wonder into it. Get your dreams into it. Where are your dreams?

Great drama does not deal with cautious people. Its heroes are tyrants, outcasts, wanderers. From Prometheus, the first of them all, the thief who stole the divine fire from heaven, these protagonists are all passionate, excessive, violent, terrible. "Doom eager," the Icelandic saga calls them. If we are meant to create in the theatre—not merely to write a well-constructed play or supply nice scenery, but to create—we shall imagine ourselves into these heroic moods. They will carry us far. For the soul is a pilgrim. If we follow it, it will lead us away from our home and into another world, a dangerous world. We shall join a band of poets and dreamers, the visionaries of the theatre: the mummers, the mountebanks, the jongleurs, the minstrels, the troubadours.

III

THE THEATRE AS IT WAS AND AS IT IS

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Magic may be real enough, the magic of word or an act, grafted upon the invisible influences that course through the material world.

—SANTAYANA

LIFE moves and changes and the theatre moves and changes with it. By looking at the theatre of the past, we may come to see our own theatre more clearly. The theatre of every age has something to teach us, if we are sensitive enough and humble enough to learn from it.

I am going to ask you to do the most difficult thing in the world—to imagine. Let us imagine ourselves back in the Stone Age, in the days of the cave man and the mammoth and the Altamira frescoes. It is night. We are all sitting together around a fire—Ook and Pow and Pung and Glup and Little Zowie and all the rest of us. We sit close together. We like to be together. It is safer that way, if wild beasts attack us. And besides, we are happier when we are together. We

are afraid to be alone. Over on that side of the fire the leaders of the tribe are sitting together—the strongest men, the men who can run fastest and fight hardest and endure longest. They have killed a lion today. We are excited about this thrilling event. We are all talking about it. We are always afraid of silence. We feel safer when somebody is talking. There is something strange about silence, strange like the black night around us, something we can never understand.

The lion's skin lies close by, near the fire. Suddenly the leader jumps to his feet. "I killed the lion! I did it! I followed him! He sprang at me! I struck at him with my spear! He fell down! He lay still!"

He is telling us. We listen. But all at once an idea comes to his dim brain. "I know a better way to tell you. See! It was like this! *Let me show you!*"

In that instant drama is born.

The leader goes on. "Sit around me in a circle —you, and you, and you—right here, where I can reach out and touch you all." And so with one inclusive gesture he makes—a theatre! From this circle of eager listeners to Reinhardt's great

Schauspielhaus in Berlin is only a step in time. In its essence a theatre is only an arrangement of seats so grouped and spaced that the actor—the leader—can reach out and touch and hold each member of his audience. Architects of later days have learned how to add convenience and comfort to this idea. But that is all. The idea itself never changes.

The leader continues: "You, Ook, over there—you stand up and be the lion. Here is the lion's skin. You put it on and be the lion and I'll kill you and we'll show them how it was." Ook gets up. He hangs the skin over his shoulders. He drops on his hands and knees and growls. How terrible he is! Of course, he isn't the real lion. We know that. The real lion is dead. We killed him today. Of course, Ook isn't a lion. Of course not. He doesn't even look like a lion. "You needn't try to scare us, Ook. We know you. We aren't afraid of you!" And yet, in some mysterious way, Ook *is* the lion. He isn't like the rest of us any longer. He is Ook all right, but he is a lion, too.

And now these two men—the world's first actors—begin to show us what the hunt was like.

They do not tell us. They *show* us. They *act* it for us. The hunter lies in ambush. The lion growls. The hunter poises his spear. The lion leaps. We all join in with yells and howls of excitement and terror—the first community chorus! The spear is thrown. The lion falls and lies still.

The drama is finished.

Now Ook takes off the lion's skin and sits beside us and is himself again. Just like you. Just like me. Good old Ook. No, not quite like you or me. Ook will be, as long as he lives, the man who can be a lion when he wants to. Pshaw! A man can't be a lion! How can a man be a lion? But Ook can make us believe it, just the same. Something queer happens to that man Ook sometimes. The lion's spirit gets into him. And we shall always look up to him and admire him and perhaps be secretly a little afraid of him. Ook is an actor. He will always be different from the rest of us, a little apart from us. For he can summon spirits.

Many thousands of years have passed since that first moment of inspiration when the theatre sprang into being. But we still like to get together, we still dread to be alone, we are still a

little awed by silence, we still like to make believe, and when an artist like Duse or Chaliapin or Pauline Lord speaks aloud in our midst a thing that is in the minds of all of us and fuses our various moods into one common mood, we are still lost in wonder before this magical art of the theatre. It is really a kind of magic, this art. We call it glamour or poetry or romance, but that doesn't explain it. In some mysterious way these old, simple, ancestral moods still survive in us, and an actor can make them live again for a while. We become children once more. We believe.

Let us glance at another scene, another drama. We are listening to the first performance of the *Antigone* of Sophocles. Again I must rely on your imagination. You have all read this play at one time or another. You all know what Greek actors looked like, with their masks and high buskins. The play has been performed in your own time and perhaps some of you have even acted in it. But we are not in America now, and this is not a revival. We are in a great half-circle of stone seats built into the side of a hill. In front of us is the stage—a long, raised platform backed

by a high screen-like wall of marble set with pillars of marble and gold. Something noble, something wonderful will presently happen on this stage. That is what it was made for. That is why we are here. It waits. We wait. We are not restless. We are content to stay in one place. Presently, in its own time, the day will come. The sun will shine upon us once more, as it has always done—the sun, too bright for our mortal eyes to look at. The sky grows lighter, but the stage is still dim and shadowy. Now the morning wind comes. We shiver a little. There is a sound of faraway doors opening "their ponderous and marble jaws." Two great dark figures steal out from opposite sides of the stage and meet in the center. They are Antigone and her sister Ismene. Their voices are lifted in a strange chant:

Do you know? Did you hear? Or have you failed to learn? . . . There is no grief, no degradation, no dishonor, not to be found among our woes. . . . What is it then?

They breathe a dreadful secret in the darkness. The first beams of the sun smite the stage. There is a fanfare of brass. The chorus enters.

Thou hast appeared at last . . . shining brighter on our seven-gated city than ever light shone before. O, eye of the day of gold!

And now the dawn has come, calm, serene, merciless as justice, inexorable as law. The drama pursues its course in the light of a new morning, marching steadily toward its climax while the sun marches steadily on toward high noon. All things are to be made clear. All things move from darkness into light. The sentence is pronounced. Antigone must go alive into the tomb. The beautiful masked figure speaks:

Men of my land, you see me taking my last walk here, looking my last upon the sunshine. Never more.

She is standing now in the shadow of the great center portal. She covers her face with her veil. Sorrow, and dread and ruin. . . . The elders of the city answer her:

And yet in glory and with praise you pass to the secret places of the dead. Alone among mankind you go to the grave alive.

Strange shadows stir in the darkness behind her. Her voice seems to come from a great distance:

I have heard of the pitiful end of the stranger from Phrygia, the daughter of Tantalus . . . most like to her, God brings me to my rest.

She speaks from another world. She is already a memory.

Cut off from friends, still living, I enter the caverned chambers of the dead. I who revered the right.

The great doors close. . . .

If we would recapture the mood of this drama today, we must turn to the music of Bach or Brahms, or to the dancing of Isadora Duncan, or to the high words of Abraham Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address:*

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground . . . The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here; but it can never forget what they did here. . . .

It is our right to be made to feel in the theatre terror and awe and majesty and rapture. But we shall not find these emotions in the theatre of today. They are not a part of our theatre any more.

Let us imagine ourselves now at the Bankside Theatre in London, in the days of Queen Elizabeth. We know today just where this theatre stood and how large it was and how it looked. Let us go there.

We are standing in the middle of a high circular building, open to the sky, with rows of balconies all around us, one above the other. At one end is the stage, a raised platform with entrances at either side and a space curtained off in the center. Above this is a balcony and above this again a kind of tower, high up against the sky. The pit where we are standing is crowded and a little dangerous. Life is cheap here at the Bankside Theatre. A stiletto under the ribs and no one is the wiser. . . . It begins to get dark. Lanterns and torches are lighted. A trumpet calls. We quiet down. High up on the platform a sentry moves—

Who's there?
Nay, stand, and unfold yourself.

We are at Elsinore. We are listening to the tragedy of *Hamlet.*

Horatio arrives with Marcellus. A bell strikes. The Ghost appears.

Nowadays, we don't believe in ghosts any more. Or at least we say we don't. But not so very many generations ago our own ancestors were burning witches for trafficking with the spirits of the dead. And I observe that when we are out in the desert, away from home, at night, sitting around a camp-fire, everyone has a mighty good ghost-story up his sleeve. And he always swears it is a true story, too. At any rate, here, in the Bankside Theatre, we do believe, and we are shaken with terror and pity at the sight of this thing out of hell. And now there is a flourish of trumpets and drums. The curtains part. The King and Queen enter in their glistering apparel, in the midst of their retinue—the counselors, the Swiss guards in bright armor, the ladies-in-waiting, the whole court of Denmark—proud, splendid, unimaginably rich in the glare of the torches. Nowadays royalty doesn't mean much in our

lives. Kings and queens are curiosities, something to read about in the newspapers along with some movie Sheba's latest re-marriage. But at the Bankside, Claudius and Gertrude are literally "hedged with divinity." This very morning Queen Elizabeth herself held an audience and laid her hands on us for "king's evil," and this very afternoon we saw her go by on the Thames in her gilded barge—Elizabeth, Gloriana, Belphoebe, Star of the Sea. We know what royalty is. We have seen it. We know what great ladies and gentlemen are. We have seen them. Kings and queens and princes are all real to us; and as we watch the delicate wayward Prince Hamlet, standing there in his black, emotions of awe and affection and adoration come thronging into our minds, all blending into wonder.

What a storm of energy there is in this play! How swiftly it moves! What a rush and whirl! Now on the forestage, now on the balcony, now behind the arras, now high up on the platform. And how these players perform it! They are trained entertainers—singers, dancers, clowns—actors. Tomorrow they will do *The Merry Wives of Windsor,* and the next day Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlane* and after that *A Midsummer*

Night's Dream or *Troilus and Cressida.* They have acted these "hits" (for that is what they are, the "hits" of their day) all over England, all over Europe. Sometimes they play before kings and queens, sometimes they play in stable-yards, before audiences of plowboys and truck drivers and sailors. They know the ways of courts and they know what it is to go hungry. They have learned their profession in a hard school of experience.

These Elizabethan actors know how to speak poetry. Hear their voices ring out in the tremendous phrases. Nowadays if we want to hear a good voice on the stage, we must go to opera. We do not expect to find one in the theatre. Music is no longer an integral part of drama. Our dramatists write for the eye, for the mind. But Shakespeare wrote for the ear. The soliloquy, "To be or not to be," is nothing more nor less than a great spoken aria. Turn to this play and read it once for the music alone.

So the drama goes on—the play, the murder, the closet-scene, the mad scene, the duel . . . mounting to its majestical end. Hamlet's body is borne to the platform. The last peal of ordnance is shot off. *The rest is silence.* . . .

And now the players are gone. What a strange thrill an empty theatre gives us! What echoes it carries, and what memories! Here was a dream, a high, swift, passionate, terrible dream. We have been brought face to face with the majesty and splendor of destiny. *Perhaps all the sins and energies of the world are only the world's flight from an infinite blinding beam.*

In the early days of the eighteenth century an English playwright named William Congreve wrote a comedy which he called *The Way of the World.* Let us go to London to see this play.

We are in a great hall lighted by crystal chandeliers. How did the drama get indoors? Nobody seems to know. The thing that is going to happen in this playhouse is neither religious ritual nor great popular art. There is a feeling of privacy here. A curtain covers one end of the room. A curtain . . . ? What is behind it? Something intimate, something personal, something . . . a little indiscreet? perhaps . . . Congreve will tell us. A servant trims the candles that burn in a row at the foot of the curtain. There is a preluding of fiddles. The curtain is lifted. We look at a room that is not a real room, but a kind of thin, deli-

cate, exaggerated echo of a room, all painted on screens of canvas. The actors enter, each one bowing to the audience. They look like nothing human, like nothing ever seen on this earth. The ladies' cheeks are rouged with a high hectic red. They wear frail iridescent dresses of silk and lace. They are laden with jewels. They carry masks and fans. The men wear periwigs and rapiers. Their heels click on the polished floors. Their hands are covered with long lace ruffles and they glitter with diamonds. The sense of luxury has come into the theatre. The players float and waver in the warm air that streams up from the tapers, like butterflies, like ephemera, born to shine a moment for our pleasure, for our humor, for our distinguished indulgence. *Et puis—bon soir!* Life? Don't come too near it! Life is just something that effervesces for a moment and goes flat. Life is a nuance, a gesture, a flicker . . . rouge . . . blood . . . ashes. . . . Love? Whoever said there was such a thing as love in the world? We know better. But while we are here we will keep up the show. And a brave show it is, a dazzling show. Distinguished manners, effrontery, phrases like fireworks. . . . But here comes Mistress

Millamant, i'faith, full sail, with her fan spread and her streamers out, and a shoal of fools for tenders:

You seem to be unattended, Madam—you used to have the beau monde throng after you; and a flock of gay fine perukes hovering round you.

O, I have denied myself airs today, I have walked as fast through the crowd—

As a favorite just disgraced; and with as few followers.

Dear Mr. Witwoud, truce with your similitudes; for I am as sick of 'em—

As a physician of a good air.—I cannot help it, Madam, though 'tis against myself.

Yet, again!—Mincing, stand between me and his wit.

Do, Mrs. Mincing, like a screen before a great fire.—I confess I do blaze today, I am too bright.

Flutes and hautboys in the air around us. . . .

There is a remarkable actress in London, Miss Edith Evans, who can speak lines like these with the precision and variety of a Heifetz. It is a very special pleasure to listen to her, and you have only to hear her go through an act of *The*

Beaux' Stratagem to realize that she has perfected an art of musical speaking that is almost unknown in our day. When a playwright begins to awaken the music that lies in the spoken word, and when an actor begins to give this music its value, a new theatre springs into being.

Plot? Oh, yes, to be sure, there is a plot. But if it should ever chance to obtrude itself too much, someone on the stage will cry out, "Come, I have a song for you, and I see one in the next room who will sing it."

And then Congreve will carelessly toss us an incomparable lyric like this:

I tell thee, Charmian, could I time retrieve,
And once again begin to love and live,
To you I should my earliest offering give;

I know my eyes would lead my heart to you,
And I should all my vows and hopes renew;
But to be plain, I never would be true. . . .

There is a moral lesson in this play, too, thrown in for good measure. Certainly, there is a moral lesson. Virtue triumphs in the end, as virtue should. But we shall not take it too seriously. It is all a part of the graceful ephemeral dance.

The epilogue is spoken. The players bow themselves out in a minuet. We shall meet them a little later in the evening at one of the fashionable chocolate-houses. *As for living, our servants can do that for us,* a Frenchman said, a century and a half later.

Somewhere around 1840 a very strange thing happens. A man named David Hill discovers how to make a thing he calls a photograph. It is a picture made on a sensitive plate of metal by rays of light, a picture of things exactly as they are. All art is profoundly influenced by this discovery. We all become fascinated by actuality. We want to see everything just as it is. We want people on the stage to walk and talk just as they do off the stage. Soon afterward the first real Brussels carpet makes its appearance in the theatre. Scene-painting becomes realistic, acting becomes casual, dialogue is modeled after the speech of everyday life. Let us drop in at a performance of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* in the early '90's.

The curtain goes up. We are looking at a room. At first glance it seems just like a real room with one wall taken off. It is a tasteful, agreeable room,

furnished, exactly as a real room would be, with tables and chairs and sofas and bric-a-brac. We might have taken tea here this very afternoon. This room has been lived in. It has an atmosphere. We can tell what the people who live here are like. The room has taken on something of their quality, just as an old coat gets molded to the person who wears it, and keeps the impress of his body afterward. See, there is General Gabler's portrait in the room beyond, and there are his pistols on the old piano, and the room is filled with flowers, and over there is a stove with a fire in it.

The play begins. How odd! Here is no solemn public ritual, no spoken opera, but a kind of betrayal. We are all eavesdroppers, peering through a keyhole, minding other people's business. We look in at the private affairs of the Tesmans, and we listen to them with the same eager, shocked, excited interest with which we might read the details of some court-room revelation. We see a spoiled, hysterical woman, dressed in the latest fashions from Paris. She pokes fun at Aunt Julia's bonnet. She pulls Mrs. Elvsted's hair. She burns Lovborg's manuscript. She is going to have a

baby and she doesn't want it. She plays the piano and shoots herself. The characters talk like this:

Well, well, then . . . My hat—? My overcoat—? Oh, in the hall—I do hope I shan't come too late, Hedda! Eh? . . . Oh, if you run—

and

Mrs. Elvsted. . . . Oh, yes, Sheriff Elvsted's wife . . . Miss Rysing that was . . . that girl with the irritating hair that she was always showing off . . . an old flame of yours, someone told me. . . .

It is all given to us in the language of everyday life. Just like a living picture. We might be listening to people on the street. . . . Little by little we become aware of a strange deep tragic play and interplay of motives behind the conventional surface. We are overcome by an inescapable sense of fatality. The ancient terror spreads its shadow over the drama. The pistol-shot at the end is the finale of a great tragic symphony.

And here we are back again. Our theatre is concerned with Little Theatre Movements and talking pictures and censorship and unions and

interlocking dimmer-boxes. Fashions change. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* written not so long ago, little Eva's father clasps her to his heart and murmurs:

O Evangeline, rightly named? Thou art indeed an Evangel to me!

In Maurice Watkin's *Chicago,* a sensational success in New York, the show-girl heroine yells:

You Goddamned louse!

and drops her man with a pearl-handled revolver. Fashions do, indeed, change. We are not living in the Stone Age any more, nor the time of the Renaissance, nor the time of the Restoration, nor in the Mauve Decade. These are the days of the candid camera and the comic strip and television and reducing diets and strange new dance-steps. We have to work in the theatre of our own time with the tools of our own time. . . . I will tell you now why I have made these images of the theatre of other days. In all these dramas of the past there is a dream—an excitement, a high, rare mood, a conception of greatness. If we are to create in the theatre, we must bring back this mood, this excitement, this dream. The plain

truth is that life has become so crowded, so hurried, so commonplace, so ordinary, that we have lost the artist's approach to art. Without this, we are nothing. With this, everything is possible. Here it is, in these old dramas. Let us see it. Let us learn it. Let us bring into the theatre a vision of what the theatre might be. There is no other way. Indeed, there is no other way.