[14]Brown, *loc. cit.*
[15]Denver News, undated clipping, circa January 1-11, 1903. [GBI, p. 5.]
[16]Riggle, *loc. cit.*
[17]Brown, *loc. cit.*
[18]Programs and reviews of these performances are in OB I.
[19]Interview with Gilmor Brown, July 10, 1957.
[20]Gilmor Brown, "A Dream on a Dime," p. 163
[21]Ibid., p. 177.
[22]Interview with Elizabeth Patterson, August 14, 1958.

inspirational power of Mrs. Adams herself. It left an indelible mark on Brown who paid tribute to her all through his life. Years later he wrote of his teacher:

> In her honor there stands in the corner of the Art Institute of Chicago, a statue inscribed, .TO Florence Jane Adams, who was a genius in the evocation of personality.'

The drains school served mainly as e "finishing school" for socially prominent young ladies. Among the girls, there were some, however, who sought training for the professional stage. There were few men in the classes. Elizabeth Patterson, long a character actress in films, was a fellow student with Gilmor. According to Miss Patterson, the teacher and the girls doted on the handsome blond youth. "Gilmor was the pet of the place." [23]

Brown's First Professional Work

After two seasons at the school. Brown began his first true professional work in June, 1906. He had the good fortune to find a Job playing bit parts in the Shakespearean touring company of Ben Greet, who were on their way to complete their current tour with a two months' jaunt through the South. The company often played at locations

other than conventional theatres., 'with many of the performances taking piece outdoors. From Greet the young actor learned much about the staging of plays with scenic simplicity and maximum use of suggestion from the few props and items of scenery employed. The plays were given on an Elizabethan platform stage.[24]

At the conclusion of the tour with Ben Greet in July, Brown went almost immediately into the company of Harold Nelson, who was getting ready for a trek through Canada. This tour, which took the young actor through many of the outposts of the central and western provinces, ended in 1907. Brown played both youthful end character parts in a repertory consisting mainly of historical melodramas end Shakespearean plays, Following this he went on a short barnstorming tour of Canada with the smell William Yule Company.[25] From 1907 to 1909, he traveled in the company of May Stuart, playing mainly through the South and Southwest, first as supporting player and later as leading man. Again Shakespeare was the staple of the repertoire, although the public was also favored with a piece entitled Ingomar the Barbarian. In his recollection of the tour, Brown said of the middle-aged actress that "she was doing Shakespeare end doing It very badly." May Stuart had wrung

from a Houston, Texas theatre critic the reaction, "Good God, not Juliet!" [26]

When the "second lady" of the company left for another engagement. Brown suggested that his friend Elizabeth Patterson be hired as a replacement, Miss Stuart took hie advice, but this ultimately led to friction. The actress-manager became extremely jealous of what she mistakenly assumed to be a romantic interest between her leading man and the new member of the troupe. Life in the company became so unbearable for

[23]Patterson, *loc. cit.*
[24]Interview with Gilmor Brown, July 13, 1957.
[25]Ibid.
[26]Brown. loc. cit.

Miss Patterson that she resigned, and was promptly followed in this action by Gilmor and an actor named Jackson Rigby.[27]

This incident, which occurred in February, 1909, was the indirect cause of Brown's becoming a theatrical producer et the age of twenty-two. He had been thinking about starting up his own company, but now bed a good reason to take action. In April, with the support of his parents who joined him in the venture. Brown formed a company under his father's name: "The Orville Brown Comedy Players." Orville was in actuality the business manager of the group, although he occasionally played parts. Mrs. Brown assisted as costume mistress, end general factotum.

She proved to have extraordinary capability in bossing the crews in the loading and unloading of the scenery, as well as financial acumen in negotiating for services.[28] At this time she was fifty-eight end her husband sixty-four, a fact which reveals their venturesome spirit since this was apparently their first Joint experience in operating a theatrical troupe. Gilmor's brother, Frank, also joined in as "advance man," seeing that the company was well publicized in each town on their route.[29]

The tour through Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming, and Utah was destined to be a financial failure, since it took the performers into rural areas during summer months when the farmers worked late in their fields. It provided another link in the chain of experience, though, which moulded Brown's ideas on theatrical adaptability. In Utah he had to devise ways of fitting his productions into Mormon churches in towns where there were no theatres.[30]

As a director of professional actors Brown revealed himself to be efficient and sensitive. Elizabeth Patterson, who was his leading lady on the tour, has described his conduct of rehearsals:

> He knew what he wanted and insisted on it. But he also let the people find their own way. They were experienced actors. When he felt something should be changed he would tell the actors. Even though he was younger than the rest of the company, they respected his ability.
>
> Gilmor was interested in all the details of the production: the acting, the settings, the costumes.[31]

Aside from a few months stint with the Bill Bittner Company in Oklahoma in 1910, Brown was occupied with tours of his own company between 1909 and 1913. The territory he covered continued to be the less populated areas of Kansas and the West, so that he often had to make adjustments to very Inadequate "opera houses" and "town halls." In Alpine, Texas he presented The Merchant of Venice, in an opera

house with only kerosene lanterns for his stage lighting, since electricity had not yet reached the town.[32]

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[27] Patterson, loc. cit.

[28] Marjorie Driscoll, Los Angeles Examiner, clipping not dated, but circa February, 1945.[Gilmoriana, p. 70. J

[29] Riggle, loc. cit.

[30] Patterson, loc. cit.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Unidentified clipping. Alpine, Texas newspaper, circa 1910. [GB II, p. 11.]

Outdoor Non-Professional Productions

In 1912, the actor-director embarked on the first of his summer dramatic festivals with amateurs. These productions were given outdoors during the summers of 1912,. 1914, 1915. and 19l6. They were important in Brown's development, both for the considerable experience he gained in working with amateur actors, valuable training for a future community theatre director, and for the additional techniques he acquired in producing plays without a siege, proscenium arch, or curtain.

His first outdoor production was A Midsummer Night's Dream. He rehearsed a cast of 21 specking characters supplemented by 80 fairies end elves, played mainly by children. The play was produced in Kinsley, Kansas, a town with a population of 2,500. Sponsorship came from a woman's organization, the Friday Night Club, for the benefit of the Public Library fund. Brown learned early the importance of interesting women's clubs in backing theatre enterprises, a lactic which was to prove repeatedly useful in the years to come, This was especially true in regard to the founding of both the Pasadena Community Playhouse and the Fairoaks Playbox.

The theatre was created in a natural Betting of a grove of giant cottonwood trees, with a creek running upstage of the trees. A bridge was built across the stream connecting the two acting areas. Above the stream was fairyland, below it the setting for the other scenes in the play. Brown paid particular attention to his lighting, placing his instruments up in the trees where they were able to effectively throw their beams down on the acting areas. In addition he used a bank of footlights masked from the audience by a covering of leaves.

The seats for the spectators ranged right up to the edge of the acting area. The comedy opened on a note of Intimacy with the Duke of Athens followed by a train of men and women, proceeding from behind the audience, down the main aisle, over the footlights and onto the stage. A troop of elves led by Oberon and fifty little girls dressed as fairies, led by Titania, also came down the aisle, They crossed the bridge over the stream and entered the upstage area of "fairyland." [33] The production struck e number of citizens as Just about the greatest thing that ever happened in Kinsley. The Kansas City Star a which sent out a reporter to view the production, seemed to agree.[34]

In 1913 Brown spent the summer in stock in Pasadena, a circumstance which will be discussed shortly. In the summer of 1914, however. Brown directed outdoor productions in both Kinsley and Hutchinson, Kansas. The Hutchinson Dramatic Festival, as it was called, took place first. Brown again exhibited his skill in dealing with women's groups by obtaining the sponsorship of the Renaissance Club of Hutchinson, who were to divide the profits with him on approximately a 50-50 basis. The ladies' club arranged the festival as a benefit for a day nursery for children of working mothers.

In Hutchinson Brown had to create his theatre since there was no regular facility available for outdoor productions. The place selected was the garden of a residence belonging to Mrs. Henrietta Briggs-Wall. It contained a deep stretch of lawn at the end of which was a wooded section, dominated by tall maples and green shrubs.[35] For hie

[33]Statements by Charles Edwards, Brown's Kinsley associate on the production, in The Hutchinson [Kansas] Gazette, June 19, 1914. [GB II, p. 14.

[34]Kansas City Star. June 9, 1912. [QB I, p. 99.3

[35]The Hutchinson Gazette. July l6, 1914.

production of Twelfth Night, the director used a very simple Betting, consisting of a few marble benches and Grecian pedestals placed within the background of trees and greenery.[36] The lighting scheme followed his plan of masked footlights plus green, rose and yellow lights mounted up in the trees.[37] The total effect impressed the critics as extremely beautiful, as lovely as a "Maxfield Parrish picture." [38]

That Brown was fully aware of the "New Stagecraft" technique of simplification and suggestion, end was attempting to use it in Twelfth Night was revealed in the comment of the Hutchinson Gazette:

> The new stagecraft is a suggestive idea that swings away from the realistic work that has long held sway, and the lights play a most important part in the setting of the play. They kindle and quicken the imagination. . . . Fresh from the centers where the new world [sic] is having its trials, Gilmor Brown will give Hutchinson insight into the best that the stage is offering in New York and abroad, when he presents the play next Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday nights.[39]

Brown's early interest in the new scenic technique should be emphasized, since a definite relationship exists between the Hew Stagecraft and the arena stage.

In all. Brown directed fifteen separate outdoor productions of seven plays during the four summers devoted to this activity. He followed the Hutchinson play of 1914 with a production of As You Like It in Kinsley. In 1915 and 1916 Brown continued what had become an annual event in Hutchinson, but also spread his work to several other towns. He produced plays in Lincoln, Herington, St. John, and Stafford, Kansas, as well as Rochester, Minnesota, the city dominated by the Mayo brothers. In each case he had to plan his productions to fit the differing locations. In both Kinsley and Rochester his work stimulated plans for construction of permanent outdoor theatres.

Of these open air presentations only two need be mentioned here. One was the performance of The Piper in Hutchinson; the other, Sakuntala, in Stafford. The Hutchinson play was Josephine Peabody's version of the story of the Pied Piper of Hamlin, which proved to be Brown's best loved acting performance in the Kansas town. Presented in 1915 in the Briggs-Wall garden. Brown again practiced great simplification in the setting. To represent the public market of Hamlin, he employed a well with a wayside shrine upstage of it. Many of the scenes centered about the shrine.[40] As The Hutchinson News reported, the shrine and the well "were about the only stage 'properties. used." [41]

The Stafford performance of Sakuntala is of concern because it wee given horseshoe staging. When discussing hie concept of flexible and central staging many years later,

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[36]The Hutchinson News. July l6, 1914.

[37]The Hutchinson Gazette, loc. cit.

[38]Ibid.

[39]The Hutchinson Gazette, "To Rehearse Tonight on Open Air Stage." Undated clipping, July, 1914. [GB II, P. 25.3

[40]The Hutchinson Gazette, June 10, 1915. [GB II, P. 42.]

[41]The Hutchinson News, June 10, 1915. [GB II, p. 40.

Brown referred to this production of the Hindu drama as a definite predecessor of the Playbox.[42] The play was given in the new city park of Stafford, as an event celebrating the opening of this civic acquisition. For his acting areas, the producer employed the bandstand which had been constructed in the park and an area in front of it. The indication that the audience sat around the actors was brought out in a contemporary description of the production:

> Part of the stage was the bandstand, and part of it a semi-circle of sand in front of it.
>
> The seats followed the circle, after the fashion of the days when the play was written when the audience sat on the ground outside the stage. [Underlining not in the original.][43]

In addition to these outdoor productions. Brown gave several indoor plays using amateurs during the 1915-16 season. At this time he was trying to settle in Hutchinson since theatrical touring had been in a general decline as a source of livelihood for actors. He tried to obtain a position teaching dramatics in the public school system but was not successful.[44] In lieu of public school teaching, he opened his own "Gilmor Brown School of Expression" in a rented house in the city. He also formed an organization called "The Festival Players" (among whom were some of his students), with the purpose of developing a nucleus of amateur actors for the summer dramatic festivals. A series of plays were performed to keep the actors in training during the winter months.[45]

An Indoor Production of a Greek Tragedy

A number of The Festival Players participated in a large scale production which Brown directed under the auspices of the Hutchinson Women 4B Club, This presentation of Euripides' The TroJan Women given in the Convention Hall of the city, was Brown's first recorded effort in staging a classical Greek drama. Always interested in historical traditions, he tried according to the program of the play, to present "as nearly as possible the conditions and atmosphere of the ancient Greek theatre." In this respect he was moving toward the intimacy concept of the arena, as he had in Sakuntala and a a Max Reinhardt had done in circus productions of Oedipus and The Oresteia approximately five years before this. The program described the setting as follows:

> The setting represents the orchestra circle, the steps and the stage of an ancient Greek theatre. . . . As no curtain is used a trumpet call will announce the beginning and end of the performance.[46]

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[42]Alice Haines Baskin, "A Little Room," [Caption; Again of Gilmor and the Playhouse"), Pasadena Star News, undated clipping in possession of the present writer. References in the article indicate July, 1954 as the probable date.

[43]The Kinsley Graphic, August 17, 19l6. [OB II, p. 64.]

[44]Bill Brown, "Pasadena Playhouse Has Roots in Hutchinson," The Hutchinson News-Herald, February 13, 1955. [POP, 1955, "General,"J

[45]Prospectus of "Gilmor Brown School of Expression" in GB II, p. 51.

[46]Program of The TroJan Women in GB II, p, 57.

The Convention Hall bed a main floor end two balconies which apparently extended around the sides of the auditorium toward the stage. The main floor was called “the arena floor,” On this arena floor were seats for the audience and the pert of the setting representing the Greek orchestra circle. True to ancient tradition an altar was placed in the center of the orchestra, around the altar the floor was painted to produce the effect of inlaid tile.

From this orchestra circle wide steps covered in white cheesecloth led up to the stage. The stage was “all draped in white to represent the ground before the tents where the captive Trojan women were being kept.” [47]

The closeness to the audience of the actors performing in the orchestra circle and on the steps was clearly demonstrated when an accident occurred during the performance. When she threw herself down on the steps, the actress playing the insane Cassandra accidentally spilled burning fluid onto the cloth covering material. As the performer tried to snuff out the spreading flame with her hand, a man from the audience rushed up the steps to help her, When the flames were extinguished the two fire-fighters received a round of applause from the house.[48]

From these outdoor and indoor productions in Kansas, it may be seen that Brown was developing concepts of the adaptability of productions to a variety of forms of theatre structure and scenic arrangement. He was moving toward the intimacy principle through staging such plays as the Indian and Greek classics. In Pasadena he continued along these lines, ultimately developing an intense desire to experiment with complete freedom in flexible intimate staging,

First Visits to California

Brown’s permanent residency in Pasadena began in 19l6, when he arrived there with a small stock company to play in the Savoy theatre.[49] It was not, however, the first time he had been there. In the spring of 1913 a tour with his own professional company ended in Los Angeles, Since ht bed not been able to work up e dramatic festival for Kansas this season, he needed employment to carry him through the summer months. By a turn of circumstance, he heard of the difficulties the little Savoy Theatre in Pasadena had been having with an alcoholic leading man. One night the actor failed to show up for a performance, end Gilmor was called in to replace him. As a result he played leading roles with the company from June 2 through November 9, 193.3. and in addition took over the direction of the plays during his last few weeks at the Savoy.[50]

In November Brown left for a more lucrative engagement in El Paso, taking with him several of the Pasadena actors. This was followed by a stint in Arizona. The summer of 1914 found him producing his outdoor festivals in Hutchinson and Kinsley, Kansas, but he planned a return to Pasadena. On August 26, 1914, the Kinsley Graphic reported:

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[47]The Hutchinson News, February 15, 1916. [GB II, P. 58.3

[48]The Hutchinson Gazette, February 17, 1916. [GB II, P. 58.]

[49]Pasadena Daily News, May 29, 1913.

[50]Ibid., October 18, 1913.

> Gilmor Brown left for Pasadena, California today where he will lead a company of his own. They will play the entire season in stock at one of the theatres In Pasadena.[51]

Although Brown did make his way to California, he was unable to carry out this plan to establish a resident company in Pasadena. Instead he traveled with a troupe through small towns in California, playing in Chino, Glendora, and Upland, for example, at admission prices of fifteen and twenty-five cents, an effort to meet the deadly competition of notion pictures.[52] He must have spent some time in Pasadena during this season, for the announcements of the Hutchinson Festival of 1915 publicize the director as "Mr. Gilmor Brown of Pasadena.," [53]

During 1915-16, Brown remained in Kansas trying, as we have seen, to establish himself in Hutchinson. He was turning thirty years of age and may have felt that it was time that he settled in one place, especially since theatrical touring was becoming more and more hazardous.

His School of Expression did not turn out to be a gold mine,[54] enrolling only a modest number of students. Furthermore his professional touring in Kansas from his base in Hutchinson had been limited in scope. As a result, when Mrs. J. B. Durand, a visitor to the Kansas town from Pasadena, urged him in the summer of 1916 to try his hand once wore in California, he gave the matter some serious thought. Mrs. Durand had initiated a Tuesday morning Drama Class in Pasadena; it was interested in bringing good spoken drama to the city. She assured Brown he would find support from her group, and she promised to introduce him to outstanding Pasadena members of the Drama League.[55]

Becoming Established in Pasadena

Brown arrived in Pasadena in September, 1916 with his parents, his brother, and his sister-in-law, the actress, Virginia Lykins Brown, and his associate for the past few years, John Allard. He had assembled a company consisting of a small number of professional actors, a group to which he soon added such Pasadena amateurs as Wendell Wilson and Marjorie Sinclair, members of the Pasadena Masquers dramatic club. Marjorie Sinclair, was a member of the "winter colony" and resided at the ultra-fashionable Hotel Maryland. As his leading lady he had brought Lillian Buck,[56] a young woman who had acted in theRochester, Minnesota summer festival and had offered to help in the financing of the Pasadena Block company.[57]

He rented the 500 seat Savoy Theatre in which he had performed in 1913. It's reputation as a theatre was none too good with the conservative element in the city since

[51]51GB II, p. 63.

[52]Publicity leaflets, (SB II, pp. 15, 21, and 3-4.

[53]Announcement, OB II, p. 36.

[54]The Hutchinson News Herald, loc. cit.

[55]Gilmor Brown, "A Dream on a Dime," p. l64.

[56]Miss Buck accepted leaser roles throughout the season after receiving negative reactions to her first performance, She was initially replaced by Josephine Dillon, who later became dark Gable's dramatic coach and first wife.

[57]Interview with Gilmor Brown, May 6, 1959.

it had housed burlesque shows prior to 1913 in addition to stock companies and motion pictures. Charles Prickett recalled that local college students on one occasion fired spit balls at the burlesque queens.[58] Brown announced that his theatre would charge "popular prices for the best shows possible" in order to help restore the position that the spoken drama had held before films had thrown it into an eclipse.[59] Tb advertise The Man of the Hour, hie opening production, he borrowed a bicycle and pedalled about the city distributing handbills. They proclaimed admission prices of twenty-five to fifty cents for evening performances, end ten to twenty-five cents at matinees.[60]

The story of the next two seasons might be called the death and transfiguration of a stock company. What happened in essence was that Brown acquired more and more recognition from the cultural leaders of the community while finding it increasingly difficult to maintain his company. This was due to the limited attendance of the general public. On January 19. 19171 a committee of prominent citizens placed a notice in the Pasadena Star-News endorsing the Savoy Stock Company as "an organization that will prove of value to the community." The notice praised Brown's "resourcefulness in adapting his performances to an inadequate stage In the only theatre available at present." The committee urged the public to guarantee to purchase in advance a number of seats each month, so that Brown would be able to present more "high-class royalty plays." An advance sale of tickets was also needed simply to keep the theatre operating. For the sake of economy the producer had already been forced to present a goodly number of old melodramas such as Piney Ridge and St. Elmo.

After the fervent appeal of the citizen's groups, matters did not improve appreciably. When Brown presented royalty plays of the better type, the attendance was still poor, and he had to turn back to mediocre non-royalty plays ("cheap plays," he called them) to compensate for the losses.[61] Ironically the inferior plays often brought in the larger audiences. The director was learning that the general public of Pasadena had simple tastes which would need considerable development before dramas with literary value would be appreciated,

While the public remained unconcerned over these efforts to bring it culture. Brown continued to receive encouragement from the Pasadena Center of the Drama league. He had taken part in the establishing of this local branch of the national organization in November. Cooperating with it, he had presented special performances at the Savoy, consisting of superior one act plays and original scripts written by local playwrights.

In 1917 he began presenting distinguished one-act plays as curtain raisers for the regular Tuesday matinee and evening performances. Among the short plays given were such dramas as Maeterlinck's "'Hie Intruder," Strindberg's "The Stronger," and Yeats' "The Pot of Broth." In addition Brown gave a series of afternoon lecture-readings for Drama League members at the music hall of Pasadena High School. He interpreted Tartuffe, Oedipus, Androcles and the Lion, and Shakuntala, accompanying each reading with a discussion of the pertinent aspects of theatre history associated with the particular play. In this way, the director of the Savoy Stock Company was cooperating

[58]Laurie Grey, "A History of the Pasadena Playhouse," Section I, 1916-17f p. 3.

[59]Josephine Dillon, Queen of Savoy Stock Company," "She Herald, city not identified? not dated, but reference in article indicates a date during week of October 9. 1916. [OB III, p. 14.3

[60]Grey, loc. cit.

[61]Pasadena Star-News, April 30, 1917.

with and developing the goodwill of the segment of his audience who wanted to see him produce dramas of quality in Pasadena.

By the end of the season of 1916-174 Brown saw that he could no longer maintain en entire company of paid professional actors. The Drains- League Center had been Interested in promoting a civic theatre for Pasadena. On April 30, the Star-Hews reported Brown's address at e meeting of the League members in which he outlined his suggestions for such a civic theatre. He proposed a combining of a small nucleus of professional actors with a body of amateur performers. The diversified repertory of the group would extend beyond that of the usual stock company by including Shakespearean dramas, original scripts, and other plays of unusual literary and dramatic value. Hew ideas in stagecraft would also be tried out.

On June 1 the Drama League Center held a public meeting for the purpose of organizing the community playhouse. Three hundred people representing the leading organizations in the city and the general public, attended this session. The distinguished Presbyterian minister, Robert Freeman, presided. As a result of the meeting a committee was formed to work with Brown in developing plans for the new theatre group which would be called The Community Players. On this occasion Brown repeated his concept Of the repertory, adding the suggestion that the plays "need not always be of the 'high brow. order, and that comedies should predominate." [62]

While there was thus a glimmer of hope for a theatrical future in Pasadena for Brown and his professional associates, their financial condition in the late spring of 1917 was extremely precarious.

The company of ten actors, six men and four women, played in summer engagements in Pomona and Pasadena until the beginning of August. Then in the week of August 6, the troupe pared down to a total of six to "barnstorm" small California towns. These six actors, a number which included Brown and his sister-in-law, became the nucleus of the paid professionals in the new professional-amateur Community Players.

While his theatre now had a community organization officially connected with it. Brown still had complete financial responsibility. The smaller number of paid actors helped to reduce expenses, but he was to face another difficult year. One ruse he practiced for sheer purposes of survival was the piratical adaptation and rewriting of plays, presenting them under new titles, to avoid royalty costs. He confessed this at a later date, describing the practice as hie "black market" operation.[63] Thus, of twenty-eight productions given during the season, seven plays were listed as being anonymously written. These embraced such titles as "Wanted, A Wife," "The Tribulations of Jimmy," "College Claims" and "Have You a Little Burglar In Your Home?" [64]

Brown further avoided royalties by the laudable expedient of presenting seven offerings of classic works (Shakespeare, Moliere, Sheridan, etc.). He also presented three non-royalty nineteenth century comedies and several bills of original one acts. It was undoubtedly the poorest season the Samuel French Company ever had in Pasadena. Brown presented only three full-length plays for which he paid any royalties.

During this period Brown drew an Income for himself averaging about six or seven

[62]Pasadena Star-News, June 2, 1917.
[63]Laurie Grey, *A History of the Pasadena Playhouse*, Section I, Season of 1917-18 p. 14.
[64]Ibid,., p. 31.

dollars a week.[65] With the company run on a co-operative basis the actors received the same amount.[66] The handwriting on the wall was appearing in bold, clear letters so far as the retention of paid professionals was concerned. During the summer of 1918 plans were made for the continuance of the theatre as a completely amateur operation, with only Brown, as director, receiving remuneration for services. His salary for a ten month season was to be $2,000.

With the incorporation of the Pasadena Community Playhouse Association in October 4, 1918, the transformation from stock company to amateur community theatre had been completed. Brown no longer had any personal financial obligation, but he had to manage his players through a season handicapped by the terrible influenza epidemic which had struck the country. Bans on public meetings and performances kept the Community Playhouse (the Savoy Theatre under its new name) closed during most of a four month period, while the rental charge for the premises continued. At one point performances were given with both actors and the painfully small audiences wearing gauze masks as a mandatory health precaution. According to Brown's own account, the Governing Board of the Playhouse came to him at this difficult juncture and admitted defeat under the financial harassment resulting from the epidemic, "The board met with me and sadly said that they feared we must close for good and all."[67]

Of course, B. rescue occurred. Brown remembered its fine theatrical timing;

> At that critical moment s letter came to me from Aline Barnsdall that enclosed a check for two thousand dollars. The Playhouse was saved.[68]

Miss Barnsdall had recently attempted to establish an artistic little theatre in Los Angeles, but the enterprise had become defunct. The wealthy heiress had apparently admired Brown's perseverance, as well as his goals.

As the season continued, the Playhouse followed its plan for one production per month rather then the weekly change of program which Brown had carried over from hi a stock company experience. The new practice allowed the amateur actors several weeks, rather than days, of rehearsal, To help train members of the community who were Interested in acting, directing, or play-writing, a practical program went into operation, This was the presentation of what were called "workshop" productions. Three of them were presented in this season under the direction of Cloyd Dalzell and Florence Macafee. Here the scope of the Playhouse repertory could be expanded through the inclusion of artistic one-act plays and original scripts in the Workshop programs. As a press release explained:

> People interested in writing for the stage will find the workshop a valuable department where they can learn the mechanics of the theatre, as nowhere else.[69]

At the end of the season, the Workshop was abandoned. The idea, however, was not lost, for Brown revived this training program in 1946 and it then became well established.

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[65] Alma E. Higgle, loc. cit.

[66] Laurie Grey, note card of interview of Grey with Carl Huxley, October, 1948.

[67] Gilmor Brown, "A Dream on a Dime," p. l67.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Monroe Lathrop, "Topics in Stagelend," Los Angeles Express, November 18, 1918. [PCP 1, p. 18.

The theatrical year of 44-SO started an upward trend for the organization after a dismaying first year as s. completely amateur group. At Brown's urging the Board agreed to hire a combination business manager-publicity director. The choice of H. 0. Stechhan was undoubtedly one of the happiest personnel decisions ever made in the history of the Pasadena Playhouse. Stechhan immediately initiated the first campaign to sell season tickets, a step which brought in $2,300.[70] It was certainly not a greet sum, but it was most comforting to an organization which had been proceeding up to then on a series of small loans negotiated through a local bank,

In addition to his activities in behalf of the theatre's finances, Stechhan launched a vigorous publicity campaign. He generated so many articles on the Playhouse in local and national publications that within two to three years the theatre had become known throughout the country. In his releases the publicist emphasized the community aspect of the Playhouse, a point on which Brown and the Governing Board strongly agreed. This was not an "art theatre" to be developed for a special clique but en institution which proposed to serve as a focal point for the cultural expression of the entire community. It fostered musical activity as well as theatrical production. It sought to give all a chance to participate in plays, either before the public, backstage, or on numerous production committees. The theatre was not trying to produce professional actors, but to provide an outlet for the expression of "citizen actors." Such was the tenor of the publicity, and it was a truthful "image" of the Playhouse at this stage of its development
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Not only did Stechhan build up the community concept but he also paid particular attention to publicizing Brown as the key figure of the theatre. As a consequence, the Pasadena director achieved s kind of "star" status which he had probably never contemplated in his days as a touring actor. He became one of the most prominent community theatre directors in the nation within a very few years.

In the same year that Stechhan was employed another important addition to the paid staff was made. Carl P. Huxley, known as Fred, began a tenure of service as stage manager for the Playhouse which lasted until he literally died on the job some thirty years later. In these early years he built and often designed sets as well as stage-managed the productions.

By 44 the Playhouse began expanding its activities in a number of directions. It started a summer series of outdoor productions, a summer school of theatre, and it initiated a children's theatre. Within a few years all of these particular activities were dropped, but they were definite signs of growth in the organization.

For 1921-22 Brown asked for two assistant directors BO that the number of productions might be increased from nine to fifteen during the regular season. Prom December through April Pasadena was s popular winter resort for wealthy visitors from across the country. Brown wanted to provide more plays during these months. With the advent of these assistant directors, in addition to the previous acquisition of an Assistant Business Manager, Charles Prickett, and a second stage technician, the staff had grown to approximately nine members.[71]

Another important sign of growth was the serious effort being expended in planning

[70] Minutes of the Governing Board of the Pasadena Community Playhouse, Vol. I, p. 51.

[71] Information from Pasadena Community Playhouse program of Little Women, October 24, 192!.

for the purchase of land and the construction of a new theatre plant. This was a step which was not only desirable but becoming more and more necessary as the rental for the "old Savoy" continued to spiral upward and as dissatisfaction with the limitations of the theatre increased.

The repertory, which had improved considerably by this time, was beginning to take on the diversified pattern which became the hallmark of the Playhouse. It Included along with its predominant number of popular comedies (no longer "black market" selections), a few classics such as the works of Shakespeare and Sheridan, an unusual colorful play (for example. Yellow Jacket), one or two premieres of original plays, and occasionally a strong modern drama. Ibsen's An Enemy of the People and Galsworthy's Strife were examples of the last category.

While the Playhouse was developing. Brown's financial condition was also on the upswing . For 1941 his annual salary from the Playhouse had reached $3,400.[7273] With this improvement in his finances, he was able to negotiate the purchase in July, 192! of a large twenty-five year old house on Fairoaks Avenue, not far from the Playhouse. He made a down payment of $1,000 on a purchase price of 7,000, and spent an additional 4l4OO renovating the building. The house had belonged to an artist who used a portion of the first floor as his studio. Brown found the studio a convenient place for committee meetings and rehearsals. It ultimately became the home of the Fairoaks Playbox.

Brown's Pasadena Productions: Adaptability, Simplification. Intimacy

During these years prior to the founding of the Fairoaks Playbox, while Brown was establishing himself and the community theatre in Pasadena, he put into further practice concepts of staging which proved to be of significance for his intimate flexible theatre. In both indoor and outdoor productions he gained more experience in adapting plays to diverse surroundings and to architectural limitations. He maintained his interest in simplification and suggestion in settings, and worked toward actor-audience intimacy through the use of a forestage indoors and through horseshoe staging outdoors.

One of Brown's talents which was especially praised by the citizen's group which endorsed the Savoy Stock Company was his ability to adapt his productions to fit the small stage of the Savoy Theatre. He continued to surprise audiences with the manner in which he and the scene designers under his supervision made the stage accommodate all sorts of scenic requirements. One writer called it a Miracle:

> Gilmor Brown is the modern 'miracle man' performing weekly miracles at the little playhouse with its tiny stage no bigger than a small room, that is made to create the illusion of a Roman amphitheatre, an ocean cavern of unearthly radiance and beauty, and a modern drawing room at will. He is a magician.[74]

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[72] Copy of Gilaior Brown's federal income tax return for 1921, Archives of the Pasadena Playhouse.

[73] Brown's salary increased to 4,00 in 1942, remained level until 19'4. when it Jumped to 6,000. By 199 he reached his lifetime peak in salary from the Playhouse at 9,000.

[74] "Community Players," California Life, May 1, 1940. [POP I, p. 123.]

The stage on which such theatrical magic was accomplished had a total width of thirty feet, a depth of eighteen feet, end a height from the stage floor to the roof of thirty feet. There was almost no wing or flying space, and very little room behind the average set.[75] Many sets extended to within a foot of the back wall of the theatre. Consequently, actors had to go out of the building into the rear alley to make "crossovers." On rainy days umbrellas were of assistance in protecting the costumes in such tours of the alley, but there were times when characters returned to the stage unmistakably damp.[76]

In Kansas Brown had revealed hie awareness of the "Mew Stagecraft" principles of simplification and suggestion in place of detailed representation. In Pasadena in 1919 he described, these concepts in a public lecture which he delivered at an exhibition of modern stage designs. On display at the Pasadena Public Library were sketches and models by such noted artists as Norman Bel Geddes, Lee Simonson, Livingston Platt, Sam Hume, and Rollo Peters.

The Star-News reported details of Brown's lecture:

> Modern stage settings, he explained, were made up of as few pieces as possible. Much is left to the imagination of the persons witnessing the performance. In the grouping of settings little change is needed throughout a play and by the clever use of theatrical lighting the scenes are changed as if by magic.
>
> The beautiful color effects obtained by the electrical playing of multi-colored lights gave the idea of vastness, of solidity, a perspective of mysticism and variety. . . ,
>
> Mr. Brown is endeavoring to carry out this idea of few settings, clever lighting effects and broader dramatic conceptions in the Community Players productions.[77]

Among the techniques the producer employed In the practice of scenic simplification was the use of drapery and set pieces. This approach was carried over to a number of productions at the Fairoaks Playbox.

Quite a few of the plays in which Brown employed the drapery background were seventeenth and eighteenth century works. The following were represents: five productions:

The Tempest.–January 26, 1920. The setting for this production consisted of light-colored drapery and three sets of steps–a wide unit at center siege, and two narrower unite at the sides.[78] The reasons for the choice of setting were financial as well as artistic. Brown once explained that at the time he bed only sixty-eight cents left in his production funds to mount the play:

> We did The Tempestnon royaltyagainst cheesecloth curtainswhich we owned-lighted both front end backdishpan floodswith colors that shifted for the various scenes of the play like the hues in a bubble. ... We played The

[75]"Backstage at the Pasadena Playhouse," the Billboard, September 18, 1946.
[76]Gilmor Brown, "The First Twenty-Five Years," p. 5.
[77]"Gilmor Brown Gives Stage Lecture," Pasadena Star-News, December 22, 1919. [POP I, p. 59.]
[78]Photograph of The Tempest production. Playhouse Photographs, Volume I.

> Tempest for ten days instead of the usual five and felt affluent for over a month.[79]

Tartuffe.–June 21, 1920. The set, e room in Orgon's house, used the light-colored curtains for a back wall and two side walls, arranged as in a box set. Beautifully decorated doors were placed in openings cut into the drapery, while a fireplace was located up center against the back curtains. The only other furnishings of the room were a most elegant period table and two chairs, and two tall candelabra stands.[80]

The School for Scandal.–January 8, 1923. For this play the setting made use of dark curtains hung in a wing and back cloth arrangement. For the scene of the suction of the paintings, five portraits were hung from a batten against the upstage drapery. Beneath the pictures was a small platform containing a love seat. Downstage of the platform stood a high-backed arm chair.

The "screen scene" called forth an even simpler setting. Against the rear drapery there stood a stylized window unit. The remainder of the furniture consisted of en arm chair, a straight chair, end a screen.

The use of curtain settings was by no means restricted to plays of an earlier period. A number of dramas written during the thirty years prior to their Playhouse productions were given this form of scenic simplification. In May and (June, 1919, Brown presented Shaw's comedy of a modem dentist. You Never Can Tell, and Percy Mackaye's The Scarecrow in drapery settings. Two other contemporary works Ashes of Roses and The Stepmother also received the same treatment in the late spring of 1919. In 1922, The Importance of Being Earnest was performed before a combination Of painted screens and drapery cyclorama. In the same year. Brown gave Arms and the Man using curtain walls for Raina's bedroom and conventional flats for other scenes.

Whenever the producer attempted a aeries of plays in repertory he relied to a great extent on the drapery method to solve the scenic problems. In December 1923 he announced repertory series which included Rostand's The Romancers A Shaw's Candida, end revivals of The Importance o f Being Earnest. and Twelfth Night, His announcement stated:

> There will be no attempt at realistic settings for any of the plays in this Repertory. We present merely s decorative background of draperies, a few simple properties, lighting in the mood of the scene enacted and a sincere interpretation of whet we believe to be the intent of the author.[81]

For several productions, such as The Rivals, Love's Labours Lost, and Twelfth Night (1918 production). Brown had used the scheme of forestage area, portals, and inner proscenium, but these were all placed behind the regular proscenium arch of the theatre. In at least two productions, however, he employed a forestage which projected beyond the proscenium into the auditorium. One was The Master of Shadows, an original religious drams staged in January, 1920; the other and more significant production,

80 far as the use of the forestage was concerned, was Much Ado About Nothing, which opened almost a year earlier on March '4, 1919.

[79] Gilmor Brown, loc. cit.

[80] Playhouse Photographs, loc. cit.

[81] Pasadena Community Playhouse program, December 25, 1923.

Advertised as a production in the Elizabethan style, Much Ado About Nothing revealed to its audiences a forestage of considerable depth, extending out over the orchestra pit and approximately the first four rows of Bests in the center section of the auditorium. In imitation of the facade of the Elizabethan "tiring house," a scenic wall was located behind the proscenium arch of the theatre. On a level with the forestage there were three curtained openings, while on an upper level there were simulations of the Elizabethan balcony and window stages.

On the forestage itself. Brown placed three pieces of furniture: two high-backed chairs on right and left at the upstage end, and a backless bench in approximately the center of the forestage. With actors performing out on this platform a step was certainly being taken toward achieving the intimacy of the Elizabethan theatre, a step limited, however, by the architectural restrictions of the building. In the photographs of the set of Much Ado About Nothing, at least four rows of seats may be seen at the sides of the forestage. These seats, which were apparently available for the audience, were so placed that persons in the first row sat at a point approximately ten feet upstage from the front end of the platform. Anyone In these seats would, consequently, be looking at actors from the side at some moments, and might perhaps have had to turn and look backwards at other times.

In Pasadena Brown continued to develop his technique In the production of plays outdoors. In certain respects these open-air presentations 'were steps toward the type of staging used In such a non-proscenium theatre as the Fairoaks Playbox. Brown built no proscenium arch or stage platform for the outdoor performances but used an open ground space for his acting area. Furthermore he worked gradually into horseshoe staging, making a clearcut use of it in a series of productions of classical Greek dramas. This experience in horseshoe staging was a direct precedent for his work in the form in the Playbox. It also created an excellent background for his efforts in central staging.

A Midsummer Night's Dream.– August 8, 1918. The first open-air production Brown presented in Pasadena was ;A Midsummer Night's Dream, a Shakespearean comedy which he had previously produced on six separate occasions in natural settings in Kansas end Minnesota. His Pasadena performances were presented in the large garden of Mrs. P. 0. Cruikshank (the mother of Mrs. Samuel B. Hinds) where Brown was able to take advantage of a natural slope and

terraced areas. His acting area consisted of an upper stage which led down by wide, grassy steps and elopes to a lower forestage.[82] According to Grey, who interviewed Charles and Oliver Prickett in 1948, "the seats for the spectators were set up on a tennis court around the forestage plotso arranged that all could see and hear." [83] The present investigator visited the site at 1071 S, Orange Grove Avenue in August 1962, and found vestiges of the Cruikshank tennis court, although an apartment house had replaced the demolished residence. The tennis court was at a lower level than the terrain near the street.

Grey's evidence suggests that the Beats may have been placed in something of a horseshoe arrangement around the forestage, but the statement certainly cannot be considered conclusive.

[82]Pasadena Star-News, August 10, 1918.
[83]Grey, op. cit. "1917-18," p. 46.

Figure 2.1: Tartuffe. June 21, 1920, Pasadena Community Playhouse. Simplified setting with drapery background.

The Tyranny of Tears.–September 5, 1918. Another garden production followed shortly after the Shakespearean comedy. Brown presented Haddon Chambers' The Tyranny of 'rears in the garden of the Broadoaks School in September.[84] The Star'-News reported that the play was a "clever comedy of the Intimate type which lends Itself well to outdoor production." It was stressed that the "seating arrangements make it possible for every spectator to see and hear clearly."

During the summers of 1920 and 1921, Brown produced plays for the community theatre in a newly developed outdoor location in Brookside Park, Pasadena. While this open air theatre Is no longer being used, it is still standing, and in fairly good condition. Here Brown was able to make definite progress toward horseshoe staging and central staging.

The theatre divided into two main sections of Beats, a lower and an upper area. The lower area contained three terraced levels for seats, which swung around the acting area in an arc cutting off approximately one third of a circle (Fig. 3). In such an arrangement of seats, the audience sat partially around the actors.

At Brookside Theatre, Brown produced four plays. Two of the productions presented in the summer of 192! are of Interest since the photographic records show that they contained visual compositions of great depth, with affinities to the patterns of central staging:

[84]The buildings are still standing in this location, although the Pacific Oaks School now occupies the premises.

Figure 2.2: *Much Ado About Nothing*. March 24 1919¡ Pasadena Community Playhouse. Projecting forestage and scenic facade in imitation of an Elizabethan playhouse.

Pilgrim's Progress.–July 13, 1940. For one of the acts in his production of Pilgrim's Progress a Brown designed a large crowd scene in a circular pattern. The downstage actors stood peripherally along the edges of the

arc formed by the first tier of seats. They faced in toward the center of the acting area. The circular formation was continued by actors standing farther upstage who also faced in toward the center. Within the circle, at approximately the center, stood the main figurea man holding a large shield upon which was painted a white cross. This entire composition would have been well suited to an arena theatre (Fig. 4).

Pomander Walk.–August 10, 1921. In his direction of Pomander Walk for the Brookside Theatre, Brown used more of these compositions in great depth. In one scene a number of actors were turned facing upstage toward a focal figure who was standing upstage left near a wall. This man gestured toward the others with an outstretched arm (Fig. 5).

In the same summers that Brown was directing outdoor productions in Pasadena he was el so performing in a theatre which unquestionably used horseshoe staging. This was the open air Greek Theatre of the University of California at Berkeley. He was Invited to act in plays presented there in 1919, 1920, and 1922.[85]

In August, 1919, Brown appeared in Sam Hume's production of Miriam, Sister of Moses, a new script which

A circular grouping suggestive of central staging.

[85]"Programs, photographs, and reviews for these productions are located in Gilmoriana."

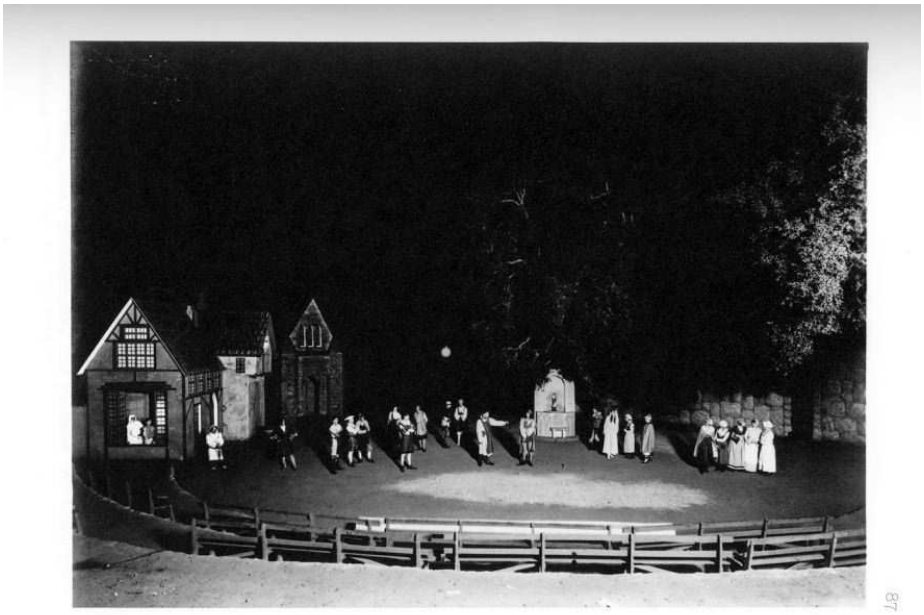

Figure 2.3: Brookside Park Outdoor theatre. Pasadena, The seats curved around the acting area. (The Piper, August 30, 1920.)

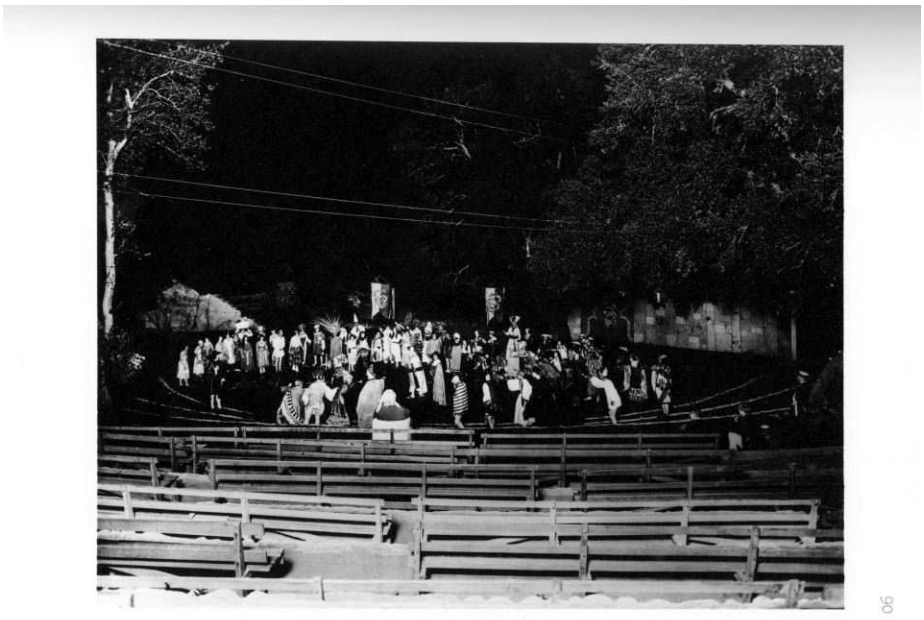

Figure 2.4: Pilgrim's Progress, July 13, 1920. Brookside Park Outdoor Theatre.

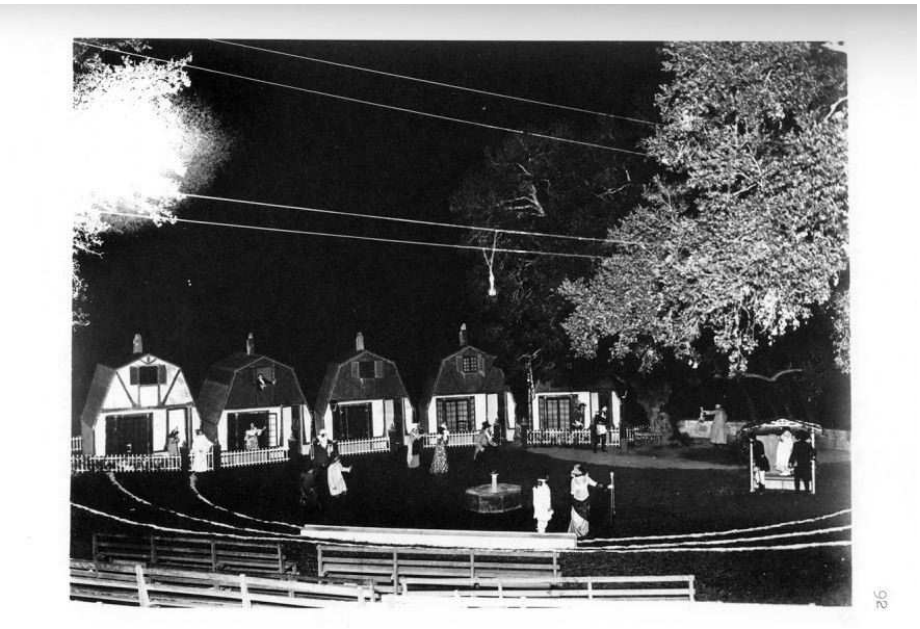

Figure 2.5: Pomander Walk. August 10, 1921, Brookside Park Outdoor Theatre.

A composition in depth, approaching central staging technique. provided acting roles for the dancers Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn. Frederick McConnell, who was Hume's assistant at the time, has described the performance as it took place la the "great open air circus," his term for the Greek theatre. He especially noted the strong effect upon the audience when the players performed within the traditional orchestra circle:

> When the action moved down into the pit of the circus, radiating inspiration and personality to the far flanks of the semi-circular embrace, the audience pitched forward, attuned and attentive, rapt and silent, mastered and conquered by the subtle and intriguing elements of pure theatre.[86]

In the summer of 1920 Brown was very much the star of Hume's Greek Theatre productions of Henry the Fourth, Parts One and Two, and The Merry Wives of Windsor, The Pasadena actor-director played Falstaff in all three presentations, to considerable acclaim from Bay Area critics. Photographs show Brown performing in the orchestra area, surrounded on three sides by the audience.

The 1922 production, under the direction of Irving Pichel and Everett Glass, provided Brown with his first role in a Greek drama at the Greek Theatre. He appeared as the blind old prophet Tiresias in Oedipus. Brown was able to observe the manner in which Pichel and Glass handled the classical form of "central staging," specifically in the groupings of the chorus within the orchestra circle. Extant photographs show

[86]Frederick McConnell, "'Miriam' at the Berkeley Theatre," The Drama, December, 1919, p. 93.

chorus members standing around the periphery of the orchestra for three-fourths of its circumference, facing in toward the altar, which was placed in traditional fashion in the center of the area. While Brown had directed The Trojan Women following the Greek traditions, six years previously, he had not had the opportunity, so far as the existing records indicate, to participate in a Greek production in surroundings modelled after the ancient theatres. The Berkeley experience was an especially useful one, since Brown was soon to embark on s. series of his own outdoor productions of Greek tragedies.

Between 44S and 192?. Brown produced the annual Senior Play for Occidental College, which was located only a few, miles from the Pasadena Community Playhouse. While the students had previously performed in modern works, a new tradition was initiated with the advent of Brown as their director. He staged three classical tragedies, Medea, The Bacchanals, end Iphigenia at Aulis, before he shifted his academic allegiance to the California Institute of Technology.

The Medea.–June 14, 44t When Brown presented 'Pie Medea in 444 the Star News pointed out that "this was the first tins that a Greek play has been presented in an entirely Grecian manner at Oxy."[87] While the newspaper account did not make clear the exact location on the college grounds, it did state that a simulation of 5 Greek theatre had been used. The audience sat in a stadium. The traditional chorus performed songs and dances, wearing costumes that were "a duplicate of the early Greek costumes in all respects." [88]

The Bacchanals.–June 12, 1924, A much more specific description of the staging for the next year's production has been recorded. In 19224 Brown directed The Bacchanals at Occidental College, creating a theatre out of a portion of the campus. He located hie acting area in the approach to the upper quadrangle. There stood two white buildings of classic design, with a broad space between them. Above was a grove of trees; below steps led down to a level area. On this level terrain in front of the steps, Brown placed his "orchestra." His plan was clearly described in the Star-Hews '.

> At the foot of these [steps] will be drawn the circle known to the ancients as the 'orchestra' in which both actors and chorus will perform. This is in exact accordance with the traditions of the Greek theatre, which has no raised stage. Around this circle concentric rows of seats will be erected in rising tiers.[89]

Later reports indicated that the above plan was carried out as described.[90]

Iphigenia at Aulis.–June 11, 1925. As a result of the success of The Medea and The Bacchanals, the President of Occidental College, Dr. Remsden D. Bird, promoted the construction of a permanent Greek theatre in which classics could regularly be staged. It was situated in "a natural bowl in the hills to the rear of the college."[91] Celebrating the opening of the new theatre in 192? was the performance of Iphigenia at Mills under Brown's direction. In this attractive stone theatre, small by ancient Greek standards but a fairly satisfactory approximation of the classical Greek structure.

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[87] Pasadena Star-News, June 15, 1923.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Pasadena Star-News, May l4, 1924. [POP 4, p. 178.3
[90] Hollywood Citizen, May 27, 1924. [POP 4, p. 192.3
[91] Los Angeles Times, June 7, 1924. [POP 4, p. 191.]

Brown was able to once more try his hand at traditional horseshoe staging. As was indicated above, groupings completely within the orchestra could attain patterns Identical with those of central staging. The structure of the Occidental Greek Theatre (known as the Hillside Theatre), WSs such that the rows of seats surrounded approximately three-fourths of the total area of the orchestra. Touching the edge of the orchestra was the bottom step of a flight of nine steps leading up to a stage. No scene was ever built for the theatre, so that the stage, which is approximately four feet above the orchestra level, has a hedge of ivy as its back wall.

Brown's outdoor Greek productions were not only examples of his Interest in pursuing the classical form of arena production, but also demonstrated his aptitude for creating a "theatre," a space for acting and for viewing, in whatever facility was at hand. This adaptable approach to the staging of plays was an important precursor to the idea of flexible staging within a single structure. As has been shown previously in this survey of the experiences which led Brown toward flexible staging, the idea of making a theatre out of unlikely places, or poorly equipped places, may be traced back to his childhood. A basement, a barn, a meeting hall, a cliff and a stream, a garden, any of these would serve for the production of a play. This concept was far from unique with Brown, but he was willing to practice it to a much greater extent than most producers and directors, especially those who had good conventional facilities available to them. Adaptability was an idea from his childhood, but he carried it into his adult years and retained it after he had regular access to excellent theatrical facilities.

On April l6, 1917, Brown revealed this flexible or adaptable approach when he took a Savoy Stock Company production to the vast Palm Room of the fashionable Hotel Maryland in Pasadena. In this dining room he placed the Savoy sets on a raised section at the west side. He rigged

his footlights and spotlights in the room, since the hotel had no regular lighting equipment suitable for the production.[92]

Brown indicated in an Interview a long time afterwards that he had also directed performances of original one-act plays in many different locations for members of the Drama League in Pasadena during the period of 19l6 to 1920.[93]

In October, 1922, the Pasadena producer formed his own repertory group to take plays out to clubs, high schools, and other organizations throughout Southern California.[94] Named "The Gilmor Brown Players," the company consisted of actors who had been associated with the Pasadena Community Playhouse. Ralph Freud has explained the great adaptability of the producer in this venture, as well as in others:

> Gilmor had played in so many places in hie tours, the-t he would make theatre anywhere. If he received a booking, he didn't ask about the theatrehe was ready to adjust to 11.[95]

To make the adjustment to a great variety of locations easier. Brown again practiced

[92]Grey, op. cit.., "Season of 1916-17."

[93]Grey, op, cit.. On a note card for her "History," Grey reports an interview with Gilmor Brown in 1948 in which he commented on these performances which took place in so many different locations. He gave no specific details, however.

[94]Christian Science Monitor, October 31, 1922. [POP 3, p. 47.J

[95]Interview with Ralph Freud, July 11, 1961.

scenic simplification. A publicity release appearing in *The Theatre Magazine* reported for the 1923-24 season a repertory of plays including Beyond the Horizon,, The Importance of Being Earnest, Candida, Twelfth Night, and The Merchant of Venice. For these plays representational scenery was avoided:

> This group makes no attempt at realistic scenery for the very obvious reason that their plays must be presented on school stages and in halls and clubs where the staging facilities are frequently very meagre and inadequate, but they follow the modern decorative method of stagecraft and their productions are presented artistically and with a definite simplicity of acting.[96]

One of the first locations to which the producer and his "Gilmor Brown Players" had to adjust was the Los Angeles Ebell Club. At that time it was located in an old building on Figueroa Street, which, according to Ralph Freud, possessed that intriguing vestige of earlier days, s sloping stage floor.[97] Here the Pasadena troupe presented Arms and the Man.[98]

On another occasion Brown took a play out to Pacific Palisades where he staged his production in the real estate subdivision office. It was the only building there at the time. Having been planned as the future recreation center for the subdivision it contained more space than most real estate offices, but was still far from being a theatre.[99]

[96] "The Amateur's Green Room," The Theatre Magazine, December 1923, p. .41. [PCP 4, p. 37 .]
[97] Freud, loc. cit.
[98] Pasadena Evening Post, October 17, 1922.
[99] Freud, loc. cit.

Chapter 3

THE GENEALOGY OF THE PLAYBOX CONCEPT

The previous chapter reviewed the practical theatre experience which led Brown toward his conception of the Playbox. The present chapter will discuss the major influenceB upon Brown which came from his reading, from attendance at lectures and performances, and through conversations with progressive theatre artists and crt flee. Many of the Influences stemmed from actual theatres which were In operation prior to 1924, while others came from proposals for new forms of staging and theatrical architecture. They may be classed in six categories according to the type of theatre or production practice suggested or employed. These categories are:

Extremely Intimate Theatres

Open Platform Stages with Scenic Adaptability

“Circus” Staging Proposals

Flexible Theatre Proposals

Private Club Theatres

Laboratory Theatres

Extremely ntimate Theatres

Rejane’s Little Platform

Toward the end of his life Brown harked back to a lecture he had heard In his youth P.B an es.rly stimulus toward the Playbox idea of Intimate staging. As a atudent at Mrs. Adams’ drama school in Chicago he hr’d witnessed a lecture-demonstration by the great French actrese, Re jane. The date would have been most probably December, 1904, when Re jane performed in Chicago for two weeks during her American tour.

Xnvited to speak et MTB. Adams. Studio, the actress demonstrated the manner in which a complete drama oould be effectively performed on a tiny square platform.[1]

Reinhardt's Kammerspiele

Two years after Re jane's lecture on the potential of intimate theatre. Max Reinhardt opened his KanHaerspiele, or Chamber Theatre, in Berlin. It was a three-hundred-sest thefttre with no balconies and with s "stage scarcely separated from the auditorium." [2] While it was no means as small as the playhouse the French actress had in mind, the Kaianerspiele was nevertheless designed to accommodate very intimate productions. ft.s Strindberg noted, its name euggested the purpose of "transferring the idea of chamber fflatsic to the drama,"[3] Reinhardtt B desire was for a "house resembling as closely as possible the body of a violin, and like the violin attuned to receive and respond to the slightest vibration." [4] Here plays of a subtle and delicate quality were performed with a restraint not possible in the Deutohea Theater, Reinhardt.s conventional-sized playhouse.

Strindberg's Intime, Teatern

In 1907, a year after the inception of the Kammerspiele, Strindberg and his partner August Paick launched the Intima Teatem (Intimate Theatre) in Stockholm, frankly following Reinhardt1s example. With n seating capacity of l6l, Strindberg's playhouse was more intimate and considerably less luxurious than its Berlin prototype. The Swedish dramatist sought a remedy for the extremely strong projection demanded in many of the large theatres inherited from the nineteenth century:

> We wanted a small theatre in order that the actors might be heard in every corner without having to shout. There are theatree so huge that everything must be said in a strained voice, which roakes everything sound falee. A declaration of love must be bellowed forth, a confidence expressed like a call to amis. . . .[5]

For his Intiiaa Teatem Strindberg wrote a number of works he called "Chamber Plays." Among theee were the dramas The Pelican, After the Pire, end The Qhost Sonata,

The First Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre

Other intimate theatres were soon established in Europe. especially in Qermany where Reinhardt had set a fashion. The moist definite influence on Ollrnor Brown, however, appears to have come from a Russian product of this trend. The particular intimate theatre was the First Studio of the WOQQQW Art Theatre, founded by Stanislavsky

[1] Gilmor Brown, "A Dream on a Dime," p. 177.

[2] Heinzs Herald, "ie Kacsnerspiele," Max Reinhardt and His Theatre. Oliver Sayler, cd., p. 148.

[3] August Strindberg, "Ifotes to the MeraberB of the Intimate Theatre," translated by Evert Sprinchom, Tulene Drama Review, Winter, 1961, p. 154.

[4] Hugo von Hoffmansthal, "Reinhardt ae an International Force," in Sayler, op cit., p. 4.

[5] Strindberg, loo, cit,

in 1913. The celebrated RusBlan director had established the Studio primarily to train young actors in his "Syatem." The quarters for the First Studio were situated on the top floor.of a building, occupying what had formerly been a sizable three-room apartment.[6] Initially the Studio aeoonanodated an audience of only seventy-five, although its capacity was soon increased to one hundred and fifty.[7]

Since a raised stage was not possible because of the lov? ceiling height, Stpinlslpvsky had the actors perform on the floor of the room. He seated his audience on tiered platforms rising in a stadium arrangement. No footlights were need 5 all the light came from above. Before the performance and during intermissions a cloth curtain closed off the acting area. The front row of seats was placed no raore than five or six feet from the ground oloth .which marked off the stage area.

Stanislavsky felt that this extreme closeness of the audience to the actors, the intimacy of the Studio, was one of the main reasons for its success:

> It seemed to the spectators that they were sitting in the very place where the action of the play was going on, that they were not spectators, but accidental witnesses of a strange life.[8]

Since the actors avoided playing to the audience, even in Shakespearean comedies4 the intimacy was of a kind which Oliver Sayler termed "impersonal":

> . . . the actors never let themselvea become aware of the audience. Even when . . they step off the ground cloth which alone marks the stege and use the normal exit from the auditorium and the foyer as a continuation of a street scene, they are in another world.[9]

IShis "impersonal intimacy" was the kind which Brown wa to bring his audiences in the Fairoaks Playbox,

The settings for the productions of the First Studio were another respect in which the Studio was a forerunner of the Playbox. Stanislsivsky made great use of draperies, simple suggestive pieces of scenery and furniture arrangements .

If Brown had not already learned about the First Studio from other sources, he would have gained much infiBOTnation from Sayler's description, published in 1920, and Stand, slavsky's account in My Life in Art, -which appeared in 1924. He owned copies of both books in the early 1940's and even obtained the revised edition of Seyler's work.[10]

Brown did not have to look to Europe alone, however, for siodels of extremely intimate theatres. Two small American playhouses had impreased him, both of which came into existence prior to the Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre. One was the Toy Theatre of Bostonj the other, the Chicago Little Theatre.[11]

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[6] Konstantin Stsnislavsky, My Life in Art4 p. 534.

[7] Richard Boleelavsky, "The Laboratory Thetre,." Theatre Arts¿ July, 19S3- P. 4T.

[8] Stanislavsky, loc cit.

[9] Oliver Sayler, The Russian Theatre Under the Revolution¡ p. 85.

[10] The Pasedena Playhouse Library possesses oopiea of Ssyle4s The Russian Theatre Under the Revolution (1940) and the revised edition7' entitled" ?0 4aslan Theptre (l922). Both contain Brown's bookplafce used in the early 1920's. Also in the Library is a copy of Stonislsvsky'B t4y Life in Art which according to e handwritten inscription, was given to Brown in 1924.

[11] In typed notes for a. lecture on the Pleybox, Brown liBted the Toy Theatre and the Chicago Little Theatre

The Toy Theatre

Established in 1911 in s remodeled etable, the Toy Theatre Boated 129 persons. It had a raised stage, fifteen feet wide and twenty-three feet deep, e, proBoenium arch and e conventional curtsin. The Toy Theatre influenced Brown through its email size and lie repertory. ?3. Lyman Os Ie, the founder, selected unfamiliar plays for the most pert. The works chosen Btresaed "first productions of native American authors, plays of foreign dramatists never before seen in this country, and the recent pieces of the modern Englishmen.[12]

The Chicago Little Theatre

The Chicago Little Theatre wee founded by Maurice Browne in 1912. Located in a long, narrow room on the fourth floor of e Chicago building, the theatre held ninety-one eeatB. Within the confineB of this small ploy house, Maurice Browne applied meny of the scenic principles of Gordon Cralg, principles which, according to Sheldon Cheney, were "practically unknown to this country.[13] Important to the Playbox concept was the Chicago director's firm belief in the "illusion value of the small theatre and the codes of production which its miniature size demanded." [14] The Little Theatre used extremely simple settingB, and paid great attention to lighting effects,

The acting often possessed restraint, "quietness of tone," [15] as Cheney described Its quality. A practice of the theatre which could have made the actors lose their restraint was the regular omission of the names of the cast from the programs. This practice was to be tried and dropped at the Fairoaks Playbox,

Open Platform Stages

At least four theatres using open platform stages without a conventional proscenium arch affected Brown In his desire to break away from the proscenium stage. Furthermore three of them pointed the -way toward Brown's type of flexible theatre through their use of varied acting areas and simple Bcenic modifications of a permanent architectural background. The three theatres with adaptable platform stages were the Theatre du Vieux Colombier, the Maddermarket Theatre, and the Redoutensaal Theatre. A fourth open platform theatre was Wheeler Hall Auditorium, which is mentioned because Brown was personally acquainted with it and listed it as a predecessor of the Fairoaks Playbox.

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among predecessors of hie intimate theatre. These note cards, which are part of the Playhouse collection of Brown's papers, date from approximately 1947.

[12]Homer W, Howard, "The Toy Theatre of Boston," The Drama, May, 1914, P. S4.

[13]Sheldon Cheney, The Art Theatre (44S ed.), p. 119.

[14]Thomas Dicklnson, The Insurgent Theatre, p. l4b.

[15]Cheney, op. cit., p, 143.

Theatre du Vieux Colombier

During 1917-19 when the Theatre du Vieux Colombler was in New York, Brown was busy guiding the Pasadena Playhouse through its difficult first two years, end did not leave California. Consequently he read descriptions of Copeau's novel productions in the Sunday issues of the New

York Times, to which he subscribed. He also learned details from other contemporary publications.[16] What must

have Impressed him was the emphasis on the actors brought about by the prominent forestage, the great simplicity of the scenic devices, and the ease with which modifications could be made in the permanent background.

Copeau's arrangement in New York has been described as "first cousin to the Elizabethan stage.[17] The Garrick Theatre in which the company performed had been altered to provide a three-area stage. The three parts were a forestage, a main stage, and a balcony stage. The balcony was a particularly adaptable area:

> The balcony and the space below it might be variously shut off from the main portion of the stage by tapestries, lattices, screens, or sections of scenery, flat or pierced with windows or doors. Steps could be variously pieced to give access to the balcony.[18]

When in 1919 Copeau brought his troupe back to France he remodelled hie old Vieux Colombler Theatre in Paris along the lines of the New York plan. Brown followed

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Copeau's work in France through articles in Theatre Arts[19] and the descriptions in Kenneth Macgowan's books.[20]

The Maddermarket Theatre

An English playhouse which had a relationship to the Elizabethan stage as well as to the Playbox idea was the Maddermarket Theatre of Norwich. In 1921 this amateur group under the leadership of Nugent Monck bought an eighteenth century building which had originally been a church, Monck remodeled it after the Fortune Theatre of Elizabethan times. The Interior of the building had a gallery running around it. This gallery was retained along three sides and connected to a balcony stage at a slightly lower level on the fourth side. Beneath this Elizabethan balcony stage was an inner stage which could be curtained off. In front of the inner stage was the main stage which occupied the entire width of the hall and half the length of the building. The interior while giving the Impression of "domestic

[16]Interview with Gilmor Brown, May 20, 1959.

[17]Irving Piehel, On Building 4 Theatre, p. 74.

[18]Ibid.

[19]In the interview of May 20, 19594 Brown told the present writer that he had regularly read Theatre Arts in the years prior to the founding of the Playbox.

[20]Brown credited Macgowan's books The Theatre of Tomorrow (1921) and Continental Stagecraft (1922) as important Influences in his letter written to Brooks Atkinson, drama critic of the New York Times, June 15, 1950.

Tudor p-rchitecture" was "sufficiently free from detail to blend .with nearly any setting." [21]

In an article in the July, 1923 issue of Thee.tre Arts (an issue which Brown must have read very throughly), Andrew Stephenson carefully described the symbolic aspects of the scenery, the simplicity of the settings, the importance of the adaptability principle, and the economy of the theatre.

The balcony stage MRS of great value because it could be decorated so as to become a symbol for the entire production:

> The uses to which a producer can put it seem limitless. , . . By pointing a medieval screen on it, or some simple eighteenth century device, the rest of the stage seems to fall into the same period.[22]

The sets were of the utmost simplicity with e for mally suggestive background:

> It must not be understood thst anything elaborate is Implied by a 'set-scene'et the most a few rostra, one or two oak chairs. Joint stools or benches are employed. The background is alwrys composed of figured tspeetries end the architecture of the stage itself, and as it is largely by these hangings that the adaptability of the stage is rendered possible, their importance cannot he exaggerated. Made of plein sacking, they are painted with various dyes, the decorations being pdapted to ecch play.[23]

Stephenson (?rgued that the real success of the Mi-'d dermerket Theatre ley in its adaptability. He called the building snd the production techniques

> practical proof of Nugent Itonck's theory that the open platform stage is not only the best stage on which to produce seventeenth century drama, but the best stage on which to produce Greek tragedy, miracle plays. Restoration comedy, and the Ipter comedies of manners, snd even modern plays.[24]

A finsi point in Stephenson's srticle must surely have caught Gilmor Brown's eye. The operation was extremely economical.

> The Nteddermarket . . . hes solved one great modem problemhow s pley of fine quality but limited appeal may be put on so as to recover the initlr-1 expenses. . .[25]

Kith eeeh play pipnned for no more th?n e week's run, the producer could still recoup expenses. This great economy was the result of the flexible use of s permanent basic setting.

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[21] Android Stephenson, "The M?dderm?'rket Theatre, Theatre Arts, July, 1923, P. 2CA.
[22] Ibid.
[23] StephenBon, op. cit., p. 209.
[24] Ibid., p. ?11.
[25] Ibid., p. 212.

The Theatre in the Redoutensaal

In 1924. Kenneth Macgowsn wrote of the thee-tre which the Auetrien government had established in e palc'ce bsllroom in Viennp. While the principle behind the staging et the Redoutensaal wee sirnller to thst of the 4feddermsrket, the type o.f erchi lecture was very different. Contrasted to the simpler and more neutral quality of the Tudor woodwork In the Norwich Theatre, the Redoutenspnl "was one of the handsomest baroque rooms In Europe."[26] It was a hall of Gobelin tapestries, mirrors, great crystal chandeliers, and paneling in cream and gold. An open platform stage stood at one end of the room. From the rear of the platform stairs led up to a balcony.

Macgowan had seen two comic operas performed in the ballroom theatre. In The Barber of Seville he observed the failure of the designer .Alfred Roller to create a Spanish exterior setting which would harmonise "with the permanent decoration of the hall. The Mcrrisge of Figaro met .with more success. The settings m"de extensive use of Bcreens. Two series were used: for the servants' room, the first scene, antique red ones were pieced downstage; for the wife's room in the second scene, a group of green colored screens farther upstpge constituted the setting. When in the third scene the wedding wss to take place, the entire permanent background "WBB revealed.[27]

In reporting Reinhrrdt's pirn to direct a series of productions in the Redoutensaal in the fall of 1922. MacgowTin made a few suggestions for improving the theatre. He felt that the eurfcein which had been used in the opera performances'wrs unnecessary:

> Why B curtain sfc all, unless the curtain of darkness? Why not uniformed attendants managing the simple metier of screens or smell set pieces with the aplomb of actors?[28]

He also urged the removal of footlights (a step which Reinhard t took when he began working in the theatre). Lastly Maegowan thought a lower forestage would add variety to the acting areas.

Recognizing thet the elegant ertificial atmosphere of the hall was highly suitable for certain plays, such as the works of Cornellle and Re cine, but quite inappropriate for many others, Macgowan suggested that a neutrel interior architecture would be more ideal for an adaptable theatre. Coupled with the neutral architectural background he proposed E series of stage area "shells." For example, the adaptable theatre might possess a set of classics! and severe walls end steps for Greek tragedies. Another shell consisting of dark wood panels might serve Shakespeareen tragedy, comedies of Goldsmith, and modem plays, [29]

Wheeler Auditorium

Since Brown did not make his first trip to Europe until 1926, he did not have an opportunity to visit any of the above theatres before founding the Felroaks Playbox.[30] He

[26]Mscgowsn and Jones, Continenta1 Stggecrr- ft, p. 185.
[27]Ibid., p. 190.
[28]Ibid., p. 191.
[29]Ibid., p. 192.
[30]Interview with Gilmor Brown, May 20, 1959.

would have been able to see at first hand, however, the platform stage which his friend Irving Pichel employed at the University of California. In 1921 Wheeler auditorium was erected at Berkeley, Pichel called it "the theatre without a stage.[31] since it had no proscenium arch, curtsin or backstage aree.4 The stege aree conBisted of a wide platform pieced at one end of the auditorium, which apparently doubled as a lecture hall.

The sets often consisted of simple decorative panels or drapery arranged over blackboards.[32] Since no

curtain was used, the actors took their pieces in the dark, and blackouts indicated the ends of scenes. Pichel maintained that the use of the platform stage helped foster an "alertness and unity of response" in the audiences at Wheeler Auditorium.[33]

Circus Staging Proposals

While Brown's conception of the Playbox drew inspiration from intimete art theatres and from playhouses with adaptable platform stages, it also reflected the rising interest in "circus" or "central" staging. This interest had its origin in the work of Max Reinhardt whom Herman Rosse called "the first of modem producers to realise the advantages of the circus." [34]

Max Reinhardt's Circus Staging

The circus building in which Reinhardt staged plays was designed in the circular shape which had become the basic European pattern for circus buildings by the middle of the nineteenth century. The Austrian regisseur produced at least three dramas in the Zirkus Schumann in Berlin during 1910 and 1911. These were: Oedipus Rex in November, 1910; The Oresteia, October, 1911; and Everyman, December, 1911.

Reinhardt'e production of Oedipus was typical of his use of the circus for staging plays. According to Huntley Carter's description, the Zirkus Schumann

> offered the whole [not a pert] of its arena to the principals, chorus, and crowd, who entered some through the door of the Greek facade erected at one end, and others by steps and entrances leading to the arena. The ring thus allowed the action to take place at the feet of the audience as well as among them.[35]

The Zirkus Schumann had originally been built in "the form of s circle around the circular central stage."[36] A little more than a decade after Reinhardt's productions, Maegowan criticized the producer for not having been "courageous or far seeing enough to

[31] Irving Pichel, "The Theatre Without s Stage," Theatre Arts, July, 1921, p. 439.
[32] "James Hyde," The Pasadenci Community Playhouse News, May 29, 19-8, p. 1T,
[33] Pichel, loc. cit.
[34] Herman Rosse, "The Circus Theatre," Theatre Arts, July, 1923. P. 242.
[35] Huntley Carter, The Theatre of Max Reinhardt,p.211,
[36] Hi ram K. Moderwell, The Theatre of Today, p. 251.

use the circus as a circus." The basis for this criticism was the fact that Reinhardt had placed a setting at one side of the circular arena.[37]

Reinhardt had retained roost of the original circle of seats, removing no more than a fourth of them to make room for the Qreek temple setting.[38] Emil Orlik's etching of Reinhardt directing a rehearsal of Oedipus suggests that even less than a quarter of the circle of seats had been removed.[39] Ihue the audience was arranged in a scheme much closer to a full circle than audiences had been in the Greek theatre. The performance witnessed in the circus was staged in a manner very much akin to present-day central staging in large arena theatres.

Behind Reinhardt's move to the circus as a new form of theatre was his desire for greater actor-audience intimacy. He was

> seeking for a means to break away altogether from the picture frame stage, to develop the idea of producing a drama that can be acted within the auditorium instead of within the picture frame, and to . . , [illustrate! .what a play gains in intimacy when its cherecters become part of the audience.[40]

In 1911 Relnhardt's "literary director" (or publifoiBt) Arthur Kahsne, expounded the theory of the increased audience participation which was presumed to have been the result of central staging:

> No smpill strongly circumscribed frame separates the world of the pley from the outer world, and the action flows freely through the -whole of the theatres....
>
> The chorus arises end moves in the midst of the audience; the characters meet each other amid the spectatore; from all aides the hearer is being impressed, so that he gradually becomes a part of the whole, and is rapidly absorbed in the action, a member of the chorus so to speak. This close contact (intimacy) is the chief feature of 4bhe new form of stage. It makes 4he spectator' 4Jpgr44 o't "the action4 secures his entire intere st and intengi fies the effect upjon him,[Italics not in original.][41]

This theory was leter echoed by Brown in very similar words when he sought to explain audience reactions st the Playbox.

Central Staging, 1914 - 1924

Reinhardt's work WSB the best known of ventures into circus or central staging in the years prior to 19224. In France, Fermin Qemier imitated the Austrian producer just after World War I by carrying productions into Parisian circus buildings,

[37]Macgowan and Jones, op, cit.¡ p. 200.

[38]foderwell, loc oit.

[39]Sayler, Max Reinhardt and His laieatre, illustration facing p. 114See also Or Uk's sketch, reproduced as item 336 in 6. Altman, et al. Theatre Pictorial.

[40]Carter, loc. cit

[41]Arthur Kahane, "Glossen Zum Theater der Punftausend," Blatter deg IteutchenTheaters, November, 1911. Quoted in' tranBia tion by 'Huntley barker, pp. cit. i p. 123.

In the United States, Azubah Latharo of Columbia University's Teachers. College directed the earliest known example of central staging in this country in 1914. She produced The Mask of Joy in the center of e gymnasium. For aeveral years, Miss Latham and Milton Smith, also of Columbia University, continued to use the theatre-in-the-round technique.[42]

In 1922 T. Earl Pardoe tried central staging at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah.[43]

The Cirque Medrano

In the same year in which Pardoe brought the central staging technique to the western pert of the United States, Kenneth Mscgowen wrote a description of performances in a Parisian circus, TRiis chapter in his book. Continental Stagecraft played en important role in the development of central staging in the United States, for it Influenced both Gilmor Brown and Glenn Hughea. Hughes'response to the book came approximately eight years after Brown4 reaction.

Macgowan was one of the critics end theorists who advocated rebellion against the tyranny of the proscenium arch and the representalions 1 acting end scenery which went along with the picture frame stage. Hence Macgowan saw in

the Cirque Medrano a perfect new form of theatre in which to re-establish the presentational style of acting. Ironically neither Brown nor Hughes was to make great use of presentetional acting in their centrally staged productions.

One of the great values of performances in this completely circular building, which had no stage adjacent to its arena, was the plastic technique developed by the actors:

> The actors seem to have consciously developed their gestures and their poses as supplementary expression to their faces. Also they warily work around during their scenes, and give each part.of the audience the benefit of both back and face. The comedy of the Medrano ie , , , funnier because it is so intimately alive, and because it is made with all the actor's body. . .[44]

Another aspect of the Cirque Medrano which Macgowan praised was the visibility of the performerB from all parts of the circular auditorium:

> There never was such an auditorium for sheer visibility. The last rows are better than the first. They take in the whole audience ae well as the show.[45]

A suitable repertory for such a theatre in Macgowsn's opinion would have included Greek trsgedy and comedy, Shakespeare4 greatest plays, and many dynamic modem dramas, such as The Emperor Jones, Strife, and The Weaver a. Not good for the theatre would be "most of the conversational realism of the past thirty years." Maogowan's ideas were iby no means taken over literally by Gilmor Brown, since as will be shown,

[42] argo Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, p, 38,
[43] Ibid,
[44] wacgowan and Jones, op. cit., p. 2o4.
[45] Ibid., p. 203.

the repertory of the Fsiroaks Playbox included much "conversational realism." Brown's theatre differed considerably from the Cirque Medrano, particularly since it was infinitely smaller,

Suggestions of Herman Rosse

A year after the publication of Macgowan's discussion of central staging, Herman Rosse urged the construction of circular theatres. His essay appeared in Theatre Arts in the July, 1943 issue.[46] Rosse, a distinguished scene designer of Dutch birth, was then working in the United States. In hie article he described the advantages of the circus technique of staging, pointing out that for many centuries the circle had been the basic theatre form. Accompanying the discussion were eleven sketches by Rosse "Illustrating the construction of the Continental circus and its adaptation to various sorts of drama and spectacle." [47]

Norman Bel Qeddes' Plans for a Circular Theatre

In the same issue of .Eheatre Arts, one which had great significance in its relationship to the Pisybox idea, Horman Bel Geddes contributed his designs for a circular theatre. This theatre scheme, known as Theatre Number Fourteen, was published for the first time. The plans revealed

> an intimate dramatic theatre of the circus type in which the audience completely Burrounds the stage. Changes of scene are made by dropping the stage into the basement. The interior of the house is so schemed in black that the actors and the plastic setting of properties, steps, etc,, will always be seen sharply outlined against darkness.[48]

Brown's Sources of Information

While Brown's statements concerning the origins of the Playbox do not specifically mention the circus staging of Max Reinherdt, there ere good reasons to believe that he was well acquainted with Reinhardt's work. Brown owned copies of Carter's 1914 volume. The Theatre of Max Rein.hardt as well ?.s Sayler's Max Reinhardt and His Theatre, Which was published in January, 1924. In the Carter book, Brown pasted his "castle" bookplete, which was one he used between 1919 and 1922. The Sayler book was given to him as a present during 1924. according to s handwritten inscription.[49]

Brown may not have known of the central staging at Columbia University, but he would have had a better chance of hearing of Pardoe's efforts at Brigham Young University.

Pardoe was one of the speakers at the Drama League Convention in Pasadena in Msy, 1924.

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[46] Maogowan was one of the three editors of the magazine.

[47] Herman Rosse, "The Circus Theatre," Theatre Arts, July, 1923, P. 235.

[48] Theatres of Today and Tomorrow," Theatre Arts, July, 19234 P. 214.

[49] Both volumes are in the collection of the Pasadena Playhouse Library.

In a letter to Brooks Atkinson, drama critic of the Hew York Times;, Brown credited Macgowan' B The Theatre of 4tomorrow and Cpntinentel Stagecraft as important sources of inspiration for the Playbox, In particular, he cited the suggestions for "staging Shakespeare in the style of the Indoor circuses of continental Europe." [50] In his 1957 essay, "A Dream on e Dime," Brown reaffirmed the (Significant role of Macgowan end Jones' suggestions concerning the Cirque Medrano.

In notes for a lecture which Brown had worked up around 1940, one section dealt with "Departures from Con ventional Stages," Here the producer had made a list of predecessors and followers of the Playbox. Among the predecessors were "Suggestions of Korman Bel Geddes: Unique theatres and stages." [51] Bel Geddes' Theatre Mtamber Fourteen

would certainly have been one of these. In the same issue of Theatre Arts in which Bel Qeddes designs were published, Brown would have found Rosse's article on "The Circus 'Bieatre."

Flexible Theatres

While there had "been theatres, such as those -with platform stages, which possessed SOURS degree of adaptability or flexibility In the use of acting areas, none reached the degree of flexibility which the Playbox was to practice. The idea of CTaximuro flexibility roust have come to the Pasedena producer in the form of proposals made by progressive theatre people, or else arose solely from his own creative thinking. He had no prototype to copy.

Appia's Concepts of Flexibility

In an Interview Brown mentioned Adolph Appia as a source of inspiration, but his statements concerning the

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Swiss designer and theoreticlsn were not very specific.[52] Brown could have learned of 4ppls's efforts at the Da4-croze Institute in Hellerau through the description in The Theatre of Tomorrow,

In an unusual Bllk-walled room designed by Tessenow, Apple staged The Tidings Brought to Mary and Orpheus and Eurydice in 1913 . II'h audience sat on banked seats regular3y placed at one end of the room, with no division between audience and acting ares "except for an open spsce of shining floor," [53] The hall possessed no stage. The flexibility of this theatre caiae from Appla's practice of re-designing the

acting area for each play with re-arranged scenic elements, platforms, steps, flats, and draperies, These productions wre apparently viewed in an end staging plan,

[50]Gilmor Brown, letter to Brooks Atkinson [carbon copy], June 15, 1950. Archives of the Pasadena Playhouse.

[51]Gilmor Brown, lecture notes. Archives of Pasadena Ple.yhou se.

[52]Interview with Gilroor Brown, May 20, 1959.

[53]Macgowan, Theatre of Tomorrow, p. 190.

From his experience at Hellerau and his fervent interest in theatrical experimentation, Appla developed the concept of complete flexibility. His suggestions were published in an essay in the Dutch periodical Wendigen in 1921, under the title "Art Vivant ou Mature Morte?" ("Living Art or Still Life?"),[54] In 1923 an Italian publisher printed the essay as a separate volume.[55]

Appla inveighed against the obstacle to experimentation caused by the end stage arrangement of traditional theatres. "The arbitrary conventions of our auditorium and stages placed face to face still control us," he complained.[56] He felt it was an error to use the saroe building for both regular and experimental productions. The Inflexibility of the traditional structure "through suggestion Operates to retard considerably our efforts toward liberation," [57]

In place of conventional proscenium stage theatres, Appia urged the construction of "elementary buildings designed merely to cover the space in which we wrk" [58] These buildings would provide a theatre Btrueture in .which there would be no fixed form for the stage or auditorium:

> No stage, or amphitheatre; only a bare and empty room at our disposal . . . clear spaces everywhere to store the practicable properties and complete lighting equipment . . . it will be easy to install temporary tiers for a knowledge seeking public . . . this experimental field will become a sort of nursery of dramatic art in which the only ones to remain inactive or silent will be those held to their spectator Beats by age or infirmity. Then we shall have a living art.[59]

Appia's Influence on Copeau

Appia.B concern with providing a flexible theatre ft¿r experimental productions came to be reflected in the work of Jacques Copeau. Copeau had become acquainted with Appia end Dalcroze in 1915¡ and subsequently maintained a friendship with both men.[60] When Copeau started his School of the Viewc Colombier in Paris in 1920 he made use of Appia .s idea of a flexible "elementary building" for his students.[61] A few years later, in May, 1924, Copeau deserted Paris and took a corps of students out into the rural area of Burgundy. There he took over a wine storage building as a "work room" for the students. It was made into a flexible theatre such as Appia had envisioned. Jean Meroier, who was one of the students, described the building

> a sort of great hall where vineyard keepers after an unusual harvest stored the surplus barrels filled with wine. Ho line was drawn between stage

[54]Cited by H. D. Albright, Adolph Appia's The Work of Living Art. p. xvii.
[55]Ibid. Albright lists the Italian publisher as Bottega di Poesia, Milan.
[56]Adolph Appia, "Art Vivant or Mature Morte?" quoted in English translation by Jean Mercier, "Adolph Appla," Theatre Arts, August, 1932, p. 623.
[57]S, A. Rhodes, translator, 'Adolph Appia's 'Living Art or Still Life?"' theatre Annual, 1943, p. 45.
[58]Mercler, loc. cit
[59]Rhodes, loc. cit.
[60]Bettina Khapp, Louis Jouvet, p. 42
[61]Mercier, "Adolph Appia," loc. cit.

> and auditorium, indeed there was neither stage nor auditorium, but a great space which we transformed as we needed to, in the process of our work.[62][63]

Copeau's experimentation in his flexible "work room" was undoubtedly quite different from Brown's efforts in the Playbox. One clue may be found in Mercier's descrip. tion of the treatment of the floor of the hall. Over the regular wooden flooring a coating of cement was placed. On this was drawn

> a vast network of lines, forming geometric patterns necessary for our work. They formed a play of directing lines which helped to maintain a perfect harmony in the various groupings.[64]

Bel Geddes' Plea for Flexible Theatres

In the same month that Copeau left Paris, Herman Bel Seddee played his part In the Kiovement toward a more flexible theatre. As a gueat of honor at the national convention of the Drama League of America, which took place in Pasadena, he made a fervent plea for a new type of theatre building. He urged the construction of flexible theatres. These were to be:

> . , not the cut-and-dried Shubert type that they are erecting by the dozens in Mew York aid throughout the country, but a simple convertible type4 adjustable to the demands of the play tobe produced, so that within a day the gtage maybeahi4tedtothe center, circus fashion, for instance/ or 'arra]M4,ar4,,CT4 lUnderlining not in original.][65]

Brown's Sources of InformatJLon on Flexible Theatre

While Brown must have read of Appia'a partially flexible staging at Hellerau through Macgowan's description, he would not have been able to satisfactorily interpret "Art Vivant ou Hature Morte?" So far as is known, the essay was written in French and not translated into Englieh until 1932. Brown's French was still in a rudimentary Btate during the years between 1921 and 1924.[66] Thus it must be assumed that if he knew of Appia's ideas aa expressed in the essay, his knowledge would have come from others who were familiar with it. He stated in "A Dream on a Dime," that in the years innnediately preceding the founding of the Playbox, he had been talking to a number of European authorities on the new developments in theatre form abroad.[67]

It is possible that one of these authorities told him of Appia's suggestions.

Brown knew of Copeau'B School in Paris, but would have had little time before establishing the Playbox, to learn details of the flexible "work room" in Burgundy.

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[62] Ibid.

[63] Walden Boyle in Central and Flexible Staging cites Mercler's account of Copeau's work in Burgundy.

[64] Mercier, loc. oil.

[65] Helen Yates, Santa Monica [California 3 Outlook, June 3, 1924.

[66] KhdJeiaoiselle Jeanne Richer! informed the present writer that Brown took fairly elementary French lessone from her at some time after 1927.

[67] Brown, "A Dream on a Dime," p, 171.

From Mercier's report, it appears that Copeau did not present any public performances of his group in Burgundy until months after their arrival.

The speech by Bel Geddes on the need for the construction of convertible or flexible theatres must have been one which Brown heard. The speech was delivered as a featured address in the convention for which Brown was program chairman. Brown had several avenues of association with Bel Geddes. Pichel, who introduced Bel Qeddes at the convention, was a friend of both men. In addition Bel Geddes had worked for Aline Barnsdall in her Los Angeles Little Theatre in 1916. It was Miss Barnsdall who had given Brown lighting equipment from her defunct theatre and in a dire moment sent the $2,000 which kept the Pasadena

Playhouse in exietence. It appears most likely that Brown heard Bel GeddeB" plea for flexible theatres at the very time he was planning his Playbox: May, 1924.

Private Club Theatres

The preceding categories of influences have had to do with physical structure and staging practices. The remaining two categories to be discussed are concerned with organizational aapects of theatres.

Brown planned the Playbox as a private elub organized to present plays to ita membera on a subscription basis, this scheme easy be traced back at least ae far as Antoine's Theatre Libre. 'Rie plan, as utilized by Antoine in 1887, had as its aims the evasion of government censorship, the assurance of regular income, and the development of a sense of comradeship among the spectators. Announcementa of plays took the form of social invitations.[68]

In England club theatres were organized in the 1890's and thereafter to circumvent governmental censorship of controversial plays. When the little theatre movement began to take hold in the United States between 1911 and 1920, many of the new groups adopted a completely private subscription basis for their operation. The purpose here was not related to censorship but to avoidance of the aiz able taxes and stringent building requirements imposed on pub 11o theatres.[69]

Two theatres operated on a club baais which resembled the Playbox in certain respects were the Vagabond Theatre of Baltimore, and the British group called Theloc. Three Hundred Club.

The Vagabond Theatre

The Vagabond Theatre, which opened in 19l6,. had only sixty-tw seats, making it one of the Bttiallest theatres in the country before the advent of the Playbox. Because of its extremely limited capacity, each member was assigned a designated night in the run for his attendance throughout the season. When a person other than a subecriber wished to attend a performance, he had to purchase his seat from a member. Generally only about five such seats were available for any single performance.[70]

[68] Anna I. Miller, The Independent Theatre of Europe p. 28.
[69] Constance Mackay, The Little Theatre in the united States, p. 218.
[70] Maolcay, pp. cit., p. 171.

The Three Hundred Club

In 1923 Mrs, Geoffrey Whitworth, wife of the founder of the British Drama League, formed The Three Hundred Club in London. As Norman Marshall observed

> Among the English Sunday theatre societies It was the sole exception to the practice of being founded by groups and operated by commit tees.[71]

The "three Hundred Club resembled the Playbox in that Mrs. Whitworth, like Brown, ran the club as its sole leader, and ohose plays which she wished to see performed. Eor the most part she eelected plays by young English authors which had little chance of production in the commercial theatre.[72]

The size of the memsbership Bought by Mrs. 'Whitwrth, three hundred persons, 4as exactly the number which Brown determined upon for his Playbox subscriptions.

Of the two groups just described, it is very probable that Brown knew of the Vagabond Theatre, since it had received considerable publicity in such American periodicals as The Dramas The Theatre, and Theatre Arts, Maekay had also described the Baltimore group in her book on Little Theatres. There is no direct evidence to indicate that Brown knew of The Three Hundred Club. There is no question, however, that in its organization it was very sisiilar to the Playbox.

Laboratory Theatres

Another significant facet of the Playbox was Brown's desire to make it an experimental "laboratory" or "studio" theatre for the Pasadena Playhouse. The producer.s ideas about laboratory theatres undoubtedly stemmed from

knowledge of those established at American universities and colleges, as well as the things he had read concerning the Studios of the Moscow Art Theatre.

In 19l6, Maokay had characterized the laboratory theatres as places where students could work out their own production problems, and where new plays were favored.[73] The following year Dioklnson defined the experimental theatre as "a laboratory for testing the tools of the theatre." [74] True experimental theatres according to Dickinson

were George Pierce Baker.B 47 Workshop, the Laboratory Theatre of the Carnegie Institute of Technology, and the Workshop of the Wisconsin Players in Milwaukee.

In July 1923. in the same issue of Theatre Arts which had brought forth so many other stimulating suggestions pertinent to the Playbox idea, Richard Boleslavsky wrote fervently of the need for laboratory theatres. He pointed out that the contemporary theatre was very much like a department store Belling ready-made, labelled goods. "Yet a real artist cannot only sell hie wares, he expostulated, "he must be free . . . he must have his own creative laboratoryand there are no such laboratories." [75]

In Boleslavsky'e view a theatrical laboratory was as important as the school and the university. It could create new forms which would influence the world:

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[71] Moraan Marshall, The Other Theatre, p. 78.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Mackay, op. cit., p. l8l.
[74] Thomas Dickinson, The Insurgent Theatre, p. 75.
[75] Richard Boleslavsky, "The Laboratory Theatre," Theatre Arts, July, 1923, p. 245.

> In a laboratory theatre every detail nnist be considered afresh for each production from the scenery, furniture, and properties to the style of acting. Old, tried forma and methods nnast never be relief upon. It roust be clear to everyone that whether a play is new or is newly/.revived, a new approach must always be sought for it[76]

The Russian producer believed that such experimental theatres should be small at the start. Brilliant examples of intimate laboratories -which developed into leading theatre B were the First and Third Studio B of the Moscow Art Theatre. In the beginning the First Studio had seventyfive seats and the Third Studio contained only thirty five.[77] Brown was to keep his laboratory theatre within this range of capacity throughout its entire existence.

Summary

The genealogy of the Playbox has been reviewed at length in order to more precisely establish its historical position. Those theatres and proposals which Brown acknowledged as influences have been indicated. In addition a few theatres not specifically mentioned by Browl have been described becauae they were predecessors of the Playbox in some significant reaped. From European and American approaches to intimate

theatre Brown derived the idea of the smallness of the building and the closeness of the actors to the audience. Among such intimate theatres were the Kanimersplele, the Toy Theatre, the Chicago Little Theatre. Copeau, and probably Relnhardfc, impressed him with the value of actor-audience , intimacy. It was Slantslavsky's First Studio with its

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— combination of intimacy and representational acting which came close to Browns own predilection,

Macgowan and other spokesmen stirred Brown'B desire to participate In the zaovement to "abolish the proscenium arch." In such adaptable open platform stages as thoae of the Vieux Colombier, the Maddermarket and the Redoutensaal theatres, he saw steps toward flexibility in staging. IRbrrnan Bel Gedrses' plea for the construction of flexible theatres may have spurred Brown on in his pur suit of maximum flexibility. This was an idea which had recently been advocated by Appla in his "Art Vivant ou Nature Morte?"

From Macgo'wan's praise of the staging technique of the Medrano circus. Brown developed the deal re to try central staging.

The organizational basis for the Playbox derived from previously estabiiahed laboratory theatres such as the Studios of the Moscow Art Theatre and the experimental workshops of American univerBlties, The private club plan had as its original source Antolne's Theatre Libre, with many reflections in American little theatres and English

Sunday theatre societies. The Vagabond Theatre of Baltimore and the British three Hundred Club showed points of resemblance to the Playbox in size and in management

[76] Ibl-d., p. 249.
[77] Ibid., p. 247.

policy, respectively.

Gilmor Brown's idea of the Playbox arose therefore from a number of individual threads of influence as well as from the implications of his past experience in theatrical production. In his hands thoee threads became woven together to produce a new pattern, intimate flexible staging. How Brown went about establishing a theatre in which to practice this new approach will be the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 4

ESTABLISHING THE PLAYBOX

The influences discussed in the last chapter began to have a cumulative effect upon Brown in the early 1920l8. His discussion with informed theatre people and his extensive reading had provoked a "consuming curiosity" to pursue his own experiments. He was especially eager to explore all the aspects of theatrical intimacy.[1] For a number of reasons, which will now be examined, Brown could not satisfy his experimental bent in the productions of Idle Playhouse.

Obstacles to Experimentation: the Fairoaks Playhouse Building

While Brown had used a projecting forestage for Much Ado About nothing in 1919. the difficulties of installation and removal on a temporary basis had apparently prohibited its further use to any extent. The basic design of the theatre building on Fairoaks Avenue rented by the Pasadena Consmanity Playhouse presented a serious obstacle to any deviations from proscenium staging. There could be virtually no flexibility in the arrangement of audience's

seats and acting areas. Furthermore since the house was rented. Brown was prevented from making any real changes in its interior structure to attain his goals.

Obstacles in the Design of the El Molino Playhouse Building"

As architectural plans were developed for the projected new building for the Pasadena Playhouse, Brown was anxious to have them contain provisions for intimacy and flexibility. In this he met with frustration, for the Building Committee of the Playhouse

[1]Gilmor Brown, "Confidential Theatre," p. 20.

Association could not see the value of such innovations. Years later Brown's failure to overcome their resistance was revealed!

> He had wanted an unconventional stage in the new theatre. He wanted it to have a large proscenium opening, no conventional boxes, so that freedom of staging could be used on Mainstage. , . . The only concession made to him in this respect was the removable forestage.[2]

In lieu of the large proscenium opening which Brown had requested, an opening thirty-two feet wide was planned. The "removable forestage" was a flight of steps covering the area of the orchestra pit. When the pit was to be used, the steps could be taken out.

Brown had also wanted side stages in front of the proscenium, connecting with the main area of the stage. The Building Committee insisted that "Nobody has tills sort of thing." [3] Instead of side stages, the Committee and the architect settled upon false boxes, which were not at all what Brown had in mind. In fact he admitted later that he loathed the boxes and thought them useless.[4]

Obstacles to an Experimental Repertory at the Playhouse

In addition to physical restrictions on experimentation, both in the rented theatre and in the designs for the projected new building. Brown had to contend with limitations in play selection. This obstacle was posed by the very nature of his organisation. The director himself had stressed many times that the Pasadena Comrounity Playhouse was a comnamity theatre, not an art theatre, and that plays had to be chosen to appeal to all segments of the public. He had produced original plays, classics, and other works not usually performed by coranamity theatres, but these had to constitute a minority of the offerings. As the California Southland reported in 1923:

> He presents Shakespeare and Shaw, now and then, but usually wholesome comedies, touched with pathos, and dramas tinged with comedy.[5]

15iis pattern endured, even through a decade which saw some broadening of the repertory. In 1930 another local Journal observeds

> .Bie Pasadena Community Playhouse becomes entangled every onee in a while in . . , box-office tape and sentiment against the unknown, and possibly, brainy* drama.[6]

All exploratory efforts on the Pasadena Conanunlty Playhouse stage were performed in public and hence subject to the inescapable response of the box office, the

[2]Laurie Grey, Interview with Oilroor Brown, 1948, note card file for A History of the Pasadena Playhouse."

[3]Interview with Thomas B. Henry, March 20, 1962. Mr. Henry was associated with Gilmor Brown as a staff member of the Pasadena Playhouse between 1930 and I960. He is at present the Supervising Director of the Playhouse.

[4]Qrey, loc. cit.

[5]"Town and Country Club Functions," California Southland, circa ifoverober, 1923. [POP 3, p. 209. J

[6]Pearl Rail, "Theatres," Saturday Night, September 27, 1930.

prime source of revenue for the organization. Brown acknowledged that "the Playhouse will experiment," but it must succeed in these [sic 3 to be true to the conffnisinity."[7]

With the limitations inherent in his Pasadena Community Playhouse situation, the producer came to the conclusion that his enormous desire to try out new ideas could only be fulfilled by developing a new theatre. It would have to be a very small private one in which he and his fellow artists could "experiment and fail, if necessary." [8] It would be a "real experimental theatre departing from all the older forms," and providing "more freedom in the choice of plays." [9]

The laboratory theatre would have no stage, proscenium arch, footlights, or fixed arrangement for the audience. As Brown conceived it

> The idea of this intimate theatre . . . xás that the action of a play would take place in any given area of the particular building being used, and also that from production to production the audience and the playing space might be shifted about.[10]

Thus it would be truly an Intimate, flexible, non-proscenlum theatre.

Acquiring a Co-Director

Before Brown could take any major steps toward establishing a new theatre, he had to secure an associate in the venture. As clever as he was at keeping several irons in the fire, he knew that hie duties at the Playhouse would keep him from operating the project single-handed. With this in mind, the producer approached Maurice Wells, his twenty-year-old Assistant Director, to sound out his feelings. As Wells recalled the Incident, the time would have been approximately January, 1924. Brown told the young man that he had a new project in mind, "'something radically different which he had been thinking about for some time." He asked Wells if he would be Interested in becoming the "resident director" in charge of an experimental theatre under Brown's supervision.[11] Since the receipts would be very small because of the limited audience, there would be no compensation to Wells for his services.[12] [13]

At the time Wells had become disenchanted with his studies at the University of California, Southern Branch, mainly because of his eagerness to concentrate on his theatre work. Thus he was ready to join Brown in the new project which the producer wanted to get under way in the fall of that year,

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[7] Hay Rose Boruia, "A History of the Pasadena Community Playhouse," p. l68.
[8] bid.
[9] bid., p. 103.
[10] Brown, "A Dream on a Dime," p. 172.
[11] Interview with Maurice Wells, June 15, 1961 .
[12] Interview with Qilnsor Brown, May 20, 1959.
[13] Wells, loo. cit.

The Situation of the Playhouse in the Spring of 1924

In some ways it was a peculiar time for Brown to choose for the initiation of a new venture. The community theatre was in the midst of a heroic effort to finance the new Playhouse building. The inadequacy of the stage of the "old Savoy" the uncomfortable auditorium, the severely limited office space and rehearsal facilities, and the continually rising rent had made the Playhouse Governing Board decide to take the plunge and build a new theatre. To top off the sources of pressure, the building had recently been condemned by the Pasadena Fire Department. In December,

1922 a lot had been purchased. During the current season of 1923-211., a fund raising campaign was in full swing to finance the construction and equipment of the new plant.

Why then would Brown want to start something nev? when the entire organization was concentrating its effort upon the greatest project in its career to date? The answer seems to lie in Brown's sense that a chapter in his life, the establishing of a community theatre in Pasadena, was reaching its conclusion. After seven years of struggle, "the Playhouse was well on its way." [14] As far as he could see the fund raising was off to a good start. In the spring of 1924* a large amount of money was quickly raised. He must have felt confident that the remainder of the required sum would come in. For these reasons he was ready for a new challenge.

As Maurice Wells has explained. Brown was a restless man:

> Gilmor wanted to have another creative activity. He had gotten the Playhouse rolling. There he only had to do one play a month. He always had to be doing, doing. He was just a dynamohe alwaya wanted to be doing some thing.[15]

Brown's father would have agreed with this estimate for he once eaid of Gilmor, "The boy never stops." [16]

Approach to the Governing Board

Having resolved to establish an experimental theatre Brown was eager to have it function as a part of the Pasadena Community Playhouse, as Stanislavsky's Pirst Studio had been a branch of the Moscow Art 'theatre. To attain this end he went to the Governing Board of the Pasadena Community Playhouse and urged them to let him found a "studio theatre" It was to be one in which the audience and players would be in much closer contact than In the conventional theatre, a laboratory in which Brown would study the effects of intimacy upon audience and actor.

Furthermore it would test the "future possibility of discarding altogether the old picture-frame stage,"[17]

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[14]Gilmor Brown, "The Playbox," manuscript submitted to the Governing Board of the Pasadena Playhouse, August 8, 1946. -

[15]Interview with Maurice Wells, May 9* 1959.

[16]Alma E. Higgle, "North Dakotans in California," The Fargo Format December 30, 1934.

[17]Brown, loc. oil.

From the standpoint of the Governing Board, Brown's request was certainly not well timed. They were not so confident of the outcome of the building-fund campaign. By May 10, 1924 a large sum had indeed been raised, but it was

only half of the estimated 4200,000 needed for the construotion and equipment of the building.[18] Moreover, they undoubtedly sensed that the estimate would prove to be too low,

With such problems to face, the Board's reaction to the idea of founding another theatre within the Pasadena Community Playhouse .was parentally tolerant, though somewhat less than enthusiastic. Brown has reported their responses

> .Rie Board as always, were roost syng¿athetlc with ray ideas and said that I should have laboratory faeilitles for such an undertaking which deserved encouragement in the same way as the experimental work of a professor of science in a university. They explained to me, however, that our capital was so small that they could not undertake such a venture.[19]

Brown must have anticipated that the Board would see no way to provide him with a place for his experimental theatre, for he countered this rebuff with an alternative proposal;

> Then I made the request that I be permitted to do this work in a former artist's studio which I had acquired in a rather dilapidated residence on South Pairoaks Avenue.[20]

.Hie "dilapidated residence" was none other than the Brown family home which the director shared with his parents and his brother and sister-in-law. The Board gave their approval to the project on the basis of its being established in Brown's home, but made it clear that they could offer no financial commitment from the Playhouse.

> Though they had the greatest sympathy with the idea, I would have to be financially responsible for it. Since I had no hobbies such as tennis or golf* it .would serve as an outlet for ray surplus energies.[21]

Acquiring Sponsorship

Securing the Board's blessing but not their purse, the director was on his own to pursue his "hobby." To obtain the necessary financial backing to prepare the theatre and to insure the costs of production in the first season, he turned to an organization which had been the backbone of the Pasadena Community Playhouse since its founding. This organization, established in 1916, was the Pasadena Center of the Drama League of America. On a national basis the Drama League had been laboring since 1911 to develop and organize audiences for the legitimate theatre and to disseminate knowledge on dramatic art. The Pasadena Center, shortly after its founding, had set up playwriting

[18]Builders to Start New Theatre," Pasadena StarNews, Kay 10, 1924. [POP 4, p. 126.3
[19]Brown, Ipc, oit.
[20]Ibid.
[21]Ibid.

contests in collaboration with Brown's stock company, the Savoy Players. In 1917, an "Amateur Players Section" was formed by the Center, which provided Brown with a nucleus of non-professional actors to utilize in the combined professional-amateur operation of 1917-18, and in the completely amateur eonanunity theatre instituted the following season.[22]

To this Pasadena Center and to the Pasadena "Tuesday Iteming Drama Class" also affiliated with the Drama League, Brown now turned for financial support and for the core of the audience in his new theatre. His approach to the officerB of the tw¿ groups probably took place between May and July, 1924. The President of the Paaadena Center was Miss Eleanor Bissell, who also happened to be a member of the Pasadena Conemanity Playhouse Board. To Miss Bissell and the other officers of these organizations. Brown put forth his plan for the operation of the experimental theatre as a private club, operating solely on a subscription basis. He had decided to call it "The Playbox," This name may have been taken from a theatre in London, at which John PIase field's Melloney Holtspur had first played.[23]

The result of Browi's overtures was that both of the local drama organizations agreed to sponsor The Playbox. By the time Brown mailed out a printed prospectus on the new theatre, half of the desired 300 members had already subscribed. This would seem to have been a moat favorable response since the total membership of the Pasadena Center

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at that time was approximately 400,[24] while the Oraaia Class had perhaps 50 inenibers at most.

Of interest is the wording of the prospectus which Brown has described as "the first announcement" of The Playbox;

> During the Season 1924-25 (October to ?¡tay) a series of seven productions will be made in .SHE PLAYBOX, under Gilmor Brown's direction.
>
> THE PLAYBQXan experimental theatre Beating fiftyis intended to bring about a unique intimacy between player and auditor. There will be no stage in the conventional sense of the word. Varied and novel plays are to be presented, of the type usually referred to as intellectual. Interesting experiments will be made in acting, settings, and lighting.[25]

The announcement laid particular stress on the desire of the producer for an "audience of adult Intelligence," for alert playgoers who "want to think as well as be entertained." A hint as to the range of the repertory was given:

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[22] 4llen Leech, "The Growth of a Community Playhouse Idea," California Southland¡ May, 1925. PP. 9-11, 20.[POP 5, P. 175.3

[23] In the fall of 1923, the Pasadena Community Playhouse had given the American premiere of the Kasefield drama. Publicity releases at that time mentioned the fact that Me Honey Holtspur had originally performed at The Playbox in London.The English theatre was, to the present investigator's knowledge, a normal proscenium theatre.

A further affinity in title for Brown's theatre may be traced to the small New York theatre called The Bandbox, the house which the Washington Square Players had made famous.

[24] Bulletin of the Pasadena Center, October, 1924, [PCP 5, pTPTT

[25] Announcement of The Playbox. Printed sheet. A copy is in the Playbox Scrapbook I, p. 1. [PB I, p. 1.]

> Occasionally we may do something by an outspoken dramatist, for whom there should be a tolerant audience. And we sincerely hope you will not be bored by a touch of the poetic at times, nor depressed if the mood be seriousbecause 'there is enough tragedy in real life without having it presented on the stage.'[26]

From a list of twelve plays six were to be selected, plus a Christmas nativity drama. All of these productions would be given to the members on a season subscription at 410 per person. Those wishing to help in the establishment of The Playbox as a Patron could do so by contributing 4100. Since the price range at the Playhouse was $0.25 to 41.00, the Playbox admission cost of approxlJna fcely 41*50 for each production was out of the "popular price" category.

The subscription campaign moved forward. In August Eleanor Bissell helped promote membership in a very tangible v?ay. On August 18 she gave a garden party at her home, to which she invited 150 people, mostly members of the Pasadena Center, to honor the eminent George Pierce Baker, then visiting in California. At a strategic moment. Brown was given the opportunity to tell the assembled guests about the new venture. When it was Baker's turn to address the group he praised the dramatic work in Pasadena, expressing interest in The Playbox. He concluded by telling the theatre enthusiasts that he envied them and dared them not to fall.[27]

Shortly after the garden party Brown left for the East on a month's vacation, a trip which combined business and pleasure. On this busman's holiday he visited leading non-conanercial theatres across the country, addressed

women's clubs In "the larger cities along the Santa Fe

route," and in New York made arrangements with play agents to produce a number of the newer scripts at the Pasadena Corowinity Playhouse. Accompanied by Maurice Wells, he attended thirty plays in New York during hi 8 fifteen days in the city.[28] He "browsed about the theatres ferreting out innovations in stagecraft. '[29] Most interesting to him was

the work of the Jewish Art Theatre which he considered as "the nearest approach to the Moscow Art Theatre in this country." [30]

During the absence of Browl and Wells the subscription drive was undoubtedly left in trusted hands in Pasadena, possibly F'1rs. Brown's. She had handled business details in his touring days, had been a ticket taker in the early days of the Pasadena Connnunity Playhouse, and in the ensuing seasons at the Fairoaks Playbox helped in "house management." In any event, the subscriptions had reached a total of approximately 210 member4ips pledged by the time Brown returned on October 1.

With the return of the Playbox directors, membership cards were sent out to those who had previously pledged subscriptions, with the request that they now mail in their checks. Each member was assigned a specific night to attend!, the same night being retained for each production in the season. Brown had planned for six performances

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[26]Ibid.
[27]Bulletin of the Pasadena Center, loc. cit.
[28]Pasadena Evening Post, October 4, 192-4. [POP 5, p. 49.3
[29]Tne Billboard, October -4, 1924. [POP 5, P. 47.3
[30]Pasadena Star-Mews, October 4, 1924. [PCP 5, p. 48.3

of every play, running Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, for two successive weeks. Instead of fifty members, the plan now provided for thirty-five at each performance, which left room for a small number of guests in the audience. A letter sent out with the membership cards informed the subscribers that the first production of the season was to be A, A. Milne's play The Truth About Blayds, opening October 29.[31]

The Physical Plant

Before the season could start, the preparation of the physical plant of The Playbox had to be completed. On hand to render service in this direction was Ralph Freud, who had been associated with the Playhouse for two years as a leading character actor. He performed a good part of the necessary painting and carpentry in converting the studio into a functional non-proscenium experimental theatre. Before examining these efforts in the preparation of the theatre, it will be necessary to describe the building itself and those portions which were to be used for *The Play'box.

The Building

The building which was to be made ready was located at 251 South Fairoaks Avenue, approximately four blocks south of the old Pasadena Community Playhouse. Situated on a corner lot it fronted on the busy Fairoaks Avenue but had a quiet side afreet. Orange Place, bordering it on the north. Across Fairoaks was the small Prospect Park, and Just north of it the fashionable Green Hotel. While fairly near the business center of Pasadena, the house was nevertheless in a residential area which by 1924 had already fallen into a decline.

Built in 1896,[32] the property had been purchased by Brown in 1921 for $7,000.[33] It is still standing. A large yellow stucco house, it was at the time of Brown's occupancy surrounded by trees and bushes[34] roost of which have since been removed. Some notion of its size may be gathered from the square footage of its interior as given in the Los Angeles County assessment records: 54106 square feet. The maximum dimensions of the Irregularly shaped building were 46 feet In width by 84 feet In length.[35] Most of the structure contained two stories with the exception of the front studio portion and a rear apartment which were 1 1/2 stories in height. Described in the assessment record as a "double bungalow," a modest designation for a house of its size, the building was divided into two halves by a long hallway running centrally from front to rear, that is from East to West.

At the front of the building there was a porch from which a central door led into the hallway of the tiouse. Doors on the sides of the porch provided entry into the East Alcove of the Studio on the right, and into a front room on the left.

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[31] Membership card and letter are in PB I, p. 3.

[32] Assessment Record, Bureau of Appraisal, Los Angeles County, record on file in Office in City Hall of Pasadena.

[33] Information from copy of Federal Income Tax Return of Gilmor Brown for 1927, Archives of the Pasadena Playhouse.

[34] Wells, loc. cit.

[35] Assessment record, loc. cit.

The Hall

The hallway, paneled in dark mahogany,[36]' included a spacious entry area approximately 11 feet wide by 13 1/2 feet long, and a rear portion narrowed by the presence of a stairway to the second floor. At the rear of this narrow area, the hall was closed off by a doorway. Behind this door, the hall continued as a still narrower corridor, 4 1/2 feet wide, running to the back of the house. Thus the hall and its continuation stretched out parallel to the studio for its full length, an architectural feature which would prove of value as an offstage area for actors of The Playbox.

The Storage Room

Within the entry portion of the hall were two doors, one on the left (South) and one on the right (North). The door to the South opened into a room which may have been originally a small front parlor or possibly a bedroom, This room was 13 feet by 14 1/2 feet in dimensions, with a normal celling height. It was to prove useful as a storage room for scenery and properties.[37]

The Playbox Studio

General, Description.–The door on the north side of the entry hall led directly into the studio, the area of the building which Brown was to use for the Playbox proper. With a total length of 52 feet from East to West, the studio varied in width in its three sections from 17 feet to 23 1/2 feet. The three sections may be designated for the sake of convenience as the East Alcove, the Central Room, and the West Room.

The East Alcove.–The East Alcove was a section 8' deep and 18'2" in width located at the front end of the studio. It was demarcated from the Central Room by its lower ceiling height. At the point of Juncture the East Alcove was 7'6" high, almost four feet lower than the minimum height of the exposed roof of the Central Room. From this point the Alcove ceiling sloped down to a height of 6'9" at its Fairoaks end. In this wall, the front wall of the building, five windows were located looking out on the Avenue, while three windows faced the side street to the north of the Alcove. In the south wall of the alcove, a door opened onto the front porch of the house, permitting an entrance from the afreet.

The Central Room.–"The Central Room of the studio was a direct continuation of the East Aloove and would not be considered separately were it not for its much greater height4 and its specific use in the Playbox. Since it had no ceiling, the Central Room revealed its steeply-pitched roof rafters . Along the center line of the room the height was 15 feet, while at each of the side walls (north and south) the roof sloped down to 11 feet. Three heavy beams crossed the width of the room at a height of 11 feet. These beams were placed at points approximately 7s 14 and 21 feet from the East Alcove, which proved to be effective locations for the mounting of lighting instruments. The north wall of the Central Room, an exterior wall, included a practical fireplace at the east, and three windows west of the fireplace, The western boundary of the Central

[36] Sw ells, loc. cit.
[37] Ibid.

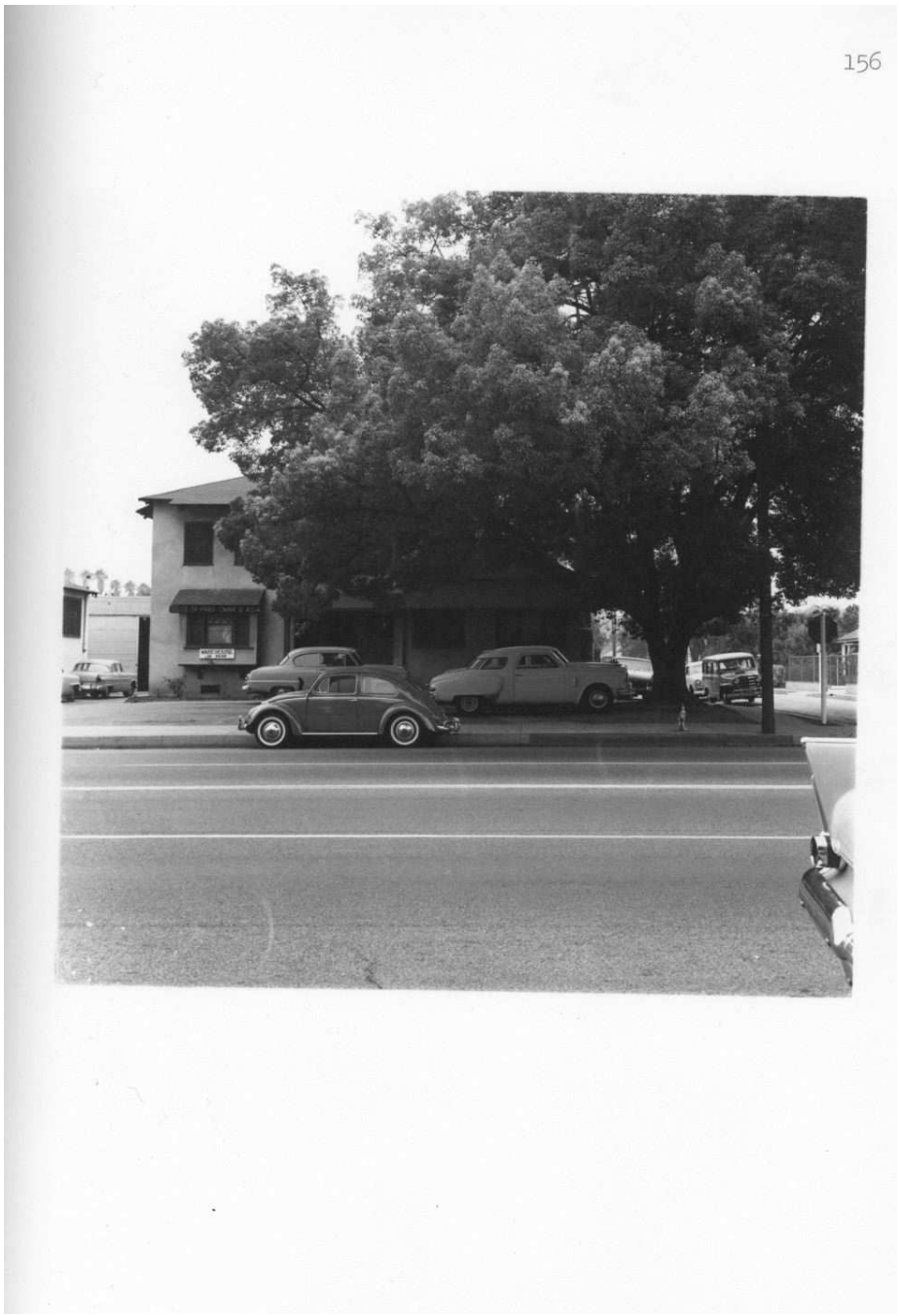

Figure 4.1: The Fairoaks Playbox building. The front of the building, the Playbox Studio was on the right.

Figure 4.2: The north side of the Playbox building. The chimney and the three windows were in the Central Room. The bay window was within the West Room. The rear door originally opened onto a covered porch.

Figure 4.3: The Fairoaks Playbox building. The front porch. The door at center leads into the entry hall. The door at right leads into the East Alcove.

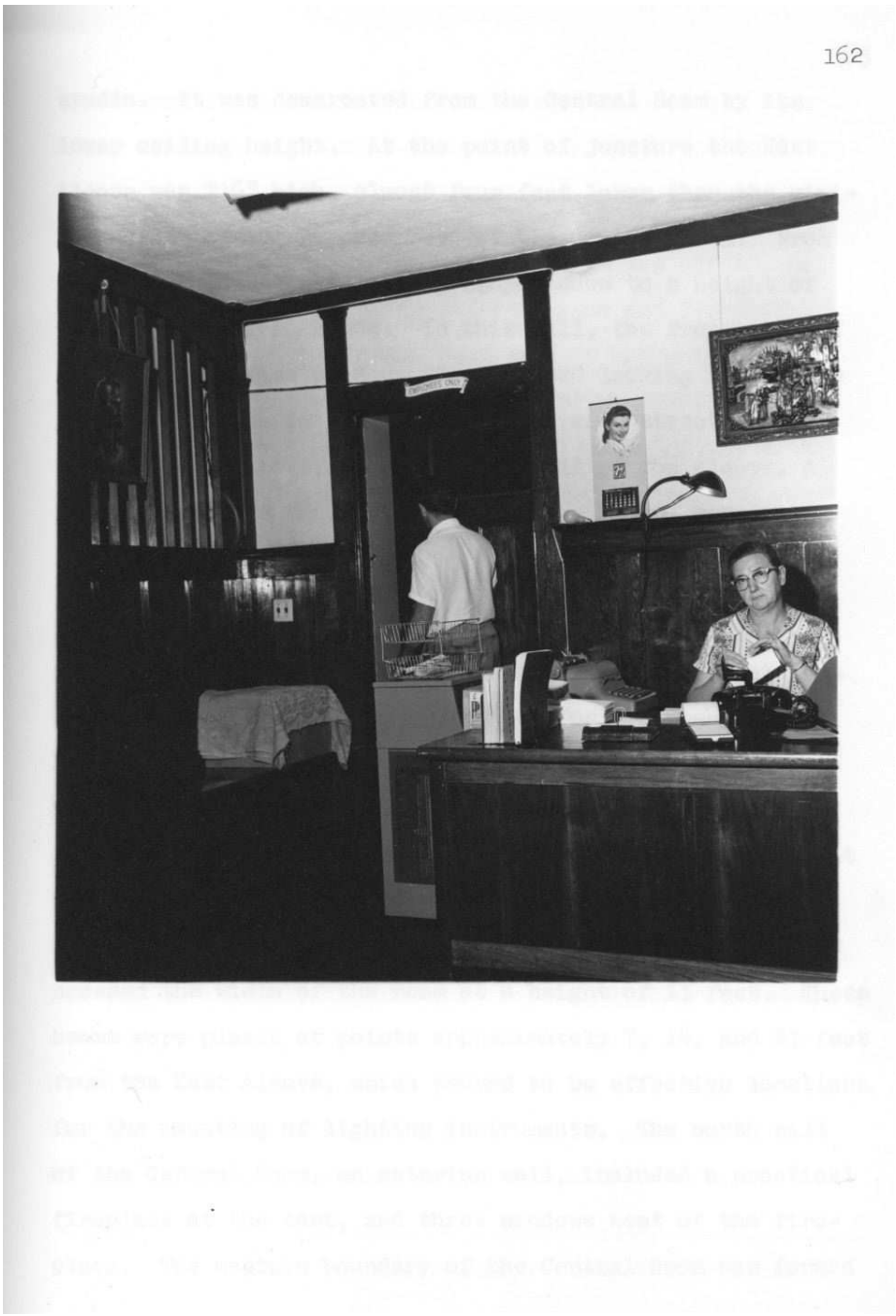

Figure 4.4: The entry hall of the Playbox building, The partly opened door leads directly Into the Central Room of the Playbox Studio.

Room was formed by an arch leading into the West Room. The overall dimensions of the Central Room were 17'2" in width and 28'6" in length.

The West Room.–The archway which set off the West Room from the Central Room was 12'4" wide and 7'8" high, and had a normal house-wall thickness of approximately 6" From the inside face of the arch to the rear wall, the depth of the West Room was 15'4". The width of the room including the 2'6" projection of a large bay window, came to 23t7". Since there was a room above this section of the studio, the West Room had a conventional ceiling, limiting the height to 9 feet.

Along the rear wall were three structures of interest, The first to be noted in viewing them from north to south was a doorway which opened onto a rear porch. One of the Playbox actors has remembered this door as a "Dutch door," with upper and lower halves which could be opened separately or as a unit.[38] The second feature was a fireplace, made of brick and, like the one in the Central Room, possessing a practical chimney. The third structure was a covered staircase, leading up to the story above the West Room. This staircase ran parallel to the rear wall of the West Room, projecting out from the wall a width of 3'3". Since the flight of steps in this staircase was hidden, the only visible portions were the bottom landing, which could be seen when the door to it vras opened, and the four steps reaching back to this landing from the floor of the room. These four steps touched the south wall of the room.

Close to the bottom Btep was a door in the south wall which opened into the room from the corridor.

Such was the arrangement of the studio which Gilrnor Brown proposed to convert into an intimate flexible theatre. It had no raised stage, since the entire floor was on the same level. It was relatively long and narrow, had a variable celling height, and possessed a number of distinctive architectural features such as fireplaces, windows, a staircase and an archway, which provided a potential division into numerous acting areas.

Preparation of the Playbox

Painting the Walls.–Among the few modifications made in the building to prepare it as an experimental theatre was the painting of the walls of the studio by a special technique. In order to obtain the maximum range of colors in the wall surfaces under the lights, Ralph Preud painted the walls with a stipple technique similar to that of polntillism. In addition to several other colors, the paint consisted of predominant dabs of green intermingled with dabs of pink.[39]

Constructing a Light Booth.–A significant modification which had to be made in the building was the construction of a light booth. The location chosen for the booth was ingenious even though beet suited to a technician who also happened to be a dwarf.

[38]Interview with Roger Stanton, August 15, 196l.

[39]In an interview with the present writer on February l6, 1962, Mademoiselle Jeanne Richer!, the manager of the Herkimer Playbox for many years, described her examination of the 4alls of the Fairoaks Playbox. In 1934, at Browi's request, she visited the building on Fairoaks, which had been under other owners for seven years, in order to make note of the color combinations in the stippling. Brown wanted to reproduce the wall color in his Herkimer Playbox. Mademoiselle Richert had good fortune in finding the original painting intact in one or two places.

Figure 4.5: The interior of the Playbox Studio, looking eastward, as it appeared in 1959. t4e low ceiling and two of the windows of the East Alcove are visible. A partition cloBee off half of the original East Alcove area.

Figure 4.6: She interior of the Playbox Studio, looking westward. Past the archway of the West Room the edge of the bay window is visible on the right, A portion of the covered staircase is on the left.

Figure 4.7: The back wall of the Weal Room. The steps and doorway lead onto a landing at the foot of the covered staircase. Partially visible at the left is the doorway to the rear corridor.

Under a section of the staircase in the central hall, Freud, and such assistants as he had, built a highly compact control booth,

A low doorway into the booth 4'as cut into the south wall of the Central Room at a point only one foot from the archway of the West Room. This door -was 5*5" in height, as was the interior of the booth. To create a peep-hole, a rectangular slot was cut in the door measuring 7" in height and 18" in .width. This slot was barely more than three feet above the floor level, making it necessary for the light technician inside the booth to sit or kneel in order to view the performance. Since the ceiling of the booth

reached a maximum height of 5'5"* an average sized man could not stand up comfortably for very long in any case,

The interior of the booth besides being restricted in height possessed modest and irregular overall dimensions. In essence it was 3'6" wide by 4..6" deep. In a recessed area on the east side of the booth a place for a switchboard was established. Thus the operator would have the switchboard to his right as he viewed the performance. On the same side as the switchboard "was a low, two foot wide coffin-shaped cubbyhole which stretched eastward for five feet under the slope of the hall staircase. This was a potential storage place for small items. To increase the safety of the booth from any fir hazard, it was found necessary to "cover the switchboard room with iron leaving one inch air space," as the inspector from the Building Department of Pasadena stated the situation.[40] Sections of sheet metal accomplished this purpose.

In addition to a door into the light booth from the Central Room* access was provided from the hall. In the nar'-ow corridor a diagonally placed doorway formed an entrance into the booth.

Installation of Lighting Equipment.–Since Brown had always had an especial interest in the potentialities of theatrical lighting, he was well av?are of the importance of light in his new venture. In the Playbox he had installed what was considered at that time extensive lighting equipment. In the control booth he placed a "good sized switchboard with five banks of dimmers." The studio was "so completely wired that lights can 'work' wherever desired. " [41] He purchased baby spotlights and had them mounted on the three heavy cross beams of the Central Room. From these positions it would be possible to throw light into all parts of The Playbox. To light the exterior of the building, for example, the rear porch. Brown planned to use flood lights. He did not purchase them but made arrangements to borrow them from the Playhouse.[42]

The Wiring.–The wiring installation, which was performed by the Jakaby Electric Company of Pasadena, pro vided seven circuits and a total of thirty-five outlets. The manner in which these outlets were spread through the studio may be seen in the following chart:[43]

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[40]Inspector's note on Permit 47108 F, Certificate #3709, for 251 s. Fairoaks Avenue, Building Department, City of Pasadena. Inspector's note dated November 1, 1924.

[41]Pasadena 'Playbox' Interests Nation," Footlights, December 7, 1925. [PB I, p. 22.]

[42]Interview with Maurice Wells, June 15, 196l.

[43]Permit #7108, Building Department, loc. cit.

Location	Circuit No.	No. of Outlets
Front	1	6
Front Center	2	6
Front	3	4
Front Floor	6	5
Rear	4	6
Rear Center	5	6
Rear Floor	7	2

Audience Seating Provisions.–The audience at The Playbox were to be all seated on the same level.[44] No platforms were "brought in or constructed for mounting their chairs. By avoiding the use of such platforms Browl was striving to maintain the utmost flexibility in the placement of seats, keeping the re-arrangement from production to production so easily effected that a single individual could make the entire change. The greater ease of moving the chairs was to be paid for at times through poorer sight lines, but this difficulty was held down by the very limited size of the audience.

which would serve to guide the audience to the right locations in the studio and avoid the embarassing possibility of their sitting down on the set of a production.

Dressing Rooms.–According to Maurice Wells, the dressing rooms for the actors were in two separate locations, The provision made for the women in the casts was the apartment of Browi's brother and sister-in-law, located directly behind the West Room of the studio and reached by a door off the rear corridor, For the men a room on the second floor of the building was designated as a dressing room.[45] In addition to these rooms, Dr, Walkup has recalled the use of the East Alcove, blocked off by curtains from the Central ROOM, as an auxiliary dressing area.[46] It

could not have been planned as a regular dressing room in the preparations for the first season, since the use of drapery to close off the Alcove was to be variable.

Final Tasks.–Hot all the operations in getting The Playbox ready wre completed by the opening night of the season. Brown had allowed a bare four weeks after hie return from his vacation trip to attend to all the remaining tasks, including the rehearsal of the first production. As a consequence, the rough wiring of the studio was not inspected until October 28, the day before the opening performance. The light control booth elicited some safety suggestions on its inspection after the third day of performance. The final inspection and approval of the wiring installation did not take place until December 2, in the middle of the run of the second production, which required many lighting effects. In spite of these slightly tardy items, it is probably safe to say that the paint was dry on opening night, and that everything else was in readiness,

[44]The evidence for the seating of the audience on the same level, which was also the level of the actors, came from several sources. In the Christian Science Monitor, November 24, 1925 a report by "Special Correspondence" from Pasadena, with a dateline of November 10, 1925, stated: "The Playbox has no stage. Audience and players are on the same level," The Pasadena Morning guns July 19, 1928, in reviewing the -work of the Fa4Lroaks Playbox reported that the productions were made "with the actors on the same plane as the audience." Dr. Fairfax P. Walkup informed the present writer in an interview in January 22, 1962 that "there were no raised platforms for the audience's chairs."

[45]Interview with Maurice Wells, August 24, 1961.

[46]Interview with Dr. Fairfax P, Wallcup, August 11, 1961.

Figure 4.8: She peaked roof of the Central Room of the Playbox. The fluorescent fixtures are attached to three massive cross beams. Brown mounted his baby spotlights on these three beams.

Figure 4.9: Bie interior of the light booth as seen from the corridor. ’She switchboard Mas originally mounted in the recess on the right. The narrow door, with its rectangular peep-hole covered, opens into the Central Room of the Playbox.

Summary

In noting the way in which Brown set out to establish his Fairoaks Playbox, one may observe the clear goals he had in mind for the theatre, the methodical manner in which he obtained financial sponsorship and acceptance by an established group in the community. Seeking to make his intimate flexible theatre a part of the Pasadena Cosaaunifcy Playhouse, he did not discard his project when it was rejected by the Board of Directors, but instead appealed for sponsorship to the very organizations which had fostered the Playhouse. He made his Playbox a theatre for a limited audience, a private theatre, supported entirely by subscription, Oarefully analyzing the features of his own home, he decided to establish his theatre in it Preparations included installing lighting equipment and wiring, painting the Interior walls so as to produce a range of color effects under the lights, and procuring easily-moved chairs for the audience.

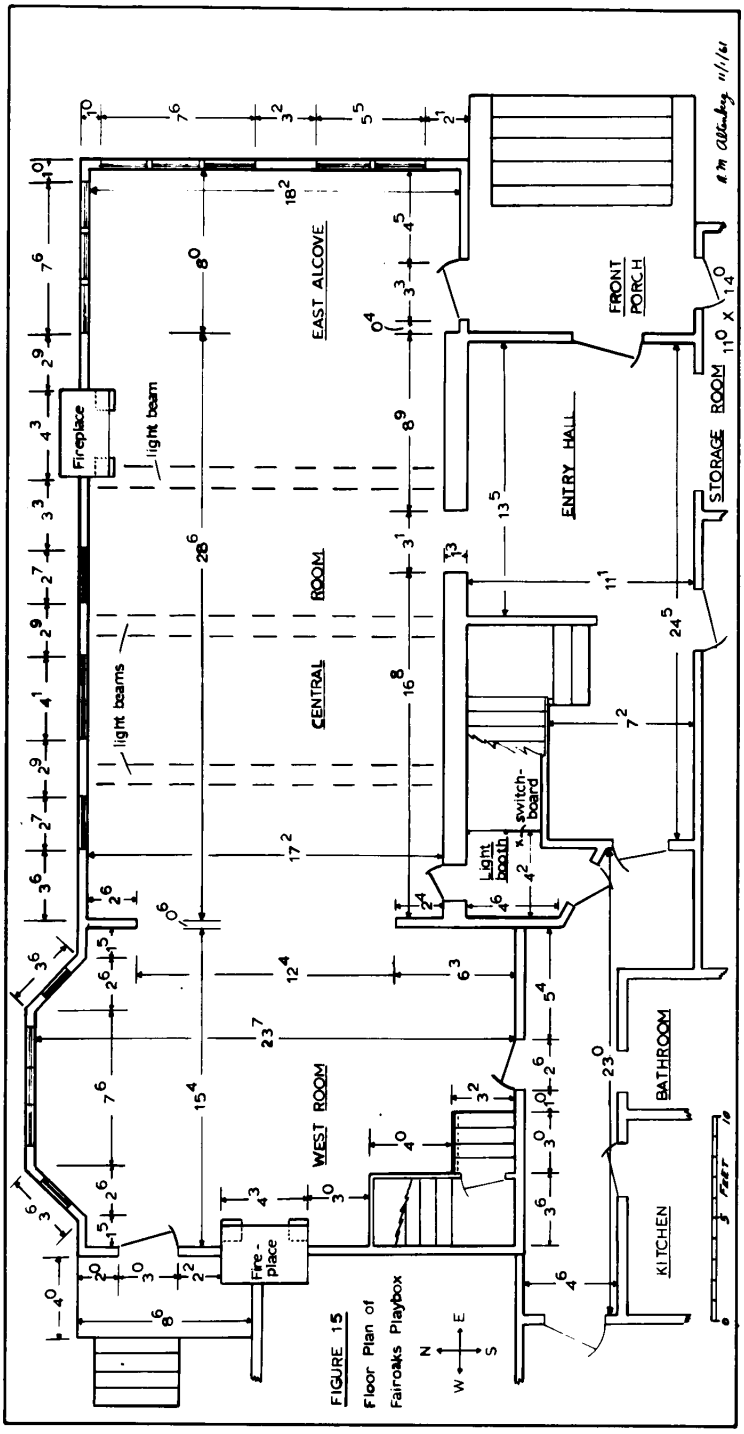

Figure 4.10: Floor plan of the Fairoaks Playbox.

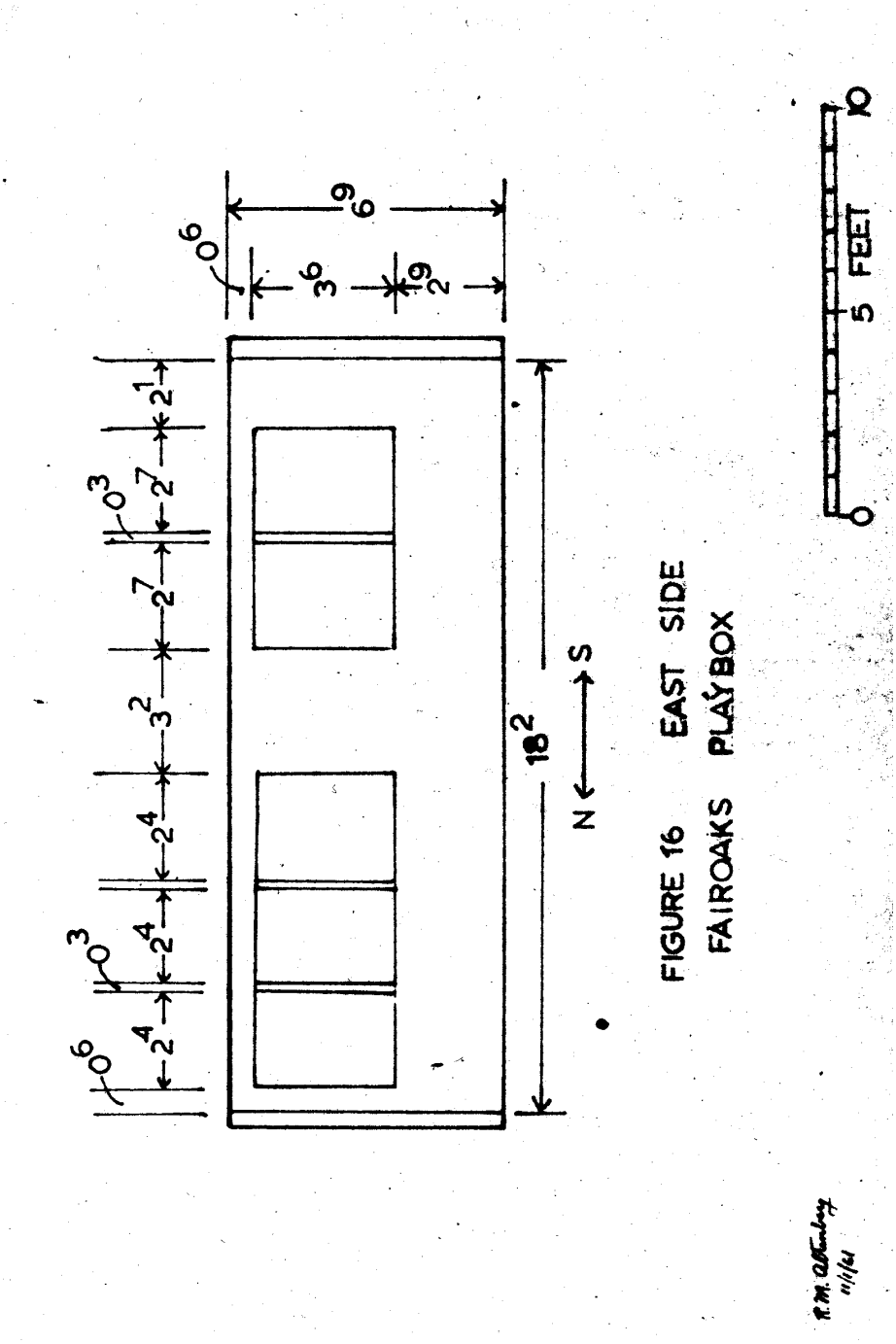

Figure 4.11: Elevation, east side of the interior of the Fairoaks Playbox studio.

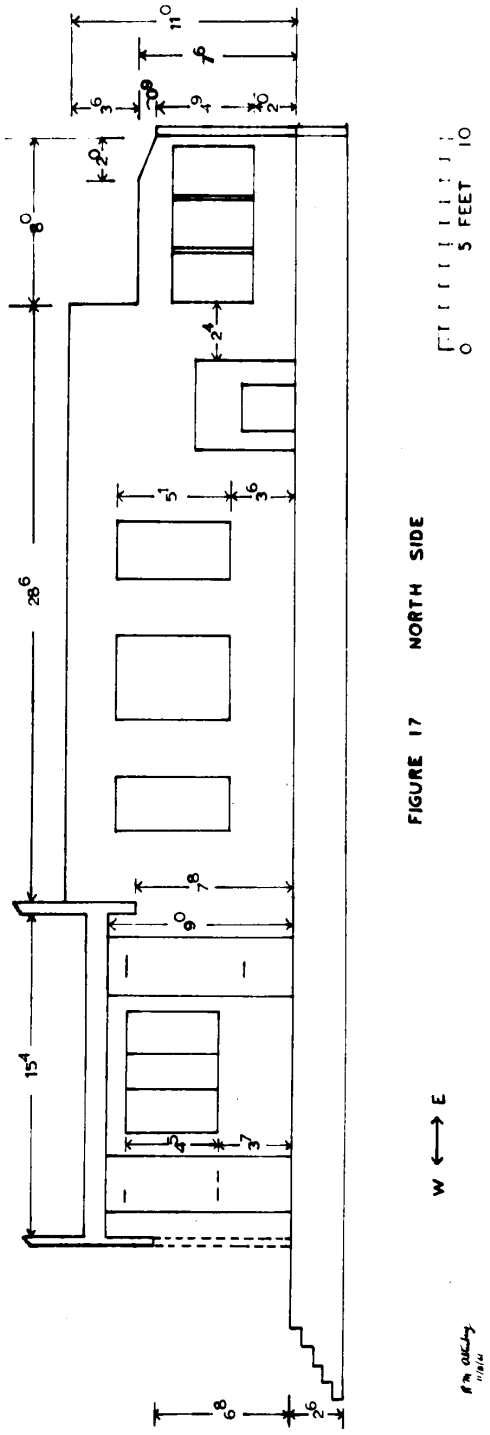

Figure 4.12: Elevation, north side.

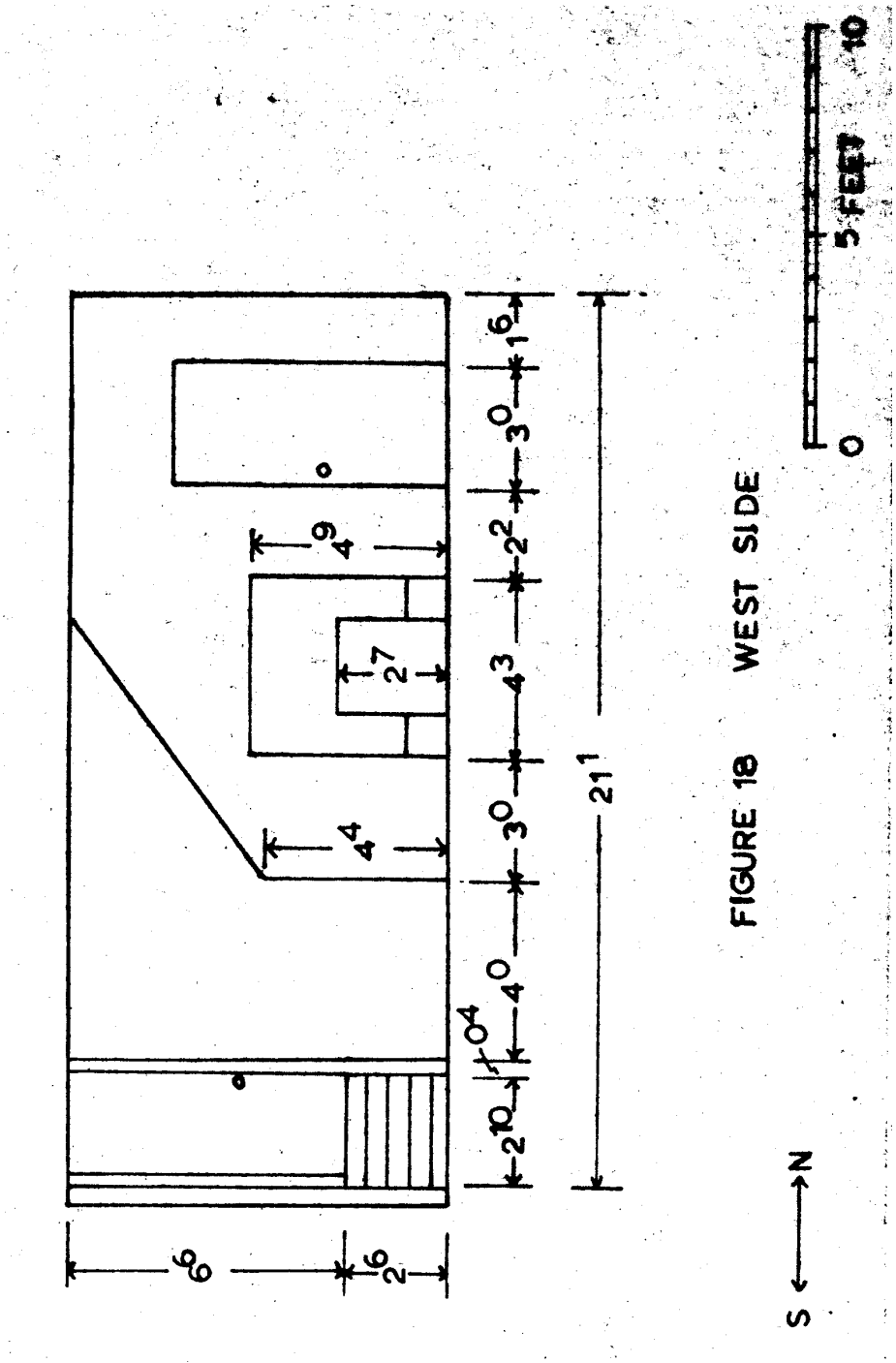

Figure 4.13: Elevation, west side.

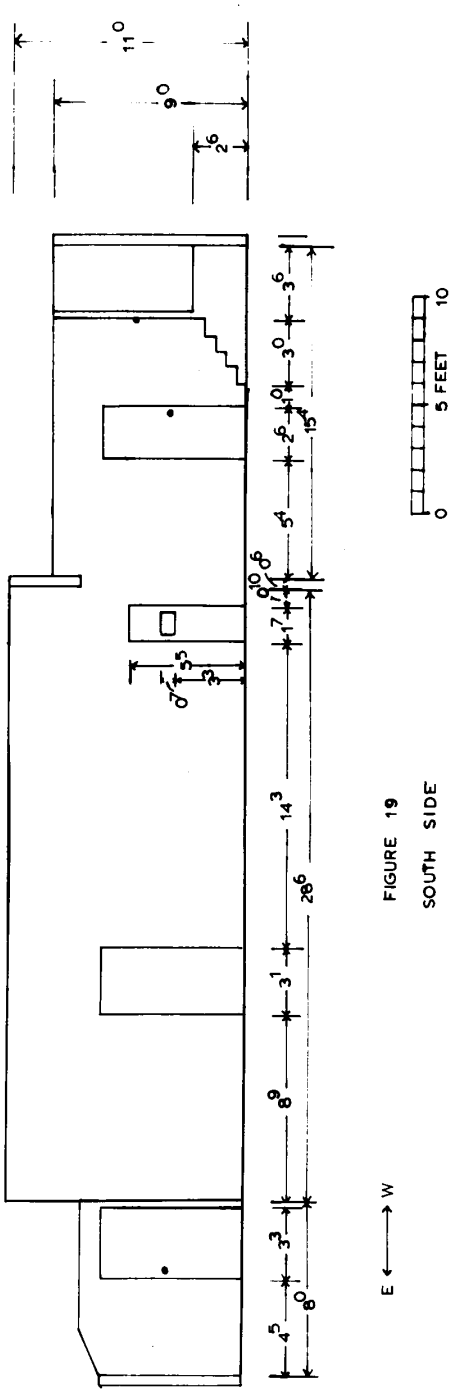

Figure 4.14: Elevation, south side.

Chapter 5

THE FIRST SEASON: 1924-1925

During the tirae that the final preparation of the Studio was being hurried along, the rehearsals of the first production, “Pie Truth About BlaydSa were also underway. As Co-Director of the Playbox, Pteurice Well conducted the rehearsals under Brown’s supervision. Before delving into the history of this initial production, as well as its successors in the first season, it is necessary to examine the background of Brown’s associate.

It may seem surprising that Brown would entrust hi a pet project to such a young man.[1] Born on August 9s 1903, Wells was only twenty-one years old at the time he took charge of the Playbox.[2] The producer, however, had been training him for at least five years, and knew the calibre of his work. Brown first met him when he was a student; at Pasadena High School. There had been a sizable group of theatre-minded youngsters at the high school, according to Brown, among ho. Wells was one of the most talented. ’She producer recalled that he had directed this group in possibly one production at the school, and several others else’where.[3]

Browl undoubtedly encouraged the youth to try out for productions at the Playhouse. In Moveiriber, 1919, the sixteen-year-old Wells played his first role there, a bit part in The Little Princess. In the same season he appeared as Trinculo the Jester in Brown’s highly successful production of The4TeRijpest. During the following four seasons, Wells performed with growing frequency on the Playhouse stage. His first leading part came in March, 1922, when he played the sensiti e protagonist, Robert Mayo, in O’Keill’s Beyondthe Horigon After this success Brown did not permit him to develop exclusively as a Juvenile or young leading man, for interspersed among youth-

[1] At that time and in the years ahead. Brown demonstrated over and over again his confidence in the ability of young men and women to assume positions of responsibility at the Playhouse and Playbox. In 1924 Ralph Freud had Just been appointed Assistant Director at the Playhouse at the age of twenty-three. The Art Director, Robert Sharpe, was all of nineteen. Sharpe .s successor in 1926 was iTames Hyde, then twenty -”two years old.

[2] Interview with Maurice wells, June 11, 1961.

[3] 4Interview .with Gilntor Brown, May 20, 1959.

ful roles came numerous character parts. Disguised by makeup. Wells appeared in such roles as the old uncle. Sir Oliver Surface, in 15ie School fpir Scandal; the Bishop of Lancashire in A Servant 3,n the House,; and the 'whimsical old Storyteller in Ijie Cricket on the Hearth

Among his important younger parts were Orlando In As You Like It, Sergius In Arms and the Man, and Algernon in The Importance of Being Earnest. Wells also performed two of Shakespeare's most comical roles. Sir Andrew Aguecheek in Twelfth NightJ and Launcelot Gobbo in The Merchant of Venice. In all, the young man had created thirty-two parts at the Playhouse by the time the Playbox opened.[4]

The directorial experience which prepared Wells for the responsibilities he was to assume in the Playbox began in the summer of 1923. He was employed as an Assistant Director at the Playhouse, helping in the production of plays under Brown's supervision. Although Lenore Shanewise came on the staff as a full-time Associate Director in the fall. Wells retained his position.

In the spring and summer of 1924 Wells received greater responsibility for the conduct of rehearsals.[5] He

received program credits for helping in the direction of a total offlfteen plays during the year prior to the opening of the Playbox. According to the official chronological list of productions published by the Pasadena Playhouse, Wells was actually the director in charge of eight of these plays.

During this period of practical theatre training

at the Playhouse, Wells also pursued his academic education at the university of California. Southern Branch, .Bie institution, now known as the University of California at Los Angeles, was then located east of Hollywood, approximately ten miles from Pasadena. For three semesters, from the fall of 1922 to January, 1924,[6] he divided his time between the theatre and the university. Finally the pressure brought upon him by the combination of late rehearsals and early classes made him to decide to give up his pursuit of a bachelor's degree. He preferred to concentrate wholeheartedly on his theatre work in Pasadena,[7]

Although he had not received a fonaal degree. Wells had acquired a good education. He had been a highly articulate writer for school newspapers throughout high school and during his semesters at the university. productions. Like his mentor. Brown, he was an avid reader, and became well versed in literature and history. In addition he displayed musical interests and aptitude.[8] At the Playhouse Metis came to be known as a witty, fluent conversationalist.[9] In spite of his quick wit and agile mind, he was a modest person possessing some tendency toward shyness. The Pasadena drama critic, Alexander Inglis, said of him:

> Maurice Wells does not strike one from Hie stage as being retiring, even

[4]Actor-Director File, Pasadena Playhouse Library.

[5]The Increased directing responsibility was indicated by the appearance of his name on the front of the program for credit as Assistant Director on specific productions. Previously Wells' name had only appeared in a list of staff members placed on the back page of the program.

[6]Records of the Registrar, the university of California at los Angeles.

[7]4Interview with Kaurice Ifells, Hay 19. 1959.

[8]Louise B. West, "Maurice Wells," Pasadena CornnMnity Playhouse 4ews, tferch 6-17, 1928. P. 91.

[9]Alexander Inglis, "From A Secluded Oarden," Pasa' dena Star-Hews, April 28, 1926.

> shy. He is. When a performance in which he has had a principal part contributing to its success has finished, he suddenly disappears. No green room search draws him forth. If his Riakeup is easily removed, the first visitor to the green room after the performance is likely to see his back disappearing through an exit.
>
> This modesty is innate 4ith him. His interest is solely in his work and his own personality is subjected to that of the character which he portrays. But if one gets him alone, he is full of vivacity. . . .[10]

Brown had made a careful choice in asking Wells to be the "resident director" of the Playbox, While Wells was young and still developing his abilities in theatre work, he was not a novice. Moreover he t?as intelligent and conscientious. While he was primarily interested in acting rather than directing, he had applied himself diligently to his production responsibilities at the Playhouse. His reason for having taken directing assignments there had been the fact that he could be paid for such efforts, while all the acting had to be on a purely voluntary basis.

At the Playbox Wells received no pay either as director or actor. Brown must have convinced him that he would receive valuable experience in directing plays in the intliaate theatre. After leaving Pasadena in 1928, Wells pursued a career strictly as a professional actor, and showed no desire to turn back to directing.[11] There is perhaps a measure of irony in the fact that so much of the wrk in staging productions in this pioneering flexible theatre was carried out by a young can who was a "director in spite of himself."

In directing Playbox productions Wells was to work under the same general supervision by Brown as he had received at the Playhouse. Brown's usual practice in the coramunity theatre was to hold an initial consultation 'with his assistant director on the analysis of the play and the method of staging it. The producer made most of the decisions on casting. He would often conduct the initial rehearsals, explaining his conception of the play and the characters to the cast. After this period he would turn the play over to his assistant director to writ with the actors until the last few days. At these final rehearsals Brown tightened up scenes and characterizations, and checked out the technical processes of production.[12]

'Phonaas Browne Henry once described the role of the associate (or assistant) director under- Brown's supervisory system. He called such a director

> one who directs a play that Gilmor Brown chooses, directs it In the manner that Gilmor Brown has indirectly suggested. Then when the play iB in the last moments of completion, after five weeks of work by the associate director, Gilraor Brown adds the finishing touches.
>
> We confer with Gilmor on the play and on the oast, and all the time it is really under the direct supervision of Gilmor.[13]

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[10] Ibid.

[11] 4Interview with Maurice Veilsf May 19, 1959.

[12] 4Elita 4.ller Lens, "lAttle Theatres, "The Billboardy October 11, 1924, p. 43. [PC? 4. P. 52.1

[13] Elizabeth Knudsen, "Interesting Personalities,1' unidentified newspaper from the Pasadena-Los Angeles area, not dated, but apparently written during the 1933–321 season. 'The clipping appears in POP 21.

Wells recalled with admiration the manner in which Brown would take over and improve a production in its final rehearsals, without disturbing the actors:

> With an adroit suggestion here, a piece of business there, he could galvanise a productiondo the right thing to make it jell without upsetting the actors. He would pull a play together, put the play in focus. To me that was his great genius.[14]

Wells was able to contrast Brown's skill with the approach of a number of Mew York producers who would "come in and destroy productions."

This was the supervisory arrangement, then, under which Wells rehearsed The, 'Rputh About Blayds at the Pairoaks Playbox. The play opened as scheduled on October 29, 1924, "So that production it is now appropriate to turn, making note of the nature of the play, the staging, the acting, and the audience reactions.

Production # 1. The Truth About Blayds October 29-31, November 5-7, 1924

The Story

A. A. Milne's play, The Truth About Blayda, tells the story of a family whose lives have been completely centered around the figure of Oliver Blayds, the last of the great Victorian poets. When Blayds is at the point of death just after the celebration of his ninetieth birthday, he reveals a terrible secret to his daughter Isobel; he never wrote the poems that made him famous. They were actually the wrk of a friend who had died leaving the manuscripts in the possession of Blayds. The truth about the old man is BO unpalatable to the family that they desperately try to reject it, but Isobel is intent on letting the world know the family secret. Having remained unmarried so that she could nurse her father in his old age, she feels angry and cheated. Finally a literary critic, Royce, whom she once rejected as a suitor, convinces Isobel that nothing good will come from revealing the secret. He also persuades her to accept him now as a husband. So the play ends, with the audience, but not the rest of the world, knowing the truth about Blayds.

The Staging

General Comment.–For this opening production. Brown and Wells used the eastern portion of the Central Room In an end staging arrangement. Thus the experimental theatre In Its initial effort made no radical departure in the placement of the acting area in relationship to the audience, 'What was notable was the absence of a proscenium arch or any form of masking for the sides of the set, the absence of a stage and a curtain, the placement of the audience on the same level as the performers at the edge of the acting area. There v?as in fact no formal division between the audience and the world of the play. Both were confined to the same open space in a room in a house.

[14]Interview with Maurice Wells, August 24, l96l.

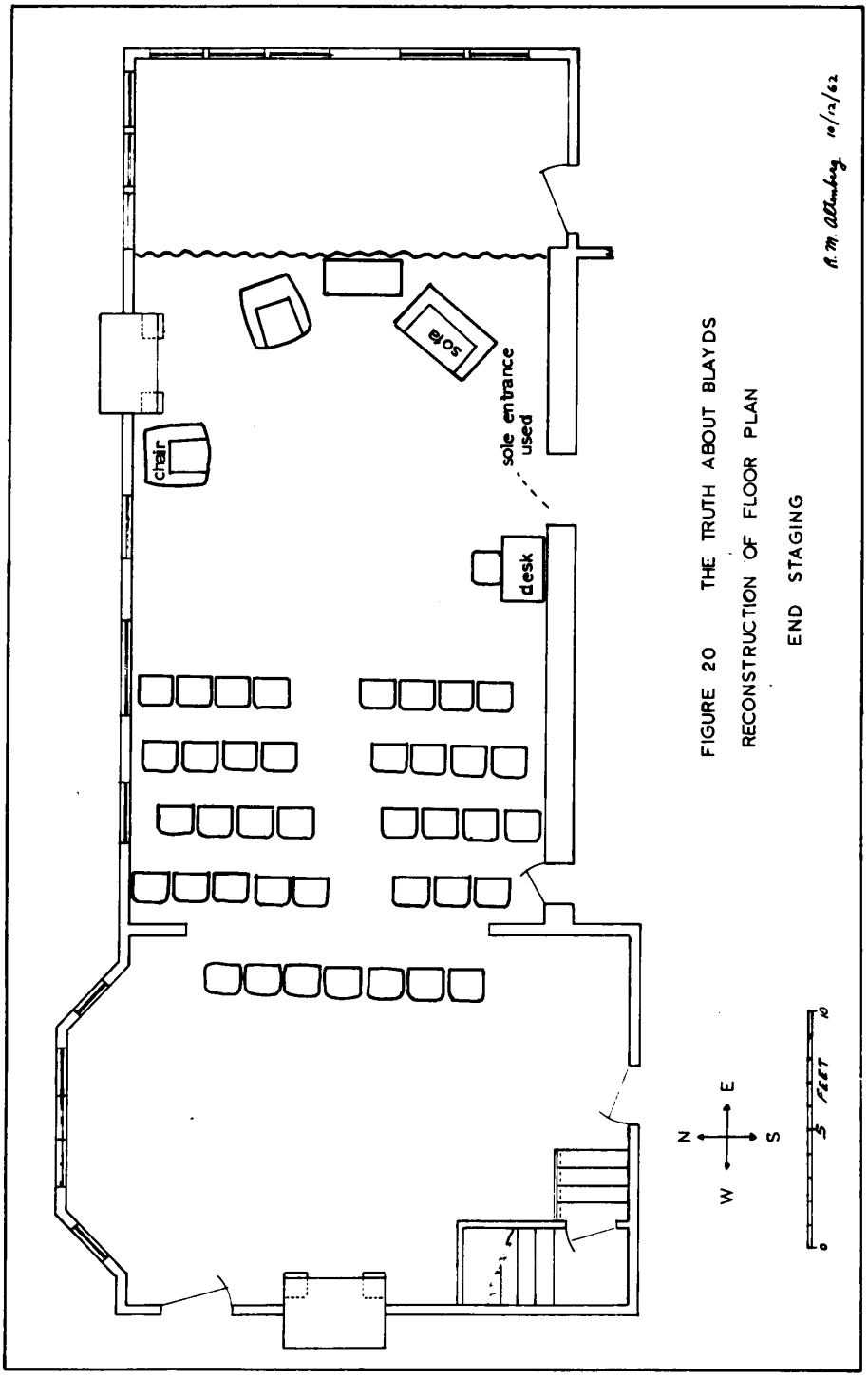

Figure 5.1: Reconstruction of end staging floor plan, *The Truth About the Blayds*.

The Setting.–The scene was the living room of the home of Oliver Blayds. A formalized back wall of the setting was created by hanging dark curtains across the entire width of the room in front of the East Alcove, completely masking it off. Upstage center a large portrait of the poet hung against this drapery. Beneath the painting a shallow table was placed with books and a vaee of flowers upon it. An arm chair and a small sofa were placed respectively stage right and stage left below the table. The permanent fireplace in the north wall of the room (stage right) formed a part of the setting. Just below it stood an overstuffed armchair. On stage left the directors had placed a email writing deck against the wall downstage of the hall door. A wide rug covered the acting area and extended out toward the audience.

From a comparison of this setting with both the playwright's visualization of the scene and the arrangement used in a later production of the comedy at the Playhouse, the method of adapting scenes to fit the structure of the studio theatre becomes clear. In the published play Milne called for;

> A solid handsomely furnished room in a house in Portman Squaresolid round table, solid writing desk, solid chairs and sofa, with no air of comfort, but only of dignity. At the back is a painting of Oliver Blayds, also handsome and dignified.[15]

The original London production of December, 1921 had carried out the writer's description to a great extent. It utilized a massive set, approximately forty feet in width, replete with ornate paneling, a chandelier, a large French window framed by drapery, and numerous luxuriously dignified pieces of furniture. There were two entrances on stage right and one on stage left. Upstage center the designer had put a fireplace, above which he placed the portrait of Blayds.

Pasadena Community Playhouse Set.–When the drama was revived for a special matinee series at the Playhouse in 1928, Maurice Wells followed the basic arrangement of entranceways of the London production, the upstage center placement of the fireplace and portrait, and the general location of furniture (although greatly reduced in amount).

Adaptation of Set at Playbox.–In the 1924 Playbox production a number of compromises were made in order to adapt the scene to the architectural features of the studio. It was desirable to maintain a position of dominance for the portrait of the poet, and above a fireplace was a logical location. Since, however, the Playbox fireplace was at the aide, rather than up center, a table was substituted in the strong upstage position. The portrait was hung above the table. It would have been possible to mask the permanent fireplace and install a theatrically constructed one upstage, but the intent was to make use of all the natural features of the building. The directors were able to satisfactorily reduce the number of entrances to only one, the door from the entry hall. In place of the handsomeness and opulence suggested by the playwright, the Playbox setting was much more modest. The furniture used in this production was dignified but could not honestly be described as handsome.

Groupings and Movement of the Actors.–From the positions of the actors and furniture as shown in Ralph Freud's photographs of the Playbox production, it may be

[15]A. A. Milne, "The Truth About Blayds," in Three Plays (New York and London: 0. P. Putnam's Sons, 1922), p. 101.

seen that the directors used the normal groupings of end staging, The actors performed in positions necessarily opened out toward the audience seated opposite them. One photograph reveals the members of the Blayds family discussing their problem as they sit in a basically send.-circular grouping (Fig. 21). The audience saw three of the five actors in profile positions, while two were in the threequarter frontal position. Another photograph depicts the family toasting Blayds at his birthday celebration (Fig. 22). The old man has just been wheeled into the room and is surrounded by a maid standing beside him near the door, his grandson behind his wheel chair, and his daughter Isobel to his right. Three others toast him standing upstage, They are facing down toward Blayds and consequently out toward the audience. His eldest daughter is downstage of the group at the extreme stage right end, and is turned toward Blayds so that she is seen in profile.

While some re-arranging of positions could have occurred for the purposes of the photographic composition, the evidence clearly points to basic end-staging practice. It is quite probable that at a number of moments in the performance actors would have had their backs turned toward the audience. Even though this was almost forty years after the advent of "Antoine's back" at the Theatre Libre, "'backs toward the audience were 'realistic."' This va-s the recollection of Maurice Wells, who observed in later years that at the Falroaks Playbox "We thought we were setting a trend. We were going in for realism." [16]

Audience Reaction

The factor in the staging which Impressed observers of the production of The Truth Abpu t B layds was the heightened reality, the "actualism," which accrued to the performance from the use of the normal architectural features of the building. Footsteps on the staircase in the hall, voicee in the foyer, seemed much more believable, than the usual theatrical off-stage voices and sounds. When the maid came in from the hall, it was a "natural appearance of a servant seemingly unconnected with the narrativeas such a character would have been in an actual home."[17] Such things, in the opinion of the Pasadena critic Alexander Inglis, made the performance unique, giving the audience the feeling that they were not in a theatre but "actually witnessing the happenings in a private home." In this production

The doorway on the right was the entranceway from the front hall of the building. the hall of the Brown home through which the audience had passed as they entered the Play-box, and the room in which they sat, ostensibly Gllmor's living room, became the hall and living room of Oliver Blaydsfittingly played by Gllmor Brown himself.

The closeness of the audience to the actors had a marked effect upon the spectators' response. Edythe King reported:

> The fact that the play is being acted but ten feet or so, from one, makes an intimacy between actors and audience unknown on any other stage.One

[16]Interview with M. Wells, August 24, 1961.

[17]Alexander Inglis, "The Truth About Blayds: some views on the recent Playbox production." Unpublished manuscript, 2 pp. Sent by Inglis to Brown at the latter's request. Not dated, circa November 1, 1924. Piled in an envelope in PB I, p. 8.

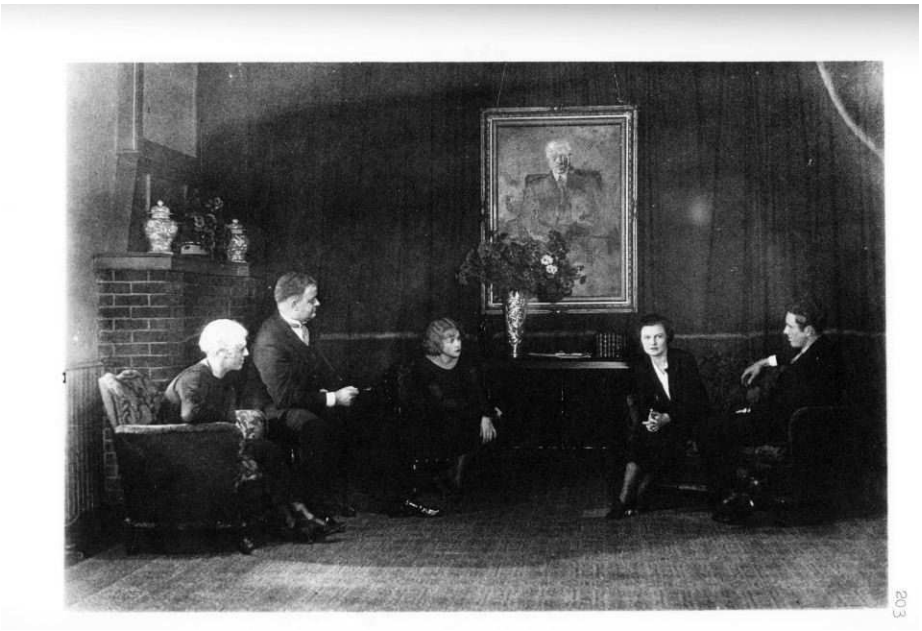

Figure 5.2: The Truth About Blayds. The drapery background completely closed off the East Alcove

> becomes a part of the idea.It would hardly seem Inopportune were one to rise and enter the conversation. [Underlining not in the original.][18]

IngliB also stressed the "unusual closeness of the players to the unseen observers." As he sat watching the play he felt like "a less communicative member of the Blayds family sitting in silence in a secluded corner of the home.[19]

The audience reaction encompassed both a peculiar sense of embarrassment and a heightened sense of participation in the events of the play. When Isobel Blayds talked intimately with her former lover, Inglis felt embarrassed at intruding into their privacy. Once he had become more adjusted to witnessing such personal scenes at close range, hie embarrassment changed to a deepened involvement in the drama. As he noted, "The happeningB in the home of Oliver Blayds became not BO much a theatrical performance as a personal experience." [20]

Evaluations of the Acting

In this first production both of the Playbox directors performed as actors. Brown played the ninety year old poet, while Wells appeared as his grandson. The important role of the middle-aged daughter Isobel was taken by Helen Hardieon, a school teacher who

[18]Edythe King, "The Theatre," Dark and Light, November, 1924. [PB I, p. 6.]
[19]Inglis, loc. cit.
[20]Ibid.

Figure 5.3: 4eTryth About glayde, The actors, from left to right were Rowena Elliot, Robert Orlffin, Walter Ogler, Helene Millard, Helen HardiBon, Gilmor Brown, Maurice We lie, and Mra, Walter Ogier.

had begun to act at the Playhouse during the previous season, and who was on the brink of a professional career. Appearing as the forty year old literary critic, A. L, Royoe, was Robert Griffin, a young man with a trained singing voice who was then developing himself as an actor. (He may currently be seen in television dramas.)

Brown, then only thirty-eight years old, made a strong impression as the aged literary giant whose fame was based on a lifelong deception. Harriet Green, a Pasadena woman active in the Drama League, has left a description of his characterization:

> He was broken in body, almost helpless in his wheel chair, his head moving stiffly, his voice worn with age, but the keen mind still alive and alert in the gleaming eyes , . . with every reason to keep his secret unto death, the old man turns from his final moment of elationhis birthday honorsto face such an invasion of old memories that the strong will crumples and the shattering story is told before he dies.[21]

A careful observer of Brown's acting over a period of years, Mrs, Green felt that out of a long gallery of his dramatic portrayals, there were few more distinct than this one. "Every detail essential to the characterization was present," she observed, "and every superfluous one was absent.[22]

Hot so fortunate in his effect upon another discerning member of the audience was Robert Oriffin. Inglls felt that he had been badly miscast as the sentimental literary roan, Royce:

> To my point of view the player in this case was temperamentally unsuited to the part . . . [his] practical business-like qualities seemed to me unfitting to a 'younger poet' who would sit in hero worship at the feet of a greater contemporary.[23]

Alluding specifically to Griffin, but perhaps including some other members of the cast in his comment the critic observed that the extreme closeness of the audience to the actors tended to greatly enlarge any faults in the performance. Kot only were casting errors more apparent, but so also were any lapses in concentration and in vocal and bodily reactions:

> Players subjected to such close scrutiny as was the case are of necessity compelled to sustain high standards in consequence of the relationship of the audience. When no inflection of the voice is lost and when every movement is significantly traced, no actor can afford to be other than consistently alert throughout the entire production. Moreover, faults which on the ordinary stage would pass unnoticed are brought out almost luridly by the Playbox method of production.[24]

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[21] Harriet L. Green, "Gilznor BrownThe Actor," Pasadena Star-News, November 13, vy4r In scrap book en ti tiled "GiIrooriana, p. 19. Pasadena Playhouse Library.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Inglls, loc. cit.

[24] Ibid.

In general, however, Inglis found the Playbox actors to have attained a high level of ability since the production had "revealed them to what might be termed the microscopic gaze of the audience, and found them well-equipped for such scrutiny." [25]

Production # 2, Pelleas and Melisande November 26-28, December 3-5, 1924

In contrast to the domestic realities of The Truth About Blayds, Brown had chosen for the second production the symbolistic drama by Haeterlinck, Pelleas and Melisande. .Hie only play by this Belgian writer which the Playhouse had presented was Sister Beatrice. Compared to it Pelleas and Melisande was a more fragile, elusive drama, and for this reason a more suitable choice for the experimental theatre than for the consamnity stag. Brown's desire to produce the play inay have been whetted by Jane Cowl's successful revival of it in New York in 1923.

The Story

Quite simple in outline, the drama transpires in a shadowy atmosphere removed from actualities of time and place. As the story begins. Go laud, the mature grandson of the doddering king of a medieval domain, finds lovely, childlike Melisande lost in a forest. He marries her and brings her back to the gloomy royal castle. As Boon as Melisande meets her husband4 young step-brother, PelleaB, the two fall deeply in love. While they struggle against the terrible force which draws them together, Golaud inevitably becomes suspicious. Pelleas decides that he must leave the country. On the night that the two lovers meet for the laat time, Golaud spies upon them in the garden outside the castle. Although he is unarmed and knows that he has been Been by his brother, Pelleas fataliBtically continues to embrace Melisande until the avenging sword descends upon him. After the demise of her lover, the wounded Melisande lingers for some weeks on her death bed. Recognizing the innocence of his child-wife's love affair, Mellsande's husband begs her forgiveness just before she dies.

The Directors' Conception of the Play

In stating their conception of the mystic nature of the play. Wells and Brown acknowledged that it was fashionable to "decry Maeterlinckto feel that he has not lived up to the title "The Belgian Shakespeare,"' "but they .urged:

> None of us can deny the strange and elusive beauty of his first playsplays so atrange and nystic (with their wistful, destiny-haunted men and women, ever groping through the darkness for light and truth) that they have never been popular.
>
> 'Pelleas and Melieande. is perhaps a drama that should be read and not seen. But we have endeavored through the medium of speech and lighting

[25] Ibidt

> to convey something at least of the inystical quality you derive frora the printed page.[26]

To attain the requisite "atmosphere" in their studio theatre without the scenic reaources of the conventional proscenium stage was to be no small feat,

The Settings

Scenic Requirements of the Play.–The original script was divided into five acts, totaling nineteen scenes of relatively brief duration. At least eleven separate locations were called for in the play; among these were a forest, a fountain in a park, a room in a castle, the vaults of the castle, and a tower. In place of the five acts, the directors divided the play into Parts I and II, but retained eighteen of the nineteen scenes, and attempted to auggest the eleven different locations. [27]

Brown's Scenic Plan.–Brown, undaunted by the scenic requirements, conceived a way of mounting the play. According to Wells:

> Gilraor explained how we could do 'Pelleas' with black drapery and set pieces. He had the general idea of the mise en scene. The audience was to sit in the rear room [West Room] behind a gauze scrim stretched across the arch. They were to look at the play through the scrim.[28]

In addition to the black drapery, the producer wanted the floor painted black. In recalling the production, Brown informed the present writer:

> The floor was painted intensely black. I've used black so many tiroes because it's so effective. Everything stands out BO isuch.[29]

As the Junior director it was Well's task to polish the floor with oil each afternoon during the run of the play, so that it would have a shiny surface when the lights played upon it in performance. After the run of Pelleas the floor remained black for future productions.[30]

The Acting Areas.–The play was produced in an unusually deep end staging arrangement, with the audience sitting BO that they faced eastward as in the previous production. This time, however, the spectators were at least twelve feet farther back, since they -were all sitting within the West Room. This allowed the use of the now unoccupied twelve feet of the Central Room to add to the depth of the acting area.

The total depth of the space reserved for the acting and scenic area may be estimated as twenty-eight feet,' in other words, the length of the Central Room. As x'rf.11 be Been, this already considerable distance, when used at its maxiiaum, was heightened by employing an extremely narrow width, often not more than six feet.

As planned by Brown, the black curtains were hung from the three cross beams of the Central Room[31] and apparently also across the front of the Eaet Alcove. This

[26] Notes printed on Playbox program for Pelleas and Meliaande. [PB I, p. 9.3
[27] Program of PelleaB and Melisande, loc cit.
[28] Interview with M. Wells, June 11, 1961.
[29] Interview with Gilmor Brown, May 11, 1959.
[30] fells, loc. cit.
[31] Ibid.

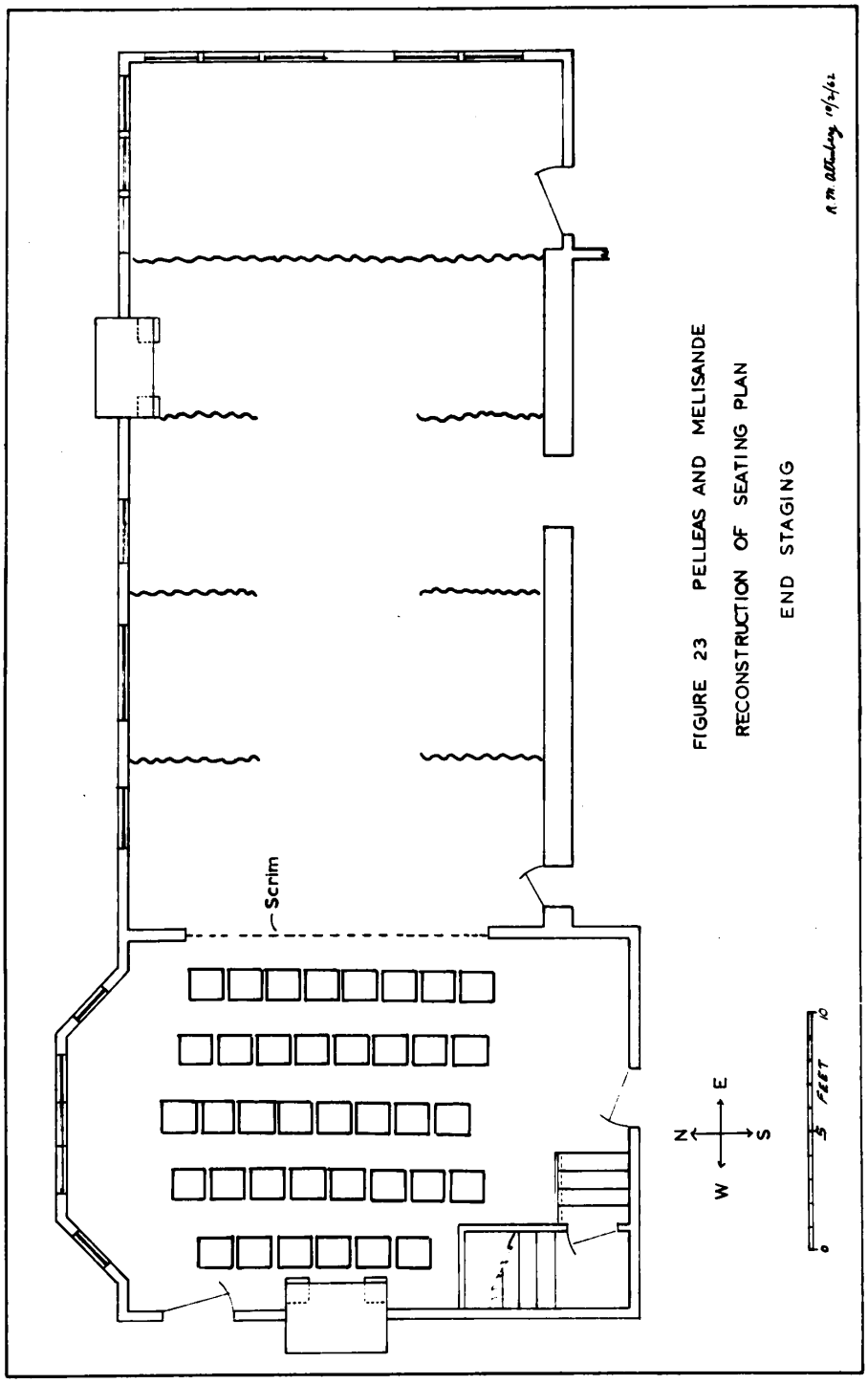

Figure 5.4: Reconstruction of deep end staging floor plan, *Pelleas and Melisande*.

created four levels of depth at seven, fourteen, twentyone, and twenty-eight feet from the front row of the audience. As each scene was performed the drapery at the appropriate level was pulled aside to create a narrow opening, revealing the simple scenery constructed for the production.

The Sets.–Three of the small sets used may be seen in extant photographs of the production. These photographs are reproduced in Figures 24, 25 and 26.

For the love scene in the garden near the castle, a highly stylized unit representing a fountain waa placed on an eighteen-inch high platform. Apparently cut out of

a stiff, light material such as beaver board, the fountain was painted white or a pastel color. To achieve the effect of water trickling down from the top of the fountain into its basin, the scenic technician attached strings of tinsel to the fountain, which sparkled under the lights. In front of the fountain was a wooden two-step unit, across which VB.S draped a piece of velour cloth. Upon these steps sat Pelleas and Melisande.

Another scene recorded in the photographs was Go laud's room in the castle. Here, Go laud, who had been injured in a hunting expedition, reclined in bed while his troubled wife knelt beside her husband to comfort him. All that could be seen through the opening in the drapery, which was at most five feet wide, was the mound-like head of the bed covered in a decorative cloth, against which Golaud was propped, and the figure of Melisande beside the bed grasping her husband's hand. A few feet behind the bed the next level of dark drapery formed the "back -wall" of the setting.

The third setting to be seen in the photographs of the production was "Melisande's Chamber." It was shown as used in the final scene of the drama, the death of Melisande. It consisted of a bed directly facing the audience with an extremely high headboard at the upstage end. In order to fit the bed into the depth between the two levels of curtains and still permit some free space below it, an especially constructed short bed seems to have been employed. Mellsande was propped up against the headboard, while three men clustered around the bed. Go laud knelt stage left of his wife,

The front curtains for this scene were drawn, as in the scene in Go laud's room, to an opening barely more than five feet in width. Below the front curtains, within the next acting area, four servant women knelt on the shiny black floor, two on each side, their backs to the audience as they peered Into the chamber.

An impressive scene which was not photographed, but which Wells remembered, took place in Melisande's Tower. Melisande was supposed to be sitting at the window of her room in a tower of the castle, looking down upon Pelleas who stood Just below. According to the action of the play, as she leaned out to speak to Pelleas her long golden hair cascaded down over his outstretched arms and face. To accomplish this scenic effect, the actress playing Mellsande simply reposed on a stepladder placed at the far end of the room, adjacent to the East Alcove. Presumably the ladder was suitably disguised. The "Tower Scene" may be counted among those using the maximum depth of the scenic area.

While all the sets were quite small, the scene shifts for this midget "spectacular" required considerable ingenuity and perseverance. As resident director Wells had not only taken on the major responsibility for conducting the rehearsal of this play, but also had a dual role each night of performance. On stage he was eeen a the doddering old King Arkel, but when out of Bight of the audience he ms nimbly functioning as chief stage hand. He remembered the task of shifting the sets as less than pleasurable?

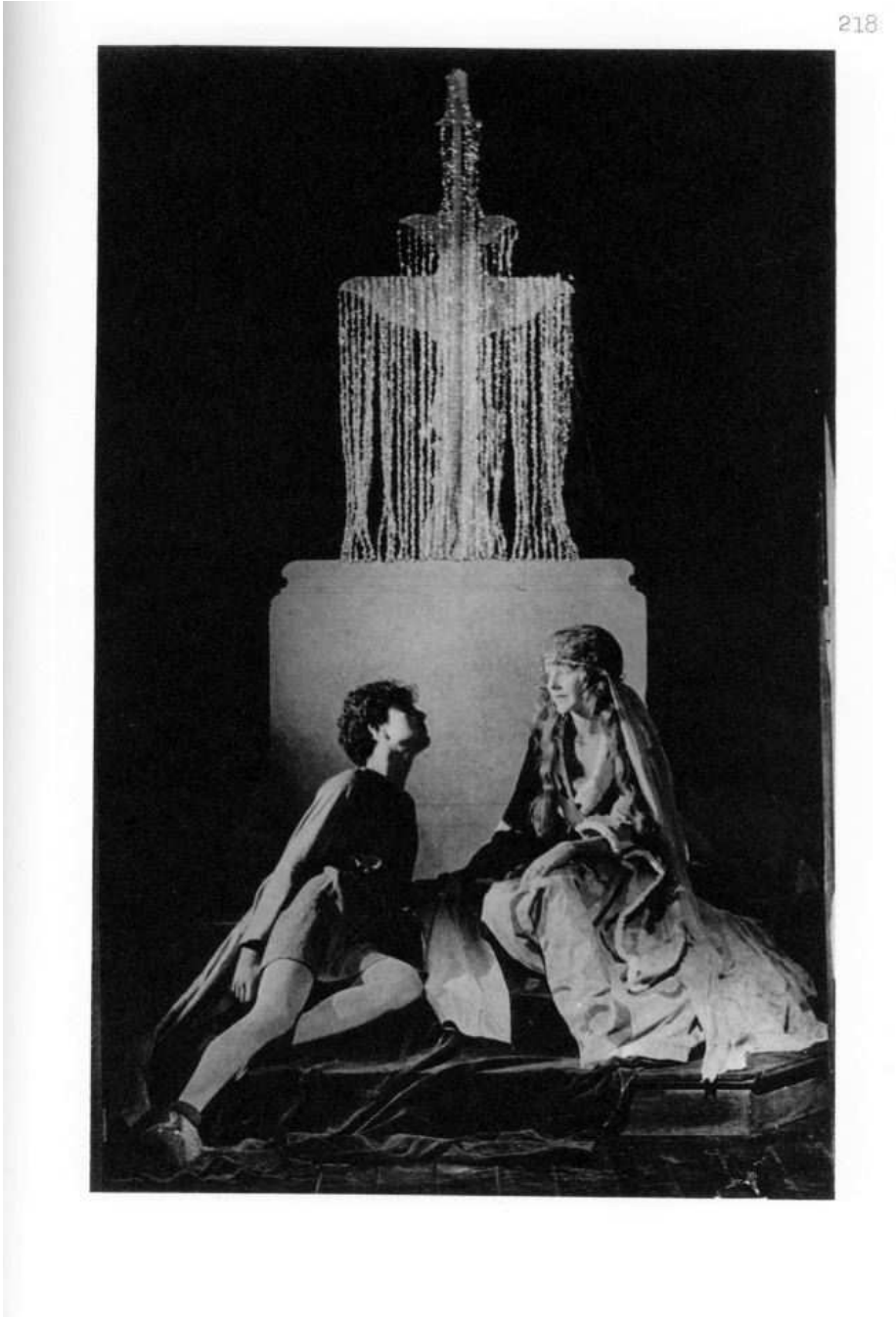

Figure 5.5: Pelleaa and, Melisande. The love scene at the fountain in the garden.Mervin Williams as Pelleas, Lois Austin as Melisande.

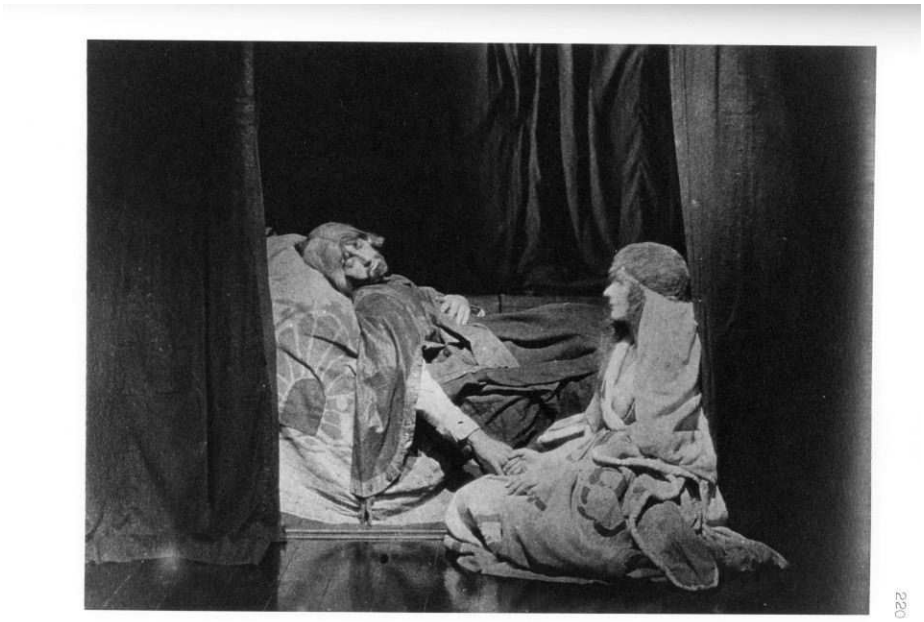

Figure 5.6: Pelleas and Melisande. Go laud's room. Robert Griffin aB Go laud, Lois' AuStin as Melisande.

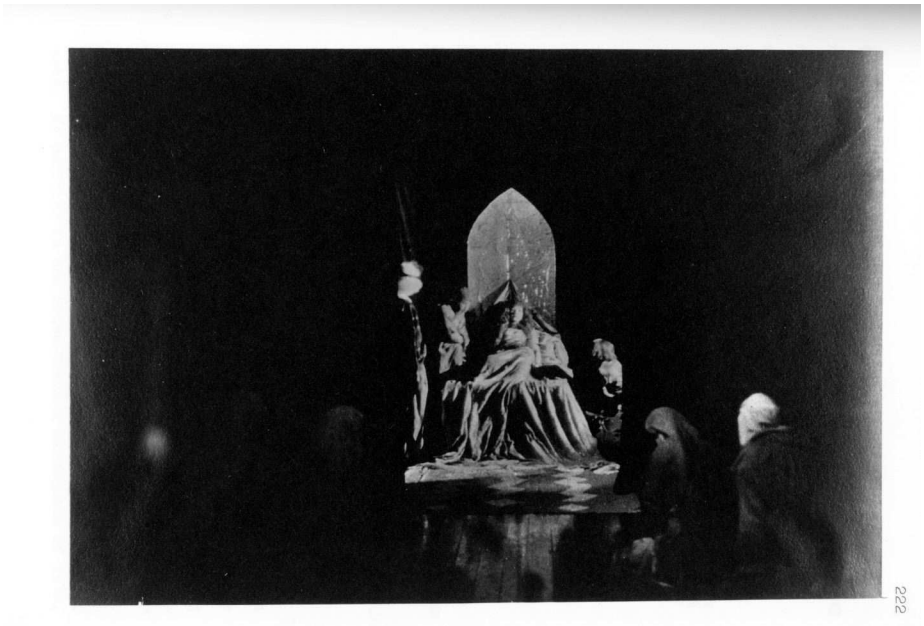

Figure 5.7: Pellea8 and Meltgande ie death of Melisande,

> I remember cursing to myself offstage, rushing back and forth getting the little sets in place, seeing that the black draperies -were not pulled open too far. It all had to be done silently since scenes were going on and the audience was so close,
>
> In order to reduce the sound I put wool socks over the slippers I wore as the King. In shifting the sets I also had to be careful to protect the polish on the black floor,
>
> Everything was extremely cramped. Every night we felt as if we got through by the skin o4 our teeth, relieved that nothing had fallen down .[32]

The only assistance Wells recalled having received in the scene-shifting operation was from a young man named Bertram Hancock who played the bit part of the Doctor in the play,[33] The two stage hands brought in the pieces of scenery from the storage room across the hall.

Lighting Effects

Of great significance in the experimentation of this production was the use of lighting, ISie directors had announced in their program note their goal of capturing the mystical quality of the play through the medium of lighting as well as speech. As e:rBployed throughout the performance of Pelleas and Helisande the light became a roost potent force in the mise en scene, carefully orchestrated with the movement of the actors, A vivid contemporary account of the ataging of the play illustrates the contribution of the carefully designed light plot;

> .Rie opening lines [of the play] are spoken in utter blackness, seeming at an indescribable distance. Like the old Greek chorus, the maids' voices cry, 'Open the door! Open the door I' Slowly a curling slit of light cut the impenetrable space of nothing, and that awful feeling of being lost in blindness, left us. The atmosphere and the conditions in which the characters were living possessed the entire audience. The scene beneath the castle, in the dark vaults, was so vividly portrayed that the black floor gleaiaed in the flecking lantern light like sliny water, and I could almost smell the moist stone, and wetness.
>
> Another scene that impressed me was when Pelleas and Mellsande meet in a passageway. Each carries a tall candle, and they exchange hurried, breathless, expectant words, then part. Pelleas shields his taper with his hand as he walks straight down-stage, until he is almost upon us, impressing that haunted, dazed look on the audience4 coming ontill within a foot of the front rowthe stage picture is wiped out in darkness, both candles snuffed? the picture gone.[34]

[32]Wells, loo. cit.

[33]Haneock was a very laodest, conscientious youth, a member of a wealthy California family with large oil interests. He perished in the Santa Barbara earthquake of 1926.

[34]Edythe King, Dark and Light, February, 1925.

In addition to the use of spotlights for the effects described, it should be noted that such natural sources as lanterns and candles carried by the actors played their part. Both of these non-electrical sources were employed in later productions*

An important aspect of the lighting was its ability to heighten the illusion of depth. Viewing the action through narrow openings in the curtains, with scenery and actors placed against dark backgrounds and Illuminated by shafts of light piercing the blackness, the audience received "a surprising Illusion of distance and space." [35]

The Acting

To project through acting the raood built up by scenic devices, Browi cast two youthful actors in the leading roless Mervin Williams and Lois Austin. Williams, who was eighteen or nineteen, was barely out of high school, while Kiss Austin, then about twenty-one, had Just finished college. Williams had already appeared in two dozen Playhouse productions and had even been Assistant Business Manager of the community theatre during the past season.[36]

2x.ls Austin had performed in eight plays on the Kainstage, including several leading parts. Both actors were to make their professional acting debuts within two months after this Playbox production.

In their performance in the Maeterlinck drama, the two leading actors gave the impression of being "fairy tale people," as Edythe King described them. Williams had caught in his role the "haunted, dazed look" of Pelleas, especially in hie scene with the candles in the passageway.[37]

A character such as Pelleas was the sort of thing Williams enjoyed playing, for he favored romantic parts, believing that they should be played with virility. This must have been his aim in the Playbox production., for two yeara later he exclaimed to an interviewer from a film magazine:

> Why do people confuse poetic with anemic? She expression of the spiritual on the stage or screen should be fundamentally virile to have any meaning. [38]

While acknowledging that William had not yet developed full command of the romantic style, the Pasadena critic, Inglis, made note of the "beauty of his work which broke out in 'Pelleaa and Melisande."'[39]

Robert Griffin fared better in thia production, as Qolaud, than he had in The Truth About Blayds. At least one reviewer considered that "the pitiful .jealousy of big Golaud was the best piece of acting Robert Griffin has done." [40]

It was -the intent of the directors to roake particular use of the actors' voices in striving to convey the mystical quality of the play. Consequently the actors spoke "the

[35]"Pasadena 'Playbox' Interests Nation," Footlights, December 7, 1925.

[36]Records of the acting and directing contributions of all who have participated in productions at the Pasadena Playhouse, on the Kainstage and in the subsidiary stages, are on file in the Actor-Director index of the Pasadena Playhouse library.

[37]King, loCt cit.

[38]Margaret Reid, "One Up for Romance," Picture Play Magazine, February, 1927. [POP 8, p. 4i.3

[39]Alexander Inglis, "Playhouse Parts," Pasadena Star-Mews ¡ June 9s 4S.

[40]King, 3,oc. cit.

wistful haunting lines . . . very softly and a trifle breathlessly." Attention was paid to the rhythmic patterns of Maeterlinck's dialogue, so that a favorable response was reported to the "studied tempos of the voices."[41]

Evaluations of the Production as a Whole

Gilmor Brown was proud of the production of Pelleas and Melisande, Years later he referred to the manner in which "the eighteen scenes of this play captured, by the simplest means, all that 'other world' quality of the Maeterlinck poetry.[42] Edythe King had found the play as a whole "lovely and colorful," with the "coloring and costuming . . . gemlike in clarity," She compared the production to "a string of pearls held to a flame, that gave them of its living fire." [43]

Mot BO well impressed with the attempt to mount such a play in the intimate studio theatre was Alexander Inglis. This critic became more and more convinced as he viewed the Fairoaks Playbox performances that the theatre was best suited to realistic domestic dramas and comedies. He stated his opinion of the production of the Maeterlinck play as follows:

> Gilmor Brown has been experimenting in the production of plays minus the paraphernalia of stage and scenery. In many casea, notably 'The Truth About Blayds,' the method haa been uncannily successful. In some eases, notably 'Pelleas and Melisande*'the method has left much to be desired.[44]

Production # 3. The Chester Mystery: The Nativity December 22-27, 1924

As part of the first season. Brown had included a special Christmas production, a midnight performance of the short "Nativity" play from the Chester Cycle of English Mystery plays. This began a practice which lasted for some years at the Playbox. The performances opened on December 22, 1924.

Staging

With tills production. Brown took a greater plunge toward the goal of intimacy, for it was the first play to be performed in horse shoe staging. At one end of the studio, either the East or Weet, the manger was placed.

The shepherds performed in the center of the room, sur rounded by the audience on three sides.[45] Straw was strews on the floor; lanterns lit the room. Setting the mood for the Christinas play, an unseen chorus sang the traditional carols,

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[41]King, loc. cit.

[42]Gilmor Brown, "A Dream on a Dime," p. 173.

[43]King, loc. cit.

[44]Pasadena Star-News, April 3, 1925. (Wo by-line is given, but the style and viewpoints are those of Alexander Inglis.)

[45]Interview with Ralph Freud, April 13, 1961.

'When the kings and the Bhepherds together followed the Christmas star to the manger, they crossed from the central acting area to the manger scene.[46] Edythe King found the play "in true synrpathy with the old yule-tide spirit." [47]

Production # 4. American One-Act Plays: December 31, 1924; January 2, 8-10, 1925

Immediately after the close of the Christmas production, Brown and Wells presented the members .with an added production, a bill of two one-act plays by American witera* The program consisted of "Woman's Honor" a satirical comedy by Susan Olaspell, and "The Song With Wings," a Pierrot fantasy by Mar4orie Driscoll, feature writer for the Los Angeles Exano.nert

Staging

While the program may not have been of any particular consequence in other respects, it introduced the "Turnabout" method of staging.

As a Iios Angelee reviewer described this arrangement at the Playbox:

> The audience sits in the center of the auditorium, and the plays are presented at either end of the room. A joyous sense of being behind the footlights prevadea [sic] the spectators and the novelty of the entire affair ie intriguing.[48]

Since the Playbox did not make use of a swivel mechanism, the audience were requested after the first play to shift their chairs so that they faced in the opposite direction.[49] The first play "Woman's Honor" appears to have been given at the east end of the room, since there is a reference in the script in Maurice Wells. handwriting to a .window on the actor's right.[50] If the window were one of those in the north wall, the actor would necessarily have been in the east end facing an audience at the west.

National Publicity

Two weeks after the conclusion of the bill of oneacts, the Playbox received what appears to have been its first national publicity. A brief news item was printed in the January 26 issue of The Little Theatre News a a PUblicatlon of the New York Drama League disseminating information to and from the non-oonmiercial theatres of the nation. Captioned "A Playbox for Intimacy, Gilmor Brown's Latest," the item deaoribed the Playbox as

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[46] Freud, loc. Pit.

[47] Edythe King, "The Theatre," Dark and Li4ht, January, 1925.

[48] Florence Lawrence, "Playbox Latest Little theatre; Who Is the Best?" Los Angeles Examiner a January 1, 1925.

[49] 'Interview with Maurice Wells, June 7, 196l.

[50] Woman's Honor" with stage directions in the handwriting of Maurice Wells appears in the volume of Plays by Susan Olaspell. This same volume found in the Pasadena Playhouse Library also contains the blocking for a later production, Bemice.

> A tiny and intimate playhouse for the production of unusual plays that might not appeal to the larger public that patronizes the Playhouse. 'She Playbox seats only fifty. . . .[51]

The description of the theatre went on to make the misleading general statement (which actually concerned only the staging of the recent one-act program), that "the audience site in the center, and the plays are presented at either end of the room."

Variety, which had a punch greater national circulation, repeated the same general information in ibs issue of

i '=¿2 February 4.[52] During the remainder of the seaiaon, Variety

regularly listed the Playbox produolions.[53]

On April l6, 1925, the columnist who wrote under the name of "The Korasad" carried an account in the Boston Evening Transcript of the work of both the Playhouse and the Playbox.[54] In this way bits of information were trickling across the country, ?3 mention was made, however, of the unique forms of staging used at the Playbox.

Production # 5. March Hares January 28-30, l925; February 5-7, 1925

While Brown kept busy directing and acting in an original play at the Playhouse during January, Veils prepared the Playbox production scheduled to open January 28. It was the comedy .March Hares, classified as "A Fantastic Satire "by its young English-born creator. Harry Vagstaff Cribble, and subtitled "'Ehe Teraperamentalists." Audiences had first seen the play in New York in the sunaaer of 1321, and again in a revival in 1923.[55]

The Story

The play tells of a zany weel-cend In the home of the Rodneys, l-fother Rodney and her daughter, Janet. Geoffrey Warehani, a handsome and somewhat eccentric elocution teacher, is Janet's partner in a studio of expression. For three years he has been residing with the Rodneys. Women have a penchant for throwing themselves at Geoffrey, whicli has only resulted in his backing away from any display of affection for them. Consequently, Geoffrey has remained for some time in the category of a prospective son-in-law to Mrs. Rodney. The catalyst in his romance with Janet IB a highly flirtatious young elocution student named Claudia Kills, invited by Janet to spend the weekend at the Rodney

domicile. When Geoffrey has taken over the living room sofa for his night's real, and all are upstairs in their rooms, Claudia in a filmy nightgown flutters do-wn to

[51]PCP 5¡ P. 128.
[52]PCP 5i P. 120
[53]Program note, Playbox program for The jten, Who Ate the Popomackj May 6, 1925. (PB I, p. 19.]
[54]Gilraoriana, p. 26.
[55]Harry W. Orlbble, March Hares (Cincinatti: Stcwart Kidd Company, 1923), pp. 5-6.

kiss the forehead of the sleeping elocutionist, The ensuing scene was mild enough by today's standards, but pleasantly shocking to the audience at the Playbox.

Awakening, the pajama-clad Geoffrey springe up and in BO doing throws Claudia on to the floor. Not seeing her immediately he steps down onto her recumbent form and screams, "?ty God! A body!" When he becomes aware who it is that has disturbed his sleep, he begs the girl to let him return to his slumber. She confesses her Interest in him;

she has been waiting for a time when she could look at him to her heart's content.

The dialogue then runs as follows:

GEOFFREY

How awful I Well, couldn't you choose a more convenient time? You will cafcch your death of cold. That thing you have on is only barely adequate from any point of view.

CLAUDIA

Don't you like it? (Holding out her skirts and piroutetting.)

GEOFFREY

I can scarcely see it. I can see more of you.

CLAUDIA

Oh!-Geoffrey!

GEOFFREY

Miss Kitts! Don't get ecstatic;

Claudia begs for a kiss, which the young man 'begrudgingly tenders her. His fiancee comes down the stairs just at this moment and views the spectacle with vigorous misunderstanding. An emotional 'battle results.

By the final curtain the various knots in the story have been tied and untied sufficiently to make way for the ultimate in manly sacrifice. Geoffrey proposes marriage to Janet Rodney.

The scene quoted above is not the only "suggestive" episode in the play. At numerous points the dialogue and situations are mildly risque, but always presented in an extremely light-hearted homorous manner. For this reason perhaps, the play was acceptable to the Playbox audience, and having passed the test with this more "adventurous" element, was later offered to the general public at the Playhouse. Of all the productions at the Fairoaks Playbox, however, March Hares was the only one in which the subject matter even approached the area of the risque.

Staging

With each production this first season, the directors had planned a different arrangement of the acting areas and seating plans. For March Hares they made their first use of what has been called "L" staging. In this arrangement the acting area ran along to contiguous walla while the audience sat along the other two walls, 'Bhus the actors were enclosed by the audience on two sides, in comparison with the three-sided configuration of horseshoe staging.

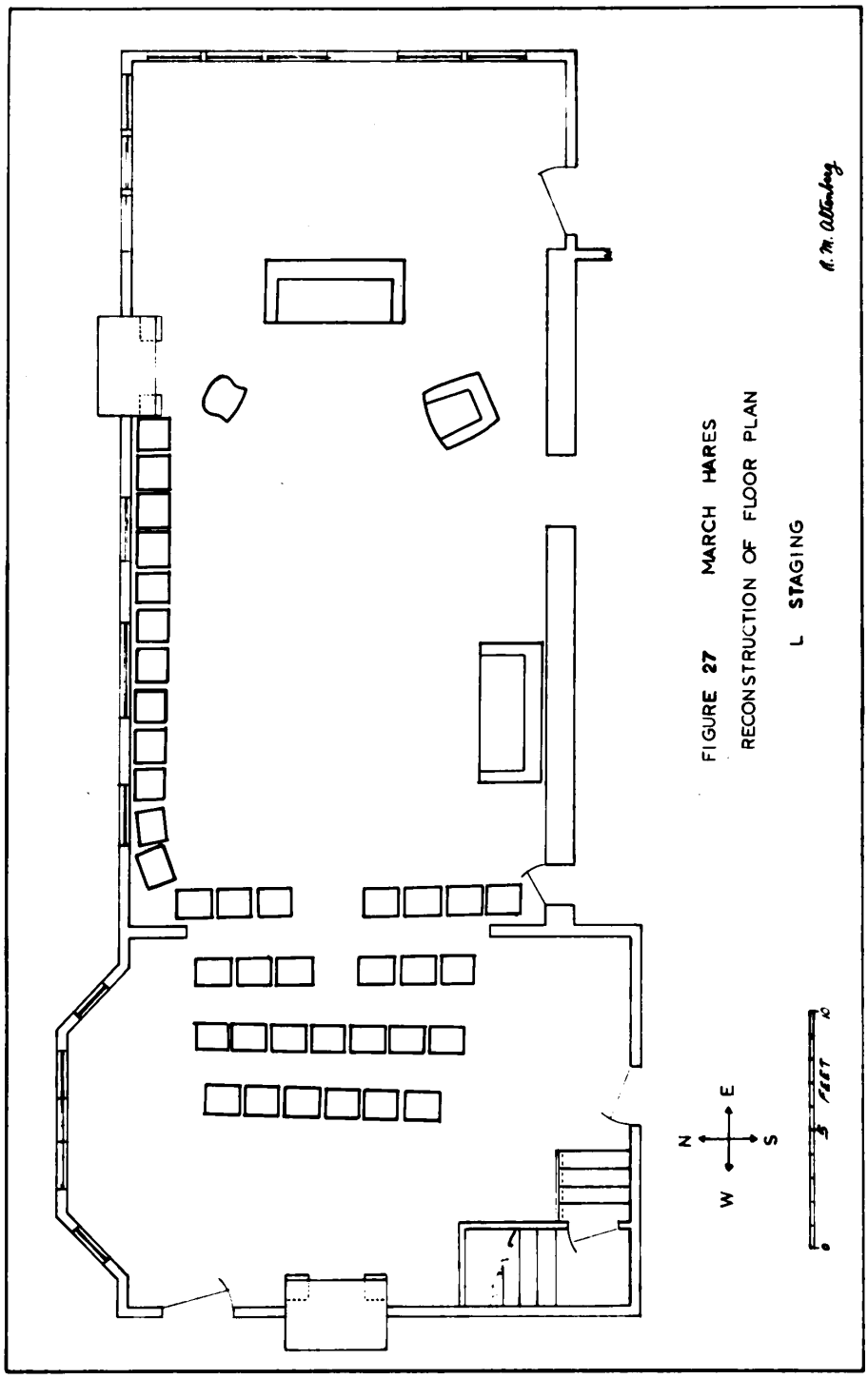


Figure 5.8: Reconstruction of L staging floor plan, *March Hares*.

Wells placed t4se seats for the audience in the West Room and along the north wall of the Central Room. He created the setting by utilizing the east end of the Central Room and an area along the south wall. At the east he had the permanent fireplace, a chair beside it, a sofa in front of the East Alcove, and a chair west of the sofa. He put another sofa, the one on which Geoffrey slept, along the south wall fairly close to the West Room. Thus, all the audience had an excellent vie4 of the amusing scene with Claudia Kitts.

The Actors

In addition to directing the play. Wells played the role of the elocutionist, Geoffrey Warehara, Opposite him were Helen Hardison as Janet, and Helen Millard as Claudia. Miss Millard, who had also appeared in The Truth About Blayds .4as still another of the Playbox actors to shortly pursue a professional theatrical career. Mrs. Adele Palmer in one of her few roles in the intimate theatre, played the befuddled Mrs. Rodney. Mrs. Palmer, known as "The Mother of the Playhouse" had been extremely active in the community theatre sinee its inception. She had not only been its leading character actress, but had also served actively on numerous Playhouse committees. She had once been a professional actress on the East coast, appearing in the Rose Stahl Company, but retired from the commercial theatre at the time of her marriage.

Criti cal Eva luation of the Performance

Calling the play "one of the most original of comedies" Edythe Ktng reported a highly favorable response from the audience. She described them as "squirming 4ith amusement and laughter , . . through the entire evening of hilarious incidents." She noted that the actors maintained their concentration, never once dropping the thought of the character they were playing, in spite of their closeness to this mirth-ridden audience. They played with sincerity. '"Hie characters were so clearly drawn," the critic observed, "that one felt ashamed of laughing aloudof being a trespasser.[56] The peculiar reaction of embarrassment struck this member of the audience as it had Alexander Inglis.

Production # 6. The Tragedy of Nan March 4-6, 11-13, 1925

One of the most distinguished plays of the entire Palroaks repertory was John Masefield's drama The Tragedy of Nan. First produced in England in 1908 by Granville" Barker the play had received critical admiration but apparently had never been widely performed. John Gassner has described the play aa a "near masterpiece . . , charged with poetic po4er." He called it a "brutal drama that belongs in the genre of the peasant naturalism best realized in Tolstoy's 'The Power of Darkness.'[57]

[56]Edythe King, "The Theatre," Dark and Light Iferch, 1925. [PB I, p. 12.]

[57]John Gassner, A Treasury, of theTheatre, Ibsento lonesoo, 3rd college ed., Simon and Schuster, I960, p. 505.

The Story

The Btory of Nan reBembles the material of old English ballads. Like many of them, it derives from an actual Incident, one which occurred in a country village of Kent in the early nineteenth century.[58] As the story goes, a decent and kindly fanner has been hanged for stealing a sheep. After the execution, his devoted daughter. Nan, comes to live with her uncle Mr. Pargetter, and his family, in a village some distance away. Her aunt treats her with great cruelty as the daughter of a thief, making the girl into little more than a household slave.

The only bright spot in Nan's existence Is her love for a handsome young man of the village, Dick aurvll. Dick proposes to Nan, but her scheming aunt manages to make him break off the match by telling of Man's "disgraceful" background. laired with the promise of a monetary settlement the weak-willed Dick agrees to marry ?01*0 cousin, Jenny. At a party In the Pargetter's house he harshly rejects Man. lhat night a cooly Impersonal emissary from the government, Captain Di-xon, reveals that Han's father has been proven Innocent of the crime for which he was hanged. He gives the despondent and embittered girl a bag of fifty gold pieces, as compensation for her IOSB,

The opportunistic Dick Gurvil, seeing the money, turns back to Man. Distraught over the harsh treatment she has received, Han stabs her faithless lover to death and throws herself in the rising tide of the river.

VJhile the language is simple, realistic, and In prose, it has rhythmic power and poetic imagery. Ihroughout there Is a recurrent theme of Death, the "gold rider," coming to carry off beauty which cannot survive in a harsh world. This image is evoked by Gaffer Pearce, an aged man who is haunted by the memory of his sweetheart's early death. In his mind Ran becomes fused with this image from the past, for she too is sought by the "gold rider."

The Staging

Gilmor Brown had the sole direction of this play. It was one of the very few for which he personally conducted all the rehearsals. Wells had no connection with the pro duction.[59]

The scene of the drama took place in the kitchen of the Pargetter home. Conclusions concerning the staging have rested entirely on the director's copy of the play, which contained numerous notations for blocking in the handwriting of Gilmor Brown.[60] An analysis of this evidence

brought the present investigator to the conclusion that the play was given an end staging presentation, employing the West Room and a portion of the Central Room for

[58]John Maeefield, prefatory note to "The Tragedy of Nan," Collected Plays, p. 144.

[59]Interview 4ith teurice Wells, May 19, 1959.

[60]Verification of this copy as the director's script for the Playbox production rested on several grounds; (1) so far as is known Gilmor Brox4n did not direct the play for any other production. (2) The script WB.B filled .with notations in his handwriting. These directions exactly fitted the location of structures in the Fairoaks Playbox. (3) The preface to the play contained pencil marks suggesting preparation for printing. The Playbox program of the play included this marked material, W The copy contained the bookplate of Oilinor Brovm, indicating that the book was his personal copy.

the acting area. So much of the West Room was used for the acting area that it would have been difficult to seat any of the audience there. Their chairs consequently had to be placed in the Central Room facing westward,

The Set.–The most prominent piece of furniture in the set was the kitchen table, placed downstage of the fireplace within the West Room, probably only a few feet above the archway. Stage right and below the table stood a cup board.[61] In the opinion of the investigator the cupboard

must have been placed beyond the archway, against the south wall of the Central Room. (It would not have been visible to most of the audience if it had been placed against the south wall of the West Room.)

The permanent fireplace of the West Room was a useful feature in the set. It was at the fireplace that Mr. Pargetter discovered the broken pieces of his prized "Toby" mug. The staircase and landing in the West Room also fitted well into the play. The playwright had characters go "upstairs" to the bedrooms a number of times, especially when the young ladies arrived for the dance at the Pargetter house. The door to the rear corridor served appropriately as the door leading from the kitchen to the Pargetters' "inner room" on the ground floor,

The iaost important entranceway into the kitchen set prescribed by Masefield was the door to the outside. Here the permanent door at the back of the West Room served most realistically, since it led directly out to the rear yard of the Playbox building. According to Wells, the directors used this door very frequently in productions, hanging floodlights outside to make the characters on the back porch visible.

Two effectively built-up entrances were made through the outeide door. The love scene of Dick and Nan at the beginning of Act Two was interrupted by the pounding on the door, as the guests arrived for the party. Nan broke apart from Dick's arms, and went to open the door, as her aunt and cousin came running down the stairs. In Act Three, Parson Drew accompanied by the government representative, pounded on the door while a scene of confusion was enacted within. The upstage position of the door helped to give the entourage an impressive entrance at this suspenseful moment in the drama. At the end of the play. Nan ran out to her death through the same door.

A final scenic element which should be mentioned was the window through which a number of the characters peered during the course of the play. It became prominent when Nan and the old fiddler, Oaffer Pearce, looked out at the full red moon, which promised a dangerous high tide on the river. This window appears to have been the first one east of the archway in the Central Room.

Depth andWidth of Acting Area.–The staging of the Masefield drama entailed the use of considerable depth, and relatively little width in the acting area. The reason for the limited width, at least within the West Room, was the reBtriction imposed by the archway with its twelve-foot opening. The portion of the acting area within the Central Room could spread out the full seventeen-foot vd.dth of that room. The same considerations will be seen to have affected the staging of The Mollusc in the second season.

[61] In Act One, on p. 1?2¡ Brown's notation for Mrs. Pargetter was: "X in front of table put away bread and cheese," On p. 153. Mrs. Pargetter who has been sitting at the left end of the table, gets up to "X.R. to cupboard."

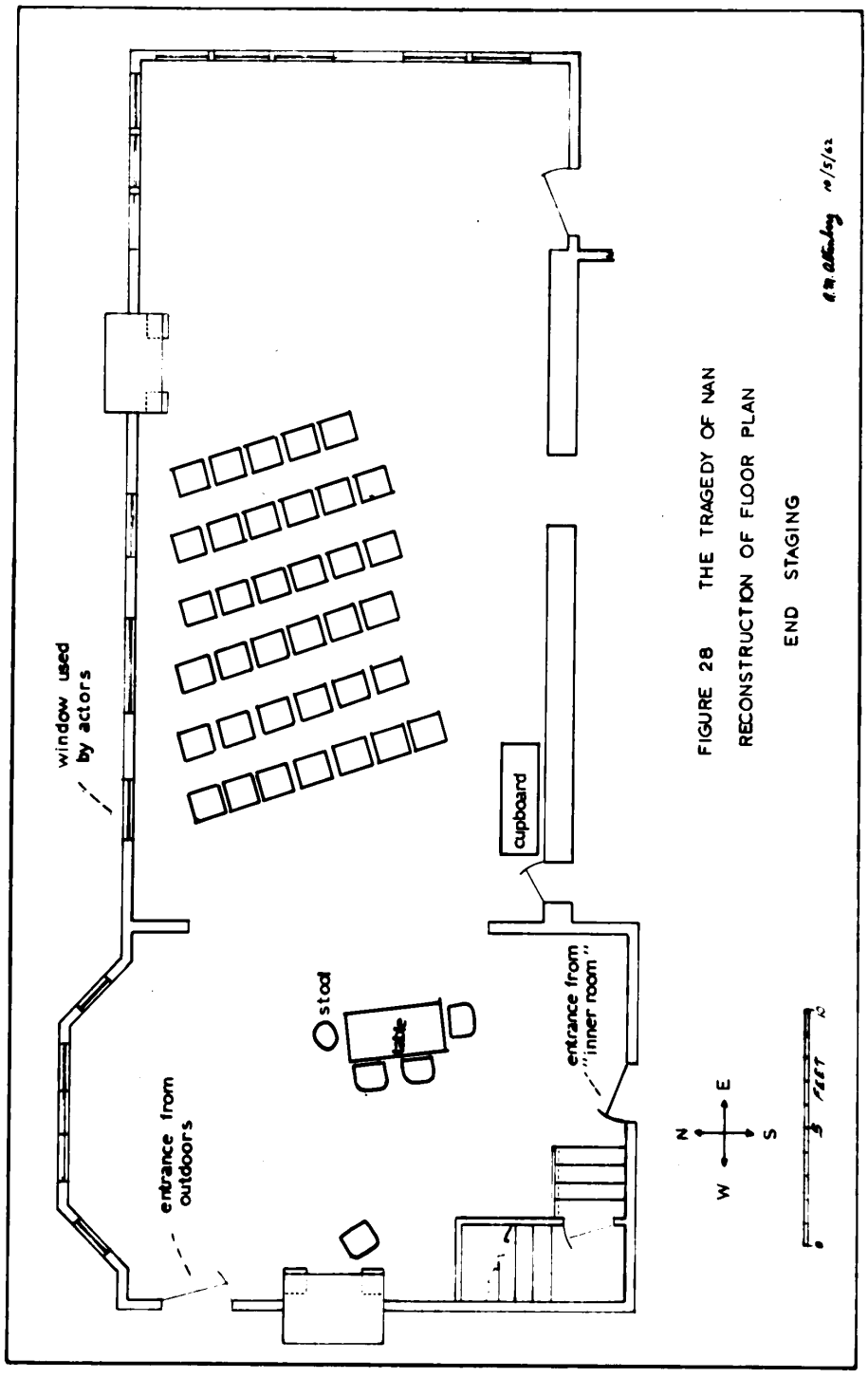


Figure 5.9: Reconstruction of end staging floor plan, *The Tragedy of Nan*.

The Acting

For The Tragedy of Nan the program listed the names of the actors for the first time this season. With this production the practice of omitting the actors' credits was abandoned.

A young woman named Marl Wirth played the role of Nan.[62] According to Wells, who was very impressed by the production. Brown had drawn a very fine performance out of her, Robert Griffin made his third appearance of the season as the shallow, selfish Dick Gurvil. In her only performance at the Fairoaks Playbox, Gilmor Brown's sister-in-law, Virginia Lykins, played the parfc of the incredibly mean aunt, Mrs. Pargefcter.

While the critics of the Pasadena newspapers had not yet begun to give the Playbox regular coverage in their reviews, a distinguished visitor saw the production and commented on it. He was Maurice Browne, the founder of the Chicago Little Theatre, who was at that time the director of the Theatre of the Golden Bough in Carmel, California. In a letter to the editor of California Southlandi he wrote i

> Gilmor Brown's production of 'The Tragedy of Nan' was, without qualification, the beet production of that exceedingly difficult and beautiful play that I have seen (this opinion was shared toy Miss Van Volkenburg, and Mr, Robert Nichols, the Engliah poet, who attended it with ne.)[63]

No other published evaluations of the performance have appeared in the contemporary records of the production.

Production # 7. *Desire* April 1-3, 8-10,' l924

The next production, "Desire" was the first Playbox premiere of an original script. It was written by Willard Robertson, whose previous effort. The Sea Woman, had been performed in New York by Margaret Anglin, Robertson had submitted "Desire" to the Playhouse as a possible vehicle for the opening of its new building. When it was rejected for that occasion. Brown decided to try it out at the Playbox.[64] He turned the play over to Maurice Wells who directed it with very little supervision.[65]

The Story

'She play relates the attempt of an ambitious young architect to make a name for himself following the demise of his distinguished employer. Although he is planning to marry Gina, the girl who has been managing the office. Lee Croy is willing to become an "escort" for a wealthy widow in order to obtain an architectural contract from her. Gina has done everything to help Lee fulfill hie ambitions, but cannot accept this disregard for her feelings. Just after the widow has signed the contract, a stroke of fate

[62]Maurice Wells informed the writer that Miss Wirth later married Dwighfc Taylor, son of Laurette Taylor. Thus the Playbox actress became the daughter-in-law of a most distinguished American actress.

[63]Letter from Maurice Browne, quoted by Ellen Leech, "The Growth of a Community Playhouse Idea," California Southland, May, 1925, p. 11. [POP 5, P. 175]

[64]Pasadena Star-News, April 11, 1925. [PB I, p. 10.3

[65]Ibid.

intervenes. A frustrated and insanely jealous suitor for the widow's affections deliberately crashes his car into her automobile, killing her. After this setback. Lee and Gina begin to make up their differences. Their romance seems to be ready to bloom again when a lawyer tells Lee of another wealthy widow who might provide work, if properly cultivated. The play ends with the entire cycle starting over again.

The Staging

The staging of "Desire" is of particular interest since it was according to all the evidence, one of the centrally staged productions. Contemporary references to the production indicated the use of the complete arena form. Ten days after the play opened, the periodical Saturday Night described the performances;

> Mr. Brown gave it at his Playbox studio in the center of a large room, with the spectators limited in number, seated in the darkened corners.[66]

The Pasadena Star Hev?s provided a similar description, noting that the play "was offered without stage Bettings in the center of the large room." [67]

Maurice Wells in recent years remembered the action as occurring in the center, with the audience seated all around the acting area.[68]

Confirmation of the meaning of the contemporary descriptions and corroboration of Wells' statement came with the discovery of the director's script. This script was found by the present investigator in the Pasadena Play house some weeks after the June 7. 1961 interview with the Playbox director. When showl the script on August 24, 196l, Wells Identified his handwriting and diagrams stating, "I worked out everything in advance so that I opuld feel secure in rehearsals." During rehearsals, he stated, he would move around the room to view the action from different partB of the audience area. Some erasures in the script show his changes from planned positions. While it is quite possible that deviations from the scheme of positions and movements took place which were not thereafter indicated in Wells' script, this director's copy nevertheless provides the basis of the staging plan. It is the best evidence available for the reconstruction of the staging of "Desire."

The Set

The first attribute of the staging which should be noted was the "design" of the set, an example of the adaptation of a proscenium stage plan to the central staging concept. The playwright described the scene as follows:

> The reception room in the offices of William Alden, an architect and antique dealer, in Boston, Massachusetts. The offices are on the ground floor of a private dwelling which has been remodeled for business.
>
> The reception room suggests the library in a private home rather than part of a commercial establishment.

[66] "Community Players to Give Desire," Saturday Ni4ht, April 11, 1925. [PB I, p. l6.]
[67] Pasadena Star-New, loc. cit
[68] Interview with Maurice Wells in the Fairoaks Playbox building, June 7s 196l.

> At right is a wide window with a seat. About one third across the back wall is a door which leads to the hall. The street door is to the right and about twelve feet away. At left is an arch opening into the other rooms of the office. To the left of the hall door is an Italian marble mantle piece.
>
> A heavy and very large English inn table is down stage and a little to the right. There are benches on either side.

On the front page of Veils' script, a diagram showing the ground plan of the set reveals his use of the studio space (Fig. 2o).

In the Playbox setting. Wells made use of two of the -windows of the north wall of the Central Room, and placed a bench between them. In place of the playwright's "upstage" marble mantlepiece, he had the permanent fireplace in the north wall. For the door to the hall and street, which was upstage in the author's description, Veils used the actual Playbox doorway to the front hall of the building. In place of a "stage left" arch leading to the other rooms, he closed off half of the East Alcove, seen at the top of his diagram, and located his doorway in the flats, or drapery, forming the partition. Vhereas the playwright suggested that the large table be put "downstage and a little to the right" Wells located this extremely dominant piece of furniture on a diagonal line in the center of hie acting area. Following the playwright's suggestion, Wells used two benches with the table, and in addition placed a chair above the table (east of It). This chair does not appear in Wells' diagram of the entire set (Fig. 29), but is indicated a number of times in the director's notations in the script. His diagram indicated the presence of two other chairs placed in a diagonal relationship, one next to the fireplace, facing westward; the other, at the opposite end of the Central Room, near the south wall, facing eastward. (The total arrangement with a reconstruction of the seating plan appears drawn to scale In Fig. 30.)

Evidence for Central Staging in the Director's Script

The diagrams and directions for movement in Wells' script support the designation of central staging. There was, of course, no standardized terminology at that time for the blocking of action in central staging. (In fact, there is still no fully established system of notation.) Wells, therefore, drew a diagram of his acting area as viewed from the west. He used the end staging terms of "upstage" for movements toward the east, "downstage" for movements west, "stage right" for northward and "stage left" for southward movements. This gave hin" a simple basis.for his stage directions, one which the actors could easily interpret.

While the notations were thus provided in end staging language, the actual plan of blocking was not that of end staging. In several ways the director's script revealed that the performance was oriented toward an audience viewing the actors from four sides. These evidences of a central staging plan were: (l) the diagonal arrangement of furniture in the acting area with at least one chair or bench facing in each of the four directions; (2) the placement of a non-focal character facing "upstage" as the apex of a triangle; (3) the placement of two characters in the

same upstage-downstage plane and (4) the rotation of the positions of characters so as to open them up successively to different sides of the room.

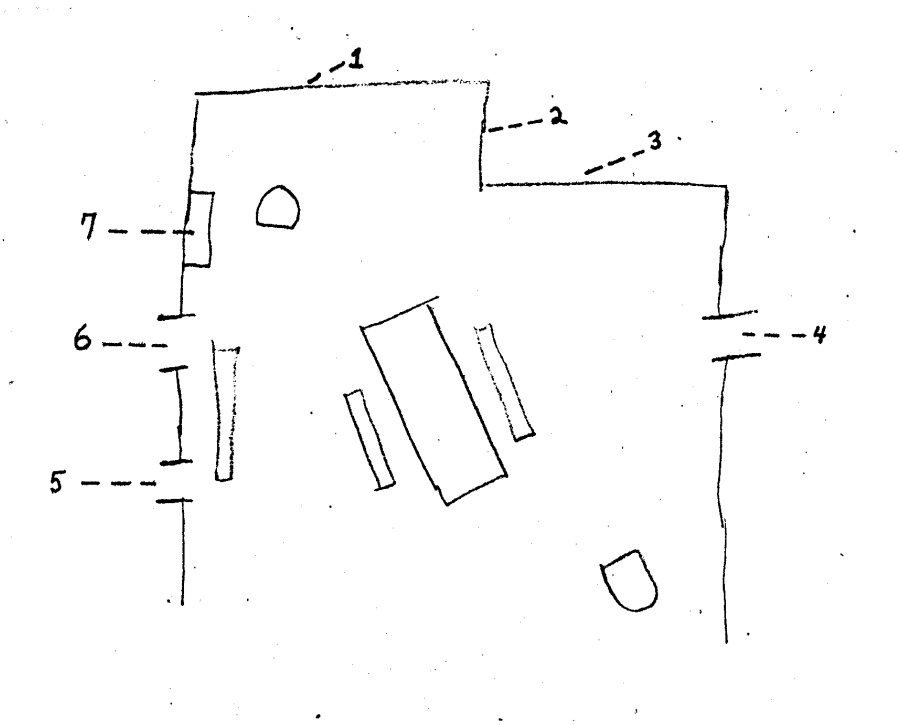


Figure 5.10: A
photocopy of Maurice Wells' diagram of the ground. plan for "Desire." The numbers, and broken lines leading to the numbers, are not In the original.

1. Wall of East Alcove, the front of the Playbox building.
2. Doorway, placed within East Alcove, Ibis doorway was supposed to lead to the other rooms of the architect's office.
3. Wall, placed in front of East Alcove, made of drapery or flats.
4. Doorway into Central Boon from entry hall of Playbox building. This door was supposed to lead to a hall and to the street door of the architect's office.
5. The second window of the north wall, counting from west to east .
6. The third window of the north wall.
7. The fireplace.

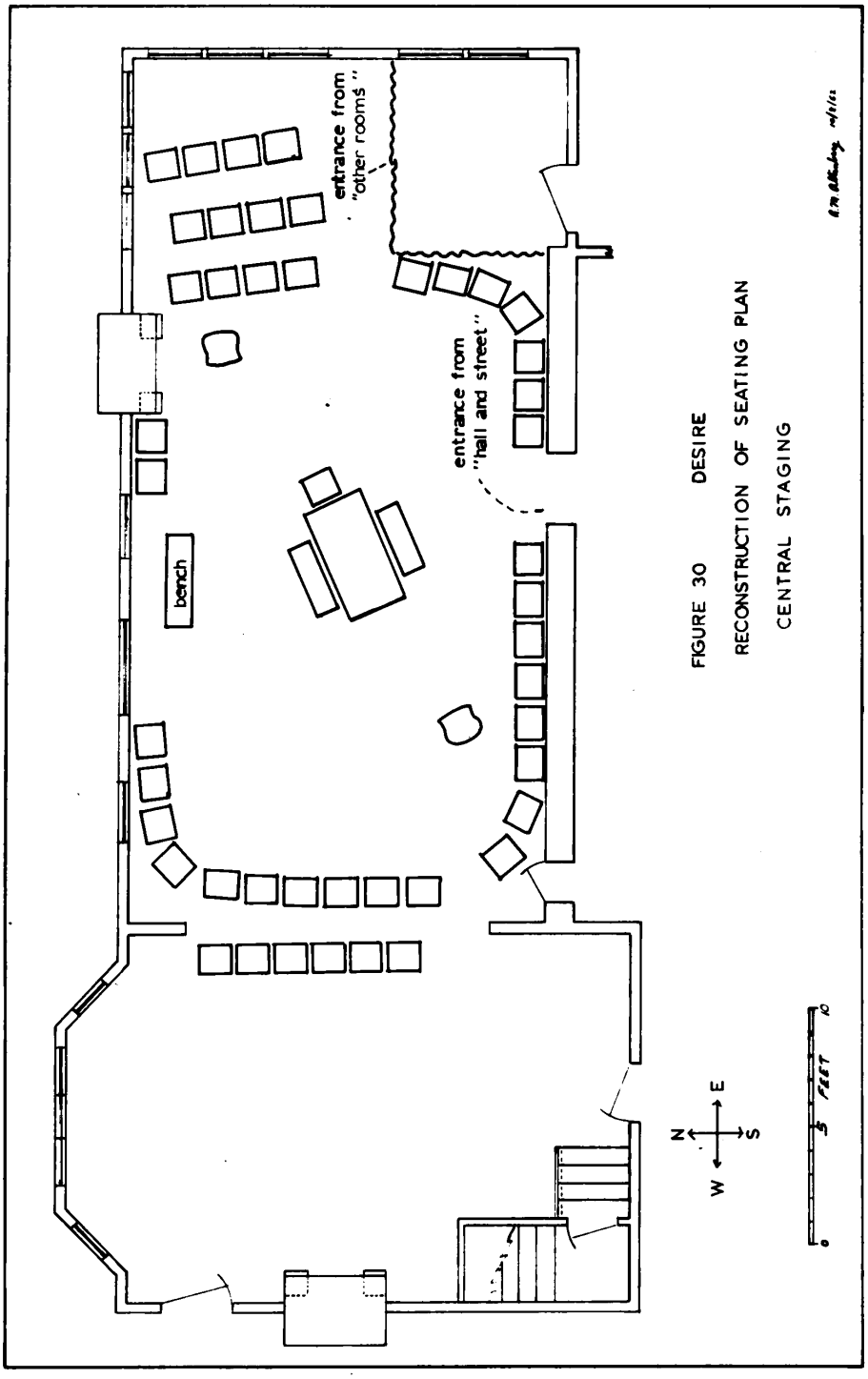


Figure 5.11: Reconstruction of floor plan of seating and set, “Desire”.

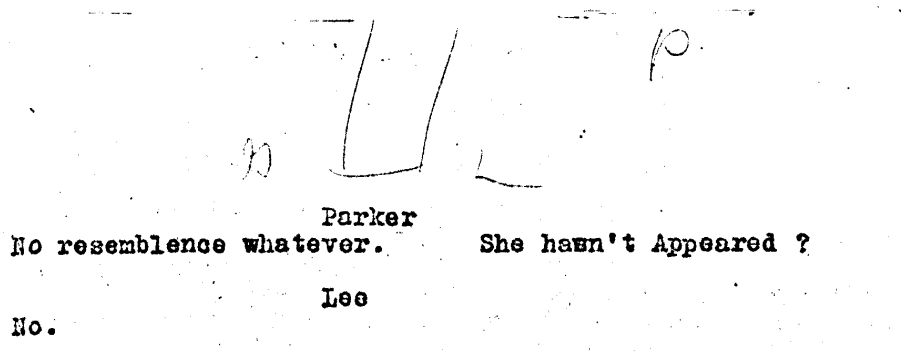


Figure 5.12: Triangular grouping, first phase. ("Desire," Act One, p. 11.)

Diagona1 Arrangement.–As may be seen in Wells' ground plan (Fig. 29), the large centrally placed table and the two chairs, one at the east end of the room, the other at the vest, are arranged on a diagonal. Thus a good amount of diagonal movement would be produced, favorable for a view of the actors from all sides of the room.

The Reversed Triangle.–In the first act of the play (p. 11), Wells planned a triangular grouping of characters which was quite suitable for central staging, but would probably be avoided in end staging. It was the reverse of the conventional triangle, since the apex was "downstage" in the diagram. Furthermore the figure at the apex faced "upstage."

The sequence of movement as planned by Wells was as follows:

1. Gina had been standing near the lower window talking to Lee, when the old draftsman Mr. Parker entered from the hall. Lee crossed around the table to greet Parker (Fig. 31).

2. As Parker became Involved in a discussion with the two of them he crossed above the table around to the right of it. Lee stood on stage left at the upper end of the table. Gina by this time was standing directly below the lower end of the table facing toward Parker and Lee (Fig. 32).

   This position in which Gina actually formed the apex of a triangle with her back turned toward the audience on the west, could be considered peculiar from a strict end staging viewpoint. From the plastic viewpoint of central staging, however, it created an acceptable arrangement.

Two Characters Standing in the Same Plane.–At several points in cells' script the diagrams show two characters standing in almost the same line, one "downstage" of the other. From an end staging orientation the upstage person would have been partially hidden from view. Since Wells carefully avoided such "'line-ups" in his prompt books for end staged productions, his use of this grouping in "Desire" was not the result of an error. He was trying to attain the plastic technique required for central staging. End staging rules had to be modified or discarded.

Two examples of "line-ups" will perhaps suffice to demonstrate Wells' practice:

Parker
Yes but he's not interested unless we can assure him that will personally supervise the work.

Lee
It's the same story everywhere.

Parker
Say, has it occurred to you that we've received no word of condition for several days.

Lee
I hadn't thought of it.

Gina
I have. It's two days since we heard.

Figure 5.13: Triangular grouping, second phase. ("Desire," Act One, p. 11.)

Figure 5.14: A "line-up," first example. ("Desire," Act Two, p. 28.)

In Act Two Gina had been standing upstage near the fireplace listening to a man named Sands warn Lee of the fatal power of the widow. The diagram on page 28 of Wells' script showed Lee near the lower end of the table in almost a straight line "downstage" of Gina. Sands was at the upper end of the table on the opposite side. At this moment the seductive widow, Mrs. Corey, undulated through the doorway, and had a short but emotional scene with Sands. Gina and Lee apparently held their position throughout this scene (Fig. 33).

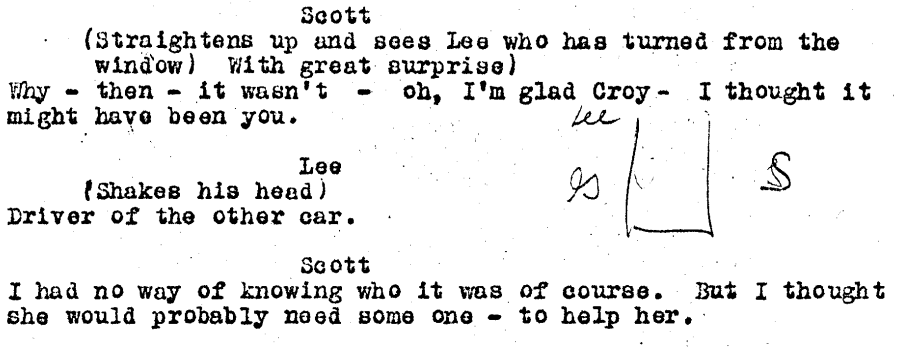
A similar "lining-up" occurred toward the end of Act Three. This time Lee was in the "upstage11 position on the side of the table near the windows, Oina stood on the same side directly "downstage" of Lee. Both remained in these positions when the lawyer Scott came in to tell Lee of a new widow to pursue (Fig. 34).

For the segment of the Playbox audience whose view of an actor was thus blocked, there was compensation in an extremely close view of the other characters. Furthermore, the actors did not remain overlong in these lined-up positions. The groupings soon shifted around.

Rotation of Positions.–In his plan for the blocking of "Desire" Wells revealed his insight in 1925 into a fundamental requirement of central staging. This was the need to rotate the positions of actors so that they would not have their backs turned toward any section of the audience for too long a time.

Such rotation was to be seen in Wells' directions for the first appearance of the widow. As she entered from the front hall Mrs. Corey was momentarily seen by all the audience. Soon she was seated in the chair near the west end of the room, her back toward the audience on the west (see Figs. 35 and 36).

Within a short while, the director had her cross to the east end of the table to look at some architectural drawings. She was then facing west, opening herself up to those

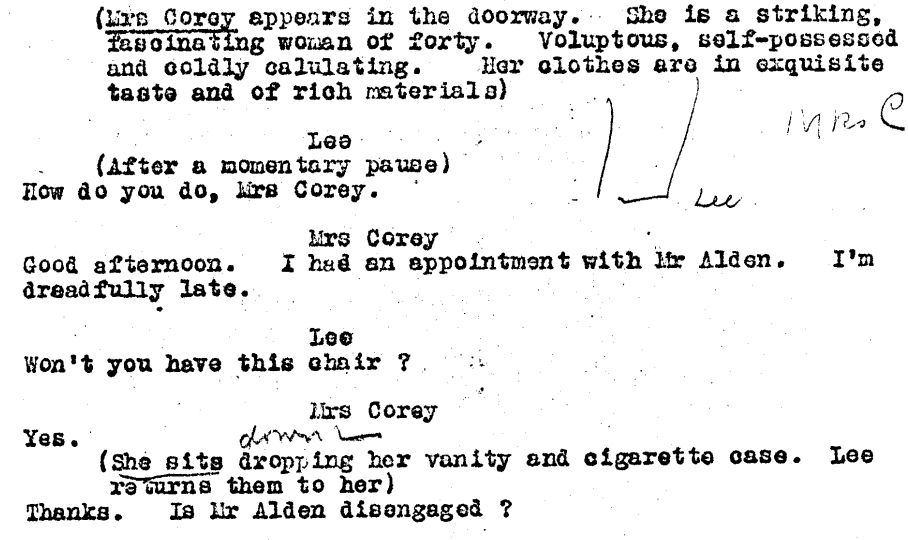


Scott
(Straightens up and sees Lee who has turned from the window) With great surprise)
Why - then - it wasn't - oh, I'm glad Croy - I thought it might have been you.

Lee
(Shakes his head)
Driver of the other car.

Scott
I had no way of knowing who it was of course. But I thought she would probably need some one - to help her.

Figure 5.15: A "line-up," second example, ("Desire, Act Three, p. 2 ?.)



(Mrs Corey appears in the doorway. She is a striking, fascinating woman of forty. Voluptous, self-possessed and coldly calulating. Her clothes are in exquisite taste and of rich materials)

Lee
(After a momentary pause)
How do you do, Mrs Corey.

Mrs Corey
Good afternoon. I had an appointment with Mr Alden. I'm dreadfully late.

Lee
Won't you have this chair ?

Mrs Corey
Yes.
(She sits dropping her vanity and cigarette case. Lee returns them to her)
Thanks. Is Mr Alden disengaged ?

Figure 5.16: Rotation of positions, first phase, ("Desire," Act One, p. 33.)

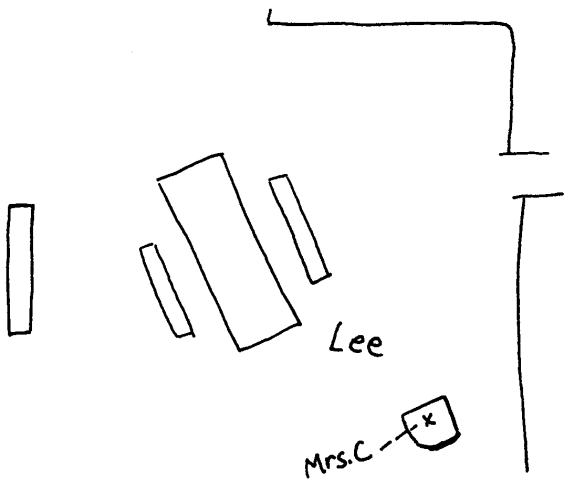


Figure 5.17: Rotation of positions, second phase, (investigator's reconstruction, based on Wells' stage direction "She sits down L," in Fig. 35.)

who had not previously had a clear view of her face (Fig. 37).

The characters also rotated about the central table in other scenes. In place of "balancing" to right or left as in end staging, the actors balanced around the table.

The Actors

Establishing himself as the principal leading man of the Playbox, as well as its co-director. Wells performed the role of the ambitious young architect. Lee Croy, Opposite him was the former "Melisande," Lots Austin, as the patient self-sacrificing Gina. An impressive-looking gentleman, Robert Loofbourrow, took the part of the kindly old draftsman, Daniel Parker. Loofbourrow, who had charge of a chemistry stock-room at the California Institute of Technology, enjoyed performing as an amateur in Playhouse productions. A young woman named Tabatha Goodman was seen as the sensuous widow, Mrs. Corey. A few years later she performed on Broadway as Judge Hardy's daughter in Skidding, the play from which the Andy Hardy film series ultimately developed.

Evaluation of the Performance

Inglls wrote a highly favorable review of "Desire," one which, in comparison to other appraisals, sounds nearly hyperbolic in its total effect. Calling the play "almost flawless in dramatic technique" he considered "Desire" of all the productions that season "possibly . . . the most

successful . , . unusually brilliant." In the two leads he stated that Maurice Wells and Lois Austin "portrayed two masterpieces of character." The acting was "possibly

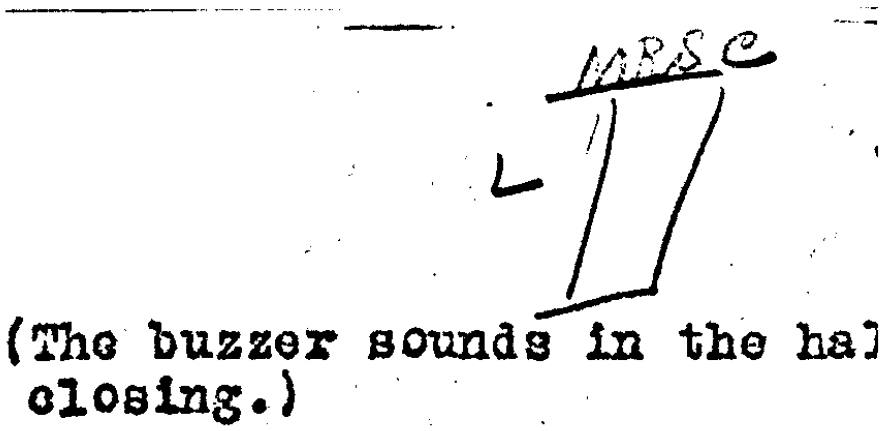


Figure 5.18: Rotation of positions, third phase. ("Desire," Act One, p, 39.)

the finest yet presented in the Playbox." [69]

Edythe King found the play "acted with the greatest delicacy." [70]

The performance was so well received at the Playbox, that Gilmor Brown decided to bring it to the wider public of the Playhouse. Accordingly, the next Playhouse opening was postponed by a week so that "Desire" could open there on April 13. Since Lols Austin was going to appear immediately in a professional production in Los Angeles, the film actress Helen Jerome Eddy took over the role of Gina for the Playhouse run.[71]

Evaluation of Acting in "Desire" at Playhouse

Reviews of the work of the actors when the production was taken to the Playhouse are of interest for purposeB of comparison. The Los Angeles 'Piases found the play

> particularly well cast, almost every member of the company gives a well-defined performance. Maurice Wells and Helen Jerome Eddy are convincing as the boy and girl, though Miss Eddy carries off first honors by the utter sincerity of her interpretation.[72]

"The Star-News Critic" noted of Wells that he "put much expression into his part. Indeed, we should say in places he thinks too obviously." [73]

Opinions of the performance of Tabatha Qoodraan as the predatory widow, were generally favorable, recognizing, as did the critic of the Pasadena Evening Post, that "it is a part that is not easy to handle and could easily be overplayed." [74] While most felt

[69][Alexander Inglis] "New Play ie Presented Locally," Pasadena Star-News, April ?, 1925.
[70]Edythe King, "The Theatre," Dark and Light, May, 1925.
[71]Pasadena Star-News, April 11, 1925. [POP 5, P. 157.]
[72]Los Angeles Times, April 15, 1925. ?PCP 5, P. 157.3
[73]Star-News Critic, Pasadena Star-News, April 14, 1925.
[74]The Post Reviewer, Pasadena Evening Post, April 14, 1925.

that she very successfully overcame the obstacles, the los Angeles Times described her characterization as "a regulation purring, strikingly rye.

gowned grasping vamp of popular superstitlon.[75] The "StarNews Critic" considered Miss Goodman "not BOphistlcated enough for the luring widow."[76]

Evaluation of Script When Given at Playhouse

When "Desire" was taken to the Playhouse it received a greater number of reviews than it had at the studio theatre. These critical evaluations of the production brought forth a number of derogatory comments on the script which had not appeared in the Playbox review's. While good points were found in the drama, it seemed to be less Impressive in the larger theatre than it had been in its intimate centrally-staged performances,

Kenneth Taylor, reviewing for the Los Angeles Record wrotes

> The drama lacks action. There is little doing and quite a lot of talking, and little of the talking is as natural as it should be. The result is a play that seems pretty flat three-quarters of the way through.[77]

Alice Halnes Baskin, writing under the title of "The StarHews Critic"' observed:

> The ethical and thought development far outweighs the dramatic incident. The only crises which occur on stage . . are crises of feeling, the only conflicts, conflicts of ideals and temperament. In other wards, the drama is of the advanced modern school. And to succeed such a play must be deft in craftsmanship, well ffsanipulated as to lines, vital as to characterizations.[78]

The play, the critic admitted, was "realistic," but she held the writer to task for not distinguishing between the uninteresting aspects of real life when reported verbatim and the qualities which make for good dramatic writing.

> So people discuss a situation in real life, repeating, reiterating the same hopes and doubts in the same phrases. The queetion is, should the dramatist report word for word the conversation of his characters? And in places would not a flash of dramatic implication, a gesture, a look, outweigh a paragraph of exposition? ... Mr. Robertson would do well to prune his verbiage.[79]

The review in the Xos Angeles Times spoke of the "almost unescapable deficiencies of the lines end situations," stressing the fact that the play was "thoroughly grounded in the obvious."[80]

The ending of the play, however, made a strong impression. Kenneth Taylor, who found much of the drama "pretty flat," vyrote:

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[75]Los Angeles TimeSt loc. cit.
[76]7 Star-Mews Critic, loc. cit.
[77]Kenneth Taylor, Los Angeles Record, April 15, 1925. [POP 5, P. 157.3
[78]7 Star-News Critic, loc. cit.
[79]'"Ibid.
[80]Los Angeles Times, loc. cit.

> It has an ending that will prove a redemption of all its faults, however; a quiet unobtrusive sort of an ending that has a startling effect upon the audience. Words cannot quite describe it.[81]

The anonymous reviewer for the Pasadena Evening Poet described the scene at the conclusion of the play:

> With the final curtain going down on the two leading characters standing far apart each in thoughtful mood, the ending of 'Desire' . . . left the audience deep in its own thoughts.[82]

The critic of the Los Angeles Times (probably Edwin Schallert, who attended a number of the Fairoaks Playbox productions) considered Lee Croy's decision to pursue another wealthy widow as a roost effective ending to the play. "Hie calm acceptance of such a line of action," commented the Times critic," ie a superb final speech as the curtain falls."[83] 4 According to a publicity release from the Playhouse published in the Star-News, audiences attending the play in its Playhouse run, came out of the theatre each night involved in aniRiated discussions of the play.

> Much of the comment is occasioned by the unexpected, rather equivocal finish which the playwright has given his dramathe modern touch it may be called, in which the answer is perhaps left to each member of the audience.[84]

¡'-o5

Production 4 8. The Man Who Ate the Popomack May 6-8, 13-15/ 1925

For the final production of the season, Brown chose a play which was to be the closest approach to an "avant garde" work performed In the three seasons of the Fairoaks Playbox. The Man Who Ate the Popomack by W. J. Turner had been published through the auspices of the British Drama League In 1923. Brown's good friend, Irving Piehel, Intended to give the play HB American premiere at his Playhouse In Berkeley, California in the Spring of 1924.[85]

This honor may have been taken from Pichel, for the Cherry Lane Players performed the work in New York that Spring, opening their run on March 24, 1924.

The Story

Classified by the playwright as a "tragi-comedy of love," the plot of this play stems from an imaginatively absurd situation. Two Englishmen, a wealthy young bachelor, Lord Belvoir, and an Egyptologist, Sir Phllo Pharon, Indulge in the exotic treat of eating an extremely rare and delicious, but foul-smelling oriental melon called the popomack. An unforeseen result of this aesthetic adventure is that they turn blue, the color of the

[81]Taylor, loc. cit.

[82]The Post Reviewer, loc. cit.

[83]–'Los Angeles Times, loc. cit.

[84]"Modern Touch Employed in Drama," Pasadena StarNews. April 16, 1925.

[85]-Prospectus for second season of The Playhouse, Berkeley. Dated December 17, 1923.' Copy addressed to Gilmor Brown. Pound in file of programs in Brown's papers, Archives of the Pasadena Playhouse.

fruit, and exude a hideous odor. The odor Is so foul that only a person similarly afflicted can stand being in their company.

The two unfortunate men attempt to solve their problem in different ways. The young man tries to get others to eat the fruit so that he will have companionship in his plight. The Egyptolegist, on the other hand, has the Ingenious idea of wearing a diver's suit to encase the obnoxioua odor. With this cumbersome protective covering he is able to mingle in society, and actually enjoys the attention he attracts. Not as successful in hie adjustment to hie condition, the young man fails in hie efforts to create a circle of popomack eaters. When deserted by his fiancee, he commits suicide.

The Staging

The production, directed by Wells with supervision by Brown, employed horseshoe staging. The audience sat in the West Room and along two walls of the Central Room. An interesting problem in arrangement of the acting areas arose from the requirement of several sets, a different one for each of three out of the four acts. In addition the play made use of a "flashback" technique, familiar at that time in films but not common in stage plays. In the Second Act, the scene changed suddenly from a London drawing room to the interior of a wealthy JMandarin's house in China, and afterwards flashed back to London again. This oriental

ecene brought the number of sets required for the production to a total of four.

The manner In 'which the directors arranged the sets has been reconstructed from the recollections of Kaurice Wells and Mrs. Fairfax Walkup.[86] Both recalled that the scene of the First Act, a picture gallery, took place at the East end of the Central Room.[8788] Drapery again closed off the East Alcove, forming the "wall" of the picture gallery.[89] The pictures were hung against the drapery, sus pended from fastenings in the actual wall above the front of the East Alcove. The area within the East Alcove formed a dressing room and waiting roora for the actors.

In the Second Act, the scene represented the drawing room of a wealthy financier. Sir Solomon Raub. Mrs. Walkup stated that this scene was placed at the west end of the Central Room. The actors entered the drawing room through the door from the front hallway,

For the Third and Fourth Acts, Lord Belvoir's apartment occupied the eastern half of the Central Room. The fireplace and the windows of the north wall neatly met the playwright's reQuireraents.

The Third Act began with a servant spraying perfume on all the furniture and then carefully closing the windows. Later in the act, a most amusing scene took place when the Egyptologist, dressed in his bulky diving suit, opened the window to shout

[86]Mrs. Walkup has had a long term of association with the Pasadena Playhouse. In January 1924 she first arrived in Pasadena, and became active in the Playhouse, She performed in The Man Who Ate the Popomack.

[87]Interview with Maurice Wells, June 7, 196l.

[88]Interview with Fairfax Walkup, August 11, 1961.

[89]'The presence of the drapery is further confirmed by the comment in a review of the production, that the drama was "played against black curtains," Dorothy Warren, Santa Monica Outlook, May 11, 1925. [POP 5. P. 193.3

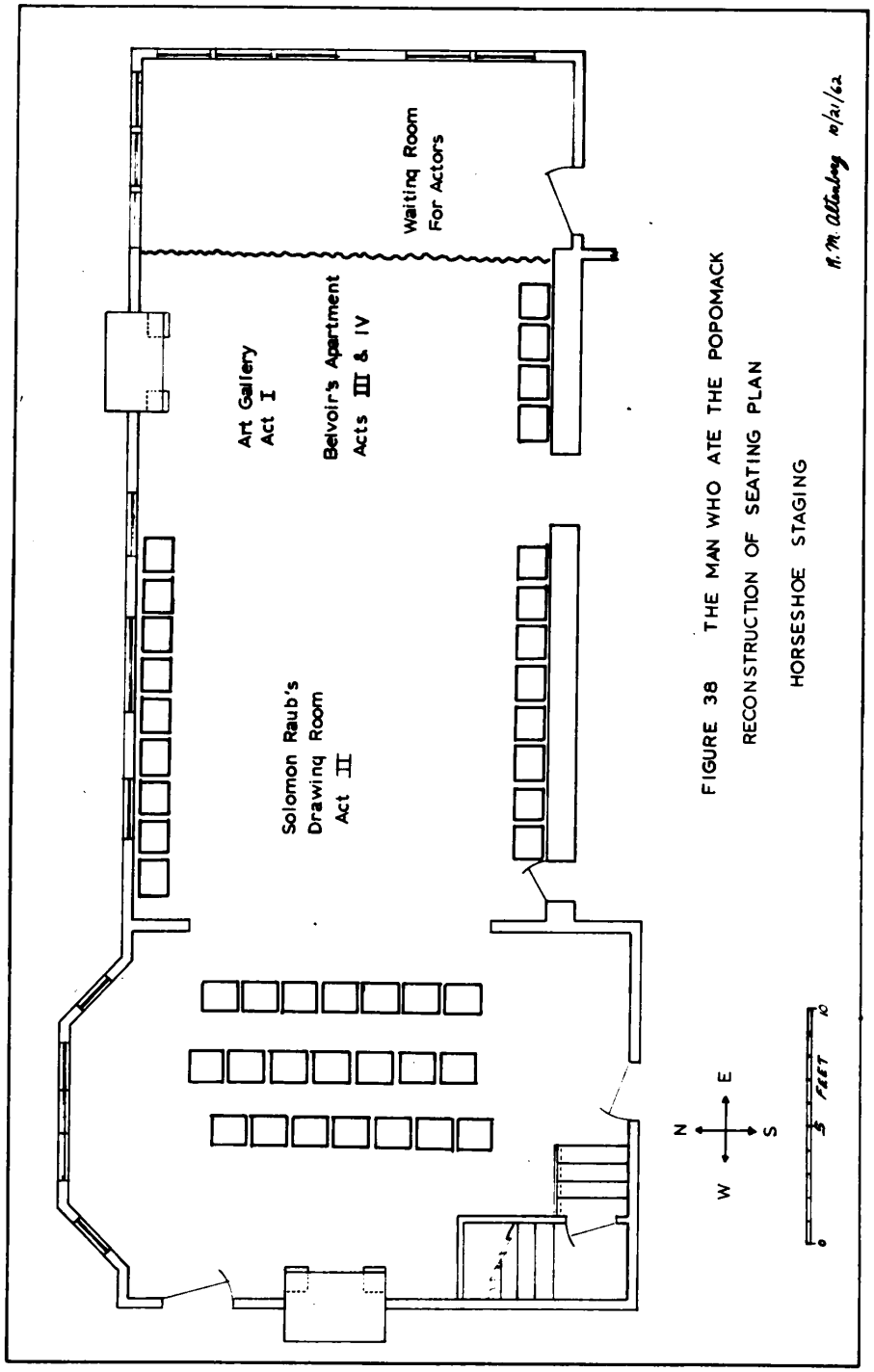

Figure 5.19: Reconstruction of horseshoe staging floor plan, *The Man Who Ate the Popmack*.

an order to his men stationed out in the street: “More airi Pump harder, you devilsl I’m suffocating:”[90]

The use of the actual window of the north wall must . have intensified the effect for the audience within the theatre. What the reaction would have been of a passerby walking down Fairoaks Avenue, is hard to surmise.

Special Effects: Makeup, Costume, Properties

The Ifew York production had left the blue coloration of the poporaack eaters and the foul odor to the imagination of the audience.[91] At the Playbox the weird color was literally depicted, but the audience were spared the stench. As Lord Belvoir, Wells put on blue makeup each night before his third act entrance.[92] Herbert Rooksby playing Sir Philo Pharon, also wore the blue makeup, in addition to his diving suit with helmet and tubing, a fantastic costume for a British drawing-room comedy. As the wife of Sir Philo, Mrs. Walkup Bported a long meerschaum pipe which she smoked when not indulging in cigars.[93] The popomack, itself, the mythical fruit which caused so much havoc, was represented by a casaba melon painted a rich turqouise.

The Acting

At a time when preparations were in progress for the gala opening of the new Playhouse building on El Molino Avenue, it is notable that Brown scheduled a large-cast production at the Playbox. Seventeen actors, including Brown, performed in The Man Who Ate the Popomack during its run from May 6 to 15. On May 18, the much publicized opening performance to a host of invited notables took place at the new Playhouse. The pressure of a great event never inhibited Brown from his custom of keeping numerous theatrical irons in the fire.

Besides Wells, Rooksby, and Mrs. Valkup, already mentioned, the cast featured such regulars as Helene Millard who played Belvolr’s fiancee, and Mervin Williams who acted the role of a rival suitor for her hand. Gilmor Brown appeared as a suave Chinese gentleman in the flashback scene. Playing the non-speaking role of a parlourmaid was Elizabeth Stevenson, the sister of Adiai Stevenson, who had recently come across the country from Illinois in order to gain theatrical experience at the Pasadena Community Playhouse.

The Acting Style

Brown had advised the actors on the proper approach to their roles in this strange play. “You must remember that the play is a fantasy,” he told them. “It is improbable, but you must act as if your actions were most probable,” Thus, according to Mrs, Walkup,

[90] W. J. Turner, The Man Who Ate the Popomack p. 45.

[91] Kenneth Macgowan, “Crying the Bounds of Broadway,” Theatre Arts Monthly, VIII, No. 6 (June, 194) 9 357.

[92] Interview with Maurice Wells, May 19, 1959.

[93] Walkup, loo, cit.

the performers made it seem as if they took the whole situation quite seriously. The result was that "the audience Just roared-they loved it."[94]

Evaluations of the Acting

Only one of three extant reviews of the production contained details concerning the actors and their style of performance. Dorothy Warren observed that the cast performed the play "in hushed rapid tempo." Of Wells' work as Belvoir she wrote:

> Mr. Wells imbued the part with an atmosphere of magic that played around the poignant tragedy. . . . There were spaces in his work in which he mysteriously suggested those dreary far-away flashes that come to us of dreadful moments in eon past. Especially did he convey these lightning impressions in the subconscious memory and imagination scenes.[95]

Helene Millard, received praise for her delicacy and restraint as Muriel Raub, Belvoir's fiancee:

> Her blond beauty and delicacy of voice and manner created much of the poetic quality of the production. The tragic confusion of pity, love and disgust which Miss Ml Hard portrayed in the third act was admirable in restraint and roost stirring.[96]

Herbert Rooksby, according to the reviewer "supplied a delicious sparkling note in the weird raelody of the play" as Sir Philo Pharon. A retired army officer, Rooksby had made frequent Playhouse appearances. In comic roles he often gave the effect of "a manly Zasu Pi Its," as one observer described his performances.[97] He apparently could project an amusing fluttery quality,

Reactions to the Production as a Whole

The audience responded favorably to this production according to Florence Lawrence. She reported:

> This tragi-comedy ... is strong medicine for the conservative audiences, supposedly supplied by Pasadena. But the tiny theatre has been packed and appreciation evident throughout the week. Apparently Pasadena play-goers are keen to hear all the advanced philosophy on life and love, whether they accept it for themselves or not.[98]

Miss Lawrence found "delicious satire throughout
the drama" but objected to ponderous sentences and excessive verbiage, which she thought should be removed.[99] Inglis
contended that he preferred plays he could understand.[100]

[94]Walkup, loc. cit.
[95]Dorothy Warren, Santa ffonica Outlook, May 11, 1925.
[96]Ibid.
[97]Interview with Mademoiselle Jeanne Richer!, February 15, 196.
[98]Florence Lawrence, The LOB Angeles .Examiner', May 9, 1925.
[99]ibid.
[100]Alexander Inglis, Pasadena Star-News, n.d,, circa May 9, 1925. [PB I, p. 18.1

Reactions to the First Season

From the standpoint of the subscribers and the directors, the first season of the Fairoaks Playbox had been most successful. Maurice Wells recalled that the audiences were generally "entranced" with the intimacy of the productions and "left the performances feeling that they had really had an evening's experience in the theatre." [101] Ralph Freud has also affirmed the immediate success of the Playbox.[102] In a contemporary account Borum described the strain which popularity imposed on the seating capacity of the tiny theatre:

> The original plan was to have an audience not exceeding thirty-five, but the Playbox was BO popular that there wa8 always a demand for from fifty to seventy-five tickets, causing people to stand and sit as they could find room.[103]

Drama reviewers of Los Angeles area newspapers found the first season to have been a very satisfactory one, although the productions had been of variable quality. They were well aware that the staging techniques of the Playbox were breaking new ground in the American theatre. Florence Lawrence reported that Brown had given the plays in "a theatrical laboratory . . . simply in the light of experiment." "The results have been of varied effect this winter," she found, "but In the main most successful."[104] Dorothy Warren asserted that the Playbox "has beaten new paths that will be far reaching in effect, according to the opinion of critics of this country." [105] Alexander Inglls emphasized the uniqueness of the mode of staging, calling it "a method of production peculiar to Pasadena in its Playbox performances."[106] Clearly Gilmor Brown was not a prophet without honor in his own locality. Spokesman for Pasadena and LOB Angeles had quickly recognized the value of his pioneering in flexible staging.

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[101] interview with Maurice Wells, August 21, 1961.

[102] Interview with Ralph Freud, April 13, 196l.

[103] Rose May Bo rum, "A History of the Pasadena Community Playhouse," p. 103.

[104] Lawrence, loc. cit.

[105] Warren, loc. cit.

[106] Alexander Inglis, "New Play is Presented Locally," Pasadena Star-News, n.d., circa April 2, 1925. [PB I, p. 10. J

Chapter 6

THE SECOND SEASON

Production # 9. The Discovery November 2-7, 1925

Brown and Wells shared in the direction of the opening production of the second season of the Play-box. Both performed in it and both contributed to the blocking of the action. Wells made most of the cuts in the script; Brown worked up the prop list. The production script is an intriguing melange of notations in the handwriting of both men.

The play which Brown had chosen to open the season was The Pi sco verys a comedy of manners by Prances Sheridan. The playwright was the mother of the celebrated Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and had achieved considerable success in her own right when David Oarrick produced this comedy in 1763. It was not long, however, before her work fell into obscurity and remained there for over a century. Around 1921 Aldous Huxley made an adaptation of The Discovery. To better suit the tastes of modern audiences, Huxley cut many, fcut not all, excessively sentimental passages of

dialogue.[1] The new version was presented as the initial production of the Three Hundred Club in London in 1923.[2] Brown did not know of this performance, for he announced in the Playbox program that "As far as we know, this is the first modern presentation of te.s. Sheridan's play."[3]

In the Huxley adaptation the play contains amusing situations and sprightly repartee, but even with its sentimentallsni reduced to a tolerable level, the script falls far below the quality of The School for Scandal and The Rivals,

The Story

In The Discovery Krs. Sheridan relates a complicated tale of amorous intrigue in the household of a debt-ridden British nobleman. Lord Medway wishes to solve his financial problems by profitably marrying off his son and daughter. For his son he has chosen a wealthy widow, iMrs. Knightlyj for his daughter, an elderly gentleman. Sir

[1]Krs. Prances Sheridan, The Discovery, adapted for the modern stage by Aldous Huxley, p. vi.
[2]Norman Marshall, The Other Theatre, p. 78.
[3]Program of The Discovery, PB I, p. 23.

Anthony Bran ville. Obstacles arise when Lord Medway's son announces his love for the sister of the widow, The daughter is enamoured of the elderly gentleman's nephexi?, To further complicate the plot, the daughter's lover is successfully masquerading as a footman in Lord Medway's household. Fascinated with the aristocratic bearing of this presumed servant, the widow tries to arrange an affair with him. Lord Medway adds to the atmosphere of genteel lust by making advances toward young Lady Flutter, who Is a guest in his home.

In due time the playwright straightens things out. The footman-aristocrat blackmails the widow into arranging a monetary settlement for him. Mrs. Knightly puts pressure on the young roan's uncle to provide the funds. With his financial situation now greatly improved, the footman reveals his identity and is welcomed as a son-in-law by the impecunious Lord Medway,

Brown's Production Plan

Gilmor Brown's conception of the production was to "give the piece devoid of accessories as it might have been played in the home of one of Mrs. Sheridan's friends preliminary to a professional performance."[4] To accomplish this goal it was necessary to create within the Playbox the atmosphere of an eighteenth century home. This was achieved through lighting, period furniture, costumes, and wall decoration.

'Rie lighting made an important contribution to the period atmosphere. Supplementing the regular baby spotlights, which were mounted overhead, were numerous candles

placed around the Studio, The effect was that the room seeaied "ostensibly illuminated only by candlelight."[5] Mrs. Baskin reported her reaction to the arrangement:

> ' "Tis like a fairy tale! Tell roedo I dream?' The narrow long, low-ceiled little room is beautifully lighted with many white wax candles, slender in their branched and gilded candelabra.[6]

The highly polished black surface of the floor served to reflect the soft wana tones of the candle light.[7]

Carefully selected period furniture and wall decoration also helped to create the eighteenth century atmosphere. Details of this decor will be discussed in the description of each of the four sets employed in the production.

The costumes were authentically designed and beautifully executed. The critics described them in such phrasee as "brilliant costumes,"[8] "gorgeous, gay elaborate costumes of the day."[9] These evaluations may be at least partially confirmed by an examination of the photographs of the production. Brown.s attention to costume details re vealed his desire to provide a meticulously mounted production.

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[4]The Star-News Critic, Pasadena Star-News, November 4, 1925.
[5]"Pasadena Playbox Interests Nation," Footlights, December 7, 1925. (PB I, p. 22.]
[6]The Star-Mews Critic, loc. cit.
[7]Footlights, loe. cit.
[8]Ibid.
[9]The Star-News Critic, loc. cit.

The Staging

The staging plan for The Discovery was basically that of end staging, although a part of the acting area intruded into the midst of the audience. The spectators eat in three rows of chairs placed along the north wall of the studio.[10] These seats would have taken up at least eight feet of the seventeen feet of depth of the room. In the reconstruction worked out by the investigator, thirty-three seats were located west of the fireplace in the Central Room. Allowing for an acting area in front of the fireplace, an additional eleven seats could also have been situated in the East Alcove (Fig. 39).

The acting area which the audience faced was unusually wide for the size of the theatre, and relatively shallow since for the most part it could not have been more than nine feet deep. Brown's plan was to divide the acting area into what Mrs. Baskin described as "three circles, imaginatively suggestive of the settings of the piece."[11] Within these "circles," simple groupings of furniture cre

ated four vignette-type sets.[12] Two of the sets alternated

within one of the areas. The furniture used by the actors was so close to the seats for the audience that the spectators were warned, as they entered the Studio, to be sure to sit in the blue chairs. "Otherwise," observed Mrs. Baskin, "one night have found himself a very part of the play.[13]

The four sets will be described, according to the reconstruction made by the investigator, beginning with the set at the east end of the studio and moving westward. The sets were Lord Medway's study, the Medway reception room, Harry Flutter's dressing room, and Mrs. Knightly's drawing room.

Lord Medway's Study.–The main sets within the Medway home, the study and the reception room, each occupied one of the circles of action referred to above. Since the action moved in some scenes from one area to the other without any sense of change of location, the fro sets then functioned as portions of one large room in the Medway home.

Lord Medway's study seems to have been most logically situated at the east end of the studio. Action took place at the fireplace in that location.[14] Pencilled notalions in the directors' script indicated the presence of a table and chair, a sofa, and a chair near the hall doorway. Louisa Medway sat at the table leafing through a book in Act One, while her father mulled over his problems there in Act Four.[15] Harry Flutter referred to the sofa in the study when he requested of Lord Medway "Do let me lounge a little on this couch of yours." [16] At another point a pencilled direction for Lord Medway was to "X and sit sofa."[17] A directorial note for Mrs. Knightly to "sit chair by door" attested

[10]Ibid.

[11]Alice Haines Baskin, "The World's Smallest Little Theatre," Pasadena Sportland, October, 1925. [POP 6, p. 97.J

[12]Interview with Maurice Wells, August 15¡ 196l.

[13]The Star-Hews Critic, loc. oil.

[14]In the Playbox production script of The Discovery the published stage directions contained business at the fireplace for the footman (Act One, p. 13; Act Four, p. 88). This action was quite appropriate for the character and situations, and appears to have been retained by the directors.

[15]The Discovery, Fairoaks Playbox production script, Act Four, p. 74'A pencilled direction for Lord Medway was "Seated Behind Table."

[16]Ibid., Act One, p. 8.

[17]Ibid.i Act One, p. 20.

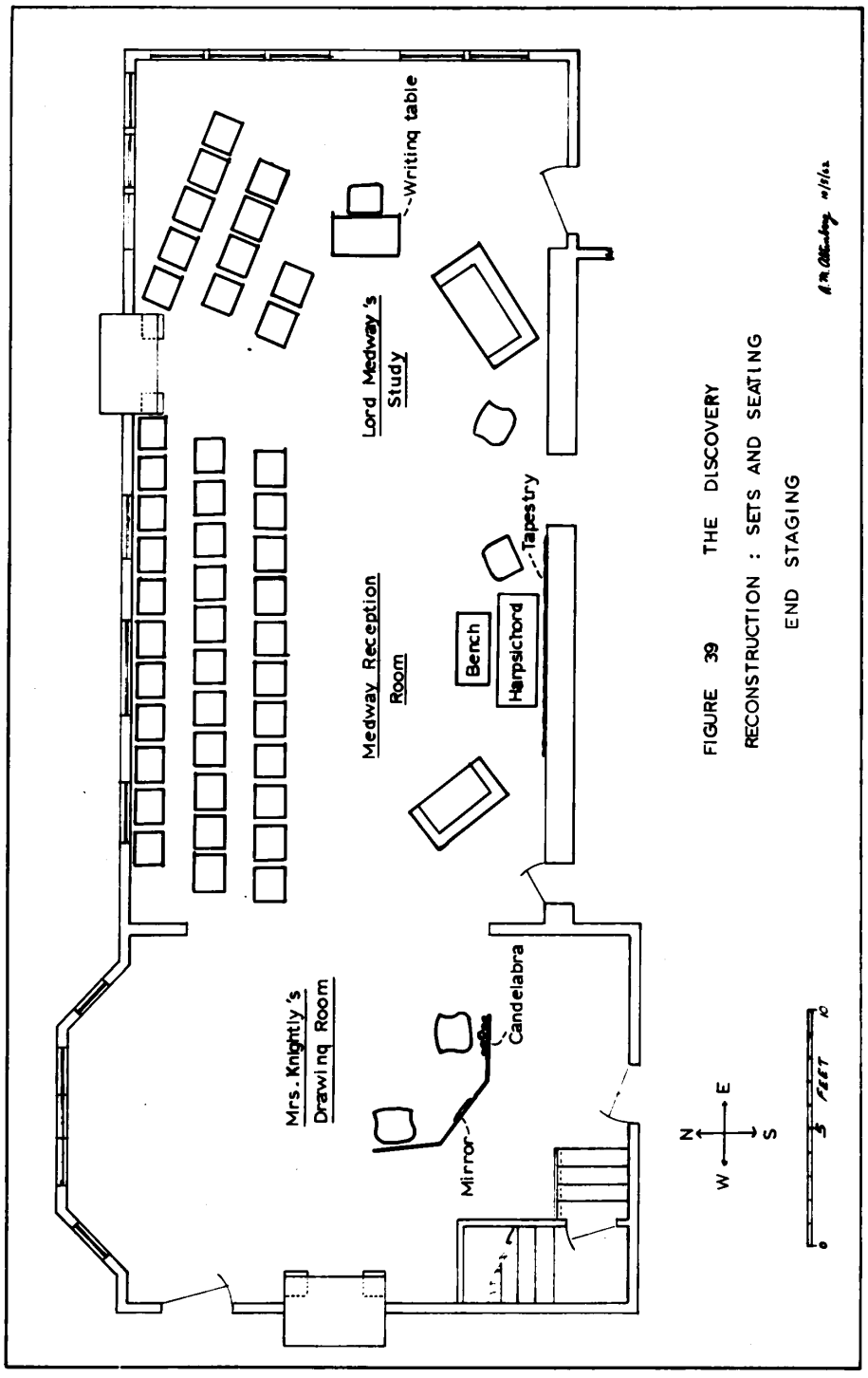

Figure 6.1: Reconstruction of wide end staging floor plan, *The Discovery*.

to the placement of the chair near the hall entrance.[18]

The Medway reception room occupied the area of the Central Room west of the hall doorway. This entrance, which served both the study and reception room areas, was closed off by dark curtains. On the wall Just west of the enfcranceway Brown had placed a decorative tapestry (Fig. 40). In front of the tapestry were a harpsichord and fabric covered bench which the producer had borrowed for the production. Stage right of the harpsichord there was a chair (Fig. 41). At stage left and slightly downstage a eofa was

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situated.[19] This may be the small high-backed sofa covered in a delicately figured fabric which was shown in a photograph of the production (Fig. 42). At the stage left end of the sofa in the photograph, the producer had placed one of the two gold colored screens used in the production.[20] Fig..-

Harry Flutter's Dressing Room.–The little set for Harry Flutter's dressing room, which was used in Act Two, included an ornately decorated dressing table and two chairs. Only one of the chairs appears in the photograph (Fig. 43), but Brown wrote directions for the use of two chairs in the fete a fete between Lord Medway and Lady Flutter.[21]

According to Maurice Wells, the Flutter dressing room set -was "placed in a spot and removed after the scene had been played."[22] In the opinion of the investigator the location was in the West Room, the probable area for the third "circle" of the three mentioned by Mrs. Baskin, In using the West Room, Brown would have stretched out his acting area to a width of almost fifty feet. Such a spread might be expected to create sight-line problems for the audience. This was indeed the case, as will soon be shown.

Several advantages would have accrued from a location of the Flutter set in the West Room. None of the furniture in the Medway reception room or study would have had to be masked or moved. The sense of a separate location within the Medway house

[18]Ibid., Act Four, p. 89.

[19]In this reconstruction of the sets, it was assumed that two sofas were used, one in the study and one in the reception room of the Medway home. The directors' notations made ample reference to a sofa in scenes which took place predominantly in the study as well as in those which centered in the reception room. It is, of course, possible that only one sofa was used in the production, since the references to a sofa make no distinction between one on the right or one on the left. The use of only one sofa, however, would have created awkward positions in terms of the blocking indicated in the directors' copy of the play.

The presence of a second sofa west of the hall door, in the Medway reception room, was suggested by the following evidence: In Act Five, Scene Two, p. 112, Brown wrote in a direction for Louisa Medway to "X to door then down to sofa." Anxious for news of her lover, Louisa once again crossed over to the door when the maid entered on p. 113. Brown's notation at that point was "X way over then sit as before." These directions would certainly indicate that the sofa mentioned was at a distance from the hall doorway into the Central Room.

Immediately after Louisa had returned to the sofa, the elderly suitor. Sir Anthony Branville, was to "sit on stool at spinet." Since he was attempting to express his affection for Louisa, it would have been logical for him to sit fairly close to her. Thus a further reason would be established for the location of a sofa near the harpsibhoard at the west end of the room. The reactions of the group who burst into the room were consistent with close positions of Louisa and Sir Anthony. The widow Knightly exclaimed, "So here are the lovebirds at last. What a pretty couple. It seems almost a pity to separate them."

[20]The two gold screens were contained in Brown's property list written on the page facing the back cover of the directors' script of The Discovery.

[21]The Discovery, Fairoaks Playbox production script, pp. 47-48.

[22]Interview with Maurice Wells, August 15, 196l.

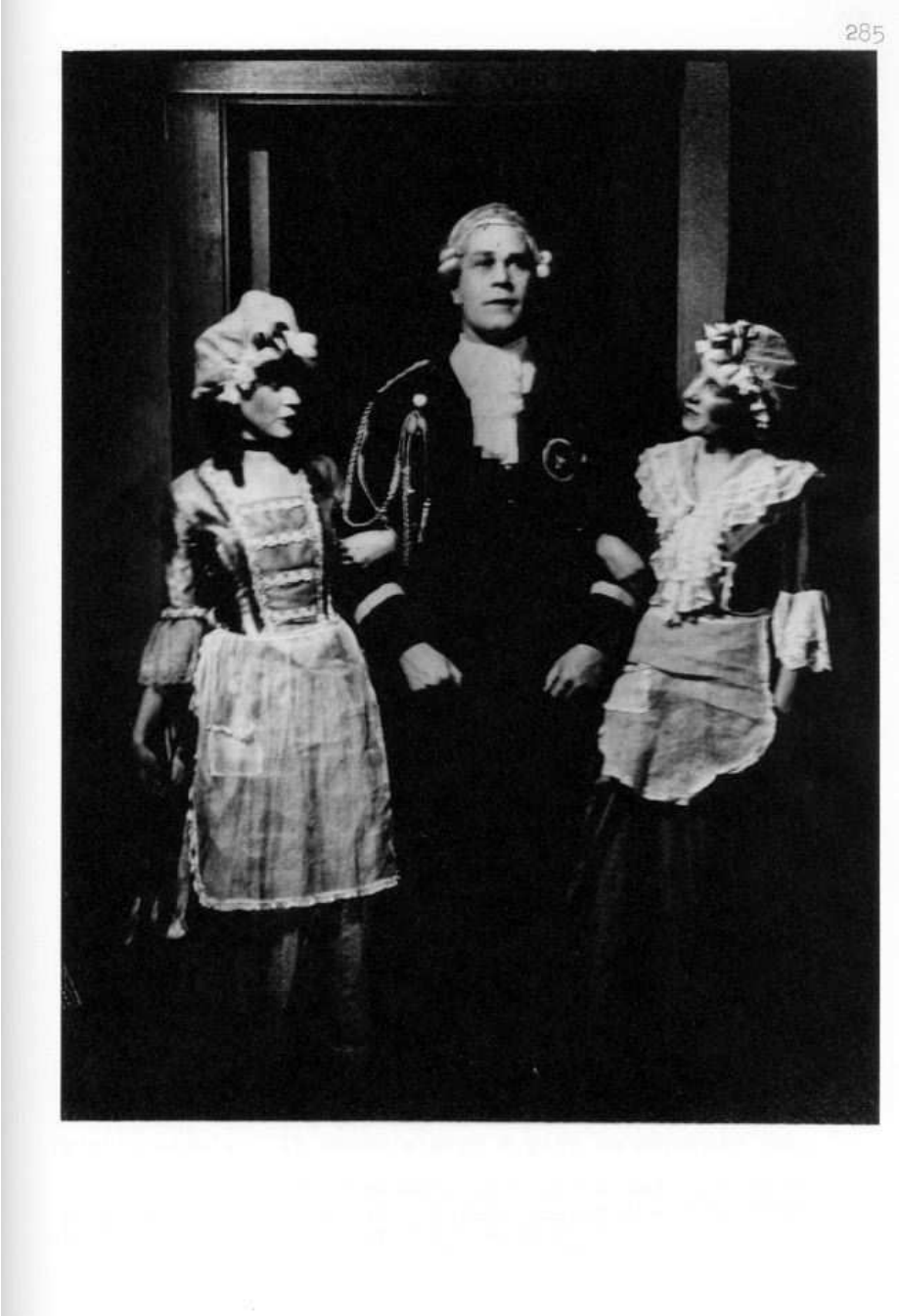

Figure 6.2: The DA BOO very, Doorway to front hall. From left to right'sLurene wttle, Gilraor Brown, Mayone Lewis.

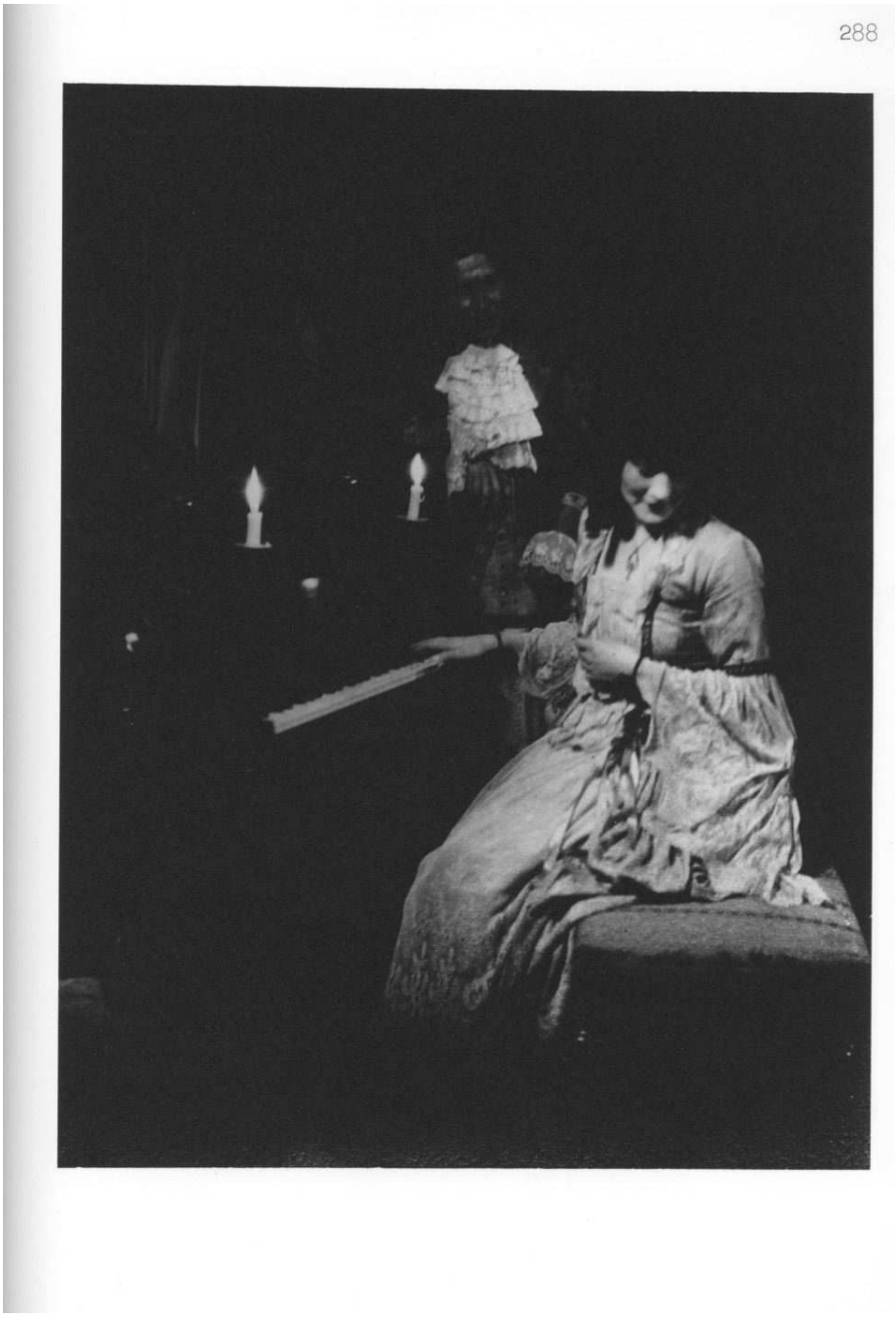

Figure 6.3: The Pi sco very. Harpsichord in front of tapeBtry. Robert Sanadowne (lord Medway), Kathryn Prather (Loulaa Medway).

Figure 6.4: The Discovery-it Marjorie Maxwell (Lady Medway), Robert Lansdowne (liord Medway).

could have been more easily established. The Flutter set could have been struck and the Knightly set moved in without difficulty because of the greater amount of space available in the West Room.

The belief that the Flutter dressing room was situated at the west end of the studio arose from tv?o clues, as well as from the advantages mentioned above. The photograph of the Flutter set contained a curious pattern of white spots not seen in any of the other pictures of the production except one which revealed a portion of the Vest Room. The latter photograph was one of Louisa standing at the archway of the West Room (Fig. 4). Barely perceptible at the right of the original photograph of Louisa, approximately a third of the way up from the bottom of the picture, were white spots of the type seen in the background of the Flutter photograph. 'These spots vrere apparently caused by rays of light striking the floor of the West Room. They do not seem to be the result of faulty printing of the photographs.[23]

An additional clue for the location of the Flutter set came from the presence of a fireplace near the dressing room furniture. Brown made a notation for a character to cross over to a fireplace during the scene in the dressing room.[24] The fireplace of the West Room would have been in a suitable relationship to both the remainder of the set and the audience's seats. It should be noted, however, that the actor standing at the

[23]In the copies of the photographs, presented here as Figures 45 and 46, the white spots, unfortunately, did not reproduce properly.

[24]The Discovery, Act Two, p. 41.

Figure 6.5: The Discovery, Helen Brooke, Jr. (Lady Flutter) Maurice Wells (Sir 4arry Flutter). The Flutter dressing room.

Figure 6.6: Kathryn Prather standing in Central Room close to west archway.

fireplace would have to stand at its south end, that is upstage, in order to be visible to the audience.

Mrs, Knightly'sPraying Room.–The setting for the drawing room of the widow, Mrs, Knightly, was extremely compact, resembling the small sets frequently employed in films and television, The photograph of this set revealed a scenic backing consisting of three flats in a screen arrangement, On the stage right flat candelabra holding five candles were mounted? on the center flat a scroll-framed mirror was placed. Two chairs appeared in the photograph, one at right and one at left (Pig, 45). In addition to these features, the Knightly drawing room must also have made use of one of the two gold screens which Brown had obtained. When the widow had unexpected visitors during her intimate conversation with the footman in Act Five, she hid the pseudo-servant behind a screen.

Scene Shifting.–In the reconstruction of the production which has just been described, only one scene shift would have been necessary. This shift would have involved the striking of the Flutter set at the end of Act Two, and the moving in of the Knightly set for the first scene of Act Three. Both operations would have taken place in the West Room.

The Play-box program of the production stated that the action of the play, which covered the space of several days, v;as to "be continuous save for one intermission." If this intermission did not occur at the end of Act Two, the Bhift x-i'ould have had to be extremely rapid to conform to the aim of continuous action. The extreme simplicity of both sets permitted such speed. It is more probable, however, that the shift took place during an intermisBion between Acts Two and Three. The play works up to a good curtain line at the end of Act Two.[25]

Audience Sight Lines.–As was indicated previously, the wide-spread acting area created definite sight-line problems for some members of the audience. None of the reviews of Playbox productions had heretofore mentioned any difficulties so far as the visibility of the performers was concerned. In her review of The Discovery Alice Baskin was sufficiently disturbed to report;

> Whether you see or do not see becomes an entirely personal affair. Crane your neck, eland up if you do not inconvenience your neighbor, the play runs on without you.[26]

Since Mrs. BaBkin commented in the same review on the low ceiling of the room, it would appear that she had been seated in the East Alcove. If such were the case, she might have had a rather poor view of the action at the extreme west end of the studio.

The Acting

Although the cast of The Discovery were performing the first comedy of manners given in the Fairoaks Playbox, Brown had already produced seven such period comedies at

[25]Lady Medway overhears her husband trying to arrange a secret meeting with Lady Flutter. As they exit she cornea "into the middle of the room" and exclaims: "Oh, Medway, Med4ay, this is beyond what I thought you capable of. But I am a fool to be amazed. At ray age I ought to have learnt that men are capable of anything!" On that note. Act Two ends.

[26]The Star-Mews Critic, loc. cit

Figure 6.7: Mrs. Knightly .s drawing room. From left to right: Jane Towar (Miss Richly), Roger Stanton (Colonel Medway), Helenita Lieberg (Mrs. Knightly).

the Playhouse. This had been a rather unusual record for a community theatre. Nevertheless, the producer had publicly admitted that it was a difficult task for his actors to attain the requisite style ft¿r these comedies of manners, Responding to criticism of his 1924 Mainstage production of The Way of the World, he had conceded:

> Doubtless the most finished actors of the professional stage today would have a hard time coming up to Mr. Congreve's standards. He wrote of an artificial and highly polished society. Few any longer possess the training to represent the ladies and gentlemen of that period. To affect their manners required a lifetime of training. Our players in the Pasadena Community Playhouse are strange to these ways, and they are fully aware of what they lack in that regard. . . .[27]

Brown argued that even though the Congrevc comedy had been beyond the abilities of his Playhouse actors, the community had at least been given a chance to Bee this rarely presented masterpiece.

At the Playbox no defense had to be offered for performing 'Due Discovery since the audience came to the studio theatre with the expectation of participating in what Brown called a "theatrical adventure." In any case the style exhibited by the actors appears to have been satisfactory so far as the critic Alexander Inglis was concerned, He reported:

> Gilmor Brown and his gifted players are bringing back the artificial manners, the stilted phrases, and the entertaining intrigues which have given the Eighteenth Century drama a distinctive place in literature, All the subtle innuendoes of quarrelsome raillery, petty machinations, and sentimental candor are evidenced in 'The Discovery.'[28]

In their performance of those sentimental scenes which Huxley had permitted to remain in the play, the actors brought "a little exaggeration ... a touch of travesty." [29] The reason for this approach was explained in the note on the program:

> No modern audience is ever going to accept completely this .literature of sentiment.' Tastes have changed, and we are now inclined to smile at the artificiality of the romantic episodes.[30]

With his love of subtlety. Brown steered his actors away from the danger of broadening "a little exaggeration" into a burlesque style.

Perhaps the roost interesting aspect of the performance from the standpoint of arena theatre history, was the representational nature of the acting. The Star-News Critic made a special point in her review that the actors had shown much less concern for rapport with their audience than was the case in "the usual theatrical presentation." The actors in The Discovery played entirely to each other, she reported, making the audience feel Invisible, "stranded on the side lines."[31]

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[27]"Gilmor Brown Has Answer to Author," Pasadena Star-News, December 9, 1924. [PCP 5, p. 90.]
[28]Alexander Inglis, "At the Playbox: 'The Discovery,"' Pasadena Star-News November 6, 1925.
[29]Program of The Discovery, The Playbox, November 2, 1925. [PB I, p. 4Tl
[30]Ibid.
[31]The Star-Mews Critic, loc. cit.

This performance provided clear evidence that Brown was not abolishing the proscenium arch and developing a flexible arena theatre in order to "retheatricalize the theatre." In this eighteenth century comedy the actors could have easily played to the audience. Instead Brown required the actors to block out any awareness of the spectators. It was representational, not presentational, acting, that Brown wanted for The Discovery.

The Actors.–In addition to co-directing The PiscQvery, both wells and Brown performed in the comedy, Wells played the foolish, temperamental Sir Harry Flutter who was continually indulging in battles of wit with his wife. His handling of these scenes ioust have been effective, for Inglia referred to the excellent comedy contained in them.[32] Mrs. Baskin noted some nervousness in Veils' performance when she referred to

> an occasional vibrant tenseness in one of the cleverest of the young actors whose extreme sensitiveness to environments I have before this noted at the Playhouse.[33]

Brown had originally intended to cast Douglas Montgomery in the role of the Footman, the lover incognito.[34] When Montgomery proved unavailable. Brown took over the part of the romantic young man, even though the producer now generally played character roles. In his performance Brown was unable to hide his directorial concerns. In the extreme closeness of the Playbox, Mrs. Baskin caught

> a side glint ever and again in the all-seeing directorial eye (alive to each and every phase of the clinical development of hie experiment).[35]

Two young actresses made their first appearance in the Playbox in this production. One was Lurene Tuttle, seen as Susan, the pert housemaid; the other was Helen Brooks, Jr., .who played lady Flutter. Lurene Tuttle went on to become a highly successful radio, film, and television actress. Helen Brooks, Jr., according to Maurice Wells, became a well established ingenue on Broadway during the early nineteen-thirties.[36]

Production # 10. Bernice December 7-12, 1925

The Director

The next production at the Playbox, was the first to be entrusted to a director other than Wells or Brown. The prime reason for using a guest director at this time was undoubtedly the pressure on the two men caused by the Playhouse production schedule. During the previous season, Ralph Freud had been on hand as an Assistant Director at

[32]Inglis, loo, cit

[33]"The Star-News Critic, loc. ,,cit. Since the other young actors in the produ c tion, 4oger "Stan ton and Fred Peterson, had given no more than two previous performances at the Playhouse, the reference must have been made to Wells.

[34]Montgomery's name appeared in a cast list next to the character of the Footman. This notation was made in Brown's handwriting in the production script of The Discovery.

[35]Ibid.

[36]Interview with Maurice Wells, May 19, 1959.

the Playhouse. Wells had been devoting himself almost exclusively to the Playbox during the season. Thus Brown had had virtually a full time director at the studio theatre and two directors assisting him at the Playhouse (Lenore Shanewise and Ralph Freud).

Wells went back on the Playhouse staff as an Associate Director, according to the listing on the Playhouse programs, with the opening of the new building in May, 1925. Freud was away in Europe at that time, but returned during the summer. It raay well have been expected that he -would remain on the Playhouse staff as an Assistant Director throughout the season of 1925-26. If such were the expectation, Freud soon revealed that he had other plans. The local newspapers announced in October that the young character actor and director was "going on the road" as a performer.

When the new Playbox season opened on November 2, Brown no longer had Wells devoting himself exclusively to the studio theatre. Furthermore, with the loss of Freud's services there were still only two directors assisting Brown at the Playhouse. This meant that there could be weeks when Brown and Wells would be so heavily burdened with Playhouse responsibilities that they would have little time to spare for the Playbox productions. Such seems to have been the case in November when both men were involved in the Playhouse Western premiere of Philip Barry's first play You and I. Wells took the Juvenile lead and assisted in the direction of the comedy. The play opened November 26. Bernice was scheduled to open at the Playbox on December 7. The plan to have Helen Jerome Eddy direct the Susan Glaspell drama was a prudent measure.

Helen Eddy's Background.–Helen Eddy was a professional actress who had been working steadily In films since 1913, and had played many roles on the legitimate stage. Although a tall, attractive woman, she was cuBtomarily cast as a dejected spinster. As one journalist put It, she could "upon thirty minutes notice . . . look plainer, more forlorn, hopeless, blighted than any female without a future at large."[37]

She first came to the Pasadena Community Playhouse in 19214 attracted by the opportunity to develop her ability in speaking parts in those days of the silent screen. She also sought a chance to play roles in which she would not ordinarily be cast in a commercial situation.

By November, 1925, she had performed in a total of ten Playhouse productions. In Bernice she v?as to make her first appearance as an actress at the Playbox,

The Play

Bern.ice was a rather somber drama, originally performed by the Provincetown Players in 1919. Because of the morbid theme of the play. Brown recognized that it was "not a piece to please the general public." He considered it, however, "unquestionably one of the finest examples of American drama , . . certain to make a deep impression upon the thoughtful."[38] For these reasons it was the type of play which would fit in with the aims of the Playbox.

The drama depicts the reactions of friends and family to the death of a young

[37]"'Richard Creedon, "Hungry Heart Roles Upset Helen's Hopes," Los Anpeles Examiner, April 29, 1928.
[38]"Notes on Fairoaks Playbox program of Bernice [PB I, p. 25].

woman of unusually fine character. Bernice has died suddenly after a brief illness. Craig, her veak philandering husband has been on a trip abroad and arrives home just after her death, Abble, the old family housekeeper, tells him privately that his wife actually killed herself. Horrified, he assumes that the discovery of his infidelity brought on the suicide. Margaret Pierce, a close friend of the deceased, learns otherwise. The housekeeper reveals that Bemice had made her lie to Craig, and that Bernice had indeed died a natural death. But what was the woman's motive in leaving her husband this cruel legacy? Margaret finally concludes that the lie was an intended act of kindness. While Bernice had always been very assured and self-sufficient, Graig was an extremely insecure person. The lie was propagated to bolster his ego, to make him believe that his wife had desperately needed his love.

The Staging

The Arrangement of the Audience Area

The arrangement of the area for Bemice had two aspects of Interest: one was the heightened effect of the dead woman's presence caused by the intimacy of the Playbox; the other aspect was the L pattern, which was the reverse of that used in March Hares.

The sense of the physical and spiritual closeness of the deceased was brought about by the relationship of the audience to the setting, as well as by the action of the play. The dialogue informed the audience that Bernice had been brought downstairs to a room adjoining the living room. The audience was actually sitting in a portion of the living room. The body was supposed to be lying behind the dark drapery which was used to close off most of the East Alcove. The room in which the body lay was at the north end.

The director placed the chairs for the audience along the south and west walls of the Central Room in a curving asymmetrical arrangement. All of the spectators thus sat within thirty feet of the imagined corpse. Their sense of the presence of the deceased was heightened by viewing the reactions of the characters as they entered and returned from the room which was supposed to contain the body. Inglis commented on the effective manner in which Helen Eddy had underscored Bernlce's presence;

> Helen Jerome Eddy . . . has certainly seized upon [the play's] salient aspects and made them vital with meaning. The eerie sensation of the dead .woman lying in the adjoining rooma woman whose greater influence begins only now that she is dead– . . . falls upon the Playbox observer with a. kind of uncanny intimacy that adds a strange reality to the performance.[39]

The L Pattern in the Setting

The L-shaped acting area ran along parallel to the east and north walls of the Studio. As stated above, the closed-off north end of the East Alcove constituted the "adjoining room" for the body. At the south end of the Alcove a small foyer was created adjacent to the door which led into the area from the front porch of the Playbox building. This

[39] Alexander Inglis, "At the Playbox," Pasadena StarNevJSi December 7¡ 1925. [PB I, p. 24.]

door into the East Alcove represented the front door of Bernice's home. The audience could see into the foyer through an opening in the drapery. Thus an entrance from the outside of Bernice's house was made through the porch door Into the East Alcove and from there into the Central Room via the opening in the drapery.

The remainder of the setting stretched out along the north wall. The architecture of the Playbox most conveniently provided a number of the scenic requirements made by the playwright. The script called for a fireplace, a wide stretch of windows to let in the late afternoon sun, and a narrow passage leading to a kitchen. The fireplace

and the windows already existed in the north wall of the Central Room. To create the passage to the kitchen the director's plan provided for hanging drapery across the archway of the West Room, leaving a narrow opening at the north. Exits to the kitchen and other rooms of the house were made through this opening in the drapery,

The furniture arrangement was clearly shown in the director's diagram of the set (Fig. 46). Two chairs were placed against the drapery wall at the east end of the studio. Along the north wall just west of the fireplace stood a tea table and two chairs, the table being removed in the first scene and brought back at the end of the play. Farther 4est, beneath the windows, there was a long table with a chair situated at its west end. Against the wall in the north west corner of the Central Room stood a small table, ideal for the placement of a vase of flowers.

Positions and Movements

Hox¡? were the actors grouped in this peculiar Lshaped setting? What were their movements? The answers to these questions were revealed in some detail in the Playbox production script. It contained numerous diagrams of the actors' positions, and directions for movement.

The positions of the actors fell into at least three patterns: an L grouping along the north and east walls; a diagonal placement, on a line cutting across from the north to the east wall; a grouping along the north wall.

The L Grouping.–The L placement of the actors in positions along both north and east walls of the Betting occurred early in the play when Craig Morris arrived .with his sister, Laura. Abbie had gone to the doorway in the East Alcove to adroit them. Laura came in first and crossed up to speak to Bernice's father who wae Btanding close to the north wall. According to the playwright, Cralg "held back" as if to enter this house was something he could scarcely make himself do. He stood near the entranceway with Abbie below him in a line along the east wall. A diagram (Fig. 48) shows their positions.

Diagonal Positions.–An example of positions on a diagonal line cutting across the north-east corner of the room may be noted in the scene between Craig and his father-in-law which followed Craig's entrance. Overwhelmed by the emotion of returning to the home in which his wife had died, Craig sat in the chair just north of the entranceway from the Alcove. Mr. Alien, Bernlce's father, sat across from him in the nearer of the two chairs west of the fireplace.[40] The two men remained in these positions for

[40]Bern!c e, Playbox production script, p. 165.

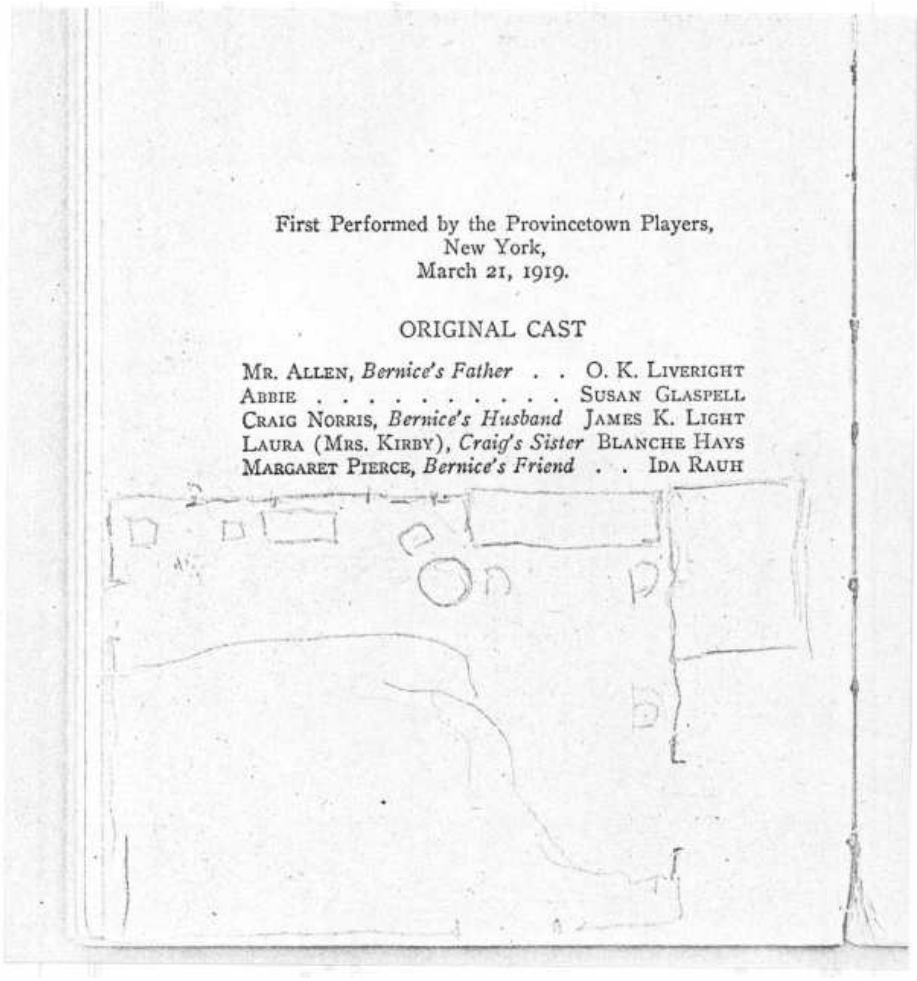


Figure 6.8: Diagram of ground floor plan for *Bernice*, reproduced from original in Fairoaks Playbox production script, p. 158.

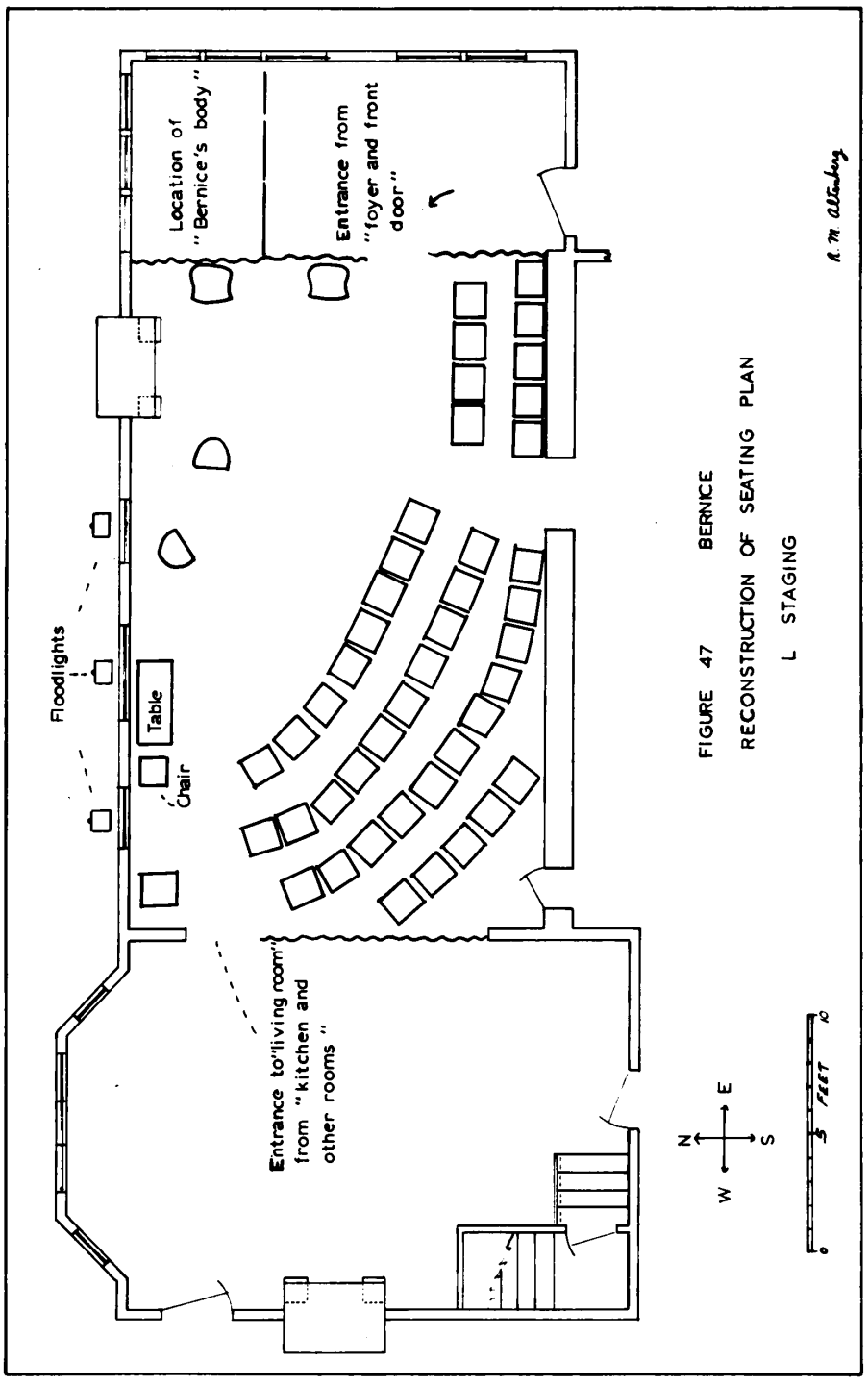
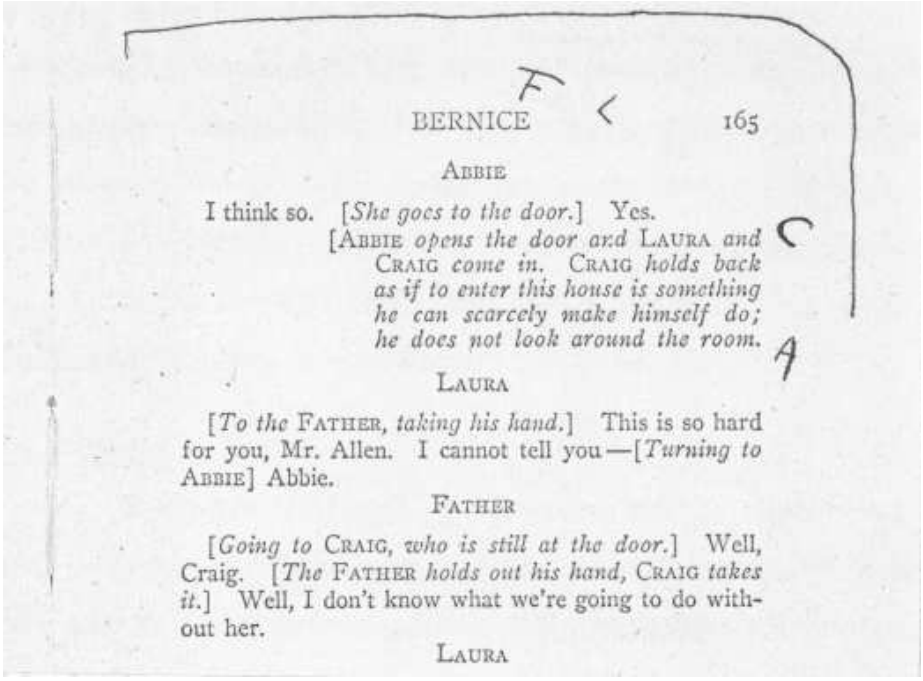


Figure 6.9: Reconstruction of L staging floor plan, *Bernice*.



BERNICE 165

ABBIE

I think so. [*She goes to the door.*] Yes.
[ABBIE *opens the door and* LAURA *and* CRAIG *come in.* CRAIG *holds back as if to enter this house is something he can scarcely make himself do; he does not look around the room.*

LAURA

[*To the* FATHER, *taking his hand.*] This is so hard for you, Mr. Allen. I cannot tell you—[*Turning to* ABBIE] Abbie.

FATHER

[*Going to* CRAIG, *who is still at the door.*] Well, Craig. [*The* FATHER *holds out his hand,* CRAIG *takes it.*] Well, I don't know what we're going to do without her.

LAURA

Figure 6.10: L grouping, Craig's entrance, p. 165.

three pages of dialogue, as the father explained the circumstances of his daughter's death (Fig. 49).

Placement Along the North Wall.–Numerous Bcenes were played along the north wall. In some the actors were momentarily spread widely apart, but most of the time they were placed fairly close together.

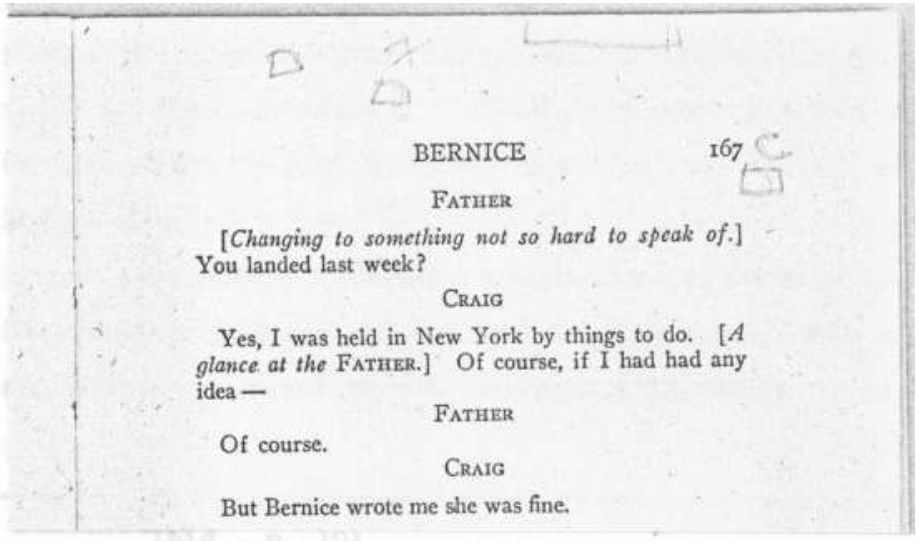
At the opening of the play, the father was sitting at the long table playing solitaire while approximately sixteen feet from him the housekeeper attended to the fire burning In the fireplace.[41] The father Boon rose and began to rearrange some of the furnishings in an effort to remove from the room the sense of his daughter's presence.

In Act Two, Craig and Margaret, his wife's friend, had a scene in which he sat at the long table drinking a glass of whiskey. In a chair near the long table, Margaret chastized him for his weakness.[42]

In the second act at least two scenes were played in an even closer grouping along the north wall, when two characters sat in the chairs just west of the fireplace.

In a scene between Laura and Margaret, the latter sat in the chair closest to the fireplace.[43] Ever the analytical person, I'fergaret was trying to make Laura understand Craig'8 Inability to dominate his wife. The next scene, a short one between Margaret

[41]Ibid., p. 159.
[42]Ibid., p. 196.
[43]Ibid., p. 186.



BERNICE 167

FATHER

[*Changing to something not so hard to speak of.*] You landed last week?

CRAIG

Yes, I was held in New York by things to do. [*A glance at the* FATHER.] Of course, if I had had any idea —

FATHER

Of course.

CRAIG

But Bernice wrote me she was fine.

Figure 6.11: Diagonal positions. Diagram, p. 167.

and Craig, came a few pages later In the script.[44] In this scene Craig now sat in the chair which was close to the fireplace, while Margaret moved into the other one. This time Craig was the analyst, discussing his father-in-law's character.

The Actors

The cast of Bernice was very small, involving only five actors. Of Interest are the performances of Helen Eddy and Roger Stanton. Mi SB Eddy appeared as Abbie, the old, loving, patient servant. Miss Eddy, who sometimes bemoaned in newspaper interviews her constant assignment to unromantic parts by film and stage producers, was willing to accept a most unglamorous role for herself in this production. As director she presumably would have had some voice in casting herself. In the role she performed what was required, revealing to the audience "the dulled but loving mind of Abbie."[45]

A member of the cast who became most active in the Playbox for this one season, was Roger Stanton, then and now an English Professor at the California Institute of Techno logy. Stanton, who described himself fco thia Investigator as "a very wooden actor," had made his Playbox debut In The Disco very as Lord Medway's son. In Bemice he performed the part of Cralg Norris, the self-doubting husband of the dead woman. In this role he projected a character "whose innate vanity touches its peak even when a new purity la brought streaming in upon hie disordered outlook."[46]

[44] Ibid., p. 191.
[45] Alexander Inglis, loc. cit.
[46] Ibid.

Production # 11. The Two Virtues December 28-31, 1925; January 1 and 2, 1926

After Helen Eddy had made her directorial contribution at the Playbox, it was Brown's turn to take over a production. Wells was fully occupied directing and performing the lead in a Playhouse production opening on December 24. Therefore it was necessary for Brown to be the sole director of The Two virtues which he had scheduled to open at the Playbox on December 28. This drawing room comedy was a good vehicle for Brown's acting talents, so that it is not surprising that he decided to play the leading role. At the very same time, however, he was also deeply involved in a Playhouse production as director and principal performer. The play was The Merry Wives of Windsor, and the role, Palstaff, an exceedingly lengthy part.

In order to open the Shakespearean comedy as scheduled on January 7, It would have been necessary to begin rehearsals for It during December. Thus Brown was simultaneously directing two productions, one at the Playhouse and one at the Playbox, while rehearsing the leading roles in both. All of this was taking place during the period of the Christmas and New Years holidays, always a poor time for rehearsals with volunteer actors. It is interesting to speculate on the outcome had he not had the assistance of Lenore Shanewlse on the Shakespearean play. As will be seen, the Playbox performances turned out to be underrehearsed.

The Story

The Two Virtues ie a British comedy of manners, first published in 1914, and brought to the United States by E. H. Southern in 19l6, It is an extremely polished, often witty work, written in a style reminiscent of Oscar Wilde without attaining his sustained brilliance. The play is extremely verbal with a minimum of physical action, and possesses a clear plotline encumbered with only a moderate amount of complication. Sutro's targets are familiar ones:

the stufflness of Victorian morality, and the snobbery of upper class British society. The story concerns itself with Jeffrey Panton, a bachelor in his forties who has a passion for historical study and an abhorrence of conformity. His sister, who wishes to dominate him, has been trying for years to get him properly married, all to no avail. 'She story begins with the reappearance of a young woman, whom Jeffrey had previously steered away from himself Into a marriage with a self-centered poet. The girl now wants Jeffrey's help to save her marriage. Her poet-husband has been spending a great amount of time with a purportedly "shady" Mrs. Ouildford. Pressured into a meeting with this woman of dubious reputation, Jeffrey finds her to be a charming, kind and intelligent woman, much more to his taste than all of the "respectable" society women he has previously encountered. To the horror of his sister, Jeffrey proposes marriage to Mrs. Gulldford.

The Staging

Few shreds of evidence remain to make possible much in the way of a reconstruction of the staging.[47] From the Playbox program of the performance, it may be seen that two sets were used, for "the scenes are laid alternately at Mrs. Panton's and at Mrs. Guilford's" [sic 3. Divided into four acts, the location shifted back and forth from act to act.

The play called for the Library at Jeffrey Panton'B place, and a drawing-room in Mrs. Guildford's house.

The Star-News Critic found the settings and staging of the play rather spare in their visual effects

> Stripped of the usual advantages of conventional production, the Intricate cleverness and flashing sword play of Mr. Sutro's brilliant comedy came as near as possible to give the impression of, being, read rather than acted. Quite in the 'literary' genre, that ia, more dependent on lines than on action (of which there ie practically none throughout the four acts of the piece) this simplicity of presentation seemed to me especially appropriate.[48] [underlining not in original.]

Mrs. Baskin referred to much of Jeffrey Panton's performance as being "addressed entirely to the ear, and undisturbed by any conflicting sensory appeal." [49]

When the play VaB taken to the Playhouse later in the season, Mrs. Baskin felt that the scenery and lighting used there heightened the performance. She indicated that in the studio theatre the comedy had been performed "without scenery and with sets only indirectly suggestive," but at the Playhouse it was a different matter:

> Presented with the full resources of theatrical illusion made possible by the beautiful harmonies of lighting and scenic investiture at the command of the Community Playhouse staff, the comedy seemed to gain in warmth and magnetic expression. There is no more skill, I believe in the performance. But the contrasts in character portrayal and standards of conduct appear heightenedportrayed in color rather than with the etcher's pointed tool.[50]

The photograph of the setting for Mrs. Guildford's drawing room as presented at the Playhouse shows that an extremely simple drapery setting was used. The three walls of the room were composed entirely of drapery, broken only by a fireplace upstage center. The remainder of the set consisted of a long table and two chairs, a small round table with an arm chair, a backless bench in front of the fireplace, and a vase of flowers, on a stand. It is possible that the lighting, and the particular color combinations of the furniture, fireplace, and the curtained walls, gave the heightened scenic effect noted by the Star-News Critic.

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[47] "The investigator located Brown's copy of the play, but the notations in it may be for the Playhouse production which took place in March, 1926.

[48] Star-Hews Critic, "'Two Virtues' at Playbox Well Done," Pasadena gtar-NeyB, January 2, 1926.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Star-News Critic, TVJO Virtues, Dart Keen, Suave Wit," Pasadena Star-News, March 12, 1926.

The Acting

The Actors.–In the cast of The Two Virtues there were besides Gilmor Brown two members who had been veteran performers at the Playhouse. These were Cloyd Dalzell, who appeared as Panton's stuffy, domineering sister. Lady Milligan, and Dorothy Hinds who played the childish wife of the would-be poet. Both woraen had been associated with the Playhouse since its start in 1917. Cloyd Dalzell had directed some early workshop productions at the old Playhouse, and appeared in numerous productions in character comedy roles. She was on the faculty of the School of Speech at the University of Southern California. Dorothy Hinds, highly placed in Pasadena society, was at that time the wife of Samuel B. Hinds, a prominent attorney and later a distinguished film actor. She and her husband were among the founders of the Playhouse and had done much to promote the institution in the community.

Keeping Helen Jerome Eddy active this season. Brown gave her the leading female role of Mrs. Guild ford. She muBt have been pleased to break away from her casting stereotype of the drab Bplnster,

Evaluations of the Acting.–The opening night of The Two Virtues was a minor disaster.

Inglls described the play as badly presented, inadequately rehearsed, since "the players were obviously unfamiliar with their lines." Tills caused the audience to have "many uncomfortable moraentB, for err'ora in the Playbox are glaring erroreasclose scrutiny tends to magnify mistakes." [Underlining not in original.]

The critic considered that Cloyd Dalzell and Helen Jerome Eddy were excellent in their performances. Brown "vas a constant delight with his little vraye of naive aimplicity and shrewd appreciation.[51] For the rest of the cast, Inglis had nothing to say, although he thought the play Itself was witty, filled with subtle, delightful humor.

Following the unusual practice observed in the reviewing of The DigcQvery, the Star-News sent Mrs. Baskin over to the Playbox for a second review. Inglis had seen the play on Monday. By Friday, the performance had considerably improved. Mrs. Baskin wrote;

> This delicately poised comedy, as I saw it at the Playbox, was most delightfully performed and presented, The sparkle of its wit, the implication of its irony, seemed to me entirely grasped by the playersif not in all oases by the audience.

She, too, had praise for Brown's acting, calling it a "delicious performance" 4ith its depiction of Panton's "mental terrors, his rash moments of daring, his whimsical absurdities, assumed as the only armor of a senBitive man to escape the insensitive encroachments of his natural predatory enemy–woman."[52]

H. 0, Stechhan, the former publicity director of the Playhouse who was now theatre critic for the California Graphic also Baw the production. Hl8 reaction was summed up in the opening sentence of his review, '"Thanks again to Gilmor Brov.'n for an evening of rarest delight in his cosy little Playboy." Approving of the acting, Stecchan commented warmly that -!. . . Mr. Brown gave a charming portrait of Jeffrey Panton,

[51] Alexander Inglis, At the Playbox,' Pasadena StarWews, December 29, 1925.

[52] Star-Newe Critic, "'Tr-.'o Virtues' at Playbox Veil Done," loc. cit.

student and bibliophile." Stecchan proved In his reviews to be a frank critic, not afraid to voice his dislikes, so that his reaction to The Two Virtues may be taken as additional evidence of the redemption of the performance after the unfortunate opening night.

Brown was evidently encouraged enough by the ultimate reception of the play to plan for its inclusion in a repertory series at the Playhouse. In any caae he did not have long after the final performance of the Sutro comedy to brood over any px'-oblems he had encountered x4ith it. He opened on the mainsfcage in The Merry., Wives of., Windsor five days later.

Production # 12, The George Bernard Shaw Cycle February 1-6, 1926

Since the Playbox had not yet performed any of the works of George Bernard Shaw, 4urice Wells decided to present a group of his short plays. Khile still performing the role of Adolphus Cusins, the professor of Greek in Major Barbara, at the Playhouse, Wells went into rehearsal to play Shakespeare in "The Dark Lady of the Sonnets" and Napoleon Bonaparte in "The Man of .Destiny." Ho also directed both of these plays. Tne third item in the cycle was "Hov He Lied to Her Husband," in which Wells did not appear.

Staging

In the staging of the Shaw Cycle, the opposite-end or "turnabout" arrangement was once again used. As Wells has described the locations of the settings, "The Dark Lady of the Sonnets" and "How He Lied to Her Husband," the first two plays on the program, were preeented at the east end of the Central Room. "How He Lied" made use of the fireplace for its domestic scene.[53]

The first two plays took approximately an hour, For "The Man of Destiny,' which probably came after an intermission, the audience were required to turn their seats around to face the west end. The set for the final play was the common room of an inn, with guests' quarters assumed to be upstairs. Playing a woman disguised as a man, Lenore Shanewise made her entrance down the staiycase at the rear of the West Room. An audience member, Roger Stanton, recalled that a table was in the center of the West Room, and that "pretty nearly all of the action was in the West Room."[54]

The Actors

Notable in the cast were Lenore Shanewise, Martha Allan, and Maurice Wells. Miss Shanewise, who had distinguished herself for two and a half years as a director and actress at the Playhouse, made the first of her two appearances at the Falroaks Playbox in "The I.Ian of Destiny." Inglls commented:

[53]Interview with Maurice Wells, June 7, 196l.
[54]Interview with Roger Stanton, August 15, 196l.

> With all that customary ability of acting, declamation and cleverness. Miss Shanewise coquetted, outwitted and defeated Hapoleon with all a woman's ruses and with a rare naturalness.[55]

Marthe Allan had recently performed her first Playbox role in .TheL Two Virtues. Visiting in Pasadena for the winter season. Kiss Allan was a member of a prominent British family residing in Montreal, Canada. In the Shaw Cycle she WB.Q The Dark Lady of the Sonnets in the play with that title, and The Wife in "Hov? He Lied to Her Husband." Inglis spoke favorably of her work: in these plays, although he was to indicate more candidly in a review a year later, that during this season her acting was not very remarkable. For Wells' portrayal of Bonaparte, Inglis reserved the height of his praise:

> To essay Shakespeare and Napoleon in the course of one evening might have ended disastrously in any handB save those of Maurice Veils. V.'hat a remarkably vivid characterization he presented! He lived the part of the cool, calculating soldier; gallant when the occasion suited him, but cruel when he wanted his own ends achieved. . . .His performance will long linger in the memory as one of the striking personalities of his stage career.[56]

Freud Takes Over at the. Playbox

With The Two Virtues and the Sha4- Cycle Brown and l4ells had each been required to perform unusual feats of theatrical legerdemain, forking simultaneously on productions at the Playhouse and Playbox, and serving as directors and leading actors in both were impressive accomplishments, especially since all had turned out satisfactorily (with the exception of the first performances of The Two Virtues). It was not the kind of thing vhich could be kept up indefinitely. As the two directors prepared in February to launch a complicated repertory season of four plays for the Playhouse, some relief in the direction of the Playbox productions was again sorely needed. The Kainstage repertory was planned to be performed throughout March, and was to be immediately followed by a massive spectacle, Kassan, the big production of the spring season at the Playhouse.

Fortunately a source of relief appeared, or rather re-appeared in February. It was Ralph Freud, returned from the road, who was ready to become active once more in the Pasadena theatre. He could not immediately be taken back into his position as Assistant Director, for what reason the records of the Playhouse do not make clear. He therefore must have worked gratuitously for both the Mainstage and the studio theatre. As an actor he Joined the cast of Hedda Gabler, one of the Playhouse repertory plays. As a director he took over the producing of the three plays t-rhich made up the balance of the Playbox season, In this way Freud became truly involved in flexible and central stag ing, an interest which he continued to pursue in later years. He became the first

[55] Alexander Inglie, Three Dramas by fhaw are Presented," Pasadena Star-News, February 2, 1926.
[56] Ibid.

manager of the Herkimer Playbox in 1930, and founded an important flexible theatre at the University of California in Los Angeles in 1942,

Freud's Background

Before treating of the plays directed by Freud at the Playbox, it is necessary to Bay something about his background. Two years older than Wells, Freud was born in England on August l4, 1901. Both his parents were connected with the theatre, his mother as an actress and his father as a theatrical financier. Settling in the United

States in 1908, the family made Detroit their home during Ralph's high school years.[57]

While in high school, Freud wrote two operettas and became associated with the amateur Detroit Theatre Guild as an actor and director. His first professional engagement came during his two years at Detroit Junior College, when he worked during summers with the Bonstelle Stock Company. There he had the opportunity to act with such members of the troupe as Katherine Gornell, Ann Harding, Prank Morgan,

Winifred Lenihan, and Guthrle McClintock. When Jo Mielziner left his position as stage manager of the company, Freud took hi is place*[58]

Like Wells, Freud did not complete his college education. He finished the two year course at the Junior College, and then in the fall of 1920 enrolled at the University of Michigan. "I didn't attend with great regularity," Freud has explained, "because I was too intensely interested in theatre. At that time there v?as not enough theatre opportunity offered at the University, "[59]

It was in September, 1921, that Freud first met Gilmor Brown. The Pasadena director had gone to Detroit to perform aa an actor, in company with Sam Hume and Irving Pichel, in a aeries of playa performed in conjunction with the Detroit Syn4phony Orchestra Association. Upon making the acquaintance of Brown, Freud took him out to the University of Michigan to talk to a group of the students. Freud became quite interested In Brown's account of the Pasadena Playhouse.

Fortuitously Freud's parents decided to take a trip to California during the season of 1921-22. Coming out with them, Freud was aoon appearing at the Playhouae. In March, 1922 he performed in a Chinese play, Yellov; Jacket, and In April he had the lead In Mollere's farce, Sganaralle, After this, the family returned East, and Ralph played again with the Bonstelle Stock Company. The lapse of time before their next visit to California was not great. In the 1923-24 season they arrived in time for the stocky twentytwo year old actor to appear as Santa Clans in a Christmas show at the Playhouse. Remaining on in Pasadena, Freud soon became a prominent character actor during that season in the Playhouse, performing in a total of ten productions by the end of the following summer. During this time he was known to Playhouse audiences as Ralph Hllllar.

As a young actor Freud could perform effectively in mature character roles. He had an excellent comedy sense, with a penchant for parts that featured dry witty responses

[57]"Ralph Freud," [probably written by P. W, Hereey, the Playhouse Publicity Director] The Playhouse News, III (May 15-26, 1928), 7.

[58]Ibid.

[59]Interview with Ralph Freud, April 13, 1961.

and "double take" reactions. Maurice Wells recalled that In some ways the actor's work resembled that of Frank Morgan with whom Freud had worked in Detroit.[60] Cloyd Dalzell had high praise to report;

> Ralph Freud was not only a fine director but also about the finest actor at the Playhouse. He was remarkably inventive with business.[61]

Freud's first opportunity in direction came in the summer of 1924, when he assisted Brown on a production of W. S. Gilbert's comedy Engaged. He was not a paid staff member at that time. It was during this Bummer that he also rendered much useful service in the preparation of the Playbox. Freud became a member of the Playhouse staff in the fall of 1924, apparently replacing Wells as Assistant Director.[62] Occupied with assisting in the direction of Playhouse shows and appearing constantly in them that season, he did not have a great deal to do with the Playbox after its opening. At the conclusion of the play On the Hiring Lj-ne on tferch l4, 19254 he took the first of a number of subsequent leaves of absence from the Playhouse. On this occasion he left in order to view the theatrical scene in Europe. In July he was back at work at the Playhouse, only to leave once again in late October, The Star-Hews reported;

> It will be sad news to his many local admirers to learn that he is soon to leave Pasadena for a time to gain some theatrical experience on "the road.'[63]

In December he was playing in a production in San Francisco.[64] In February, 1926, Freud returned to Pasadena.

Freud's Versatility.–Freud impressed his associates at the Playhouse with his remarkable versatility. In addition to hi8 skill as an actor and director, he had definite aptitude for "set designing, writing, photography, and sketching.[65] To this list should be added general carpen

try, scene painting and construction. As the Playhouse Mews pointed out

> Freud is always busy with his hands as well as his head. He has made some of the finest photographs of sets the Playhouse has had, his woodblock prints and pen and ink sketches have been used on the covers of the Playhouse News and in the editorial columns. . , . He has turned his attention to stage sets at various times with coiranendable results, and his main duties as actor and associate director go on without interruption, On the theory that age bothers no man who has many interests in life and is busy all the flipe, Freud should live to be a million years old. . ,[66]

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[60] Interview with Maurice Wells, May 19, 1959.

[61] Interview with Cloyd Dalzell, July 20, 1961.

[62] The Pasadena Coannunity Playhouse programs from October, 1924 to the April, 1925 opening of the new El Molino building do not list Wells as a staff member. Wells apparently received no salary from the Playhouse for a good part of that season.

[63] Pasadena Star-News, October 7, 1925. [POP 6, P. 75.3

[64] Alice Haines Baskin, "From Little Theatre to Big Theatre," Pasadena Sportland, December, 1925. [POP 6, P. 152.3

[65] Ralph Freud/' op. cit., p. 8.

[66] Ibid.

Freud's Personality.–In spite of his outgoing qualities on stage, Freud was apparently not always at ease in his relations with people offstage. Mademoiselle Jeanne Richer!, who first encountered Freud around 1927 or 1928 recalled that in those years

> Freud had been exceedingly shy. It was very hard for hir to meet new people. I used to see him but he never spoke to me.[67]

This impression was also shared by a writer for the Playhouse News.

> It is as an actor only that the public knows Freud, for he is self-effacing, somewhat shy for the reason that he has never yet taken himself seriously. His seriouB moments he spend a with hi a characters, and with his numerous hobbies. If he has any temperament he shaves it off every morning. He anuses himself and others with sllght-of-hand tricks, card tricks, and other little foibles. With a sense of humor that is delicious at times, and at others illuminating, he animates every group he is with, and yet makes no effort whatever to be the 'life of the party? Usually he is too busy covertly watching others and too interested in what they are saying or doingif of any value.[68]

Production # 13. The Mollusc March 1-6, 1925

The Play

Freud's first directing effort at the Playbox was a play which has now fairly well disappeared from the current theatre repertory, but which was a popular piece in the first quarter of the century,

First performed in 1907, The Mollusc by Hubert Henry Davies was a fairly conventional well-constructed English domestic comedy. It made no pretensions to literary qualities or sophistication. The reason for selecting it for the experimental theatre must have been to add "balance" to the season. It was also particularly well suited to the intimacy of the Playbox.

The story told in the play is a simple one. Mrs. Baxter, a pleasant but lazy woman, has managed to convince herself, her husband, and their young governess, that she Is too 111 to perform many little chores around the household, Tom Kemp, her forty-five year old bachelor brother tries to reform her. He considers Mrs. Baxter a mollusc. He finally manages to straighten out the affairs in his sister's home as well as find himself a bride in the attractive governess. Miss Roberts,

The Staging

This play was given end staging with the acting area occupying the West Room and a portion of the Central Room. The evidence for this assignment of location came from a production script and a confirming statement by Roger Stanton.[69] The production

[67] Interview with Jeanne Richer!, February l6, 1962.
[68] 'Ralph Freud," op. cit., p. 9.
[69] Roger Stanton played Mr. Baxter in the production.

script contained references to the use of the staircase, the landing and the steps, an exterior door, a window, and movement out to the hall, all of which conformed exactly to the features of the West Room and the Central Room, Stanton confirmed the use of the West Room when he described the staging as "making use of the steps and landing" and the rear door.[70]

In the reconstruction developed from the evidence by the investigator, the audience's chairs were opposite the acting area. In order to attain sight lines so that actors on the steps and landing in the West Room would be visible, the seats may have been placed more toward the north rather than being centered within the studio.

The Set Arrangement.–As the investigator has interpreted the evidence, the set for The Mollusc was arranged as follows: below the enclosed staircase of the West Room, a "settee" was placed. It was close enough to the staircase steps for a person standing by the settee to speak confidentially to someone on the landing.[71] In this position the settee would also have been near the fireplace, forming a "conversational grouping" with a chair at the stage left end of the fireplace.[72]

The other pieces of furniture were placed downstage, just beyond the archway, so that they were actually in the Central Room. A chess table was situated at stage right. An arm chair was at the right of the table, and a straight chair at the left. The arm chair was a low, wing-backed type, placed on a diagonal facing upstage and in toward the

7"4 center.[73] At stage left, close to the first window in the north wall of the Central Room was an arm chair, favored by the lazy Mrs. Baxter. A table stood next to it.[74]

(Fig. 50.)

The director of The Mollusc worked with an acting area of considerable depth, as had been the case in the staging of The Tragedy of Nan. In order to keep the furniture within the West Room visible to the audience, none of the pieces could have been placed much to the sides of the twelve-foot-wide archway. To avoid cluttering the set and masking upstage pieces it was therefore helpful to place some of the furniture within the Central Room. There an extra five feet of width was available. One could also use a window in the north wall which would be seen by all of the audience.

A further reason for extending the setting into the Central Room would have been the desire to avoid any consideration of the arch of the West Room as a "proscenium

arch." The Playbox had been founded as a non-proscenium

theatre. None of the reviews of productions at the Fairoaks Playbox have suggested that the plays were viewed through a proscenium frame. The elimination of a stage

[70]Interview with Roger Stanton, August 15, 196l.

[71]Production script. The MolluscJ p. 84. Mr. Baxter was "on landing," Tom Kemp "crosses to settee" to whisper a question to Baxter.

[72]Ibid., p. 33. Mrs. Baxter "sits in chair by fireplace." Later, on p. 43, Mr. Baxter sat in the same chair at the fireplace to chat with Tom who was opposite him on the settee. Thus the chair would have been near the stage left end of the fireplace.

[73]Roger Stanton remembered the position of the arm chair. On p. l6 of the production script the straight chair was identified: Miss Roberts "sits on st. ch. by chess table."

[74]Production script, p. 58. Act Two began with Mrs. Baxter lounging in an armchair reading a novel, according to the published directions. A pencilled notation indicated that the chair was "near window." On p. 66 another pencilled direction indicated that Mrs. Baxter "sits chair near window." When Tom seated himself in the straight chair left of the chess table, Mrs. Baxter was close enough to her chair by the window to ask Tom to throw a book to her.

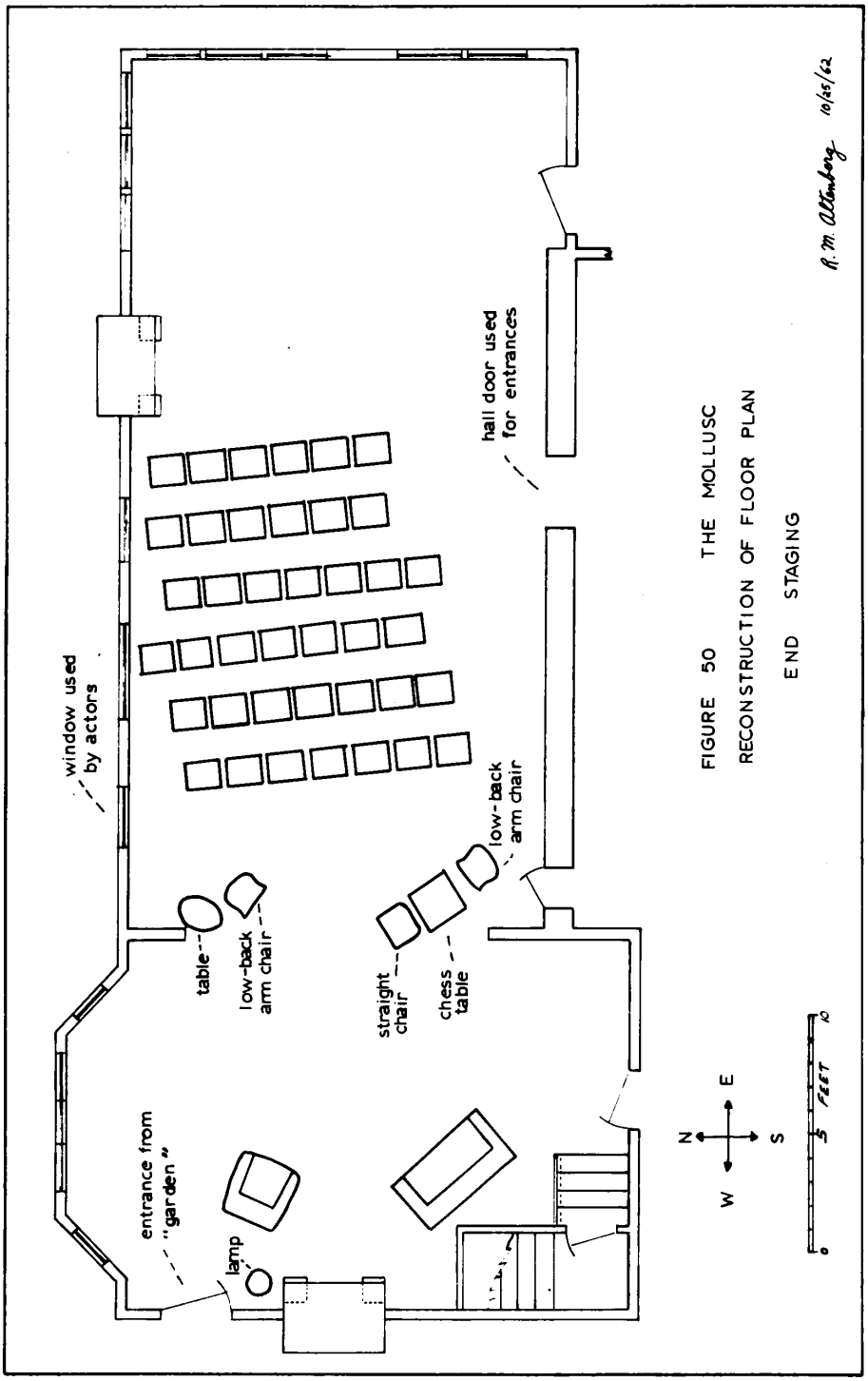

Figure 6.12: Reconstruction of end staging floor plan, *The Mollusc*.

curtain was an important means of preventing the -west archway from appearing to be a proscenium. Bringing the setting and the actors past the arch into the Central Room was an even more effective measure. In this way the underlying principle of Playbox staging was sustained. There was no formal separation of audience and actors.

Freud's acting area in The Mollusc would have occupied approximately the first seven feet of depth of the Central Room in addition to the entire depth of the West Room. His actors were therefore performing in an area twenty-two feet deep. Assuming entrances and exits through the front hall door into the Central Room there was a maximum potential depth of as much as thirty-three feet. This relatively narrow, deep acting area may be contrasted with the proportions of sets in the conventional proscenium theatre; the latter have usually possessed much greater width than depth,

Movement of the Actors.–Three entrances in the set of The Mollusc helped to maintain a fluid pattern of movement, working particularly in depth, as has been indicated above. The steps leading down from the covered staircase provided an upstage right entrance, as well as an effective level. The rear door opening on the garden of the Baxter home served as an extreme upstage left entrance. Amusing 'business occurred there when Mrs, Baxter had her would-be reformer, Itota, running out filling planters with water from an outside faucet. An extreme downstage right entrance could be made from the hall door in the Central Room,

.Hie use of this door from the front hall clearly indicated that the actors were penetrating the audience area. Any logical arrangement of seats in relationship to this set would have necesBitated the placement of three or four rows of seats .west of the hall door. Thus an actor entering the Central Room from the hall would have been behind the backe of possibly half of the audience. Roger Stanton remembered making such an entrance in the third act. As Mr, Baxter, the henpecked husband, he supported his malingering wife, carrying her through the hall door past the audience, and finally depositing her on the settee in the West Room.[75] 'One published stage directions called for an entrance down a staircase, but Freud's staging created an even funnier movement. The greater distance to be covered heightened the absurd picture created by the two actors.

Evaluations of the Direction

H. 0. Stechhan found the production lively and entertaining. He noted that the play was especially well served by the extreme intimacy of the Playbox:

> Presented under novel conditions, the comedy seemed to take on a new significance, for it really is a play of the little theatre being BO tenuous in quality as to get lost in a large area.[76]

Inglis reiterated his strong belief in the especial suitability of domestic comedy for the Playbox, He observed:

> Playbox productions of the domestic comedy variety are the plays Which find the Connaunity Players revealing extraordinary capabilities. 'The

[75]Stanton, loc. cit.

[76]H. 0. Stechhan, California Graphic, March 20, 1926. [POP 6, p. 240.3

> simplicity of the settings; the naturalness of the environment; the wholly logical relationships of the players which are brought about by the complete lack of theatrical methods; all these conspire to make the domestic drama a correlative of the Playbox.[77]

For Rreud's first Playbox direction the reviewers meted out praise. Stechhan was pleased with the restraint imposed upon the acting by the director. "By holding the action to a definite point," he wrote, "this degree of concentration helped to overcome the chief objection to what might be termed the close-up stage. That is exaggeration. At all times the group kept well within the picture."[78]

The Acting

The Mollusc required e cast of only four actors. The leading role of ?.8. Baxter was played by Cloyd Dalzell, who according to Inglis, "brought an extremely vivid artistry to the part . . . carrying through the simpering ridiculous dialogues without developing the play into farce."[79] Marthe Allan showed continued improvement as an actress in the role of Wise Roberts:

> Miss Allan, since her early appearance with the players here, has been gradually enhancing in dramatic lore and the very finished performance she gave laBt evening stands out notably ae the fineat thing she has yet accompli shed.[80]

Stechhan praised her excellent diction?

> Iferthe Allan's Miss Roberts was a delight because of her mellifluous English. Seldom does one hear such an organ on our stage, professional or otherwise[81]

As Mr. Baxter, Roger Stanton found a part in which he could relax to a greater extent from his self-described stiffness. He brought a sparkle into hia acting which had not existed before. In one performance he particularly hit hie stride, so that Gilmor Brown came to him the next day, and commented "I understand that eomethinf; really happened last night." According to Stanton, Brown was not given to tossing praiae indiscriminately to actors.[82]

Production # 14. The Great Galeoto March 29April 3, 1926

Freud's next production at the Playbox was a very different type of play from any previously performed at the studio theatre. The drama selected was The Great Galeoto

[77] Alexander Inglis, "Drama Suited to Playbox Methods," Pasadena Star-News, March 2, 1926, p. 15.
[78] Steehhan, loc cit.
[79] Pasadena Star-News, loc. cit, [PB I, p. 30.3]
[80] lbid.
[81] Stechhan, loc¡ cit.
[82] Stanfcon, loc. cit.

by the nineteenth century Spanish playwright-mathematician, Jose Echegeray. Written in l88l, the drama had a somewhat florid style, which was kept in check by Spanish formality. Inevitably, it contained the motif of the preservation of honor. In a sense the play was related to thesis drama, since it made a great point of demonstrating the disastrous effects of gossip,

The Story

The protagonist in the story is a young poet, Ernest, who has been living in the home of a family friend, Don Julian. Insidiously the gossip of the town has begun to link him romantically with Teodora, his benefactor's beautiful young wife. In consternation, Ernest moves out of the house. Despite their actual innocence, the two young people are the continued target of the gossip of the town.

At a cafe Ernest overhears a viscount malign the reputation of Teodora. Ernest strikes him, an action which brings forth the viscount's challenge to a duel. Don Julian, hearing of the intending duel, and wanting to believe in the innocence of Ernest, fights with the viscount and is critically wounded. Brought to the young man's apartment, .which is near the dueling place, Don Julian discovers his wife there. She actually came to plead with Ernest to avoid the duel, but her dying husband believes her guilty of other motives,

When the unforgiving Don Julian dies, his brother (aptly named Don Severe) attempts to drive Teodora from her home. Ernest protects her. Since the town's goesip has insisted that he has been her lover, he now accedes to its pandering will. He leaves with Teodora. Society has become another Galeoto.

It was Galeoto who arranged an illicit affair between Queen Guinevere and Sir Lancelot.

The Staging at the Playbox

The Playbox program listed three sets for the play: Ernest's room in Don Julian's villa, used in the prologue 5 the drawing room of Don Julian's house, the set for Acts One and Three; Ernest's rooms in a cheap lodging house, the set for Act Two. Mo further information has been found concerning the staging of the I4iroaks Playbox presentation. Some light may be shed, however, by a review of the production as given in the Recital Hall of the Playhouse, Presented in this large room as a special attraction for the members of the Playhouse Association, the drama enjoyed a three-day run in its new location. Ihis second run of the play occurred two weeks after the original performances.

The Staging at the Recital Hall

Referring to the presentation at the Recital Hall as "the Playbox production of ... 'The Great Galeoto,'" ?'8. Baskin contrasted it to the usual Mainstage production. She described this Playbox presentation as an exaaiple of "bare 'laboratory. methods, stripped of all extraneous aids to illusion, such as footlights, sets and propertles of anything but

the roost sketchy character." In the Recital Hall the three scenes required for the production were already in place before the draina began. No sets were shifted during the performance, 4e extreme simplicity, the spareness of the settings, were revealed in the critic's list of the furniture and properties; in Ernest's room in Don Julian's house, there were two chairs, a table with a lamp and a large book on it, and a casement window unit. Don Julian's drawing room made use of candelabra, a settee and a chair. 15o suggest Ernest's quarters in a cheap lodging house, Freud had used only a chair and a table. On the table were a book and two photograph frames.[83]

There is no way to determine from Mrs. Baskin's description whether the "simultaneous setting" plan with all the sets in place at the opening of the performance had also been used at the Fairoaks Playbox, It was most probable, however, that the same snail groupings of furniture had been used at the studio theatre as at the Recital Hall. A parallel problem with a raulti-set show existed in The Discovery earlier in the season. Wells described its little scenic groupings as "vignette-type sets," Such a term would appear to have been equally appropriate for the sets of The Great Oaleoto.

At the Reoital Hall, the actors took their places in darkness, since no curtain was used, ?fc.s. Baskin revealed that in "certain parts of the play the action took place from and among the audience." The effect upon the audience was "the stripping away of the accustomed sense of fictitiousness." In other words a greatly heightened sense of actuality permeated the events of the play. An example was the scene in which the wounded Don Julian was carried in. Mrs. Baskin reported that "there is a very shuddering ini Qh

presslon of being in the room with actual tragedy."[84] As Freud has since remarked, "We weren't sure whether we were establishing any aesthetic distance."[85] Apparently the physical closeness of the audience, their virtual placement within the acting areas of the play, made the happenings of the play seem a part of the spectators. own immediate world. The boundary between art and reality was almost overstepped. Baskin's statement that parts of the play took place "among the audience," may indicate that perhaps a form of horseshoe staging was employed at the Recital Hall, and by further inference at the Playbox.

The Acting

'The great Qaleoto was a definite challenge to the Playbox performers. While it has been called a "tragedy in the grand style, "[86] its plot and dialogue could easily have trapped the actors into an overblown and florid style of playing. In an intiiaate theatre the effect upon the audience might then have been comical rather than dramatic. long soliloquies and innumerable asides in the play were relics of an older style of writing which required careful handling, Freud guided his actors well past most of these traps, "All of the players sensed the possibilities of the play for melodrama," Inglis reported/' and kept it well out of that category." He urged, however, that "much of the soliloquiz-

[83]Hie Star-News Critic, Pasadena Star-Ne-ws, April 16, 1926.
[84]Star-Hews Critic, loc. cit.
[85]Interview with Ralph Freud, April 8, 196l.
[86]Jose Echegeray, The Great Qaleoto [Introduction by Elizabeth R Hunt 3. p. XlT

ing might be cut."[87] The absence of any adverse comment on the delivery of the asides suggests that these were acceptably unobtrusive or were omitted. At times lines were delivered too rapidly, [88] probably in an attempt to maintain tempo in the long speeches scattered throughout the play. In general the actors used restraint in their vocal delivery. As Mrs. Baskin noted:

> Another general tendency is to keep the voices at conversational pitch. Nothing would be more out of taste than any tendency tox.'ard ranting.[89]

The Actors.–This play, like its predecessor, required a small cast, six actors in all. In the leading role of Ernest was Mervin Williams, whose not-completelymatured romantic acting style Inglis had previously described. Ernest was the last of Williams' four roles at the studio theatre. Of the performance by the twenty-yearold actor, Inglis wrote:

> He evidenced in the part an unsuspected maturity, the Indefinable thing which has hitherto been lacking in his performances. He stood out last night as an actor of unusual artistry ending those gropings after understanding which have persisted with him throughout his previous parts. Last night, it was patent that he knew, intuitively appreciated, those subtle shades of discrimination in thought and character which the author so essentially required.[90]

Mrs. Baskin was not as impressed as her colleague by Mervin Williams' acting in this play. Her comment on his performance as seen at the Recital Hall was the cryptic remark:

> Ernest is a new opportunity for the youthful talent of Mervin Williams.[91]

Of the others, Helen Jerome Eddy appears to have been outstanding as the maligned wife, Teodora, creating a "tragic and pathetic figure." Baskin noted especially her "beautiful plastic poses" suggesting that the actress' film experience "would seem to have developed an especial sense of the value of posture and expressive restraint of pantomine."[92]

Making his first Playbox appearance in the role of Don Julian was Edgar Lear. Inglis commented approvingly on the nineteenth century manner which Lear displayed in his acting:

> Edgar Lear, with that rare gift of voice and gesture is an actor wholly uncommon to American types. He retains those reminders of the old school that made acting truly great in England.[93]

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[87] Alexander Inglis, Pasadena Star-News, April 9. 1924.
[88] Ibid.
[89] The Star-News Critic, loc. cit.
[90] Inglis, loc. cit.
[91] The Star-News Critic, loc. cit.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Inglis, loc. cit.

Lear was actually a Los Angeles psychiatrist and neurologist, whose real name was Dr, Cecil Reynolds, A close friend of Charles Chaplin and other theatre and film luminaries, the doctor had a tremendous desire to be an actor but still clung to his medical practice.[94] He appeared in two productions at the Playbox and five at the Playhouse between 1924 and 1927.

Publicity on Central Staging at Playbox

After The Great Oaleoto had finished its Recital Hall run on April 17, a LOB Angeles columnist wrote an article describing the central staging technique at the studio theatre. Prompted by the need to write a piece connected with Shakespeare's birthday. Harry Carr of the Los Angeles Times provided a most explicit description of theatre-inthe-round style at the Playbox. He pointed out its connection with the Shakespearean theatre in which "part of the audience sat on the stage." His description follows;

> This interesting theatrical experiment in the Playbox Theatre in Pasadena very strongly hints to us what acting must have been like in Shakespeare's time,
>
> TOUCHING THE AUDIENCE
>
> The Playbox isn't the Community Theatre as many people think. It is literally a theatre in a parlor. The audience sits in the living room of what used to be an ordinary bungalow; and the actors perform the play at arms length from the audience. Right in the middle of the same room.
>
> This brings back something of the condition of Shakespeare's time when part of the audience sat on on the stage.
>
> CAN'T YELL
>
> It brings into being an entirely new stage technique, although as I say it is probably the oldest technique in the world.
>
> Acting of the modern stage is built like a painting in a frame. That is to say, designed to be seen entirely (and heard) from one sideone angle. This Playbox technique is more like sculpture. It is directed at an audience entirely surrounding the actors.[95] [underlining not in original.]

Carr's statements about the Playbox would suggest that he knew of at least several centrally staged plays at Brown's Intimate theatre, although the columnist did not specify which ones he had seen. By this date, April 21, 1926, fourteen productions had already been given at the Playbox. The available evidence would seem to rule out central staging for twelve of them. Of the remaining two, there is positive evidence for central staging of "Desire," given in the first season. The scant evidence concerning The Two Virtues has neither confirmed nor contraindicated a theatre-in-the round presentation.

[94] Interview with Ralph Freud, May 10, 1961.

[95] Harry Carr, "The Lancer," Los Angeles Times, April 21, 1926. [PB I, p. 34.1

At the time Carr prepared his column he could not have seen, therefore, more than two Playbox productions in the central staging form. He may have seen rehearsals, however, of the production scheduled to open at the Playbox a few weeks later. A contemporary description of the performance of that play. The Dragon, has revealed the use of central staging.

Production # 15. The Dragon May 3-8, 1926

3?or The Dragon, the very next production following Carr's description, Freud employed central staging. The evidence for this will be discussed below.

The play by Lady Gregory had been produced by Brown at the University of Southern California in the preceding summer. Dubbed a "fantastic comedy," it was essentially a burlesque of Irish legends and fairy tales. Ancient Celtic prophesies and deeds of daring were reduced to the level of absurdity by placing them In a very trivial atmosphere.

The Story

The comedy takes place In the castle of a very petty duffer of a king whose main adventures occur at the dinner table. Regrettably his new Queen rules over his diet with a firmly held scepter. Pate soon strikes at the court when an old astrologer predicts that the King's daughter, the flighty seventeen-year-old Princess, will be devoured by a Green Dragon within a year. To prevent this frightful prospect the Queen urges that they speedily marry off the Princess so that she will have a husband to defend her. Various unlikely candidates appear, a Cook being most highly favored by the King. Finally the Dragon arrives, but turns out to be a reformed creature who is revolted at the idea of eating people. He prefers coconuts.

The Staging

In his review of The Dragon H. L. Stechhan seems to have clearly described the central-staging form. He wrote of the play that it was:

> . . . performed in the intimate confines of a studio, with people sitting all around the four walls and the action unfolding In the center. . . .[96] [Underlining not in original.]

Roger Stanton, who played the role of the King's counsellor, remembered that the action took place both in the West Room and the Central Room. "I recall having come from the west into the Central Room, where most of the audience were seated," he stated,[97]

[96]H. 0. Stecchan, "Little Theatre Doings Here and Elsewhere," California Graphic, May, 1926, p. 9. fPCP 7, P. 78.]

[97]Interview with Roger Stanton, August 15, 1961.

A third piece of evidence concerning the staging was a copy of the script used in the Fairoaks Playbox production which contained a diagram of part of the set and notations for positions and movements of the characters.[98]

From this script some details concerning the setting and the staging plan were obtained.

The Setting.–For the First Act Freud had placed a small table in the West Room very close to the arch and slightly south of the center of the opening (Fig. 51). He put three chairs at the table, one at each end, north and south, and one west of the table. (That is, above the table when viewed from the Central Room.)

In the Central Room there were a throne[99] and a sofa[100] according to the pencilled notations in the script, The exact positions for these could only be guessed,

Positions and Movement.–The actors entered the scene through the rear corridor door into the West Room, and from the front hall door into the Central Room. These entranceways were designated respectively in the script as "enter little room R" or "R," using the old system of designating doors, and "big room R,." The rear exterior door in the West Room may also have been used, but there was no clear evidence for this.

In the opening scene of Act One most of the action took place around the table in the West Room, at which the King had surreptitiously attempted to consume delicacies. A diagram (Fig. 52) showed the positions of the characters at the moment in the first act when the Princess was pleading .with the King not to send her away to be married. The King sat in a chair north of the table. The Princess knelt at the feet of the King. The Queen stood close beside the King, while the counsellor, Dall Olic, was at the northern edge of the archway. On the opposite side (at the south), the Nurse stood watching the Princess make her plea.

Just after this moment the focus of attention swung into the Central Room, as the Gatekeeper entered through the hall door announcing, "There is company at the door. . . . Servants and a company of women and one that would seem to be a Prince." The Princess quickly left the group to prepare herself for the visit, exiting through the door in the West Room.[101] Soon the timid Prince of the Marshes and his two aunts came into the Central Room,[102] Moving toward the throne in the Central Room, the Queen invited the aunts to be seated.

At the beginning of Act Two, the Murse and the Princess were sitting on the sofa in the Central Room.[103] The Nurse tried to comfort the girl who had become despondent over the prophesy that a Dragon would eat her. Determining to keep up her courage the Princess left the room.

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[98]This copy contained the signature of Theresa A. Maloy inside the front cover. Miss Haloy had played the role of the Queen in Gilmor Brown's production of The Dragon at the University of Southern California. She had apparently returned her copy of the play to Brown who later made it available for the Playbox production.

[99]Playbox production script. The Dragon, p. 32: "Queen goes to throne,"

[100]Ibid., p. 51. "Act Two, Scene: The same. Princess and Nurse." Above the published words "Princess and Nurse" is the word "sofa," written in pencil.

[101]Ibid., p. 31.

[102]Ibid., p. 32.

[103]Ibid., p. 51.

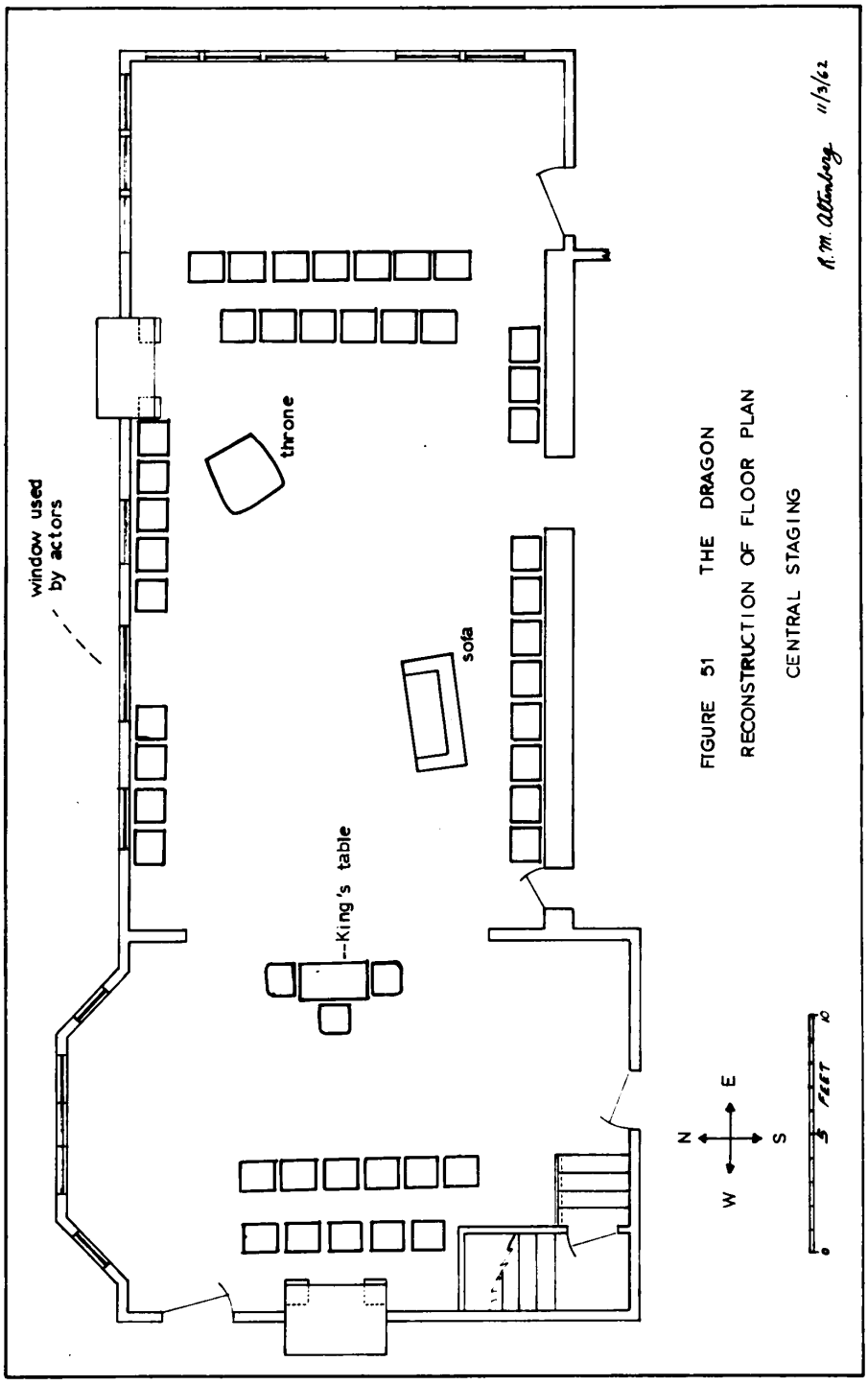

Figure 6.13: Reconstruction of central staging floor plan, *The Dragon*.

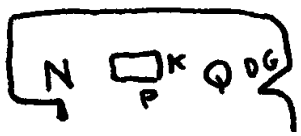

Figure 6.14: Diagram in Playbox production script of The Dragon, p. 30. The table is placed near the archway of the West Room.

Entering through the door into the West Room,[104] the Dall Glic played the next brief scene with the Murse. .Bits was followed by the entrance of the Queen, also through the door of the Vest Room.[105]

The production script provided no further directorial notes. From the above scanty bite of information, it may be seen that the play was staged in depth, with actors moving back and forth through the West and Central Rooms. In the West Room the furniture of the set was placed close enough to the arclway so as to permit audience seating to the rear. All the information on the staging appears consistent with the presence of the audience along four walls of the Playbox studio.

Critical Evaluation of the Staging.–H. 0. Stechhan was frankly critical of both the intimacy of the Playbox and the central staging technique so far as the production of The Dragon was concerned. "One needs perspective and illusion to lull him off to dragon-land" he pointed out, conditions which did not exist, he felt, when the spectator could see other members of the audience surrounding the actors. He stated hie complaint in this manner;

> When performed in the intimate confines of a studio with people sitting all around the four walls and the action unfolding in the center, there is no chance to forget yourself and realize you are watching a whimgey.[106]

The noises from the street didn't help either, especially the "pounding of the big P.E. cars [street cars] as they thunder by Just outside."[107] Of the costumes and other visual effects, Stechhan spoke favorably:

> .Hie production was quite elaborate and prettily costumed. At least it filled the eye of him who found it a bit hard to follow the rest.[108]

The Acting

Alexander Inglie considered the performance of this Irish fantasy amusing and well controlled. "The play ie like an old fashioned fairy tale," he wrote, "that has been

[104]Ibid., p. 53.
[105]Ibid., p. 54s "R small room.
[106]Stechhan, pp, ci t.. p. 9.
[107]Ibid.
[108]Ibid., p. 17.

humanized with the foibles and weaknesses of folks." [109] The critic described the performance as dominated by the comic element.

> So cleverly is the comic element handled by the playera that it never becomes a farce at all, but is truly a 'fantastic comedy.' Broad effects that could become ludicrous only become exaggerated comedy, rich, delicious comedy smacking of the grotesque and of caricature, but always within the limits of genuine comedy.[110]

Ralph Freud played the King in a manner reminiscent of Old King Cole, merry "in his own lugubrious way." Belle Mitchell, a professional actresa, created in the Queen a "stern, hard hearted variety of woman whose best visions have ever practical aims." Lurene Tuttle, as the seventeen year old Princess, was according to Inglie, the center of the play, giving a brilliant performance:

> The wayward fancies of maidenhood and youth, the sudden bouyancles, and the sudden despairs, the ready tears, and the equally ready laughter of a young woman who is yet a child were offered with a rare and exquisite artistry.[111]

Stechhan, who had spoken adversely of the central staging, also did not favor the style of the actors in this production. He called The Dragon

> , . . one of thQBe highly fanciful things emerging from the folk lore period, that listen 'well. as fairy tales, but are hardly intended for present day American audiences.[112]

Stechhan conceded that it was possible that a performance of the play by the Abbey Theatre might make it a bit more palatable entertainment. The Playbox actors, however, didn1! have the right Irish spirit to put the play over for

> When attempted by Southern Califomians who haven't the twinkle in the eye, the gift for foolin' characteristic of the soul of Erin, and a bit of blarney in their voices, it becomes rather sad and soggy fare.[113]

The Second Season Concludes

With the end of the run of The Dragon on May 8, 1926 the second season of the Playbox concluded. While the season had been well received, there was a serious doubt in Brown's mind as to the feasibility of continuing the enterprise. The reason lay in the conflicts which had cropped up during the year between the demands of the Playhouse and the operation of the studio theatre. Later that year Brown explained the problem in these words:

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[109]"At the Playbox" anonymous review of The Dragon, Style of A. Inglia. Pasadena Star Heg, circa May 4, 19?6, [PB I, p. 34.]
[110]Ibid.
[111]Ibid.
[112]Stechhan, loc. pit.
[113]Ibid.

> In June at the end of a very strenuous season it seemed impossible to open the Playbox again this year; not that there was any lack of response from the public, but because the directors felt themselves unable to keep up the necessary artistic level of performance and carry on their numerous duties at the Community Playhouse at the same time. The Playhouse must of necessity come firstthat is as it Bhould be.[114]

Freud had relieved the burden by taking over the last three productions of the season, but there was no assurance that he vould be on hand for the ensuing year. On May 15 the Board of Directors of the Playhouse had taken up the question of engaging Freud as an Assistant Director. The Board voted to approve any decision made by Brown on the matter.[115] Apparently the question still was not Bettled in June. No subscriptions had yet been solicited for the next season.

Complicating the problem of making plans for the Playbox was a trip to Europe to which Brown had been looking forward. He -was to leave Pasadena at the end of July, accompanied by Wells. Freud was married in July, 'which may have had some bearing on his plans for the coming season. In any event, he took an assignment to be Assistant Director at the Playhouse during the weeks of Brown's absence in August, September, and October. At some point an agreement was also reached to have Freud become an Associate Director for the 1926-27 season, a promotion which roust have included the appeal of a salary increase. The availability of Freud to participate in the direction of Playhouse productions meant that the Mainstage burden would be sufficiently lightened for Brown to continue the Playbox. He indicated this when he wrote:

> Now with the valuable addition of Mr. Freud to the Playhouse staff, it becomes possible to once more4reopen this unusual experiment in intimate drama.[116]

Brown had made the decision to go ahead with a new season at some time before he reached New York on his way to Europe in August. Stopping in at the office of The Billboard, the prominent theatrical trade periodical. Brown revealed his plans for the Playbox. The Billboard announced that "The Playbox that interesting venture of the intimate theatre type will continue, though only four plays will be given this season.[117]

During September or October, while Brown was touring the theatres of Europe, a prospectus for the season was sent out to past Playbox subscribers, promising five rather than four plays,

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[114]"The Playbox Re-opens," printed prospectus for the Playbox season of 1926-27. [PB I, p. 38.3

[115]Minutes of the meetings of the Governing Board, Pasadena Community Playhouse Association, May 15, V)4'

[116]'The Playbox Re-opens," loc. oil.

[117]The Billboard, August 21, 1926, p. 39. [POP 7, P. 174.3

Chapter 7

THE THIRD SEASON

The Third Season Opens

The first production of the 1926-27 season was a little known Oerraan play scheduled to open November 15. Since it was to be directed by Wells, with Brown as overseer, it was imperative that the team arrive back in Pasadena sufficiently in advance of the opening date. Always fond of surprising people. Brown had not told anyone at the Playhouse the exact date for his return from Europe*

On the night of October 18, Freud was busy in the Playhouse directing his production of The Fanner's Wife, Dissatisfied with the work of the actors, Freud chastised his oast saying, "If Gilmor Brown were here to see this rehearsal he*d take the next train back to New York." Suddenly a voice rang out from the darkened balcony of the theatre, "Oo on with the second act." As the Star-News reported the event, "Gilmor Brown was back in the Community Playhouse without so naich as telling a soul that he was there."[1]

In Germany Brown had come across the play which was to open the third season He set Wells to work on it immediately after their return to Pasadena. It had the curious title of '"Rie Trackwalker's Child."

Production # l6. "The Trackwalker's Child" November 15-20, 1926

'She first play of the new season, "The Trackwalker's Child" was the work of a German writer, Alice Stein, Inglis called it a well-constructed piece, moving steadily toward a strong climax, but marred by defective motivations. This he attributed to the didactic aims of the playwright,[2]

[1]Pasadena Star-News, October 19, 1926. [POP 7, p. 195.3

[2][Alexander Inglis] "At the Playbox," Pasadena StarNews. circa November l6, 1926. [PB I, p. 39.3

The Story

The plot as described by Inglis was as follows:

> In a trackwalker's hut on a railroad in Southern Germany, Ewald and Mariaia live a life of dull routine. In their peasant way, they are happy. Into this environment comes Carl, a wandering minstrel and Friedel, a dancing circus girl, who have been thrown together by their life on the road. The violinist, weak with fever and hunger, dies in the trackwalker's hut, leaving the childish Friedel to the care of the railroad to 1k.[3]

Into the picture enters another man, named Dewitz, who makes love to the girl. In spite of this distraction, Priedel and the trackwalker, Ewald, become drawn closely to each other:

> Presently the dull peasant is neglecting hia duties on the track, lured by the child!shness and the quaint experiences of the circus girl. Honest Kartha is shortly being surrounded by deceit and the exposing of the tragedy that has happened in her life makes a pathetic story. The close of the play touches a note of heroic self-sacrifice. , . ,[4]

This final action, the critic observed, saved the play from "being wholly depressing."

The Staging

The only available evidence concerning the staging has been Wells' report that he used the rear door of the West Room for the major entrance into the trackwalker's hut. An unexpected incident occurred in connection with this practice of extending the action of the play to the exterior of the building. The story bears recounting since it reveals one hazard of placing a flexible theatre in a private home.

For Wells' entrance in the role of the dying mustclan, it was necessary for him to be carried up the back steps of the flood-lighted rear porch into the West Room. As Ewald, Lloyd No lan,[5] then beginning his acting with the Pasadena group, had to support the drooping Wells, as they came into the view of the audience. One night of performanoe the pair on the back porch attracted the attention of a stout lady who was walking down the street with a load of laundry under her arm. A kindhearfced member of the neighboring Hegro consnunity, she was unfamiliar with the Playbox. She ruahed up to be of assistance, thinking that Wells was in an alcoholic stupor. "The poor man!" she exclaimed as she threw her laundry down on the porch, and grabbed Wells by his other arm. In clear sight of the audience the two actors were forced to make their entrance into the studio accompanied by this new member of the cast. When the woman suddenly caught sight of the assembled audience, she cried out "Lordi" dropped her hold of Wells, and made an abrupt retreat to the porch. Retrieving her laundry, she disappeared into the night, leaving the astonished audience to interpret the meaning of the scene they had 4ust witnessed in the trackwalker's hut,

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[3] 4id.

[4] Ibid.

[5] In an interview on June 15, l$6l, Maurice Wells recalled that it was Lloyd Molan who played this part rather than Joseph Bell. Bell's name was listed on the program and mentioned in IngliB. review.

Production # 17. Anthony and Anna December 6-11, 1926

In spite of the availability of an additional director on the Playhouse staff, the practice of directing two plays at the same time continued for the Playbox producers. Relief came only from the fact that at least three people were now on hand to divide up the labor formerly done by two directors. The situation in respect to Anthony and Anna was typical enough. Immediately prior to its opening Brown was directing a play for the California Institute of Technology where he was the head of drama activities on a part-time basis, His production of Aristophanes Plutus opened there on November 30.[6] At the same time Wells and Freud were assisting Brown in preparing the Playhouse production of Amber, scheduled to begin its run on December 2.[7]

At the Playbox all three acted important roles in Anthony and Anna, which they rehearsed simultaneously with the other productions, The Playbox show opened on December 6, Wells had the ma4or share in the direction of this English comedy, and also took the male lead*[8] Brown appeared in a number of scenes and was thus on hand to offer directorial guidance during a portion of the rehearsal period prior to the dress rehearsals*

The Story

Anthony and Anna was a drawing-room comedy written by St, John Ervine, a playwright whose works Brown especially liked. In Anthony and Anna, Ervine took a cynically aroused glance at relationships between impoverished English nobility and newly-rich entrepreneurs during the years following the first world war.

Into the Inn of St. Peter's Finger, a traditional English hostelry which has seen better days, the playwright brings his characters. The place is owned "by a champion of the old order, Oeorge, a philosophic Cockney who acts as head waiter, desk clerk and 'bell hop. To the Inn come Jacob Perm, a self-made, dyspeptic American millionaire, and hie beautiful, over-indulged daughter, Anna. A stuffy British novelist named Dunwody has followed them there in pursuit of Anna's affections. In spite of Dunwoody's interest, Anna soon falls in love with Anthony Fair, a young upperclass Englishman who has been earning his living as a professional house guest. In the homes of the wealthy, "Tony" has been paid to exude charra, Anna ie eager for him to marry her, but he refuses to do so unless they receive a large monetary settlement from her father. Tony insists that he will not be forced to work at a regular job. Mr. Penn cannot countenance idleness in a son-in-law, but is finally convinced by Anna that a reform of the Englishman is imminent. She whispers to her father that once married, she will see to it that her husband goes to work,

To parallel Tony Pair's situation, the playwright introduces lady Cynthia Speedwell. In straitened circumstances this aristocratic woman is quite willing to become the wife of the brash, lower-class war profiteer, James Jago, whose sole attraction is hie wealth.

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[6]Dorothy Reeves, Pasadena Sun, December 1, 1926. [POP 7f P. 234.3

[7]Program of Amber, Pasadena Consnunity Playhouse, December 2, 1926.

[8]Interview with Maurice Wells, May 20, 1959*

He, in turn, is delighted to pay for the prestige that comes with Lady Cynthia's title. Thus Ervlne probes into the fallibility

of both the buyers and the sellers of aristocratic prestige

The Staging

Por Anthony and Anna Veils employed turnabout staging. During the first act the audience was seated in the Central Room, facing toward the west. At the conclusion of the act they were asked to turn their chairs around. They faced toward the east for the remainder of the play.

The comedy required two sets: the dining room of the inn used in Act One, and the sitting room used in Act Two and Three.

In the dining room set, which was situated in the West Room, Veils placed three tables for the guests, two in a downstage position at right and left near the arch, and one upstage center, close to the fireplace. The natural features of the room fitted the playwright's concept of the action surprisingly well. Ervlne had Indicated an entrance into the room from the outside of the inn; the rear door served well for this purpose. If it remained a Dutch door (as Roger Stanton remembered it in The Mollusc) it could also have been used for the window in Act One. Wien the play opened, Fred the assistant waiter, was staring out into the street, looking for prospective customers. He could have done this through the open upper-half of the Dutch door,

Furthermore the lower portion of the door was perfect for the unconventional first entrance to Anna, who was directed to "appear at the open window," She warned, "Look out, I'm aoaAng through this way." Then according to Ervine's stage directions, she threw her legs over the window Bill (for which the lower half of the Dutch door could have been used), lost her balance, and stumbled into the rooai. Fortunately she was caught by Tony Pair.[9]

She door in the south wall, which led out to the rear corridor of the Playbox was well located for the exit to the kitchen and to the wash room of the inn. When Ralph Freud entered the scene as deorge, carrying his platters of roast beef, he undoubtedly came from the Brown family kitchen, which was directly across the hall from the West Room. Since the guests. rooms were supposed to be upstairs in the inn, the staircase of the West Room was conveniently located for the action. In the first act, Anna went up the stairs to get her father, and returned with him to have lunch in the dining room.

When the audience had performed their "turnabout" during the intermision, they were now looking at the sitting room of the inn.[10] Before them was a wall of black drapery extending across the East Alcove.[11] At the south end, a break in the drapery permitted a visible entrance from the front porch of the building.[12] The fireplace at the northeast end of the Central Room was Included in the set. Near it was a sofa or

[9] St. John Ervine, Anthony and Anna, p, 18.

[10] Interview with Ralph Freud, April 15, 196l.

[11] The Star-News Critic, Pasadena Star-News, October 54 127. In this review of the Playhouse mainstage production of Anthony and Anna, Mrs. Baskin stated that "very rauch the same simple method of effective black drapes la employed as that used originally at the Playbox." The black drapery had been used many times at the east end of the Playbox and undoubtedly had been placed there for the sitting room set.

[12] Playbox production script, Anthony and Anna, p. 53. Welle wrote a notation for Jago to enter from "outer door." From the context of the scene, this would have been the door into the East Alcove.

bench.[13] Two chairs were also used, one up center against the drapery[14] and another downstage left, by the hall door of the Central Room.[15] (Fig. 53.)

Special Effect

A special effect revealing a touch of Belasco naturalism occurred in the Second Act of Anthony and Anna, The act began with Tony standing by a window, most logically the one in the north wall, downstage of the fireplace. "Rain, rain, go to Spain," he exclaimed as he watched the water trickle down the window. Posted outside the building, a production assistant with a garden hose In hand was spraying water on the window pane. Ihls rain effect continued for aome time.[16]

The Acting

'Bie single review found by the Investigator was one by Alexander Inglis.[17] He considered the performance "so brilliant that it ie only reasonable to hope that the wider public which supports the Playhouse will be given an opportunity to see this play." The critic bestowed his greatest praise upon the acting of Ralph Freud who performed the role of the comically philosophical innkeeper, George.

> Ralph Freud predominates. His art is traced in doing little things well. . . Character acting of the highest kind emphasized his performance, which was not only sympathetic and truly realistic, but was endowed with a comprehensive regard for those qualities and traits which constitute genuine personal!ties*[18]

Wells was considered as admirable in the role of Anthony Pair, being "very suited to those parts where he walks in a hih comedy plane,"[19] Helen Jerome Eddy played the frank, outgoing American girl, while Gilmor Brown was her indulgent millionaire father. Both received favorable reactions from the reviewer. Inglis did not fail to mention once again that Marfhe Allan, who played Lady Cynthia Speedwell, had "made tremendous strides in technic and acting" since her first days with the local players eleven months before.

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[13]Ibid.i p. 43. Dunwody sat down beside Anna. The investigator has assumed therefore that a sofa or bench was used.

[14]Ibid.., p. 48. cells' note: "Anna sit chair C."

[15]Ibid., p. 47. Fair "X to chair by Door."

[16]Interview with Ralph Freud, loo, cit.

[17]"At the Playbox," Pasadena Star-News, December 7, 1926, [FB I, p. 40.] No byline was given, but the style and familiarity with British life point clearly to the work of Alexander Inglis.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Ibidt

Production # 18. "Noah's Deluge" December 20-25, 1926

Reviving the late evening performances of a special Christmas week production. Brown presented "Hoah's Deluge" from the Chester cycle as his offering for the Christmas season. He had previously directed the play for a play production class he had taught in the 1926 sunaner session at the University of Southern California,[20]

The Story

The plot of this short work followed in general the traditional biblical outline*

> God commands Koah to proceed with the building of his ark, declaring his intention to punish the sins of men by sending '?10 flood. Noah, having finished the construction of the ark, informs his wife of the fact, urging her to embark. Darae Noah prefers the company of her gossiping cronies to the comforts of the ark, and proves a shrewish wife. However, she is compelled to enter prior to the coming of the rains. Later the releasing of the raven and then th dove shows that the storms have abated and Noah and his family disembark, receiving the blessing of God for their future prosperity,[21]

The Staging

According to Ralph Freud, who performed in the play, "Noah's Deluge" was given horseshoe staging. The Ark was placed at one end of the studio, while the audience sat around three sides of the acting area, which extended out in front of the Ark.[22]

The action at the beginning of the play called for God to appear "in some high place, or in the clouds" while Moah and his family stood outside the Ark, A member of the audience recalled the delightful effect of God standing above the Ark holding out a sprinkling can.[23] In order for the Deity to be sufficiently elevated the actor playing the role had to stand on a high level within the Central Room. (ISie lower ceilings of the West Room and East Alcove would have precluded such elevation.) Moal4s family must then have been standing in the middle of the Central Room, in the midst of the audience, facing "Ood."

As the play progressed the family went through the motions of completing the Ark and bringing the numerous animals into the boat. Brown may have had them carry "parchment figures" depicting each animal, as he had done in his university production.[24]

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[20] Pasadena Morning Sun, July 28, 1926. [PCP 6, p. 141.]

[21] "At the Playbox, Pasadena Star-Sews., December 22, 1926. (PB X, p. 42J

[22] interview with Ralph Freud, April 13, 1961.

[23] Interview with Ruth Burdiok, March 29, 1962.

[24] When performed at the Vnlversity of Southern California the Pasadena Star-News of July 28, 1926 reported that the animals were represented by parchment figures carried into the Ark by the family of Noah." [POP 7i p. 141.]

When Noah's wife refused to board the Ark without talcing along a full complement of her "gossips," she separated herself from the rest of the family. She and her crony then quaffed hearty draughts from a "pottle of Malmsey," a half-gallon of sweet wine. This scene must have been staged in the middle of the Central Room, Her bibulous activity was, of course, terminated by two of her sons who forcibly carried her into the boat.

Direct Address to Audiencet The Itown Crier.–An addition to the play which was purely an invention of Brown was the presence of a town crier. The Star-Newg review reported that "Gilmor Brown, as the town crier, urging the citizens to good behavior, was a delight."[25] Presumably the crier appeared before the play began, announced its subject matter, and then exhorted respectful attention from the townspeople who were to see the pageant of "Noah's Deluge." Since the oast Included no actors performing the role of the citizens. Brown was actually addressing the Playbox audience. The arena nature of his theatre made it easy to employ this direct address to the spectators. This was one of the few instances on record in which the audience was thus brought directly into the action of a play.

The Actors

In the role of Moah, Brown cast Curtis Arnall who had mainly performed bit parts at the Playhouse, but was being given a growing opportunity in the studio theatre* Wells and Freud appeared as Noah's sons. Shorn and Ham, As Japhet, Jerome Co ray made his sole Fairoaks Playbox appearance, He was to become very much a Playhouse product, performing in seventeen Mainstage productions during the 192627 season. In later years he figured prominently in the Federal Theatre in Los Angeles and in the national offices of the U.S.O, during World War II and after. The beloved Mrs, A. H. Palmer portrayed Moah's Wife in this her second and last Playbox appearance. She died the following year, Freud's wife, Mayfair Freud, played one of the wives (not his) in the play, while his brother-in-law, Edward Murphey, had the honor of being "God." Murphey, a professionally trained singer, had been prominent in Playhouse musical productions. Gilmor Brown, as has been noted, played the town crier, a characterization which Inglis described as "a little cameo of genius," Lenore Shanewise and Helenita Lleberg played wives of Noah's sons, while Marine Allan had the role of a Gossip.

Of the cast of ten, seven were also performing in The Goose Hangs Hi4h at the Playhouse. During the run of "Noah's Deluge" they would finish their labors on the Mainstage at about eleven P.M., and drive directly over to the Playbox to put on their medieval coBtumes and makeup. Each night a small portion of the Mainstage audience who were also Playbox subscribers followed the actors in a pilgrimage to the studio theatre.

At 11:30 P.M. the Playbox performance began. The Christmas performances in the studio theatre usually ended with festive singing of carols in which the audience joined the actors.[26] This custom of the special "midnight11 Christinas performances was carried into the Herkimer Playbox when it was established in 1930 and remained

[25]"Pasadena Star-News4 loc. cit.

[26]Interview with Fairfax P. Walkup, August 14, 1962.

a tradition of Brown's intimate theatre until 1936.

Production # 19. Rosmersholm January 17-22, 1927

Rehearsals for Rosmersholm. the first Ibsen production of the Playbox, were in progress after the holiday season. In ten years of producing at the Playhouse only

three plays by toe great Horwegian writer had been performed, Ibsen's works, then as now, were not a strong attraction for an average American audience. Brown was ultimately to present many of the playwright's works throughout the years, but in 1927 he was Btill in the process of introducing Ibsen to Paaadena's theatregoera. This was part of his program to develop his audienc e, an educational procedure in which he fervently believed, and of which the Playbox was a most important facet.

The Staging

Both Maurice Wells and Lenore Shanewise, the principal actors in Rosmersholm, have stated that the acting area was at the east end of the Central Room, [27][28] Wells remembered that the audience was seated along the north wall of the studio but did not recall whether they were seated in any other section. That some of the audience were exceedingly a lose to the actors t4ells recalled most vividly, for at one performance he had to bear up under the gaze of three celebrated theatrical personalities who were visiting the Playbox; they were Morris Gest, Charles Chaplin and Max Reinhardt. They were apparently seated in the front row a matter of some inches from the actor. Wells remarked that it was difficult maintaining hie concentration with such distinguished Bpectators placed so near him.[29]

The play was listed on the program as taking place In "the Bitting roora at RosmerBholm.!t The focal area of the set, as Veils remembered it, included a table, a desk and a chair, forming a "study." These were situated in the vicinity of the hall door in the Central Room.

Inglis found Rosmershplm well suited to staging in the Playbox. Once again he observed the particular adaptability of plays .with a domestic setting to this theatre in a living room. He reaffirmed the heightened effect of "reality8' caused by the intimate production technique:

> With an uncanny art, Pasadena Community Players have captured the motiveB, moods and intentions of this unusual play and in the Playbox this week are presenting the work with a strangely vivid reality. It is peculiarly suitable for Playbox production. For in this amazing self-scrutiny to which Rosmer and Rebecca subject themselves, there seems to be logj

[27]'Interview with Maurice Wells, June 7, 1961.

[28]Interview with Lenore Shanewise, December 17, 1961.

[29]Wells, loc. cit. Two noted European dramatists were also in the group; Karl Vollmoeller, who created the scenario for The Miracle, and Rudolph Kommer. They had all been dinner gue sts of Marine Allan at the Huntington Hotel prior to the performance, according to the Pasadena StarNews, January 25, 1927.

> c al rea sons why the analysis should be done within the confines of a home, unseen4 unknown to the outside world4The effect is enhanced by the hint that the observer is being permitted to look in upon this tragedy of experience by the transparent curtain which divides the players from the onlookers. [Underlining not in original.][30]

The "transparent curtain" to which the critic referred was metaphorical, not actual.[31]

The Acting

As Rebecca West, Lenore Shanewlse played with

skill; "the unfolding of her true nature comes as a revela 32 tion, unexpected, unbelievably subtle."[32] This was the

rna4or performance of the actress-director at the Fairoaks Playbox. She apparently was able to adapt her acting to the conditions of the Playbox, although, as Wells has recalled, she did not at that time particularly like the extreme intimacy of the studio theatre.

The cast was well supplied with actor-directors, since Brown joined his associate directors Wells and Shanewise in the performance. Brown portrayed Ulric Brendel, a grandiloquent ex-tutor exuding a seedy dignity, the role was related in style to the barnstorming actor in Schoenthan's A Night Out, a part which Brown virtually made his trade-mark, acting it over and over again with great success for almost forty years. The impression he made as Brendel in the Ibsen drama was apparently not as strong, although the reviewer spoke quite favorably of his work:

> Gilmor Brown found rare scope for his romantic traits in the ne'er-do-well [sic] Brendel, preaenting a picturesque and interesting study.[33]

Reinhardt's Reaction to the Playbox.–The reaction of Max Reinhardt to the Playbox production is of interest since Reinhardt had been a twentieth century pioneer in the pursuit of "intimacy*" In addition, the reglsseur's broad knowledge of continental theatres lent especial significance to his view of the Playbox's relationship to the European scene. Reinhardt and his party attended Rosroersholm on the last night of its run, Saturday, January 22, 1927, As the Star-News reported his reactiont

> Mr. Reinhardt was quite carried away with what he saw at the Playbox, which he likened to the studio of the Moscow Art Theatre.[34]

Wells remembered Reinhardt*s comment that the acting technique was very much like that of Stanislavsky's Studio.[35] A number of parallels between the Playbox and the Moscow Art Theatre's First Studio have already been noted in Chapter III. Reinhardfc's

[30] At the Playbox," Pasadena Star-News, January l8, 1927.
[31] 4ells, loc. cit*
[32] Pasadena Star-News, loc. cit.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Pasadena Star-News4 January 25, 1927. [POP 8, p. 62.)
[35] Interview with Maurice Wells, June 7, 1961.

observation has helped to substantiate the relationship of these two "experimental theatres."

Production # 20. "Amelia" February 28March 5, 1927

In the Playbox prospectus for the 1926-27 season, Brown had announced the possibility of producing a group of Alice Riley's plays. He had previously presented a number of her one-act dramas at the Playhouse in 1922 and 1924. Instead of presenting more short plays by this writer, he scheduled a premiere at the Playbox of her full-length domestic comedy "Amelia," As a writer Mrs, Riley had developed some reputation for her children's plays, but had attained greater prominence as one of the founders and leaders of the Drama League of America. This position of eminence was reinforced by her status as the wife of the President of the Chicago Title and Trust Company.

The production of Mrs. Riley's new play was a politic move on Brown's part. She and her husband regularly spent the winter months in Pasadena, and would be on hand to view the Playbox performance. Because of her importance in the Drama League, the Star-News observed that "the Playbox production is likely to become known to every center of this organization in the country."[36] Brown's interest in cultivating the good will of Mrs. Riley proved worthwhile for the future of the Playbox. This energetic lady was extremely helpful a few years later In working with Pasadena Drama League women to arrange finances for the construction of the Herkimer Playbox.[37]

Evaluation of the Play

Mrs. Riley's "Amelia" certainly did not qualify as a representative selection for the Playbox, since It had no qualities calling for a specialized audience. Other than the "political" reasons for Its choice. It would have fitted into the repertory of the studio theatre under the category of adding "balance" to the season, as did The Mollusc in the previous season. In evaluating the script, Inglls noted that "the craft of a practiced hand ie discernible in 'Amelia. although some details of the plot will not stand too close a scrutiny**' Aside from the implausibllity of the story, the critic noted "a fine spirit of comedy. . . admirable characterizations and strong, dramatic situations," making the play "excellent entertainment."[38]

The principal performer in the production was Helenita Lieberg, She played the leading role of the forty-yearold widow, Amelia Wood. This wealthy lady was pursued by a French composer who loved money as much as music.

The Staging

Ho evidence concerning the staging of "Amelia" haa come to light except the statement in the program that the set represented the living room of a suburban home near

[36] "At the Playbox," Pasadena Star-News, March 2, 1927.
[37] 'Interview with Ralph Freud, April 13, 1961.
[38] Pasadena Star-News, loc. cit.

Chicago, It was a single set play*

Extra Productions

With the production of "Amelia" the scheduled season of five plays had come to an end. Because of "many requests . . . received for the maintenance of the regular schedule of seven productions,"[39] Brown decided to present two extra plays on a separate 43*00 subscription. The announcement was made in the program of "Amelia," stating that the plays would be given during the weeks of March 28 and April 25. Both of these were to be well known but seldom produced plays. With a child's love of secrets, Brown dropped the mystifying hint to the members that the first play would have "a surprise for you in the player seen in the principal role." The second play would "probably be 'The Wild Duck. or Tchekov*s 'The Three Sisters.*"

Production # 21. The Ship March 28April 2, 1927

The surprise which Brown had in store for his audience in the first extra play was youthful Marine Allan portraying an eighty-three-year-old woman. 'Hie drama In which she appeared was The Ship by St. John Ervine.

For this production MiBB Allan not only played an important role but also directed the play. The honor of being guest director at the Playbox was one which had previously been extended only to Helen Eddy. Brown had recognized Marthe Allan's latent ability as an actress and director, and was also aware of the value of her social position in furthering his theatres.

The Background of Marthe Allan

Marthe Allan's background included both high social standing and a limited amount of theatrical experience. She was the daughter of Sir Montague Allan, head of the Allan Steamship Company of Montreal, Canada. The family had formerly lived in England. During a more recent period of residence in the British Isles, Miss Allan had acquired a bit of theatrical background through work with the Birmingham Repertory Theatre under Sir Barry Jackson and a'season in London with Basil Dean.[40]

First arriving in Pasadena for the winter season of 1925-26, the young woman was immediately attracted to tee conffiiunity theatre group. Her initial acting took place at the Playbox in The Two Virtues in December, 192?, and at the Playhouse in Ma.1or Barbara In January, 1926. By the time of the production of The Ship In February, 1927, she had already appeared in five plays on the Mainstage and five in the Playbox.

At that time, according to Maurice Wells, she was about thirty years of age; and very slender in appearance:

[39] "Pasadena ConBBunity Playhouse News, n, yo. 18 (March 21, 1927), 14.
[40] The Pasadena CoCTnunity Playhouse News, I, Ho.22 (July 15. 1926), 10.

> She had a scrawny, very spare, boyish figure, and short bobbed blonde hair.
>
> Her personality was most attractive. She was very British with a delicious sense of humor.[41]

Wells considered her "really a very adroit comedienne."[42]

The Play

The drama which Miss Allan directed at the Playbox was one of three plays by St. John Ervine given in Pasadena that season. In December the Playbox had given Ervine's Anthony and Anna. while in February the Mainstage had offered "She Lady of Belmont,

the Ship, written in 1920, was a play which the London theatrical managers had rejected, but which had been well accepted by little theatres. Znglis reported that

> London managers declined the play on the plea that it was sad and on the assertion that it was 'above the heads' of average playgoers-a ridiculous statement. sixty times last year by little theatre groups in this country and in Great Britain. . . .[43]

The play deals with the relationships of three generations in the Thurlow family: old Mrs, Thurlow, at eighty-three wise and tolerant of others1 viewpoints; her sixty-two-year-old son, John, dynamic and domineering) and her grandson, Jack in his early twenties, rebellious and convinced of the correctness of his own viewpoints. The major conflict of the drama arises from John's desire to have his son one day take over his great shipbuilding company. The young man, who hates machinery and wants to live a "natural existence" bluntly rejects his father*s dream and quits the shipyard for the life of a farmer. Desperate to have a Thurlow heir in his company, John attempts to bribe his son's partner to ruin the farming venture,

The play reaches its climax when John becomes ill and is unable to go on the maiden voyage of his new ship, "The Magnificent." This is the vessel which the shipbuilder considers his greatest achievement. Under great pressure Jack agrees to take his father's place in the "shakedown cruise." When "The Magnificent," in the manner of the "Titanic," crashes into an iceberg and sinks, young Thurlow insists on going down with it. He feels that this is what his father would wish,

The news of hi8 son's death BO unnerves John that he prepares to shoot himself, but his aged mother convinces him that this would be untrue to the Thurlow tradition of courage under adversity. Throughout the play, old Mrs. Thurlow has tried to mediate diplomatically between the Inflexible wills of her son and grandson. How much courage it has taken for her to accept what has happened is seen when, left alone, she momentarily gives in to her grief, and then quietly recovers her self possession.

An Evaluation of the Play.–A present day reader of this play would find the dialogue and characterization handled for the most part with notable skill and restraint.

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[41] Interview with Maurice Wells, May 19, 1959.
[42] Ibidt
[43] Alexander Inglis, "Marthe Allan in *The Ship,"' Pasadena Star'-Mews, March 31, 1927.

The resolution of the plot in the third act, however, might disturb the reader. After a clear and detailed development of the conflict between father and son over the farm in Acts One and Two, Ervine suddenly telescopes events in Act Three. There is insufficient preparation for the voyage of the new ship, and for the disaster which overtakes it. The son's decision to "go down with the ship" seems very inadequately motivated.

At the time of the Playbox performance, no such misgivings concerning the structure of the play seem to have troubled the Pasadena critic. Inglis wrote of the drama:

> The play is high art. The fact that sadness and tragedy permeate it doe a not detract from the artistic beauty of its theme and unfolding. Xt ie undoubtedly the finest thing St. John Ervine has done.[44]

The critic conceded that Ervine did not in general devote sufficient effort to his dramatic writing. "If he would only give himself the time to develop his playe with the finish which their subjects deserve," Inglis stated, "he would stand as one of the greatest dramatists of the period."[45]

The Staging

The evidence diacovered concerning the staging was Bcanty. The Playbox program listed two sets; a room in John Thurlow's house, and the living room of Jack Thurlow's farm. A Third Act scene designated in the published play as taking place in John's garden was made to occur inside his house in the Playbox production*

From notations in a production script of the play and from photographs of the production, a few conclusions were reached concerning the setting for John Thurlow's home used in Acts One and Three. This set made use of the West Room and a section of the Central Boom in front of the arch-way and adjacent to the first window in the north wall. In the West Room the fireplace was used as a focal point, with a chair and tea table placed at one side and a aofa on the opposite side. Pencilled stage directions made references to the "recess" by which a chair was situated,[46] and into which the large model of the ship "The Magnificent" was placed.[47] This location must have been the area under the staircase adjacent to the fireplace., which could be approplately described as a recess.

Photographs of the production have indicated that the area at the northwest corner of the Central Room was used in Act III. An arm chair was placed close to the north end of the archway. In front of the first window of the north wall stood a floor lamp and a table.[48] This area would have been used for Scene II of Act III in place of the exterior scene which the playwright described as a corner of the garden of Thurlow's house: "The corner is sunny, and John Thurlow often goes there . . . there is a seat, shaded by a tree; in the corner, and here John Thurlow is sitting."[49]

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[44]Inglis, loc. cit.
[45]Ibid.
[46]Fairoaks Playbox production script. The Ship, p.l4.
[47]Ibid.t p. 19.
[48]See photograph. Figure 58.
[49]St. John Ervine, The Ship, p. 83.

In one of the photographs Robert Freeman, as John Thurlow, sat in the chair in his dressing gown, in this corner of the Central Room. Another picture revealed Marthe Allan as old Mrs, Thurlow standing beeide him. At this point in the play the shipbuilder was supposed to be convalescing from an illnesB.

For the placement of the set for Act Two, the living room of Jack TRiur low's farmhouse, no post five evidence has been found. It would have been possible to use the West Room for it, changing the furniture to suggest the Bhift of locale, but it would have been more conaisfcent with Playbox practice to have placed it in another part of the studio. One would expect the set, therefore, to have been situated farther east, in the Central Room, and posaibly extending into the East Alcove.

Properties: The Model of the Ship

For the model of "The Magnificent," a prop which waa ao extremely important in the drama, Marthe Allan went to the Matson Steamship Company. She was able to borrow a model of a ship which had not yet been launched. By one of the inexplicable workings of chance, the Matson ship paralled in real life the history of ita counterpart in Firvine's drama. When the Matson liner was launched it too met with a terrible accident. On its trial run the boiler exploded, wrecking the ship.[50]

The Acting

In every respect the production of The Ship was a personal triumph for Marine Allan. In his review of the production Inglls devoted almost all of his comment to the excellence of her performance as old 4Irs Thurlo'w. In his high appraisal of the production as a whole, he was, of course, also lauding her direction,

In reviews of previous productions in which Marthe Allan performed, Inglis had kept noting that she wae "improving" as an actress. He admitted, however, in hie ar tide on The Ship that in the roles she had previously taken, W.BQ Allan had "displayed a style not particularly talented," although she had obviously shown interest and enthusiasm in her work. Her acting had been marred by the constant presence of personal "'mannerisms."[51]

As the grandmother in The Ship, Miss Allan had suddenly come into her own as an actress. It was her firet real character role. The critic thought that the need to entirely lose her own identity had helped the actress di vest herself of her mannerisms. The role in any case had atruck a deep chord of response in Misa Allan, and revealed the cumulative effect of the training in acting she had been receiving in Pasadena. Inglis observed that:

> Miss Allan shows In this performance that she la a player of psychologic skill and of unequalled technical ability . . . the presentation she gives . . , places her among the best players in the local aggregation*[52]

[50] Interview with Maurice Wells, May 19, 1959.
[51] Inglis, loc. cit.
[52] Ibid.

The critic called her characterization a matured study of the old lady who believed in tolerance and moderation. "Miss Allan's study of this soul," he wrote, "is one of exquisite beauty and tenderness; one of the most charming delineations ever witnessed in the Playbox.[53] Miss Allan's fine diction was also praised.

Of the other members of the cast, the critic commented favorably on the performance of Helen Staats as John Thurlow's wife, and of Joseph Kearns as the son. Jack, Miss Staats (now Helen Staats Millikan) was another socially prominent resident who en Joyed participating in Playbox and Playhouse productions.

Inglls failed to make any mention of Dr. Robert Freeman who played the predominant role of the shipbuilder, John Thurlow. Dr. Freeman was the minister of the Presbyterian Church of Pasadena, a very distinguished civic leader, and a member of the Board of Directors of the Playhouse. He had always been greatly interested in drama, and had on a number of occasions given play-readings. He never acted on the Mainstage of the Playhouse, before or after The Ship. After this production he never again performed at the Playbox.[54] It is possible that the omission of any description of his performance was an act of critical discretion.

Production # 22. Justice
April 25-30, 1927

'POT the second extra production and the final one of the season. Brown selected neither The 4ild Puck nor The Three Sister a, possibilities mentioned in the announcement, but Galsworthy's Justice, The play was directed by 4ells, who also took the leading role of Palder.

The Story

While the plot of Justice is well known, a few details concerning it may help to clarify the discussion of the staging.

William Falder, a young clerk in a law office, falls in love with a married woraan. She has been brutally treated by her husband but cannot obtain a divorce. In desperation Palder plans to go away with her to South America. To obtain funds for the trip he forges a cheek in his employer'8 name. When the forgery is discovered, the head of the firm, who is a stickler for the letter of the law, insists on criminal prosecution. As the result of the trial, the naive, sensitive young man spends three years in prison* Broken in spirit, he finds after his release that he cannot keep a job because of his prison record. He seeks help from his former employers. VJhen a detective arrests him at the law office for having failed to report regularly to the authorities, Falder loses all hope. He jumps down a atone staircase outside the office, breaking his neck.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Records of the Actor-Director file, Pasadena Play* house library.

The Staging

The play was a multi-set show requiring five separate places of action. The Playbox program indicated the following scenes: the lav? offices of James and Walter How, the courtroom, the office of the prison warden, a corridor in the prison, and a cell.

The principal evidence for a reconstruction of the staging was a production script of the play, with diagrams of sets and notations for positions and movement in the handwriting of Maurice Wells.[55]

The law Office.–The setting for the law office was extremely simple. The diagram on page one of the production script (Fig. 54), showed a table and three chairs; one above the table, and the other two at right and left respectively. Doorways were at stage right and stage left upstage of the table, facing out toward the viewer. Downstage left of the table a doorway could be seen in a side wall.

On the hypothesis that drapery was hung in front of the East Alcove, this scene would have most aptly fitted the east end of the Central Room.[56] Openings in the drapery at the extreme right and left ends to create doorways would have been consistent with previous Playbox practice. The existing hall door was properly situated to be used for the downstage left. door, approximately nine feet from the drap cry.

The diagrams and directions for movement indicated that the doorways of the law office set were used as follows: (l) the upstage right door represented the door to the "outer office" of the law firm and was supposed to lead out of the building; (2) the upstage left door, led into the office of the law partners, James and Walter HOWJ and (3) fche downstage left door was the one into the junior clerk's room (Palder's room).

The Courtroom Set.–A diagram very sketchily drawn on the fly leaf of the production script (Fig. 55) suggested that the courtroom set may have been placed in the West Room. The diagram appeared to indicate an archway below the set, but the evidence here was not very conclusive. The diagram, however, showed the basic elements needed in the scene: at stage right, a bench; upstage center, a chair for the defendant; belox", the witness box; at stage left, the Judge's chair and enclosure.

TOien Justice was later performed at the Playhouse, a very similar courtroom set was used. The furniture and structures, however, were much more widely spread out than they were in this diagram.

The Office of the Warden.–The production script contained a diagram (Fig. 56) for the furniture in the office of the warden (or "Governor") of the prison.[57] Only a desk and a chair stage left of it were shown in the diagram. The action of the scene, however, suggested that an additional chair must have been used by Cokeeon, the chief clerk of the law office, when he begged for better treatment for Falder.

Entrances and exits in the warden's office all occurred on stage right. A note on page 66 of the production ecript indicated the presence of a door in the set. The word "door" was written in pencil next to the published directions, as follows:

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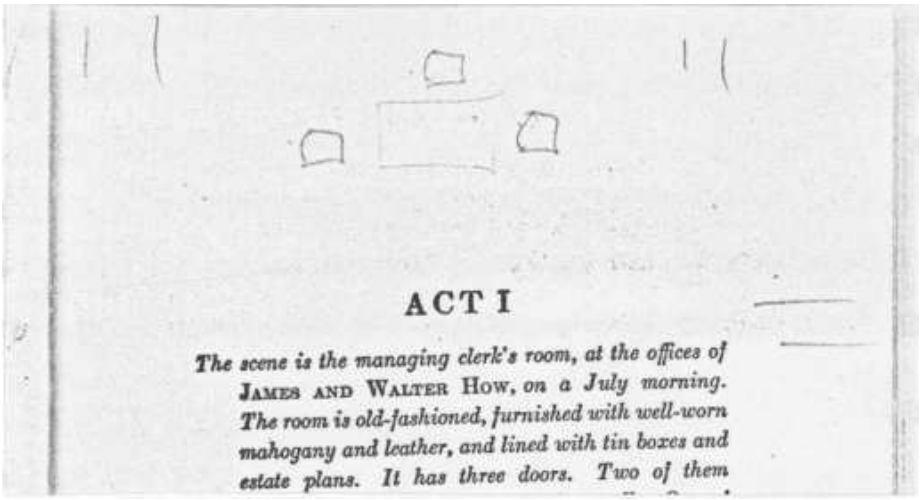
[55] "The production script of Justioe contained jottings by Wells of the names of actors for bit parts in the Playhouse production of Cyrano which opened a week before Justice. This evidence plus 'the names of actors for the Playbox cast of Justice helped to identify the script as the Playbox copy.

[56] When Justice was performed in the June repertory series for the Mains'bage, a background of curtains was used for the law office, the courtroom, and the warden's office.

[57] Production script. Justice, p. 61.



ACT I

The scene is the managing clerk's room, at the offices of JAMES AND WALTER HOW, *on a July morning. The room is old-fashioned, furnished with well-worn mahogany and leather, and lined with tin boxes and estate plans. It has three doors. Two of them*

Figure 7.1: *Justice*, the law office.

> THE GOVERNOR. [To Wooder, who has come in] door Ask the doctor to be good enough to come here for a minute. [Vooder salutes and goes out,]

If a permanent door of the Playbox were used, the warden's office would have been placed in one of two possible locations. The first was in the Central Room along the south wall, west of the hall doorway. In this location the doorway would have been on the right of the acting area. The other possible location would have been in the West Room.

Prison Corridor.–For the scene in the corridor of the prison outside the block of cells, the production script revealed that the cells were placed upstage in the set, and that entrances into this set were also raade from stage right.

Conclusions Concerning the Staging.–In susaning up the evidence for the staging of justice the following facts and conclusions emerged:

1. The settings were sparse in the amount of furniture employed: a table and three chairs for the law office; a desk and one or two chairs for the warden's office.

2. The locations of the settings could not be determined with precision, but the evidence suggested that the law office was placed at the east end of the Central Room with doorways created in the drapery wall which closed off the East Alcove. Less clear were the locations of the warden's office and the courtroom. The warden*s office may have been situated along the south wall in the Central Room, while the law court may have been placed in the West Room.

3. From the groupings of the characters, the audience appears to have been placed opposite the actors and not surrounding them. The diagrams show basic end staging positions, The audience must have had to move their chairs during the

Figure 7.2: *Justice*, diagram suggesting the set for the scene in the courtroom. (Production script, fly leaf.)

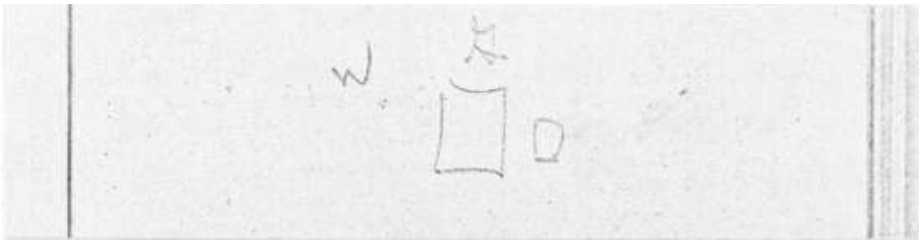


Figure 7.3: *Justice*, the warden's office (Production script, p. 61).

performance to face acting areas in different parts of the room. Such a practice vas referred to in May Rose Borum's general description of staging at the Fairoaks Playbox. Miss Borura stated that:

> The plays, or various parts of the same play, might take place in several parts of the room, with the audience moving about to accommodate itself to the action. . . .[58]

Evaluation of the Direction

Inglls rolled out his superlatives in reviewing Wells. direction of the drama:

> As a production, it is virtually flawless; staging and effects are excellent? nuances in the directing work reveal a subtle and understanding lore of conditions and circumstances surrounding the characters and scenes. . . .[59]

In the scenes taking place in the prison, the director had used a grim realism which caught with dramatic power the depressing atmosphere surrounding the caged men.[60]

The Acting

Justice was a large cast production for the Playbox. With sixteen actors performing nineteen roles, only the cast of The Man Who Ate the Poporoack was equal in the size. At least half of the performers had not previously appeared at the Playbox. Hardly any of the newcomers played prominent roles. An exception was Jeanne Woods!de who appeared as Ruth Honeywill, the distressed woman whose plight brought on Falder's downfall. The Star-News reported that she performed with "exceptional artistry, presenting a pathetic figure . . . with powerful simplicities [sic],"[61]

In the leading role of the ill-fated clerk, Palder, Wells received commendation for "his genuinely sincere treatment of the part," which at times rose to "real greatness of insight."[62] The psychiatrist-actor Edgar Lear

(Dr. Cecil Reynolds) had the opportunity in his role of the defense attorney to make an eloquent plea that his client was suffering from temporary insanity. The veteran Play

house actor Herbert Rooksby portrayed the ultra-respectable but sympathetically Inclined chief olerk of the law office, Coke son.

Summing up his evaluation of the production, Inglis stated that the "work of the players Is admirable . . an excellent cast has been selected.[63]

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[58]May Rose Borum, "A History of the Pasadena Playhouse," p. 104.
[59][Alexander Inglis], "At the Playbox." Pasadena Star-News, April 26, 1927.
[60]Ibid.
[61]Ibid.
[62]Ibid.
[63]Ibidt

Justice Taken to Playhouse

By the time that Justice opened at the Playbox, Brown had already decided to take the production to the Malnstage of the Playhouse as part of a repertory series in June. It was scheduled to run there on June 7, 8, 9.[64]

It would be pleasant to report that the transplanted Playbox production ended on a note of triumph, but such does not seem to have been the case, A lapse of over a month had occurred since the conclusion of the run at the studio theatre. During that time it became necessary to obtain four replacements for actors now unavailable. Robert Loofbourrow had died suddenly of a stroke on May 20, so that Joseph Sauers (known professionally as Joe Sawyer) had to take over the role of the older law partner, Ralph Freud was a replacement as the warden, while a man named Albert Stephens took over the part of the prison chaplain. Sauers and Freud in addition to rehearsing their parts in Justice, were, along with Wells and others in the caet, preparing for Shaw's jf4isalliance and Shakespeare's Two Gentlemen of Verona. These playa opened in the week prior to the run of the Galsworthy drama.

Dorothy Reeves of the Pasadena Morning Sun reported that on opening night, the Playhouse production of Justice "revealed the neceesity for whipping it into shape." The main problem was that

> Several, of the players were uncertain with their lines and that detracted somewhat from the emotional intensity which the play inspireB.[65]

Miss Reeves felt that the outstanding performances were given by Herbert Rookaby and Edgar Lear. Wells, she observed, played Palder "in his usual sympathetic manner." She especially liked the anguished pantomimic action of Falder in his cell. To these critical reactions Alice Baskin, added her commendation of Edgar Lear's rhetorical power as the defense counsel, and Rooksby's meticulously detailed Cokeson. Jeanne Woodside's performance struck her as "uneven in dramatic shading."[66]

A much harsher criticism of the entire performance came from a reviewer for The Film Mercury of Hollywood. Writing in an unsophisticated but very candid manner, the reviewer announced:

> The acting mostly was quite poor and acted as a detriment in the enjoyment of the play. The scene in the prison should have been built up and the effect on the audience wuld have been more compelling.[67]

The End of the Fairoaks Playbox

With the conclusion of Justice on April 30, 1927, the productions at the Fairoaks Playbox came to an end. The reason for the discontinuance of the studio theatre was not that Brown and hia associates lacked time to devote to it, although that had been a

[64] Ibid.

[65] Dorothy Reeves, Pasadena Morning Sun, June 8, 1927.

[66] The Star-News Critic, Pasadena Star-Mews, June 8, 1927. [POP 8, p. 199.]

[67] 'Anabel Lane, "Footlight Motea," The Film Mercury (Hollywood, California), June 17, 1927. [POP a, p. 207.J

major problem, but rather the simple fact that Brown had bought another home. He conse quently needed to sell the Playbox building.

In March, the producer had been negotiating for the purchase of a much smaller house, situated at 695 Herkimer Street (now called Union Street), on a lot of very modest size. He had made a $600 dowi payment on the selling price of 46,000. On Friday, April 22, Just before the opening of the final Playbox production, the transaction was completed, and the title to the property was transferred to Brown.[68] The producer and his parents gained occupancy of the Herkimer house by July, If not before.[69]

Brown's reason for purchasing another home may have been his mother's health, which had begun to fail In the past few years. She was seventy-seven and had suffered several heart attacks,[70] although this had not kept her from remaining on the job at the door of the Playbox, greeting the members and their guests, as late as February, 1927.[71] The new home would have been much easier to manage

than the massive Fairoaks building, since it contained about a fourth of the square footage. It was also better for a heart patient since it was only one story high. The abandoning of the physical quarters on Fairoaks which had seen the Playbox through those pioneering years was a step at least momentarily softened by the comfortable profit which Brown had realized from its sale. Purchased in 1921 the building had grown in value during the prosperous, inflationary years of the twenties, so that it sold for $17,500. It had cost Brown $7,000 and he had spent $2,700 improving the property, realizing a net profit of $7,800.[72] He invested his surplus in a trust fund for himself and in the purchase of two pieces of real estate, a lot, and a house on a lot in Altadena. Ironically the values quickly deflated in the next few years so that he lost $2,000 in the sale of the lot in 1928. On the sale of the Altadena house in 1931 he lost an additional $7,500.[73] These facts concerning his finances may account for Brown's reliance on financial assistance from others when he came to construct his Herklmer Playbox in 1930. They may also help to explain the title of his autobiographical essay, "A Dream on a Dime."

Plans for a Future Playbox Within the Playhouse

As Brown gave up the studio theatre, he was already working on plans for the continuation of the Playbox within the Playhouse, In terms of both physical location and legal responsibility. In May, 1927 a Playhouse "Committee on General Policy of the Playhouse for the Future" reported to the Governing Board its recommendations on the status of the Playbox.

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[68]-"Transactions for 695 Herkimer," Gilmor Brown's financial papers. Archives of the Pasadena Playhouse.

[69]A permit #545D for 695 Herkimer Street, Building Department of the City of Pasadena, was issued to Brown on July 5, 1927. He had made an application to enlarge two sleeping porches and add two closets in the house.

[70]' MarJorle Drisooll, "Stage Loses True Friend in Mrs. Brown," Los Angeles Examiner, November l6, 1927. [POP 9, P. 927T

[71]'Program of "Amelia," The Playbox, February 28, 1927.

[72]Copy of Gilmor Brown's Income Tax Returns, 1927. Archives of the Pasadena Playhouse.

[73]Ibid., 1928, 1931.

The committee proposed that the work of the Playbox and the Workshop should be progressively "related" to the activities of the School of Theatre which the Playhouse was to open in 1928. The Play-box, and the Workshop, .which Brown had established in 1926 as a training ground for less experienced ooraanunity actors, directors, and technicians, were thus both to be affiliates of the School, rather than of the Mainsfcage. The committee did not want any of these activities to interfere with or conflict with Mainstage production which they considered to be "the main business of the Playhouse."

That the operation of the Fairoaks Playbox had caused conflicts with Playhouse Interests the committee clearly underlined in a recommendation which amounted to a reprimand to Brown, Wells, and Freud:

> Associate Directors are expected to be at all rehearsals of malnstage plays to which they are assigned, and not allow Playbox participation to interfere with their mainstage obligation*[74]

Brown apparently absorbed the criticism with his customary diplomacy. At the annual meeting of the general membership of the Playhouse Association on June l6, the official provisions for the Playbox were made public. The President of the Association, Mrs. Millbank John son announced that a new building was planned which would house the School of the Theatre and would also contain the Playbox and a warehouse. In his address to the members. Brown spoke of his dreams for the Playbox, "Soon to be incorporated within the Playhouse Association," and expressed his hopes for the construction of the projected building.

As things turned out, the School opened in rented quarters in 19'4Qf and action on the proposed building was postponed following the stook market crash in the fall of 1929. The story of Brown's decision to once again run the Playbox as his private venture, in a new flexible theatre to be built behind his house on Herklmer Street, does not belong within the confines of this study. The history of the Fairoaks Playbox ended on a note of hope for the speedy incorporation of the unique theatre within the Playhouse, This was not accomplished until after Brown's death thirtythree years later.

[74]Minutes of the meetings of the Governing Board of the Pasadena Playhouse Association, May, 1927.

Chapter 8

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING THE PRODUCTION HISTORY OF THE FAIROAKS PLAYBOX

Introduction

In this chapter an attempt will be made to synthesize the data concerning the production history of the Fairoaks Playbox. Where deemed helpful, certain items of evidence already cited will be repeated. The categories under which the production effort will be discussed are:

The Repertory
The Staging
The Scenery
The Lighting
The Acting Technique
The Use of Makeup
The Actors

The Repertory

Goals

In founding the Playbox, Brown intended to produce thought-provoking plays, comedies and dramas whose special qualities made them more suitable for an art theatre than

a community theatre or commercial playhouse. In the prospectus of the Palroaks Playbox he had announced his desire to present novel plays ”of the type usually referred to as intellectual.” These plays would sometimes be frankly outspoken in content, sometimes poetic and tragic.[1]

In addition to dramas with special non-commercial qualities. Brown wished to include well-known plays which might reveal new facets through an intimate style of production.[2] The combination was aimed at producing a balanced repertory. This purpose was clearly expressed 4ust before the opening of the second season:

> Our season will be as catholic as it is possible to make it, and in our desire to do the ’unusual’ we hope never to lose sight of the fact that after all, 1 the play’s the thing.’[3]

To what extent did the repertory of the Fairoaks Playbox carry out the announced goals? In general the producer did give the members the types of plays he had described in his prospectus. Most of the selections were new to his audience, several were poetic in style, a number had sad (although not truly tragic) outcomes, and a number could be called sophisticated or philosophic. The repertory was perhaps not a ”intellectual” as might have been anticipated, nor was it especially frank or outspoken. It was diversified.

Novelty.–One way In which the Falroaks Playbox attained novelty and freshness In Its selections was in the emphasis placed upon British and Europen plays in preference to American works. Three-fourths (76 per cent) of the plays selected were of foreign composition, many of them works which were either new or Infrequently produced in California.[4] So far as the Investigator could determine, The Discovery and ”The Trackwalker’s Child” received their first U.S. performances at the Playbox, Turner’s The Man Who Ate the Popomack appears to have had its Southern California premiere there.

The six plays which comprised the American works in the repertory were almost all unfamiliar ones. ”Desire” and ”Amelia” were new previously unperformed scripts. “Song With Wings,” a locally-authored one act, had been produced only once before, for a special Playhouse performance in 1919. Glaspell’s Bernice and ”Woman’s Honor,” and Gribble’s March Hares seem not to have had any frequency

of production in Southern California prior to their Playbox runs,

Poetic Plays.–WhiIe most of the selections, both comedies and dramas, were written In realistic prose. Brown held to his purpose of presenting a few poetic works. The most definitely poetic plays chosen In the three seasons were Pelleas and Mellsande and The Tragedy of Nan, both containing numerous passages of rhythmic prose-poetry filled with symbolic imagery. In addition the two medieval plays, “The Nativity” and ”Noah’s Deluge,” should be mentioned since they were written in the characteristic rhyming verse of the Chester Cycle.

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[1] The Announcement of The Playbox. [PB I, p. 1.]

[2] Gilmor Brown, ”A Dream on a Dime,” p. 174.

[3] Printed announcement to Playbox subscribers, fall, 1925. [PB I, p. 25J

[4] In contrast British and European plays comprised no more than forty-five per cent of the Pasadena Playhouse repertory during the 1924”27 period. Thus American writers contributed fifty-five per cent of the Malnstage selections, more than twice their share at the Playbox.

Serious Dramas.–Brown had revealed his intention of producing a number of serious and even tragic dramas which he hoped his audience would not consider merely depressing. He was aware that a popular objection to serious dramas was that "there is enough tragedy in real life without having it presented on the stage," a comment still heard today. Such a negative attitude toward grim realism had definitely affected and continued to affect the choice of plays for the Mainstage of the Pasadena Playhouse. During the seasons of 1924-27, only twenty-eight per cent of the dramas presented at the Playhouse fell into the straight realistic genre. The predominant forms of drama on the Kainstage were eseapistic: colorful romances, fantasies., and sentimental pieces, 'the Playhouse also included a few melodramas in its offerings.

By contrast, the ten dramatic works in the repertory of the Fairoaks Playbox .were strongly dominated by straight serious dramas. Sixty per cent of the dramas fell into this category. These plays were Bernice, Justice, The Ship, "The Trackwalker's Child," Bosraersholm and "Desire," Unhappy endings prevailed in these realistic dramas as well as in romantic dramas such as Pelleas and Melisande and The great Qaleoto, The audience at the Playbox must not have been dismayed by the presence of death in the plays they witnessed. Ninety per cent of the Playbox dramas were marked by the deaths of major characters.

Sophisticated Comedy.–Besides providing an outlet for the production of serious realistic dramas which the regular Pasadena audiences did not ordinarily wish to see, The Fairoaks Playbox gave Brown a chance to present a greater measure of sophisticated British comedies. Folksy sentimental comedies, which were the more frequent choice for the Mainstage, found little place at the studio theatre. There Brown gave his audience such drawing-room comedies of English origin as The Two Virtues, The Man Who Ate the Popomacka The Truth About BlaydSi The Discovery, and 'How She Lied to Her Husband," "The Dark Lady of the Sonnets," and "The Man of Destiny" by Shaw.

Frankness.–The Fairoaks Play-box did not progress very far beyond the practice of the Mainstage in presenting plays of a frank or outspoken nature. Even in his experimental theatre Brown could not ignore the oonservatiBm in matters moral, social, and political, which set the tone for life in Pasadena, Although the producer sought a more broad-minded and adventurous audience for the Playbox, he had tapped for support virtually the same groups which had backed the Playhouse.

The studio theatre brought forth three plays which discussed or presented sexual relationships with a limited degree of directness. In its original form. The Man Who Ate the Popomack contained a number of disquisitiona on man's need for sexual gratification, but these appear to have been severely blue-pencilled for the Playbox performances.[5] What remained was rather mild, but was still franker than what the general Pasadena audience might have accepted.

Requiring as it did that paJama-clad actors cavort amorously at midnight, March Hares came closer to the risque. The absurdity of the situation and dialogue, however, greatly reduced the suggest!veness.

In presenting the relationship of an ambitious young Boston architect and a sensual

[5]"A copy of the play from the Pasadena Playhouse library shows such cuts Indicated in the handwriting of Maurice Wells.

widow, ”Desire” hinted at Immoral behavior. The circumspect playwright worked his way around any difficulties by suggesting that the characters slept In separate rooms at the widow’s house. The play would surely not have offended either a proper Pasadenan or Bostonian,

In perusing the repertory for outspoken comment on social, political, or economic problems, one can find only Galsworthy’s Justice delving Into such areas. The play Implied that the poor did not always receive their equal portion of justice in the courts of law, and that ’?10 British prison system needed overhauling. While the play undoubtedly had some impact on Playbox viewers, the effect might well have been reduced by the specific English background of the drama.[6]

Selecting Plays for Intimacy.–In choosing material for the Fairoaks Playbox, Brown strove to give his audience not only new or unusual plays4 but also those which were especially suited to the extreme intimacy of his flexible theatre. Introspective dramas seemed to benefit especially from the closeness of the actors to the audience. Rosmersholm4 Bernice, ”She Truth About Blayds, The Ship and ”Desire,” were all enhanced by the intimacy.

As a constant observer of the productions throughout the three seasons, Alexander Inglls noted repeatedly that domestic plays were ideal for the Playbox. He felt that when the locale of the play was the interior of a house, an exciting actuality came into the performance. One could develop a pleasantly embarassing sense of eavesdropping, of ”overseeing and overhearing secrets,”[7] In the first season he found The Truth About Blayds ”uncannily successful” as a play for the intimate theatre, and ”Desire” even more so. In contrast, Pelleas and Mtelisande seemed to him ill-adapted to Playbox staging.[8]

In the second season, Inglls described The Ifolluec, a domestic comedy, as especially suited to the intimate theatre. In commenting on the performance he generalized:

> Playbox productions of the domestic comedy variety are the plays which find the Community Players revealing extraordinary oapabililies. The simplicity of the settings; the naturalness of the environment, the wholly logical relationships of the players which are brought about by the complete lack of theatrical methods; all these conspire to make the domestic drama a correlative of the Playbox.[9]

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[6] A clue to the conservatism of Pasadena audiences as it affected play selection may be seen in the attitudes expressed toward Id. Horn produced on the Mainstage in 1925. and ”Deep River” which Brown wanted to present at the Playhouse in 1927. When Liliom was given in the spring of 1924, objections were voiced because, as the Pasadena Star-News reported, ”the play dealt with a group of people from the lower social stratum.” The newspaper felt constrained to editorialize that ”Prosperous Americans who lead lives of luxury . . . need to be reminded occasionally that there are many in the world not so fortunately placed.” (Pasadena Star-News, April 1, 1925.)

In June 1927, the Governing Board of the Pasadena Community Playhouse Association rejected Brown’s request to stage a play entitled ”Deep River, by Ransom Rideout. The reason for the Board’s ruling was that the play, which was concerned with the Negro problem, would ”Doubtless raise certain racial questions and the language would cause criticism.” (Minutes of the Meetings of the Governing Board of the Pasadena Community Playhouse Association, June 15, 1927.)

[7] “New Play is Presented Locally,” Pasadena StarNews [n,d.], circa April 2, 1925. [PB I, p. 10.]

[8] 4id.

[9] [Alexander Inglis] ”Drama Suited to Playbox Methods,” Pasadena Star-News March 2, 1926.

Finally in the third season, the critic explained why he considered Rosmersholm, peculiarly suitable for Playbox production,

> Ftor in this amazing self-scrutiny to which Rosmer and Rebecca subject themselves, there seem to be logical reasons why the analysis should be done within the confines of a home, unseen, unknown to the outside world. The effect is enhanced by the hint that the observer is being permitted to look in upon this tragedy of experience by the transparent curtain which divides the players from the onlookers,[10]

Plays with Interior Settings Predominant.–In selecting plays for the studio theatre. Brown observed a significant limitation; nineteen of the twenty-two productions required solely interior settings. The three productions which demanded exteriors (Pelleas and Melisande, '"One Nativity," "Moah.s Deluge") could all appropriately be given stylized rather than realistic scenery. Thus Brown avoided plays with exterior sets, excluding altogether those which necessitated realistic depiction of the outdoor scenes.[11]

The Quality of the Repertory

Although the repertory emphasized unfamiliar and infrequently performed works, it managed to attain a fairly high level of artistic merit. At least half of the dramatists represented were writers of distinction. Among these were Shaw, Maeterlinck, Ibsen, Galsworthy, Echegeray, St. John Ervine, Lady Gregory, and John Masefield. Their plays, while not in every case their best work, contributed greatly to bringing the Playbox near to the status of an art theatre. Perhaps the finest plays presented were The Tragedy of Nan, Pelleas and Melisande, Rosmersholm and Justice, Another play which enjoyed critical acclaim was the Great (4aleoto, a work whose reputation, in the opinion of the investigator, has exceeded its virtues. While none of the full length comedies could be called outstanding. The Truth About Blayds, The Mollusc. and The Two Virtues were at least above average in quality. Uneven and overwritten. The Man Who Ate the Popomaok was nevertheless an original and grotesquely amusing tragi-comedy. The Shaw plays and "Noah's Deluge" were superior one-act comedies.

New Plays.–Neither "Desire" nor "Amelia," the two completely new scripts which were premiered at the Fairoaks Playbox, could be said to have risen above mediocrity. The dialogue of "Desire" was filled with cliches; its characters were rather stereotyped, and its exposition clumsily handled. According to its reviewer, "Amelia" was a pleaeant, somewhat implausible minor domestic comedy.[12]

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[10]Ibid., "At the Playbox ; Ibsen Drama Staged by Players," Pasadena Star-Hewss January 18, 1927 .

[11]This limitation was not subsequently observed at the Herkimer Playbox, where an area with a plaster cyelorama was designed especially to accommodate exterior scenes.

[12][Alexander Inglis], "At the Playbox? Stage Comedy Written by Visitor," Pasadena Star-News4 March 2, 1927.

Mademoiselle Richer! recalled the production at the Herkimer Playbox of other play a by Alice Riley, the author of "Amelia." Zn the opinion of Mademoiselle Richer!, Brown probably chose these plays out of friendship rather than out of an especially high regard for their qualities as dramatic works, (Interview with Jeanne Riohert, March 12, 1962.)

Two plays previously performed in Europe which seem to have had their American premieres at the Fairoaks Playbox were Alice Stein's ""Hie Trackwalker'a Child" and Aldous Huxley's adaptation of Frances Sheridan's The Discovery. Inglie had some kind things to say for "The Trackwalker's Child," but found definite shortcomings in the motivation of the characters and in the probability of the plot, Louise Lorimer, an actress who performed in a revival of the play at the Herkimer Playbox, remembered the drama as one of dubious value.[13] The Discovery possessed a number of clever scenes and witty passages of dialogue but insufficient merit to keep it from sliding back into the mass of eighteenth century plays from which it had been disinterred.

The Staging

Intimacy and flexibility were the goals of the staging at the Fairoaks Playbox, 'Brown wanted primarily to create a theatre in which the raaxitfflJro of intimacy between the actors and the audience could be attained. His theatre was conceived as a laboratory in which he could study the effects of such intimacy upon both the performers and the spectators. Secondly, Brown wanted to stage plays with the greatest amount of flexibility in the location and form of the acting areas in relationship to the placement of the audience and the architectural layout of the building,

Intimacy

For Brown the pursuit of intimacy was directed toward creating a closer bond between the actors and the audience. Contemporary accounts of the Fairoaks Playbox described Brown's desire for a "unity of thought and imagination,"[14] his wish for an "imaginative cooperation intense enough to produce a complete sense of oneness."[15] The audience were to feel the strongest possible identification with the people and events of the plays they viewed. They were to be carried to the verge of becoming participants in the action.

The unity of actors and audience therefore meant a unity of belief in the "stage fiction." To strengthen this belief. Brown tried to remove all obviously theatrical devices and techniques. For the Fairoaks Playbox he set the aesthetic goal of a deepened realism,

To attain the maximum of intimacy in the studio theatre, the producer eiqployed several measures:

1. He restricted the size of his theatre to a very small space compared to conventional theatres.

2. He avoided the use of any structural division between audience and acting areas.

3. He established the principle of designing acting areas which penetrated the audience areas.

[13] Interview with Louise Lorimer, February 5, 1962.

[14] "Pasadena Playbox Interests Nation,.' Footlights, December 7. 1925.

[15] Alice Haines Baskin, "The World's Smallest Little Theatre," Pasadena Sport land a October, 1925. [FB I, p. 20; POP 6, p. WT]

4. He occasionally employed the scenic transformation of the entire studio into the place of dramatic action,

Smallness.–Numerous visitors to the Fairoaks Playbox attested to its smallness. Alice Baskin called it "The World's Smallest Little Theatre,"[16] and a writer for Foot" lights, a Los Angeles theatre Journal, referred to the Playbox as a "minute little theatre."[17] In selecting the studio section of his own home for his experimental theatre. Brown was fulfilling his demand for a space In which all audience members would be close to the actors. The relatively long and narrow shape of the studio was not Ideal, but was improved somewhat by the frequent practice of closing off the East Alcove. This reduced the length from fifty-two to forty-four feet, while the width ranged from seventeen feet to twenty-three feet. The studio interior, including the East Alcove, Central Room, and West Room occupied approximately 950 square feet, no more than the interior of a very small home. Stated another way, the Playbox area was a little larger than the combined size of two double garages.

In such a restricted space, the audience could not help but be seated close to the actors. Observers variously described the position of the actors as "but ten feet or so from one,"[18] "within five feet,"[19] "within a hand's reach."[20] At the most the occupants of the last row of seats in an end staged production would never be farther than twenty-feet from the edge of the acting area. (This

is based on the assumption of seven rows as the maximum number.)[21]

Absence of Structural Demarcation.–As a further step to attain Intimacy Brown avoided the use of any physical structure which could create a clear line of demarcation between the audience and the acting areas. While there was an archway into the West Room, it was not treated as a proscenium arch. In this flexible theatre there was no proscenium. Even in end-staged productions, the acting area was open; action flowed forward to the first row of the audience,

The producer did not normally employ a stage curtain in any part of the studio to delineate the opening or closing of scenes or acts of a play. The only exception to this rule appears to have been Pelleas and Mellsande in which traverse curtains were used. Draperies, of course, frequently served as scenic walls.

Brown also barred two other traditional theatre structures: the raised stage, and the sloping seating area. The actors performed on the floor of the studio, which was level throughout the Playbox. The audience aat on this same floor level. Brown made no use of risers. The artistic rationale for placing the audience and the actors on the same level was the expectation that this would increase the viewer's sense of being in the same room with the characters of the play. A highly practical reason for the procedure

[16]Baskin, loe, cit.

[17]"Pasadena Playbox Interests Nation," loe, cit.

[18]dythe King, "The Theatre," Dark and Li4ht, Decem" ber, 1925. [Refers to The Truth About Blayds.j

[19]Ibidi March, 1925. [March Hares.]

[20]"In Pasadena. Playbox," Saturday Night, February 6, 1926. [The Shaw Cycle.] (POP 6, p. 184.J

[21]Brown persisted in his desire to keep the Playbox small. At the Herkimer Playbox the area he allotted for acting areas and audience seating was kept to approximately the same square footage as was provided in the Fairoaks studio. When in 1940 Brown began planning for a third Playbox building, he informed his members that he wished to construct a still more flexible theatre, but not a larger one. (Program of Escape to Autumn, March 31, 1940, Herklmer Playbox. Archives of the Pasadena Playhouse.)

may have been the fact that it was much easier for a single individual to handle the frequent changes in the seating plans,

From the standpoint of visibility the level seating and acting areas must have presented a problem. Even with the staggering of seats, visibility must have been Impaired when more than three rows of chairs for the audience were used in any section of the theatre. It la curious that in all the reviews of the productions only one complaint concerning sight lines was registered. This was in connection with The Discovery. Despite this absence of public complaints, Brown wanted his next Playbox to provide better visibility. In the designing of the Herkiaer Playbox, he

and Ralph Preud planned it as a "multiplane theatre," featuring permanent concentric gradations of level.[22]

In spite of the absence of structural demarcation, Brown found it necessary to establish some means of distinguishing the areas for perforiaers from the audience's space. The lighting and the uniformity of the seats for the audience accomplished this. The baby spotlights in the overhead lighting system were utilized so as to play upon the acting areas and leave the spectators in relative darkness. The uniform blue cane chairs on which the audience sat contrasted with the varied pieces of furniture of the sets. This measure generally prevented the spectators from inadvertently sitting down in the acting area.

Design of Acting Areas to Penetrate the Seating Space.–In his pursuit of intimacy. Brown planned for acting areas in each production to intrude in different ways into the seating space. For example in such an end-staged production as The Mollusc, the actors made entrances in a path from the rear of the audience. In central, horseshoe, and L-staged presentations, the actors clearly performed within sections of the audience.

Scenic Treatment of the Entire Theatre.–A fourth physical means of bringing the audience more closely into the action of a play was the scenic treatment of the whole studio. In this way the entire theatre was transformed into the place of the dramatic action. In The 1X1 sco very tall candelabra situated around the Playbox helped to convert it into an eighteenth century hoae. In "The Nativity" the audience, on entering the studio, found it illuminated by lanterns, its floor covered with straw. The atmosphere of the stable in Bethlehem pervaded even the rows of blue chaira.[23]

Flexibility

Flexible staging resulted naturally from two impulses at work in the Fairoaks Playbox: the first was Brown's effort to explore more intimate spacial relationships between performers and audience than existed in proscenium staging; the second impulse, was the producers desire to treat each play as an individual experiment in pro' duction

[22]Interview with Ralph Preud, July l6, 1961.

[23]This scenic transformation of the theatre was another technique which had been used by Max Relnhardt in his large scale productions Becking actor-audience intimacy. In the London and Hew York productions of The Miracle, Reinhardt had temporarily converted the interior of an exposition hall and a Broadway theatre, respectively, into simulations of cathedrals. The audience sat vsithin the transformed area.

At the Herkimer Playbox, Brown made great use of the technique, often carrying the scenic motif out to the entrance lobby.

technique.

Flexibility in Location of Acting Areas

The basic principle of flexible staging which became established In the Fairoaks Playbox was that the location, shape and inter-relationship of the acting and audience areas Mere rearranged to meet the needs of each new production. The action of any play took place in whatever portion of the studio served best. Since the script of Bernice prescribed a wall with many windows to let in the late afternoon sun, the director, Helen Eddy, selected the north wall of the Central Room for that purpose. Similarly because The Mollusc required a fireplace and stairway, Ralph Preud picked the West Room for the maJor portion of his set.

Throughout each of the three seasons. Brown saw to it that the location of the acting areas constantly shifted. This practice not only fulfilled scenic needs, but also prevented the audience from considering any section of the theatre as a "stage." Brown later commented on this measure in reference to the Herkimer Playbox, but it was a remark which applied equally well to the Fairoaks theatre;

> The only limitation I place on the directors IB that the same area not be used too much or too repeat" ediy in the succession of plays so that the audience come to regard subconsciously a certain part of the Playbox as a stage.[24]

The continual relocation of the acting areas was well demonstrated in the sequence of productions in the first season. Brown opened the theatre with an end staged performance of The Truth About Blayds, The set was situated at the eaat end of the Central Room. The production which followed, Pelleas and Melisande,was also end staged but made use of the entire depth of the Central Room. The horseshoe staged "Nativity" occupied the middle of the Central Room and (probably) a portion of the Vest Room. Hext the American one-act plays brought in turnabout staging, with sets at both the east and west ends of the studio. Cribble's March Hares introduced an L-staged arrangement. The acting area stretched along the east end and south wall of the Central Room. In The Tragedy of Man the Pargetter kitchen occupied the entire V4est Room and a portion of the Central Room in front of the archway. Thus no acting area remained in the same location for two successive productions.

Flexibility in Location of Audience

The audience areas were just as ubiquitous as the sets. For the first play, the spectators sat in the Central Room facing eastward. For Pel teas. their seats were moved back into the West Room, though still facing toward the east. In the horseshoe plan of "The Nativity," the audience were divided into three sections ranging around the .walls of the Central Room. For the turnabout production which followed, the spectators sat in parallel rows in the Central Room, first facing east and then swinging around to face the west.

[24]Gilmor Brown, "Confidential Theatre," p. 22.

Forms of Flexible Staging Employed.–By the end of the first season. Brown and his associate director Maurice Wells had tried out most of the forms of flexible staging which have become standard. They produced plays in central staging, horseshoe, L, turnabout, and end-staging during that season and in the two seasons which followed. The investigator could find no evidence for their use of "sandwich" staging, but it would have been a form well suited to the Fairoaks Playbox.

Central Staging

Potential of the Studio for Central Staging.–In this investigation, the term central staging has been restricted to mean only the arrangement in which the audience sits on four Bides of the actors. In Brown's opinion the studio was most compatible with this form, for he described it as "exactly adaptable to center staging."[25] Brown's statement was certainly correct, although the seating potential for a complete arena was limited by the narrowness of the Central Room.

The most favorable dimension for the width of the arena could be obtained when single rows of seats were placed along each of the two walls (north and south) of the Central Room. A width of twelve feet was then available. When two rows of seats were placed along these walls the width would then have been reduced to no more than seven feet. Such an extremely narrow central acting area might appear to have been unusable. Since a comparably narrow space was employed at the Herklmer Playbox,[26] Its use at

the Fairoaks theatre should not be ruled out. In any event, two rows of seats would surely have been the maximum number on the north and south sides of the Central Room. The arena thus had a potential width of from seven to twelve feet.

If a director so desired, he could have made his central acting area in the Fairoaks Playbox an extremely long one, since the studio stretched out for fifty-two feet. Allowing for two rows of seats at both the east and west ends, it was possible to produce an arena forty-two feet in length.

Evidence for Central Staging.–Verification of the practice of central staging at the Fairoaks Playbox has come from a number of sources. In contemporaneous accounts the journalists Harry Carr, H. 0, Stecchan, and a writer for the periodical Saturday Night, reported their observations of centrally staged productions at the studio theatre. The roost explicit description came from Harry Carr, a columnist for the log Angeles Times. He reported that the actors performed in the middle of the same room in which the audience sat. He noted that the audience entirely surrounded the actors, Since the performers were viewed from all angles, Carr coaqpared the Playbox technique to sculpture, contrasting it with the picture frame stage in which the audience watched the play from only one angle.[27]

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[25]Gilmor Brown, letter to William P. Halstead, September l6, 1954. Correspondence of Gilmor Brown, Archives of the Pasadena Playhouse.

[26]The centrally situated sunken "pit" area in the Herkimer Playbox was seven feet wide by fourteen feet long, Used in numerous productions, it formed the central stage for Molehills and was the arena portion of the horseshoe staged "Life Sentence."

[27]Harry Carr, "The Lancer," Lps Angeles Times, April 21, 1926. [PB I, p. 34.3

H. 0 Stechhan discussed the centrally staged production of The Dragon. He spoke of "people sitting all around the four walls and the action unfolding in the center."[28]

The periodical. Saturday Wight, reported that "Desire" had been given in the Playbox studio "in the center of a large room."[29]

Recording the information gleaned from interviews with Gilmor Brown in the spring of 1927, May Rose Borum stated that productions at the Kairoaks Playbox were staged "sometimes with the players in the center and the audience all around them."[30]

Complete arena staging was assuredly practiced at the Fairoaks studio. How many productions employed it? In terms of specific plays, the investigator discovered strong

evidence for central staging in two productions, "Desire" and The Dragon, The ooaBnents by Carr, Borum, and others suggest, however, that there certainly -were more than two plays performed in this manner. From an analysis of the evidence concerning all of the twenty-two productions at the intimate theatre, it would appear likely that not more than four or five were centrally staged. Plays for which little evidence on staging has been found, but which could have been among the additional full arena presentations were "The Trackwalker's Child," "Amelia," and The Two Virtues. The evidence so far discovered concerning seventeen other productions weighs against their having been centrally staged,

Characteristics of Central Staging at the Playbox.–Techniques -which characterized the central staging at the Fairoaks Playbox included: the orientation of the furniture and actors to an audience on four sides; the provision for diagonal movement; the rotation of the actor's positions.

For "Desire" Wells placed the furniture around the periphery of the acting area as -well as in the center. He put chairs at the northeast and southwest ends and a bench on the north side. In the middle of the acting area he placed a table with two benches and a chair. The chairs on the periphery faced inward toward the center, while the furniture around the central table faced outward toward the edge of the oval acting area. Actors could thus be motivated to move toward the center or out to the periphery. "Hley could also ibe seated to face any desired segment of the audience,

TSie position of the central table and the two peripheral chairs on a diagonal line extending from northeast to southwest provided pathways for diagonal movement of the actors. Such movement tended to "open up" the actors to more of the spectators.

Since actors Btanding in one portion of the arena had their backs fumed temporarily toward a segment of the audience. Wells planned for rotation of poet lions. Diagrame and stage directions in his production script of "Desire" reveal this maneuvering of the actor's positions to successively face the various sides of the theatre. 'Ho make sure his plan was effective and did not slight any part of the audience. Wells checked his blocking from the four sides of the studio.

.Hie location and size of the central acting area differed in each of the two known full arena productions. In "Desire" the director confined the set to the eastern two-thirds of the Central Room, For The Dragons the arena extended into the West Room, and probably did not reach as far to the east as did the set for "Desire." The Investigator

[28]H. 0. Stecehan, "Little Theatre Doings Here and Elsewhere," California graphic. May, 1926, p. 9. [PCP 7, P. 78.

[29]Saturday Hight, April 11, 1925. [PB I, p. l6J

[30]May Rose Borum, "A History of the Pasadena Playhouse," p. 104.

estimated the size of the acting areas as twelve by twenty feet for ”Desire” and twelve by thirty feet for The Dragon,

Critical Reactions to Central Staging.–Judging from the critical response to these two centrally staged productions., the realistic drama ”Desire” seems to have benefited to a greater extent from the staging than did the Irish fantasy. The Dragon, Edythe King. Alexander Inglis, and “the Itoroad,” a columnist for the Boston Evening Transcript. unanimously praised the script and the performance of ”Desire” at the Playbox. They considered the play eminently suitable for the intimate staging and were pleased with the method of production. When the same cast performed the play on the picture-frame stage of the old Playhouse, another set of critics, Alice Baskin, Kenneth Taylor, and the reviewer of the Los Angeles Times found the script to be an inferior piece of dramaturgy, flat in its dialogue and plot.

The difference in evaluation could undoubtedly be attributed to the application of more rigorous critical standards. In the opinion of the investigator, an equally important factor was the loss of the positive values which had accrued from the extreme intimacy of the central staging. The play was Indeed mediocre, but the actors were able to slake it seem a much better piece of work in the arena of the Playbox, Emotional reactions had come across more pointedly there. Furthermore there was a fascination for some In being able to observe very keenly the reactions of the audience seated around the players. As Edythe King explained:

> Often it is most absorbing to see what the psychological effect of a certain situation in a play will be upon an audience, ’Desire. was full of suoh chances, . . . The listeners paused, cocked their heads, and mentally wriggled delightedly at the obvious discomfort of Lee Croy, architect, admitting to his fiancee that he made love to his rich young client in order to win success. How we enjoy others’ embarrassment! So we all went home thinking it was a fine play. . , [31]

In the case of The Dragon no Mainstage performance can be directly compared with a centrally staged Playbox presentation, Stechhan, however, commented very specifically on the disadvantage of an arena performance for a non-realistic play of this type, ”One needs perspective and illusion to lull him off to dragon-land,” he expounded.[32] When seated so close to the actors with the other members of the audience all in view, he found that he became too aware of himself as a spectator. He could not develop the necessary belief in the comic fairy tale world of the play. In this case the central staging prevented rather than aided the viewer’s absorption in the ”stage fiction.”

Horseshoe Staging

According to Cloyd Dalzell, Brown need the horseshoe variant of arena staging more frequently than the complete central staging form.[33] The producer found limitations in the four-Bided arrangement of the audience which could be overcome in the three-sided plan. Horseshoe staging made it possible to present the entire audience with a

[31] Edythe King, ”The Theatre,” Dark and Light, May, 1925.
[32] H. 0. Stechhan, loc. oil.
[33] Interview with Cloyd Dalzell, July 28, 1961.

simultaneous and clear view of a scenic background, while still maintaining the plastic value and intimacy of the arena.

.Three productions have so far been identified as staged in the horseshoe manner. Ralph Freud described to the investigator the three-sided seating for "'Ehe Nativity," and "Noah's Deluge"; Fairfax Walkup reported the horseshoe arrangement of The Man Who Ate the 4Popomack. All three plays contained one important scenic item which required viewing by the entire audience. In '"Hie Nativity" it was the traditional manger scene for the birth of Christ. In "Noah's Deluge" the Ark was the mandatory bit of scenery. In The 4n. Who Ate thePopoaiack, the attention of all had to be focussed on a painting which hung on the wall of a picture gallery at the start of the play and in an apartment in the latter half of the performance.

Unified vs. Discontinuous Sets.–Vhile the two centrally staged productions previously described were single set shows, maintaining unity of place, this was not true of all of the above horseshoe presentations. Only "Noah's Deluge," possessed a unified setting. The arena portion was a direct continuation of the Ark scene, representing simply the ground in front of the Ark. By contrast the arena in "The Nativity" had no continuity with the man ger set. The arena depicted a hill miles from the stable in Bethlehem. Consequently, in good medieval style, the movement of the shepherds and magic from the hill to the manger was a symbolic, conventionalized action. Here was a departure from the customary actual!sm of Playbox staging,

Since it demanded a total of four separate settings which had no physical continuity from one to the other. The Man Who, Ate .the, Poponiack had a more complex scenic plan. The playwright had described a London art gallery in the first act, a drawing room in the second, and a room in an apartment in the third and fourth acts. In addition, a "flashback'1 scene in the second act called for a dining room in a home in China, These individual scenes were arranged in the following manner in the Playbox:

1. The art gallery occupied the east end of the Central Room, A drapery wall stretched across the East Alcove.

2. The drawing room was situated in the west portion of the Central Room.

3. The Chinese set was probably placed temporarily in the area where the art gallery had been located,

4. The room in the apartment also occupied this same eastern portion of the Central Room.

L Staging

At least two playe, March Hares and Bernice, were given L staging at the P4airoaks Playbox. In this form the audience sat along two contiguous walls while the set -was arranged along the other two walls of the studio. This partial arena provided more area for scenic backing than could be obtained in horseshoe staging.

For March Hares the audience sat along the north wall of the Central Room and in the West Room. The furniture of the set, which represented a living room, was distributed so that the bulk of it occupied the area near the fireplace at the east end of

the Central Room. A space along the south wall at the western end of the Central Room served as a second scenic area. A sofa located in this second area figured importantly in the climactic scene of the mock-seduction.

I" gernice the two sections of the audience ranged along the south wall and in front of the West Room, The two scenic walls were most useful in this production. The north wall provided the expanse of windows through which autumnal sunlight could be simulated. The eastern wall of the set, which consisted of drapery hung in front of the East Alcove, was broken by entranoeways leading in from the room of the dead woman and from the street,

Groupings.–According to the production script of Bemicea Helen Eddy planned the positions of the actors so that they were on sonic occasions sitting or standing parallel to the north wall, at other times along the east wall, sometimes in an "L" grouping along both walls,

In her notations for positions and movement, the director retained the traditional terms of "upstage" and "downstage," but, significantly, avoided the use of "right" or "left."

Turnabout Staging

The form which the investigator has called turnabout staging was especially useful for multi-set plays in the studio theatre. In this form the sets were located at opposite ends of the theatre while the audience sat in between them. Since all spectators sat facing the set being used, the relationship was essentially that of end staging. The advantages of the turnabout method were these:

1. Completely separate scenic areas could be provided.
2. In a two-eefc play the locale of the action could change entirely without having to move any items of scenery. The audience shifted rather than the sets. (In a three-set play, of course, one of the Bete had to be struck to make room for the third scene.)

To make the turning of the seats simple and convenient for the audience. Brown had provided very light weight chairs. In general the audience was required to perform the shift during intermissions. The limited size of the audience helped to keep the turnabout a relatively uncomplicated task.

Turnabout staging took place in at least three productions: the American one-act program; the Shaw Cycle of one-act plays, and Anthony and Anna. In all three productions the audience sat in the Central Room, while the sets were located at the east end of the studio and in the West Room. Only one shift of the chairs took place in each of these performances. It occurred after the first of two plays in the American one-act program, after the second of three plays in the Shaw Cycle, and after the first of three acts in Anthony and Anna.

Simultaneous Settings with Audience Movement

A method of Btaging which might be considered a variant of the turnabout technique involved the placement of three or more sets around the audience. This practice bore a

Btrong Bimilarity to the medieval technique of simultaneous Bettings. AB Way Rose Borum described the simultaneous staging at the Playbox, ”various parts of the same play might take place in several parts of the room, with the audience moving about to accommodate itself to the action. . . .”[34]

A play which may have been staged in this manner was The great Qaleoto, A description of the Playbox production of this play, as given in the Recital Hall of the new Playhouse building, stated clearly that ”the three scenes are already set before the drama begins.”[35]

The fragmentary evidence concerning the production of Justice at the Fairoaks Playbox also suggests that it may have been given a form of ”wrap around” simultaneous staging. The setting of the first and fourth acts, the lawyers. office, was located at the east end of the Central Room; the courtroom set of the second act was probably situated in the West Room; the warden’s office and the row of cells, which constituted the sets for the third act, may have been arranged along the Bouth or north walls of the Central Room. If such an arrangement had been used, the audience would have executed at least two complete turnabouts and possibly some other maneuvers of their chairs during the performance.[36]

End Staging

At the Fairoaks Playbox, Brown by no means diBearded the traditional placement of the audience directly opposite the acting area. The investigator found evidence for the end staging of five productions: The Truth About Blayds, Pelleas and Melisande, ’She Tragedy of Nan¡ The Discovery, and The Mollusc. Although there were similarities between the end staging of the Playbox and proscenium-staged performances, there were also significant differences:

1. The acting areas in three of the Playbox productions were relatively deeper than normal sets in proscenium staging,

2. One Playbox production had an unusually wide scenic area,

3. Portions of the acting space in two of the productions intruded into the audience areas.

[34]Borum, op cit.i p. 104-.

[35][Alice Baskin], The Star-News Critic, Pasadena Star-News, April l6, 1926.

[36]An interesting sequel to the simultaneous staging of the Fairoaks Playbox occurred in the design of the Herkimer Playbox. Brown’s second flexible arena theatre contained four alcove stages which surrounded a central room. A different set could therefore be placed in each of the stages, surrounding an audience seated in the center of the theatre. The practice of having the audience shift their chairs to face the various sets continued in the second Playbox along the same lines as in the Fairoaks studio.

When Paul Baker opened his Studio Theatre at Baylor University in 1941. he considered its design a radical innovation. It was, nevertheless, very similar to, though much larger than, the Herkimer Playbox which had preceded it by eleven years. The concept of stages placed on three sides of the audience had been proposed by the Austrian designer, Oscar Strnad prior to 1922. Much greater priority may be found in the design by Furtenbaoh, who according to Kenneth Kaogowan, had in the seventeenth century ”laid out a square theatre with a stage in each corner.” (Kenneth Maogowan and R. E. Jones, Continental Stagecraft, p. 199.)

Deep Acting Areas.–In Pel teas and Melisande, The Tragedy of Nan and The Mollusc the acting areas possessed greater depth than width. This was the reverse of the normal proportions of sets in proscenium-framed theatres. 4or Pelleas the total scenic area viewed by the audience comprised a space seven feet wide by approximately twentyeight to thirty-six feet long. According to the investigator's reconstructions, the sets for Nan and The Mollusc both occupied a depth of about twenty-three feet and a width varying from thirteen to seventeen feet.

In the case of Pelleas and Melisande, Brown sought an effect of great distance in keeping with the dream-like quality of the play. In the other two productions, the depth of the acting areas resulted partially from an attempt to compensate for the limitation imposed by the narrow archway of the West Room. An additional cause for the

depth was the extension of the set into the Central Room so that no one might consider the archway as a proscenium.

Width of Acting Area.–An exception to the practice of using greater depth than width in the end staging occurred in the production of The Discovery. This presentation offered an unusually wide acting area containing three furniture groupings. According to the estimate of the investigator, the total space reserved for the actors extended from thirty-five to a possible fifty feet, east to west, Since three rows of audience seating also stretched out from east to west, the average depth of the acting area could not have been over nine feet,

Intrusion of Acting Areas into the Audience.–Consistent with the purposes of this non-proscenium theatre, the acting areas in The Discovery and The Mollusc penetrated the space set aside for the spectators. In The Discovery action took place at the fireplace at the northeast end of the studio, a location which would have been between two sections of bhe audience. In TheMbilusc actors made entrances from the hall door behind the audience, following a path which went alongside the rows of the spectators1 chairs down to the main portion of the set in the West Room.

The Scenery

Contemporary descriptions, photographs, and later statements by Gilmor Brown and Maurice Wells were all in accord that the director used little conventional scenery at the Fairoaks Playbox. Fairfax walkup wrote in February, 1926:

> There is no stage setting in the usual sense but the suggestion of the time and place is attained through the use of an occasional chair, table and couch, with curtains. . . .[37]

Alice Baskin confirmed the fact that the Playbox used "bare laboratory methods stripped of all extraneous aids to illusion, such as footlights, sets and properties of anything but the most sketchy character."[38] Another Journalist described the studio theatre as having been operated "for the purpose of experimenting with the production of plays without

[37]Fairfax P. Walkup, "Costumess Playhouse and Playbox," California Southland, February, 1926, [POP 6, p.192.]

[38][Alice Baskin3, The Star-Hews Critic, Pasadena Star-News, April 16, 1926. [PB I, p. 33.]

settings,"[39] [Underlining not in original,] In Brown's words "Limited properties and slight indications of locale were enough to suggest different settings."[40] The producer saw a great value in having "no elaborate production formula to hamper the play."[41]

Furniture Groupings

In general the differentiation of the place of action oazne more from the furniture, properties and costumes than from actual scenic backgrounds. Such was the case whether a play was given end staging, central staging or one of the variant forms. The furniture groupings which thus constituted the settings were often extremely siaqple. Vignette settings were used in such multi-scened productions as Justice, The Great Galeoto, and The Discovery, In Justice the lawyers. office and the prison warden's office each contained no acre than a table and two chairs. In The Great Galeoto, a settee, a chair, and candelabra sufficed to represent the drawing room of the wealthy Don Julian.

Because of the importance of the furniture in establishing the environment of each play. Brown and his directors paid great attention to its selection. The friendship of a number of dealers in fine furniture was of considerable help. Bradford Perrin, the owner of Pasadena's Serendipity Shop lent pieces from his collection to capture the early nineteenth century period in The Tragedy of Nan. (He also played a role in the production.) The Meyer and Di Segni Gallery of Los Angeles provided the antique table and benches needed for the architect's office in "Desire." The careful choice of period furniture was also notable in The Discovery, which featured such authentic and beautiful Items as the dressing table and chair in the Flutter set. For that production Brown also borrowed a harpsichord from a private Individual.

Permanent Architectural Features as Scenery

For inoet of the productions, the permanent structure of the studio interior served adequately ae scenic background. There was a variety of features to draw from; two fireplaces, windows of differing widths, an archway, a staircase, a dutch door, a hall door, ceilings of different heights. The architectural style was sufficiently plain to adapt to the needs of many plays. Furthermore the mixture of colored dabs which had been applied in the pointillistic painting of the walls, permitted the surfaces to take on a range of color according to the types of gels used in the spotlights.

Introduction of Scenic Devices

In addition to the permanent architectural features and the furniture groupings, the settings employed simple scenic elements which were introduced as needed. Drapery, screens, tapestries, items which had been prominent in the designs of the "Mew Stagecraft," found a place in the studio theatre. For Brown they were a very natural carry over of ecenio practices already employed in the old Playhouse building and in the recent performances of the Gilmor Brown Players,

[39] Pasadena Morning Sun, May 26, 1927. [PCP 8, p. 190.]
[40] Gilmor Brown, "A Dream on a Dime," p. 172.
[41] Ibid.

In many of the Fairoaks Playbox productions, the producer hung dark curtains across the front of the East Alcove. The curtains appeared in the opening production as an unbroken wall against which was suspended the portrait of the venerable poet Blayds, In The Man Who Ate the Popo" mack the same drapery became the wall of an art gallery. In Bern4cCa Anthony and Anna. and Justice, entranoeways were created through openings in the curtains. In "Desire" the drapery apparently closed off only half of the East Alcove.

Curtains functioned somewhat differently in Pelleas and Meli sande. Hanging from the heavy cross beams of the Central Room, the curtains were pulled open to reveal tiny sets at different levels of depth. They functioned therefore both as wings in the settings and as traverse curtains.

Screens played an important part in the mounting of The Discovery. To give the studio a greater atmosphere of elegance befitting the house of an English nobleman, the producer obtained two sets of gold screens. One of these he used as backing behind a sofa (Fig. 44), effectively masking off a part of the wall of the Central Room. The other gold screen probably furnished the hiding place for the footman at Mrs. Knightly'B. The principle scenic backing for the Knightly drawing room was itself a screen arrangement of small theatrical flats. On these flats candles and a mirror provided decorative elements.

In the same production, a tapestry covered a section of the south wall of the Central Room in the area where the harpsichord was placed. The tapestry supplemented the effect of luxury suggested by the gold screens.

Set Pieces.–Besides the draperies, screens, and tapestries, small scenic units representing more specific locales were employed. Such units or "set pieces" were important in the production of Pel teas and Melisande. Photographs of these bits of scenery revealed the producer.s goal of stylization in the settings of the Maeterlinck drama. The scene depicting the fountain in the park, for example, consisted of a two-dimensional unit cut out of beaver board, placed behind a small platform, Proro this beaver board fountain silver-tinsel streams of water dripped down. (Fig. 24.)

The Lighting

The Lighting System

The overhead lighting system of the Fairoaks Playbox could well be taken as a prototype for today's arena theatre installations. The components of the system were: baby spotlights mounted on the three cross beams of the Central Room.; floodlights placed outside the building; thirty-five floor and wall outlets spread throughout the studio; a switchboard with dimmers for five circuits, situated in a small control booth adjacent to the southwest corner of the Central Room.

Since the beams on which the spotlights were mounted were seven feet apart, the instruments were spread directly over a fourteen foot expanse in the middle of the Central Room. Prom these positions, at a height eleven feet above the floor, the spotlights could throw light into all parts of the studio. The exterior floodlights were mounted as needed for each production. They were used mainly to illuminate the rear porch, and

to throw light into the studio through the windows.

Charaoteyisties of the Lighting

The lighting of the Fairoaks Playbox had a number of special functions and characteristics!

1. It replaced the stage curtain as a means of opening and closing scenes and acts.
2. It played a dominant role in defining the acting areas.
3. At times it pinpointed extremely small areas,
4. The exterior illumination made it possible to carry the action of a play to the outside of the building.
5. Mon-electric lighting occasionally supplemented the electrical system for special effects.

The Fairoaks Playbox used blackouts to replace the traditional stage curtain. Brown had previously followed this practice in his outdoor productions and had witnessed its use indoors on the open platform stage of Wheeler Hall in Berkeley, California. Mrs. Baskin attested to the fact that Playbox actors took their places on the set in a blackout before each scene.[42] Ralph Preud confirmed this observation. He explained to the investigator how the directors made use of fluorescent paint, when it first came on the market, to provide guide lines in the dark for the actors.[43]

In the absence of a stage platform and proscenium arch, the lighting played a major role in defining the limits of the acting areas. While Brown wanted great intimacy, he still wished to retain this one boundary between the audience and the actors. The use of baby spotlights apparently reduced the amount of light spill upon the audience. In such a centrally staged production as The Dragons however, enough light played upon the spectators to make them quite visible to each other.

When only a very small acting area was needed for a scene in a play, it was possible with the baby spotlights to pinpoint that location, leaving the rest of the studio in darkness. Vignette lighting which isolated the actors in this manner occurred in The Discovery. It also was used in Pelleas and Melisande, and in all probability in Justice and The Man Who Ate the Popomack.

Floodlights placed outside the building were a somewhat unusual feature of the lighting. By illuminating the rear porch, the floodlights enabled it to become an actual part of the settings of such plays as The Mollusc and "The Trackwalker's Child." For morning or afternoon scenes, entrances through the rear doorway could be made in simulated daylight. When placed next to the windows of the north wall, as in Bemice, the floodlights could bathe the Central ROOBI with an imitation of autumnal sunlight. One of the photographs of 15ie Truth About Blayds shows the position of a floodlight outside a window of the Central Room (Fig. 57).

[42]The Star News Critic, Pasadena Star News, April 16, 1926.
[43]Interview with Ralph Freud, April 28, 1961.

Figure 8.1: Maurice Wells as Oliver BlaydB-Conway in The Truth About BlaydB, He is sfcanding at the first window west of the fireplace in the north wall of the Fairoaks Playbox. The edge of a floodlight may be seen at the left end of the window.

On occasion other forms of illumination supplemented the electrical lighting, principally for atmospheric effect. An example of this was the host of tall candles which burned throughout the studio in The Discovery. Lanterns served a sisiilar purpose in creating the atmosphere for the manger Bcene in "'Hie Nativity." In Pelleas and Melisande one scene made a particularly effective use of candlelight. The two lovers each carried a tall candle as they came toward each other in a passageway. Aa they parted, the candlelight flickering upon Pelleas' face heightened the emotional reaction. Edythe King was greatly impressed by the picture thus created:

> Pelleas shields his taper with his hand as he walks straight downstage, until he is almost upon us, impressing that dazed haunted look upon the audiencej coming on,till within a foot of the front row,the stage is wiped out in darkness, both candles snuffed; the picture gone.[44]

The Acting Technique

Simplicity and sincerity were the two qualities Brown.sought from his actors in the Fairoaks Playbox, These were the same attributes he had emphasized to the actors of

[44]Edythe King, "The Theatre," Dark and Light, January, 1925.

the Pasadena ConBaunity Playhouse in the years prior to the founding of the Playbox. As Brown explained to the investigator, he had always believed that

> Acting with genuine sincerity is the roost important thing, There is always the tendency to turn to acting 'acting. .
>
> If an actor is working for an effect only, he needs to be told directly that it's falseit isn't rightit isn't sincere.[45]

In the early years of the Playhouse he had helped his amateur performers to seek out the inner meaning of the plays and determine the true motivations of their characters. He had urged the actors to perform honestly without striving for effect. According to Inglis, this approach made it possible for Brown to obtain good results with relalively untrained actors, even in difficult plays.[46]

When the producer began presenting plays in his intimate theatre he found that this sincerity was of even greater importance than on the conventional stage. Idttle escaped the eye or ear of the spectator. Any failure of an actor to believe in the scene he was performing became highly magnified under the "microscopic gaze" of the audience. As Inglis observed, faults which slight perhaps pass unnoticed on the ordinary stage could be "brought out al" most luridly by the Playbox method of production."[47] Calling Brown's theatre a "close-up" stage, H. 0. Stechhan considered exaggeration the greatest pitfall to be avoided by the actors.[48]

Because of this close and therefore relatively enlarged view of the actors, the producer concluded that the Playbox demanded a definite refinement of realistic, representational acting, 4e player had to learn to hide hie technique even more than in conventional theatres, "Any technical means of achieving results," Brown pointed out, "become . . . appallingly apparent." Stage projection was out of place. The actors had to use a level of vocal and bodily projection approaching that of real life. Furthermore they had to be careful to play emotional reactions strictly to each other and avoid directing them to the audience, In the representational productions which were predominant at the Fairoaks Playbox the audience could become embarrassed when actors failed to play to each other. A Brown explained the problem:

> If this restraint is not achieved, the members of the audience cease to be 'less communicative members of the family sitting in silence in the corner of the home. and become outsiders forced to witness at close range the emotions of people who, however deep our sympathy with them, are still strangers,[49]

In other words the spectators might begin to feel that they were now too insnediately involved in the events of the drama. In spite of the goal of physical and psychological intimacy, a measure of aesthetic distance had to be maintained .

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[45] Interview with Gilmor Brown, May 18, 1959

[46] [Alexander Inglis3, Pasadena Star-News, n.d., season of 1924-25, prior to April, 1925.

[47] Alexander Inglis, "-The Truth About Blayds: Some views on the recent Playbox production." [PB I, p. 8.]

[48] H. 0. Steehhan, California Graphic. March 0, 1926. [POP 6, p. 240.]

[49] Gilmor Brown, "Confidential Theatre," p. 25.

In the Fairoaks Playbox, therefore, the actor had to work for a strong, sincere identification with his character, He needed to avoid obvious theatrical effects, maintain strict concentration, and exercise restraint in voice and gesture. The way in which this refinement of realistic acting was pursued may be seen through the comments of a nuiriber of observers,

Sincerity

Inglis frequently spoke of the sincerity displayed by Playbox actors. When Maurice l4ells portrayed Napoleon in '"Rie Man of Destiny," the critic claimed that

> He lived the part of the cool calculating soldier; gallant when the occasion suited him, but cruel when he wanted his own ends achieved; and he indued [sic 3 the character with a human quality at once subtly suggestive and vividly penetrating.[50]

As Palder in Justice Wells was commended for hie "genuinely sincere treatment of the part."[51]

In his own work Gilmor Brown showed that he practiced what he preached. When the Playbox production of Anthony and Anna was taken to long Beach for a special performance, the local reviewer remarked that "Gilmor Brown lived up to his reputation. He did not seem to be acting at all. He was old Jacob Penn."[52]

Even in the farcical March Hares the actors followed the guide line of sincerity. Edythe King reported that "the characters were so clearly drawn that one felt ashamed of laughing aloud. . . ."[53]

Only a few of the reviews of the productions made negative comments concerning the acting. Of this limited number of negative evaluations, none actually pointed out examples of insincerity. In a few instances, however, the critics noted that certain actors were not well cast for the roles they were performing. Inglis considered Robert Griffin too business-like for a hero-worshiping poet in The

ch.

Truth About Blayds.[54] Alice Baskin thought that Tabatha Goodman was "not sophisticated enough for the luring -widow" in "Desire."[55]

Concentration

One of the basic purposes behind the establishment of the Fairoaks Playbox was the desire to give the Pasadena actors unusual training in concentration. As Ralph Freud recalled, "the actors were trying to lessen their consciousness of the audience.s presence, " they were learning to block out the audience."[56]

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[50] Alexander Inglis, Three Dramas by Shaw are Presented," Pasadena Star-News. February 2, 1926, [PB I, p. 28.3

[51] Libido Pasadena Star-Newsi April 26, 1927. [PB I, P. 51.

[52] Long Beach [California] gun, January 5, 1927. [POP 8, p. .43. J

[53] Edythe King, "The Theatre," Dark and LIP4IJJ circa February, 1925. [PB I, p. 12.3

[54] Alexander Inglis, "The Truth About Blayds: Some views . .," loc. fiit

[55] The Star-News Critic, Pasadena Star-News, April 14, 1925.

[56] Interview with Ralph Freud, April 13, 196l.

In the first season of the studio theatre, a critic marveled at the way in which the actors sustained their concentration in such an absurd farce as March Hares:

> To follow clever line with nonsense in rapid succession, while within five feet of you sits an audience squirming with amusement and laughter, and not once drop the thought of the character you are playing, is a test for anyone's concentration.[57]

In appraising the training in concentration which the actors underwent, Mrs, Walkup concluded that "the majority develop astonishingly under these conditions . . . finding it necessary to stay in character all the time, never letting down for a moment ."[58] She conceded, however, that there had been some performers who could not maintain their concentration in the extreme Intimacy of the Playbox. The result was an extreme self consciousness which could not be eradicated. In the case of these actors, "the experiment [was] not repeated."[59] In later years Mrs, Walkup recalled her own Initiation as a performer at the Fairoaks Playbox as an experience similar to "having undressed before an open window."[60]

Reviews of fche productions have yielded little in. formation as to which actors had been the self-conscious ones. The only specific report of lapses in concentration came from Mrs. BaskAn in her review of The Pi sco very. Ironically the two offenders were the Playbox directors, Brown and Wells, both of whom acted in the play. At several points in the performance, the critic caught Brown glancing over at the other performers, more concerned with his task a a director than as an actor. In the same performance Veils had apparently revealed some self-consciousness. Mrs. Baskin did not name him directly, but her comment seema to have applied to him. She had perceived "an occasional vibrant tenseness in one of the cleverest of the younger actors, whose extreme sensitiveness to environments I have before this noted at the Playhouse."[61]

Restraint

Many of the comments on productions at the Fairoaks Playbox have spoken of the restraint displayed in the acting. Critics repeatedly used such terms as "delicate," "subtle," and "restrained." The restraint characterized the

physical aspects of the performance, the level of vocal and pantomimic projection, and the control of emotional reactlona,

The vocal side of Playbox performances particularly impressed critics. In 1925 the full-voiced projection which marked much nineteenth century acting had by no means disappeared from regular connroercial productions in the Los

Angeles area. Harry Carr found that the Playbox actors avoided the "shouting" which was common in other theatres.[62]

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[57] Edythe King, loc. cit.
[58] "Fairfax P. Walkup, "Costumes: Playhouse and Playbox," loc cit.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Interview with Fairfax P. Valkup, August 10, 1961.
[61] The Star-News Critic, Pasadena Star-News, November 4, 1925.
[62] iiarry Carr, loc. cit.

Mrs. Baskin testified that a distinctive feature of Playbox acting was the "general tendency to keep the voice at conversational pitch."[63] Significantly she made this comment in reference to the performance of .Rie Great QaleotOf a play Which could have easily led the actors into heightened projection.

Mot only was the vocal projection kept to a conversational level, but the style of delivery was molded after natural speech. The young actors of the Playbox were taught to avoid the exaggerations of the older style of stage diction. As Carr indicated, they were not given to "wailing out 'Hevah, nev-ah, nev-ah,' when they mean never, never, never," They were required, he said "to Bpeak in an ordinary, natural way,"[64]

The impact of the newly acquired low-key projection affected the Playbox actors in their first season when they took productions from the intimate theatre to regular-Bleed houses. The Truth About BlaydSJ for example, played a benefit performance in the new auditorium of Pasadena's Shakespeare Club. The actors had not yet learned to re-adJust their Playbox projection level to make it fit the conditions of a much larger theatre. The audience had to strain to hear many of the lines, especially in the earlier part of the play, Helen Hard!son, playing the female lead, was at moments almost inaudible.[65] During the entire preceding

season when she performed in a number of Pasadena Playhouse productions on the Mainstage, she had drawn no criticism of her vocal delivery. The incident revealed that the actors had needed to learn a new technique for the Playbox, one which was suited to the intimate theatre and had to be kept separate from the technique of the conventional stage.

Brown and his directors sought emotional subtlety as well as conversational delivery in many of the Playbox presentations. "Desire" impressed Edythe King with the great delicacy of the acting.[66] The Santa Monica critic, Dorothy Warren, noted Helene Millard's "delicacy of voice and manner" in The Man Who Ate the Popomack. Bringing emotional seriousness to a tragi-comedy which frequently bordered on the absurd. Miss Millard portrayed a mixture of pity, love, and disgust with "admirable restraint."[67]

The Playbox actors received praise for performing several comedies as comedies rather than as farces, and for controlling the emotional values of one drama so that it did not become a melodrama. Cloyd Dalzell was commended for her work in The Mollusc, in which she carried through the "vivid simpering dialogues without developing the play into farce."[68] Under Ralph Freud's direction The Dragon was broadly performed but kept within the bounds of comedy;

> So cleverly is the comic element handled by the players that it never becomes farce at all, but is truly a 'fantastic comedy.. Broad effects that oould easily become ludicrous only become exaggerated comedy, rich delicious comedy, smacking of the grotesque and the caricature, but always within the limits of genuine comedy."[69]

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[63] "The Star-News Critic, Pasadena Star-News, April 16, 1926.
[64] Harry Carr, loc. cit.
[65] Alioe H. Basklnl, The Star-News Critic, Pasadena Star-News, February 13, 1925, [POP 5, p. 127,]
[66] Edythe King, "The Theatre," Dark and Light, May, 1925.
[67] 'Dorothy Warren, Santa Monica Outlook, May 11, 1925.
[68] Alexander Inglis, Pasadena Star-News, March 20, 1926.
[69] Ibld., [n.d.], circa May 4, 1926.

The tragedy which was performed with sufficient restraint to prevent its turning into a melodrama was The Great Oaleoto.. Inglis commended the actors, remarking that "All the players sensed the possibilities of the play for melodrama and kept it well out of that category,[70]

The conversational projection level and the emotional restraint of the Fairoaks Playbox became the basic technique advocated by Gilmor Brown throughout hi a thirtyfive year of production in flexible arena theatres. Charles Lane, a film actor who performed at the Herkiiaer Playbox during its first decade of operation, has reported on Brown. teaching of the intimate acting technique!

> Everything had to be scaled way down.movement, projection. We worked very hard at that. Gilaaor taught us, [71]

When sound motion pictures and ultimately television developed into important media. Brown recognized that Idie acting technique required for them was essentially the technique he had explored in the Fairoaks Playbox during the days of silent films.[72]

Acting Styles

The principal acting style employed at the Fairoaks Playbox has been shown to be realistic and representational, matching the style of writing of the greatest number of plays presented there. One third of the productions, however, were plays written in a style other than that of twentieth century realism. 'Ehis group of plays included the dramas Pellcas and Melisandei The Great Qaleoto4 and "The Nativity"? the comedies, The Discovery4 The Dragon4 and "Noah's Deluge," and the tragi-comedy The Man Vho Ate the Popomack, Did ths performances of these plays deviate from the predominant realistic acting style of the Playbox? Did presentational acting occur in these productions?

From the evidence discovered to date, one can conclude that there was almost no intentional playing to the audience at the Fairoaks Playbox, Xn all the reviews of the performances there is mention of only one instance of direct address to the audience. In "Noah's Deluge," Brown appeared as the 'Sow, Crier, a character of his own creation. and "urged the citizens to good behavior." Since the program listed no townspeople as meribers of the cast. Brown must have been addressing the theatre audience. This action presumably occurred before the play itself began,

The conclusion that presentational acting was definitely avoided in the studio theatre is further supported by the descriptions of the productions of 4Bie Discovery, This coreedy was clearly written in a style extremely suitable for, and almost demanding, presentational staging. In eighteenth century fashion, it contained numerous asides and soliloquies which could appropriately be directed toward the audience. A few examples will Illustrate the nature of the playwriting technique.

In the Second Act of The Disco very s lord Medway tries to arrange a marriage for hie daughter -with Sir Anthony Branville. During his conversation with Sir Anthony,

[70] Xbidx April 9, 1926.
[71] Interview with Charles Lane, June 21, 1961.
[72] Gilmor Brown, "A Dreaia on a Dime," p. 177.

Lord Medway delivers the aside, ”I won’t lose the old fool if I can help it.” In the Fifth Act, the amorous widow, seeking a response from the non-committal Pootaian, suddenly observes in an aside, ”Jealous 1 A happy sign,”

In addition to asides, an ample number of soliloquies were scattered throughout the play. After his tearful daughter has gone out of the room in the First Act, Lord Medway comments:

> This is the plague of having daughters; no sooner out of their leading strings than in loveand always with the wrong roan. I only count myself lucky that her passion is not for some handsocie young groom or footman.[73]

Similarly, the widow, Mrs. Knightly, after her first encounter with the handsome footman, rhapsodizes;

> Alas, ny poor susceptible heart. What a form, what manly grace, what captivating music in his voice. Beside this Adonis, Medway is a poor, inconsiderable fellow. . , .[74]

Confronted with a play written in this style, one might expect that the Playbox producer would have had his actors play some of It to the audience. Alice Baskin has reported, however, that not only did the actors play completely to each other, but that they blotted out the audience so effectively that she felt invisible, ”stranded on the side lines.”[75] The significance of this evidence becomes heightened when it is realized that on the Mainstage Brown produced numerous plays in the presentational style, especially period pieces.

While the presenfcational technique was avoided, some approaches to a Btyle other than the realistic occurred in connection with the performances of Pelleas and Melisande4 The Man Who Ate the Popomack4 and The Dragon. In Pellaas and Melisande, the producer and his associate had attempted to capture the mystical quality of Materlinck. poetic drama. Reinforcing the penumbral atmosphere created by the lighting, the actors spoke their lines in a soft, breathless manner. Their speech was therefore even more subdued than the usual conversational mode of delivery. The voices were orchestrated for tonal quality and rhythm,

A special vocal style was also employed in The Man Who Ate the Popomack, The actors spoke in hushed voices, maintaining a rapid tempo. As the unfortunate Belvoir, Wells tried to suggest a dream-like state in those moments of the play when the fantasies of his character were depicted. Dorothy Warren described the ”atroosphere of magic” which the young actor brought to his role, ”There were spaces in his work,” she declared, ”in which he Mysteriously suggested those dreary far-away flashes that come to us of dreadful moments in eons past,”[76]

In *The Dragon*, as discussed above, Freud elicited a broad comedy style from his actors. It departed slightly from the realistic mode of other comedy performances at the

[73]Mrs. Prances Sheridan, The Discovery, p. 18.
[74]Ibid,, p. 90.
[75][Alice Baskin], The Star-Mews Critic, Pasadena Star-News. November 4, 1925.
[76]’Dorothy Warren, loc cit.

Fairoaks Playbox, in that it contained touches of the grotesque. Roger Stanton recalled the sudden appearance of a weird-looking old man with an extremely long beard.[77] At the end of the play the Qreen Dragon naist also have created a strange effect as he thrust his head in through a window and revealed his distaste for eating humans.

The Use of Makeup

Since the artistic goal of the Fairoaks Playbox was not stylization, but a heightened illusion of reality, the actors. use of makeup was directed toward attaining a very natural appearance in snost of the productions. The performers quickly discovered the need to subdue or eliminate theatrical makeup, Maurice Wells, who mainly played youthful characters, did not use makeup. He told the investigator, "I used no base, rouge, lipstick, or eye shadow. I just powdered down,"[78] When the Playbox performers gave

the special benefit presentation of The Truth About Blayds, the reviewer reported that "Throughout there Is no more makeup than Is essential, chiefly that of turning Mr. Brown's youth to Blayd's age."[79] Douglass Montgomery, who liked to favor his audience at the Playhouse with an ample amount of makeup, had to be told to "tone it way down" when he appeared in the Playbox.[80]

When special effect were needed, they were made subtle enough so that they would not disturb the audience. The treatment of bleeding exemplifies this practice. In The Great galeoto, Edgar Lear had to be carried in severely wounded after a duel. The blood effect was suggestive, but not shocking. Alice Baskin reported that it was

> most interestingly qualified to meet the unusual exigencies of close contact with the audience and yet at the same time convey to the full the bloody extremity of his condition.[81].

Photographs of the productions reveal the general subtlety of the actors' makeup. A portrait of Wella in The Truth About Blayds Shows no traces of theatrical makeup. (Fig. 57.5 To transform himself into a middle-aged man in the same production, the young actor Robert Griffin used subtly drawn wrinkle lines on his face and a smoothly blended patch of gray in his hair.[82] The cast of the drama

The Ship wore very little, or no, makeup. Only one of the men in the group photograph, Joe Kearns, who played the role of young Jack Thurlow, had a made-up look. Applying his makeup with less subtlety than the others, Kearns' eyebrows seem to have been penciled over and his eye shadow is noticeable (Fig. 58).

The makeup for Pelleas and Melisande was slightly less natural than that in the realistic dramas, but was still not "stylized." Mervin Williams appears in the scene at the fountain to have an extremely white face, and strongly defined lips. Part of the effect

[77] Interview with Roger Stanton, August 15, 196l.
[78] Interview with Maurice Wells, June 10, 1961.
[79] fy[Alice Baskin], The Star-News Critic, Pasadena Star-News J. February 13, 1925.
[80] Wells, loc. cit.
[81] (Alice Baskin3, The Star-News Critic, Pasadena Star-Hewsa April l6, 1926.
[82] This makeup may be seen in a photograph in the Playbox scrapbook PB I, not reproduced here.

Figure 8.2: The east of The Ship, Seated, from left to right: William Evans, Marthe Allan, Betty Elliot, Joe Kearns. Standing; William Earle, Robert Freeman, Helen Staate, Ruth Jewett. The actors are Btanding at the northwest corner of the Central Room.

in the photograph resulted from the very bright lighting used, but part undoubtedly came from the makeup itself. In another scene, Robert Griffin, appears as Go laud, wearing a somewhat “stiff” wig, but a fairly natural beard.

Two characterizations at tee Playbox required actors to assume the appearance of advanced age. The thirty-eight-year-old Brown portrayed the ninety-year-old poet Oliver Blayds. Marine Allan, who was about thirty, took the role of an eighty-three-year-old woman In The Ship,

To represent the poet. Brown used deep furrowing under his eyes, with ample shadowing for the sunken effect of extreme age. He put a considerable amount of whitener in his hair. Two photographs reveal his makeup, one an extreme close-up, the other a group shot. In the close-up, definite lines can be seen drawn on the forehead, at the corners of the mouth, and above the bridge of the nose. In this photograph, the actor looks definitely ”made-up.” (Fig. 59.) In the group picture, however, which represents Brown as he would have appeared to an audience member seated ten or fifteen feet away, the makeup blends together (Fig, 2b). It is a highly believable likeness of an old man. Curiously, Brown took on in this group photograph almost the exact appearance he presented in real life at the age of seventy-three when the investigator interviewed him.

The makeup used by Marthe Allan as old Mrs. Thurlow appears subtle in close-up as well as in group photographs. The furrows fanning out and down from the nose

are produced by carefully blended shadows. The backs of the hands are made up to highlight the tendons. The wig and bonnet aid in the remarkable transformation of the attractive boyishlooking young lady into the dignified grandmother. (Fig. 60.)

The Actors

The actors of the Fairoaks Playbox did not form any permanent company. In twenty-one productions. Brown used 105 actors to fill 183 roles. Within this massive group there was a core of sixteen actors who performed with aboveaverage frequency. Fifteen members of this group played in from three to six productions each, while one, Maurice Wells, appeared in a total of twelve productions. The remainder of the personnel consisted of nineteen actors who served in two productions each, and seventy actors who made single appearances.[83]

Categories of Actors.–The core group of the actors at the Palroaks Playbox inay be divided into categories according to their goals and experience as follows: seven beginning professionals; three established profesgionala; six non-profesBionalfl

The beginning professionals consisted of young performers, mostly in their twenties, who became paid professional actors at the time of, or shortly after their Playbox work. The names and number of productions for this group were: Maurice Wells (12)4 CurtisB Amall (6); Mervin Williams (4); Helenita Lieberg (later known professlonally ae Ellen Hall) W; Helene Millard (3)5 Robert E.

Oriffin (3); William Earle (actual name, William Earle Qunn) (3). In addition to these young actors, Lurene Tuttle, Douglass Montgomery, Lois Austin, and Helen Brooks, all served in tw productions.

The core who had already been established as professionals when they appeared in the Fairoaks Playbox included; Gilmor Brown (6); Ralph Freud (4)? and Helen Jerome Eddy W. Professionals who made only two appearances each were Lenore Shanewise and Mrs. Arthur Palmer.

The non-professional category was comprieed of those performers who were not eeeking paid work ae actors in the theatre or films. Among the individuals in this group, those who were most active at the studio theatre were: , Marthe Allan (6); Roger Stanton (5)i Ernest Witbeck (5); Herbert Rooksby W; William Evaus (3) and Helen Staats (3). Fewer, but significant performanees were given by Cloyd Dalzell, Robert Loofbourrow, and Edgar Lear (Dr, Cecil Reynolds).[84]

Conclusions

The Fairoaks Playbox was a natural outgrowth of the theatrical effort of Gilwr Brown. The flexibility concept stemmed to a large extent from his twenty years of previous experience adapting play production to a great variety of physical conditions. Brown

[83] TheBe computations were made by the investigator from the programs of Fairoake Playbox productions.

[84] Marthe Allan became a theatrical producer and talent agent in Montreal during the 1930.s, but apparently did not pursue a professional acting career. Edgar Lear may have done a small amount of paid acting in New York and else'where, but was primarily a practicing neuro-psychiatrist.

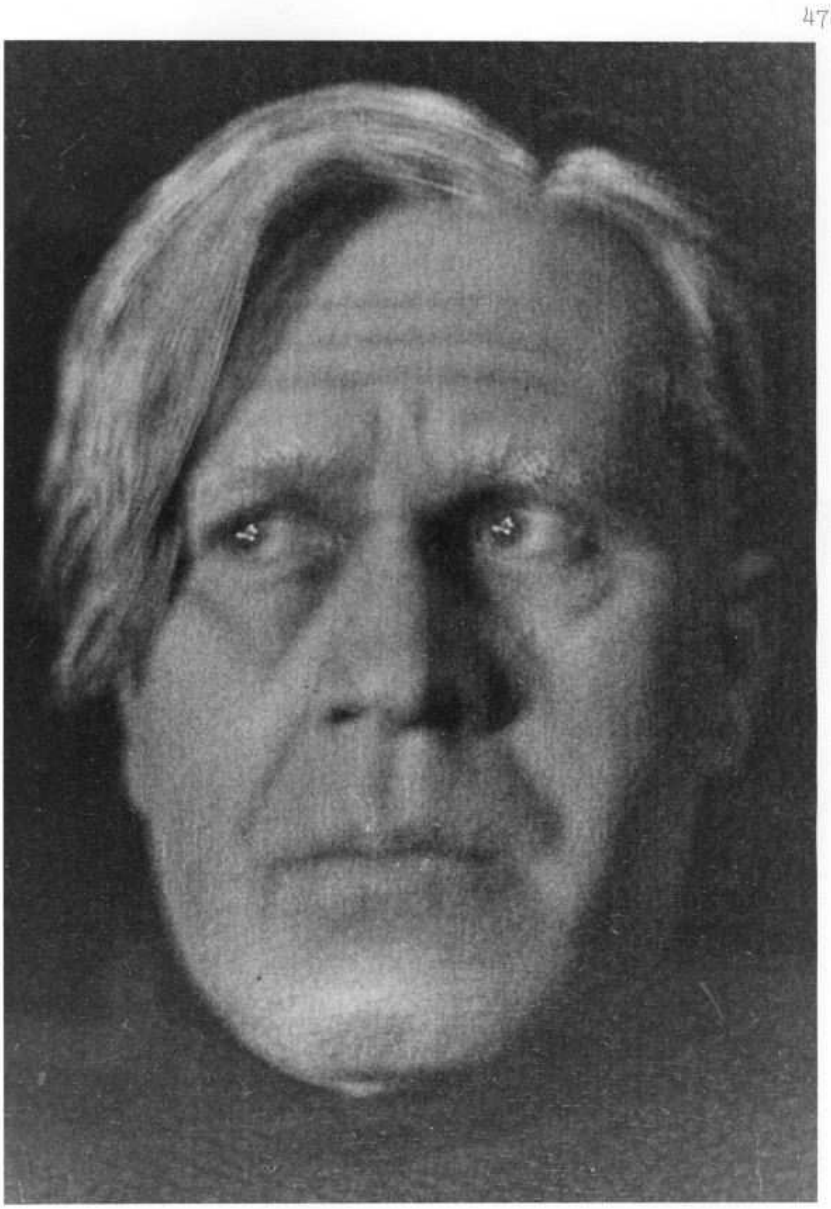

Figure 8.3: Gll”K.r Brown as Oliver Blayds in The Truth About Blayds.

Figure 8.4: Marthe Allan as old Mrs. Thurlow in The Ship.

believed that one should be able to create theatre wherever he might be, in whatever facility was available. He had often taken his productions to places other than regular theatres, such as hotel dining rooms, club house rooms, churches, and even a real estate office. He had staged Shakespearean plays, Greek tragedies, and modern plays in outdoor theatres in which the actors performed on the ground without any proscenium arch or curtain. In such outdoor theatres in Kansas and California, Brown's audiences gained additional intimacy by sitting at least partially around the acting area. Horseshoe staging and groupings resembling those of central staging resulted.

Stinailafced by this experience and by accounts of the work of Relnhardt, Copeau, Stanislavsky, Appia, Bel Geddes, and others. Brown had, by 1924, become increasingly obsessed with the desire to attain maximum actor-audience intimacy. He wished to break away completely from proscenium staging. Since this was not possible under the physical and economic limitations of the Pasadena Community Playhouse, of which he was the founder-director, he established the Fairoaks Playbox. He used the studio portion of his own home, an area fifty-two feet long,, and seventeen to twenty-three feet wide, to house his small laboratory theatre. He organized the theatre as a private club operated by himself, with a subscribing audience membership of approximately three hundred. The Fairoaks Playbox drew upon the directing, acting, and technical talent pool of the Pasadena ConBioinity Playhouse. It was nevertheless a completely separate enterprise from an organizational and legal standpoint.

In the three seasons of the Fairoaks Playbox, between 1924 and 1927, Brown presented twenty-two productions. Two of these he directed himself, and four he co-directed with Maurice Wells. Ten other productions were staged by Wells, three by Ralph Freud, and one each by Helen Eddy and Marine Allan. For one production, "Amelia," the director has not been identified. All of the plays casie under Brown's BUperviBion. The diversified repertory contained a greater percentage of serious realistic dramas and sophisticated English comedies than prevailed at the Pasadena Community Playhouse. Many of the plays were either new or Infrequently performed works. About half of the playwrights represented were .well-known writers such as Galsworthy, Shaw, Maeterlinck, Ibsen, Masefield, and lady Gregory.

What did the Fairoaks Playbox contribute toward the development of theatre-in-the-round in this country? For the intimate form of arena theatre it yielded a number of practices. It developed a centrally-placed overhead lighting eystem, featuring baby spotlights, which worked satisfactorily at a height eleven feet above the floor level. It used blackouts in lieu of a curtain. For the opening of each act, the performers found their places in the dark. The Fairoaks Playbox employed the floor of the room as the acting area. It emphasized aa the main ingredient of the Betting, an arrangement of furniture placed in an acting area marked off by light.

The Pairoaka Playbox revealed that a contemporary drama could be heightened in effect when performed with the audience surrounding the actors on four side, in a room whose interior occupied barely a thousand square feet of space. 'She plaetic technique of center stage blocking was explored, the need for rotation of actors' positions diecovered. 'The theatre developed a refined form of realistic acting suitable for the perfonaance of contemporary dramas and ooaiediee in a theatre-in-the-round . It showed that the closeness of the audience to the performers demanded more emotional sincerity, restraint, controlled projection, and concentration, than in the conventional

proscenium theatre, All of these practices of the Fairoaks Playbox helped to make it a prototype for the arena theatres developed later by such producers as Glenn Hughes, Albert McCleery, and Margo Jones.

The Pairoake Playbox was, of course, more than a center stage theatre, While it possessed all the concoaai" tants of a theatre-in-the-round, pure central staging made up only a minority of its productions. The most important part of its accomplishment was its demonstration of the values provided by flexible staging . It used permanent architectural features as a basic scenic backgrounds in the manner of the Vieux Colombier, the Madderroarket, and the Redoutensaal theatres. It made fewer raodifications of this background, however, than did these European theatres. Furthermore the scenic area included the entire studio with its four walls, not simply one end of the playhouse.

The principle of flexible staging revealed itself in the protean shapes of the acting and audience areas. All of the no-w standard variants of arena staging were employed, with the possible exception of "sandwich staging." This investigation found the following as minimal figures for the number of productions in each category; centrally staged (2); horseshoe (3); L staged (2); turnabout (3)5 end staged (5). For seven productions the form of staging has not yet been clearly determined. In all productions the directors tried to select arrangements which would best meet the scenic and acting requirements of the individual plays.

A final contribution of the Palroaks Playbox to the development of the intimate center stage and flexible theatre in the United States was its success. The audiences .were fascinated with what was for them a unique approach to play production. As Alexander Inglis, Alice Baskin, Edythe King, Harry Carr, and other drama critics and journalists have observed, the sense of eavesdropping, of being a part of the dramatic action, WB.B an exciting experience. "She highly favorable reception of the Fairoaks Playbox led Gllmor Brown to establish the Herkimer Playbox and to operate it from 1930 to 1957. While Brown is no longer living and his Playbox theatres have concluded their history, today's audiences are greeting his succesBors with fresh enthusiasm.

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Appendix A

PRODUCTIONS OF THE FAIROAKS PLAYBOX

1924-25	Play	Director	Dates
1.	The Truth About Blayds by A. A. Milne	Wells and Brown	Oct. 29-31 Nov. 5-7, 1924
2.	Pelleas and Melisande by Maurice Maeterlinck	Wells	Nov. 26-28 Dec. 3-5, 1924
3.	Nativity, Chester Mystery Anon.	Wells and Brown	Dec. 22-27, 1924
4.	One Acts: Woman's Honor, by Susan Glaspell, Song With Wings by Marjorie Driscoll	Wells	Dec. 31,1924- Jan. 2, 1925 Jan. 8-10, 1925
5.	March Hares by Harry W. Gribble	Wells	Jan. 28-30, Feb. 5-7, 1925
6.	The Tragedy of Nan by John Masefield	Brown	Mar. 4-6, Mar. 11-13, 1925
7.	Desire by Willard Robertson	Wells	April 1-3, 8-10, 1925
8.	The Man Who Ate the Popomack by W. J. Turner	Wells	May 6-8, 13-15, 1925
1925-26			
9.	The Discovery by Mrs. Frances Sheridan	Wells and Brown	Nov. 2-7, 1925
10.	Bernice by Susan Glaspell	Helen Eddy	Dec. 7-12, 1925
11.	Two Virtues by Alfred Sutro	Brown	Dec. 28-Jan. 2, 1926

1925-26	Play	Director	Dates
12.	George Bernard Shaw Cycle: The Dark Lady of the Sonnets, How He Lied to Her Husband, The Man of Destiny	Wells	Feb. 1-6, 1926
13.	The Mollusc by Hubert H. Davies	Ralph Freud	March 1-6, 1926
14.	The Great Galeoto by Jose Echegeray	Freud	March 29-April 3, 1926
15.	The Dragon by Lady Gregory	Freud	May 3-8, 1926
1926-27			
16.	The Trackwalker's Child by Alice Stein	Wells	Nov. 15-20, 1926
17.	Anthony and Anna by St. John Ervine	Wells [Brown in cast]	Dec. 6-11, 1926
18.	Noah's Deluge Chester Pageant	Wells and Brown	Dec. 20-25, 1926
19.	Rosmersholm by Henrik Ibsen	Wells [Brown in cast]	Jan. 17-22, 1927
20.	Amelia by Alice C. D. Riley	?	Feb. 28-Mar. 5, 1927
21.	The Ship by St. John Ervine	Marthe Allan	March 28-April 2, 1927
22.	Justice by John Galsworthy	Wells	April 25-30, 1927

Appendix B

LETTER CONCERNING ORIGINS OF FAIROAKS PLAYBOX, FROM GILMOR BROWN TO BROOKS ATKINSON

June 15, 1950

Mr. Brooks Atkinson
"THE NEW YORK TIMES"
Times Square
New York City, New York

Dear Brooks Atkinson;

After reading your article in "THE NEW YORK TIMES'* of June llth I remember how bitterly disappointed I was when you were on the Coast last season that you were so busy you weren't able to visit seme of our smaller theaters, and particularly The Playbox.

You see, as far as I can find out, the Playbox was the first of the theaters in America to adopt what has been called, "arena staging," "circle staging," and "central staging," although these names scarcely suggest the more flexible approach which was my ideal for a stage of this type.

I founded the Playbox on October 29, 1924.

It was inspired, originally by the visit of Jacques Copeau and his Vieux Colombier to this country and by the very flexible staging of hi a Repertory at that time; by Kenneth Macgowan's "The Theatre of Tomorrow" and also his article with Robert Edmond Jones on the possibility of staging Shakespeare in the style of the indoor circuses

of continental Europe; by many articles in "TSEATER ARTS" (then under the supervision of Edith Isaacs); by the study of the experiments in Europe, especially the work of the Experimental Theatre in Moscow which I saw in 19564 and by a study of the indoor circuses of continental Europe.

The Playbox, of course, has never been widely publicized since it really operates upon a club membership.

However, I know it was something of an inspiration to Glenn Hughes before he founded his Penthouse Theatre in Seattle. I know that after his visits here I talked, with him about the use of the Meany Hotel ballroom for the start of bis very fine work with arena staging.

Margo Jones, whom you mention, also spent some time here with me and. staged Tennessee Williams' "YOU TOUCHED ME" in the Playbox before it was taken to Hew York. I think that she, too, would say that the Playbox was Bcciething of an inspiration to her Theatre in Dallas.

Also, Albert McCleery will, I am sure, acknowledge that he had a real start from here for his Fordham. experiment with central staging.

And Ralph Freud, head of the Iheatre Division of the University of California at Los Angeles, helped me during the early history of the Playbox.

I am sending this information so that you may have it for any future reference on the subject.

Cordially,

Giliaor Brown Supervising Director

P.S. Am enclosing a folder of our Festival.

Since writing the above letter decided to phone you and appreciated getting through to you. Shall be looking forward to seeing you in Kew York later in the summer.-G.B.