1933

Negro in American drama

THE NEGRO IN AMERICAN DRAMA

A Thesis Presented as Part Requirement
for the Degree of Master of Education

By

Marguerite Cartwright, B. Sc. in Ed.

Boston University
School of Education
1933

First Reader: Everett L. Getchell, Professor of English
Second Reader: William Hoffman, Professor of English, College of Business Administration

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

It is my conviction that the American Negro was "born" to entertain and to act. With this opening remark I fear that I have justifiably gained the disapproval of those who may object to my apparently unfounded and unscientific contention.

Are human beings of certain racial groups actually "born" to perform any specific function? Certain of our psychologists will emphatically tell us no.

Yet there is much in the Negro's past, process of development, and present which is strangely coincidental with his exceptional talents in this direction. Possibly it is an environmental effect, or it might reasonably be the result of hereditary influences in his make-up. However, his experience has been intensely dramatic and the substance of great drama has always been his. No racial group in America has reached greater emotional depths or passed so dramatically through more levels of life. Indeed, it is as Alain Locke observes: "--the essential, elemental forces of great drama in all time,--epic turns of experience, tragic intensity of life, discipline and refinement of the emotions, have been accumulating, like underground well-springs, for generations in Negro life, and now are beginning to seek artistic vent and find free-flowing expression." But in spite of this

I shall, perhaps strangely and rather naively, prefer to think of it as an instinctive, inbred, God-given something--that the Negro is somehow inevitably "created to entertain."

The spirituals, which are an outgrowth of the Negro's sorrowful struggles in slavery, have made the realm of music forever their debtor. Indeed, some feel that the only contribution made by the United States to any of the arts is this one to the world of music.(1)

The same elements in the Negro's background which are responsible for this music, inevitably and very naturally lead him to express himself in drama. The eminent successes of Negro actors on the modern stage seem to indicate limitless potentialities in this field. The late David Belasco was brought to realize the importance of the Negro on the stage by his production of Lulu Belle. That great producer prophesied in 1926, "The theatre of tomorrow must reckon with a new force--the race of Ham!"(2)

It is indeed true, as Eugene O'Neill observes, that "--the gifts the Negro can and will bring to our native drama are limitless, and open up to a dramatist new and intriguing opportunities." Ridgley Torrence goes even farther and hopefully says: "I have sometimes imagined that the Negro, other things being equal,

---

(1) Mr. Clayton Hamilton has expressed this opinion.

(2) Belasco, David. Tomorrow's Stage and the Negro. Liberty, p. 17, Aug. 7, 1926.

might produce the greatest, the most direct, the most powerful drama in the world."

Hence we have a drama of Negro life developing because a native American drama is in process of evolution. It has meant the phenomenal rise within a decade of a Negro drama and a possible Negro theatre the significance of which is national as well as racial.

The pioneering genius of Eugene O'Neill, Ridgley Torrence, and Paul Green has contributed much in the awakening of the dormant dramatic gifts of the Negro folk temperament. In their recognition of the undeveloped possibilities of Negro life and folk ways they have brought distinctive new themes, characteristic situations, and an authentic atmosphere to the developing national drama. We have Paul Green aiming "to build up a genuinely native drama, a fresh expression of the folk-life in North Carolina, drawn from the rich background of local tradition and from the vigorous new life of the present day. In these simple plays we hope to contribute something of lasting value in the making of a new folk-theatre and a new folk-literature."

The increasing number of successful plays of this type forms a valuable and significant contribution to the theatre of today and opens fascinating possibilities for the theatre of the future.

The Negro playwright has attempted to advance Negro drama as such and to provide the talent of the

Negro actor with a fit vehicle and a native medium. The Caucasian playwrights in their search for modern American realism have found new material, a firmer and more secure grip on the actualities of American life, and a lusty and rigorous realism. The field is obviously in its first stage of development, but it has given us several of the most noteworthy and representative American plays that have yet been written.

The level of the subject matter of these plays has suddenly been raised from vaudeville and farce to significant folk-comedy and tragedy. However, his early period of enforced clowning and caricature could not completely stifle the Negro's dramatic endowment. His temperament, as does that of the Irish, moves natively and spontaneously in the world of make-believe with the primitive power of imaginative abandon and emotional conviction. With more self-control, education, poise, and spiritual freedom, a great actor and moving interpreter is evolving. The Negro drama is then becoming less moved but more moving, less controversial but more challenging, and more universal even in sounding its most racial notes. Therefore, we may well look to the Negro drama to bring back to the jaded, sceptical stage some of the elemental, renewing moods and powers of the early drama.

THE ETHIOPIAN ORIGIN OF THE DRAMA

Is it possible that all drama began with the early Ethiopian Negro? This is such a fascinating conjecture that I shall treat this topic fully.

Classical scholars tell us that the drama as we understand it began in the sixth and fifth centuries B. C. in Greece, but that the ground work of this Greek drama was merely the evolution and elaboration of an old folk-festival which the early Hellenic peoples carried out each year in honor of Dionysus (or Baccus), the god of wine. There is much archaeological evidence and many ancient traditions which link up Ethiopia and its African environs with the world of the heroes reflected in Homer and later poems.

Since the sources of the traditions made use of by the dramatists were essentially the same as those utilized by the poets, the works of these early dramatists frequently contained references to Ethiopia and the Ethiopians. In addition to this, there are certain indications that the Dionysian festival, which provided the foundations of the Greek drama, may have had its very origin in the inner or Ethiopian areas of Africa.

I shall pause briefly to consider the traditions and evidence which might have prompted

this suggestion. It has been pointed out by modern investigators that Dionysus of the Greeks was the same as the Egyptian god Osiris and that his worship was introduced into Greece in pre-Homeric times by Orpheus Musoeus and Melampodes after they had visited Egypt.(1) The truth of this specific tradition cannot be verified, but it is never-the-less quite true that comparative studies in Greek and Egyptian religions reveal that the rites and worship associated with the god concerned were remarkably alike in the two lands.

The origianal Dionysus, according to the Libyan tradition, was the illegitimate son of Ammon, the king of a kingdom in inner Africa. Ammon, fearing the jealousy of his wife, Rhea, concealed from her the birth of this son, and secretly sent him away to the city of Nysa. Most of the older legends locate Nysa as being in or near Ethiopia. Diodorus(2) specifically tells us that the Egyptians claim that Dionysus was brought up at Nysa, and later this author cites an old Greek tradition that Nysa was in the region "--where Egypt's Nile begins to rise."

---

(1) Booth. Diodorus. Book I, Ch. VII, p. 95-97.
(2) Booth. Diodorus. Book I, Ch. I.

Then we have Herodotus (1) giving two passages of the same import. In one he specifically states that tradition affirmed that Dionysus was "carried off to Nysa, above Egypt in Ethiopia;" in another passage(2) he refers to the "long-lived Ethiopians who dwell about the sacred city of Nysa and have festivals in honor of Bacchus (Dionysus)."

Moreover, the description of this land as preserved in the Libyan traditions recalls at once what must have been in very ancient times the natural conditions of that African region surrounded by the Nile and its tributaries. This heart of old Ethiopia was known to classical geographers as the "Island of Meroe." Diodorus(3) quotes from an ancient poet a verse which locates the sacred Nysa as being the region where Dionysus was reared. The Libyan tradition further relates that while Dionysus was growing up in the idyllic surroundings of Nysa, he was instructed in the most learned arts and sciences, and as the years passed became noted not only for "the strength and beauty of his body and the endowments of his mind , but also for his inventions of things useful in the life of man. While he was yet but a mere boy he found out the nature and use of wine by discovering how to press

---

(1) Herodotus. Book II, p. 146.
(2) Herodotus. Book III, p. 97.
(3) Booth. Diodorus. Book I, Ch.I, p. 23.

the clusters of the vine, and he later learned how to dry grapes in order to store them for future use. He found out likewise what ground was most proper for the planting of many things. Then in the hope of attaining immortal honor he communicated his inventions to mankind."(1)

As Dionysus' fame and glory were spread abroad, the secret leaked out that he was the son of Ammon. When this information came to the ears of Rhea, the wife of the Libyan king, she went away to her brothers, known as the Titans, who were kings in other parts of Africa, and after marrying one of them, Saturn, persuaded them to march against her former husband. In the wars which followed, Ammon, before he fled to Crete, prophesied that Dionysus would not only regain the kingdom, but that he would also greatly enlarge his own dominions and would eventually be worshipped as a god.

Dionysus, then, first invaded Egypt and taught the Egyptians "the manner of planting, the use of the vine, and how to keep and store up wine and other fruits." Following this, he made a world tour,

---

(1) Booth. Diodorus. Book I, Ch. I, p. 23.

going as far as India. In all the countries through which he passed he taught the people the improved art of husbandry and agriculture, and by these good acts he obliged all mankind to render him grateful remembrance and immortal honor. Dionysus was finally slain by the Titans, and after his death he was translated to a state of immortality by posterity.

This is in my opinion one of the most remarkable stories of antiquity. It provides us with one of the most rational explanations yet advanced concerning the origin of the Dionysian festival, and therefore of the drama. It likewise explains the alleged borrowings of Egyptian religious rites and rituals made by Orpheus and Melampodes and goes a long way towards explaining the many remarkable similarities between the early Hellenic religions and those of ancient and modern Nilotic Africa. Then, aside from the general ring of truth which the whole story has, there are some parts of it which find a certain amount of confirmation in some relatively recent studies made in connection with the cultural and religious histories of Egypt and inner Africa. Through these means it has been established that the earlier form of the worship of Osiris in Egypt (the Greek Dionysus) finds some surprising counterparts in the religious beliefs and practices of many of the

inner African races of the present day. Sir Alfred Wallas Budge (1) is convinced that the older Egyptian forms of Osirian belief and worship were carried into Egypt out of the Negro countries of the south where such beliefs and practices had already long been widely established. It has also been shown (2) that the worship of Ammon (or Amon or Amun) in Egypt was preceded by an older and more universal system of similar worship in the general Ethiopian area of the African interior. It is also a well known fact that the symbol of Ammon in both ancient Ethiopia and ancient Egypt was a long-horned ram, and here it is interesting to note that the old Libyan tradition states that Ammon, Dionysus' father, always wore, when he went forth to battle, a helmet shaped in the form of a ram's head with horns. Here is doubtless an explanation of the fact that the Dionysus of the Greeks was sometimes represented with horns growing out of his head. From Zeus (or Dio), his alleged father, and Nysa we get his name, Dionysus.(3)

In the original festival to Dionysus, a part of the celebration consisted of "a company of women, once virgins, who carried javelins decked with flowers,

---

(1) Budge, A.W. Osiris. p. 269.
(2) Bosset, Rene. Berbers and North Africa. Vol. II, p. 508-9.
(3) Booth. Diodorus. Book I, Ch. I, p. 219.

and who ran about like furies hallooing (1) and setting forth the praises of the god--as if he were present among them."(2) As time passed, these crude choruses became more refined, and in order, it has been supposed, to recall more widely the acts of the god, other singers and dancers were added to mimic or enact some of the experiences which Dionysus and his companions were said by the traditions to have undergone. Thus it was, if we are to believe our classical scholars, that the first stages in the development of the drama were born. Still later other refinements were added and the action was extended to include not only experiences directly connected with Dionysus and his companions, but also other gods and heroes mentioned in the ancient traditions. These developments eventually culminated in the catholic plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, with the heroic sagas as their themes, in which Dionysus seldom if ever appeared (except in the Bacchantes of Euripides). But even in the Golden Age of Greek drama, when Dionysus was no longer an integral part of the play itself, his ancient connection with the drama as an institution was still symbolized by generally having present in or near the theatre a statue of this god, and he was always looked upon as the patron divinity of this form of art.

---

(1) One wonders if they resembled a modern burlesque chorus.
(2) Booth. Diodorus. Book IV, Ch. I, p. 194.

Whether or not in the older celebrations of the Dionysian festivals any mention was made of events and individuals of an African or Ethiopian setting is not known, but in view of the god's traditional African connections it is not improbable that this was the case. Surely, in the advanced days of the Greek drama, Ethiopia and the Ethiopians came in for a certain amount of consideration. How extensive were these considerations and what was their nature are matters about which historians now speak with but little certainty. This grows out of the fact that most of the plays composed by the Greek dramatists are now lost. Of the seventy tragedies ascribed to Aeschylus, only seven have survived; of the one hundred thirteen credited to Sophocles, again only seven remain; and of the ninety-two dramas, including eight satyric plays, that are said to have been composed by Euripides, only seventeen are left.(1) Unfortunately, it also turns out that those dramas whose themes were such that they might be expected to involve references to Ethiopia and the Ethiopians are all to be numbered among those that have been lost. For example, Sophocles and Euripides are each known to have written a drama entitled Andromeda, but neither of these now remains. It is safe, however, to assume that these were built, as the title indicates, around the experiences of the

---

(1) Taylor, J.R. The Story of the Drama

Ethiopian princess, Andromeda, the beloved daughter of Cephus, king (legendary) of Ethiopia, and his presumptious queen, Cassiopia. An ancient legend lists Andromeda's father, Cephus, among the Argonauts who accompanied Jason to Colchis--said by Herodotus to have been a nation of blacks.

Pliny makes an incidental allusion to Ethiopia's wealth. In the digest of the story of Andromeda as it is preserved to us by Ovid it seems this conclusion is again borne out. Whether or not Pliny's reference and Ovid's digest were taken from the Andromeda of Sophocles or Euripides scholars are uncertain, but if they were--and it is quite likely that this was the case--they indicate how rich these two lost plays must have been in minutiae concerning ancient Greek traditions of Ethiopia.

A further hint of the popularity of Ethiopia with the Greek dramatists, as well as some idea of the nature and extent of their knowledge concerning the ancient land and its traditions, may be inferred from the fact that they, as in the preceding instances, not only made Ethiopians the central figures of some of their plays, but also included incidental references to the blacks and their country in certain of their other known works which were essentially European in theme and setting.

Aeschylus, in that immortal work, Promethus Bound,(1) causes the long-suffering Titan to say to the unfortunate, far-wandering Io that while she must avoid the "ford of Pluto" and "Kisthene's Gorgonian plains" "Where dwell the gray-haired virgin Phorkedes" she may, however, approach with safety the tribe of black men who dwell "By the Sun's fountain (near) Ethiopia's stream." Although this instance is the only one in the surviving works of the great dramatists in which Ethiopia is specifically mentioned, there are nevertheless several others in which references and allusions are made to peoples and places in Africa which suggest certain Ethiopian connections or relationships.

The cumulative results of the preceding discussion, notwithstanding the scarcity and often fragmentary character of the passages on which they are based, would seem to justify the conclusion that the interest and knowledge of the Greek dramatists concerning Ethiopia and its people were by no means inconsequential matters or things apart from the thoughts and traditions of the times. The thesis that drama actually began with the negroid Dionysus is obviously insecure, having as its basis centuries of tradition, superstition, and legend. However, I feel that it is a consideration which no student interested in the complete story of the part played by the Negro in this art can afford to ignore.

---

(1) Blackie, J.S. Aeschylus' Lyrical Dramas.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

William Shakespere seems to have been the first English playwright to recognize the dramatic possibilities in the life of the darker races. One of his greatest tragedies, Othello, written at the height of his career, was woven about a black Moorish character, in a study of the effect of an elemental passion--jealousy--upon his charming but emotional and overpowering nature. The difficulty of adequately representing this black hero has proven embarrassing many times to the Caucasian stage, and as a result, this powerful drama has suffered a distinct unpopularity. Naturally, its chief interpreters have had to give a bleached and adulterated presentation of the black commander of the Venetian army.(1)

The precedent set by Shakespere was not followed by any of his immediate successors in England. It was not until half a century later that a Negro again appeared as the principal figure in a popular play, when Mrs. Aphra Behn's Oronooko (2) appeared in London in 1667 as a novel, which was at once dramatized. This sentimental story told of the unhappy lot of a noble Negro prince in captivity. Three decades later, another play with the same theme, Thomas Southerne's Oronooko, was presented at the Drury Lane Theatre in London. The only dramas of Negro life

---

(1) Until nearly two centuries later, when London and the Continent were treated to an unprecedented occurrence--the appearance of a Maryland Negro, Ira Aldridge, in this role.
(2) Known also as Abdelazer, or The Moor's Revenge.

written in England during the next one hundred fifty years seem to have been Henry Bate's The Blackamoor Washed White, produced at the Drury Lane Theatre in London in 1776, and Thomas Archer's The Black Doctor, published in 1847.

Early American playwrights gave little consideration to the Negro, except for an occasional stereotyped character and a few unimportant plays dealing with Negro life. Of the latter, few are worthy of mention. Examples are: Barbadoes, by Lewis Hallam, produced at the John Street Theatre, New York City, in 1768; The Africans, or War, Love and Duty, by William Dunlap, Philadelphia, 1811; The Captured Slave, by an unknown author, Buffalo, 1815; and The West Indian, a Comedy, by R. Cumberland, New York City, 1818. There were minor Negro roles in a dozen or more American plays prior to 1850, and these show a gradual evolution of a crudely drawn, standardized, and unconvincing stage Negro towards a somewhat more realistic type.

One of the earlier examples of attempted portrayal of Negro character by an American playwright is to be found in the low comedy part, Cesar, in L. Beach's Jonathan Postfree written in 1807. Beach's crude attempts at Negro dialect indicate a conscious effort to scrape together native tokens of originality, but the result was not particularly happy, and Cesar talks more like

the popular American conception of a Chinaman than he does like any actual Negro type. The sheer art of dialect was slow to evolve in American literature, and we scarcely find real Negro idioms put down until Joel Chandler Harris gathered his Uncle Remus stories late in the nineteenth century. However, these early American plays are valuable because they reflect American life and tastes of the period. Thus we find a sentimental attitude toward the Negro manifest in the theatre long before Uncle Tom's Cabin, but the mechanics of realistic stage dialogue were weak.

With the appearance of Mrs. Anna Cora Mowatt's crudely sentimental Fashion, we find Negro delineation, in the role of the colored servant, Zeke, taking on a slightly more realistic form than was usual in the earlier plays. Fashion, which was first produced at the Park Theatre, New York City, March 24, 1845, represented the high-water mark of social drama of the period, and it proved to be the success of the New York theatrical season. However, its literary merits were slight, and Edgar Allan Poe criticized it as "an imitation of the worst in modern drama." Mrs. Mowatt defended herself by saying that she had made no attempt at fine writing, but had designed the piece as an acting comedy, and desired to achieve dramatic success rather than literary success. Although Zeke represented some advance towards

realism over earlier Negro characters, he was still far from genuine either in speech or in manner. Both the play and the character have long since sunk into obscurity along with most of the earlier American plays.

The only other considerable ripple in Negro theatrical history prior to 1850 was the appearance of the previously mentioned Ira Aldridge, the first Negro to surmount the bars of race prejudice and receive recognition on the professional English-speaking stage. The importance of this pioneer Negro actor was such that I am devoting a separate section to the treatment of his career.

IRA ALDRIDGE

Ira Aldridge, who faced European audiences as early as 1830 in the most ambitious plays of the drama, was born in a suburb of Baltimore, Maryland, about 1805. His father was a full-blooded Sengegal chieftain who had been converted to Christianity by missionaries in Africa, and had come to Baltimore to take charge of a Negro parish. The elder Aldridge proposed to make a missionary of his son, but Ira rebelled. He insisted on becoming an actor, and proved his capacity in amateur performances. His father sent him to England, where, freed from the influence of parental opposition, Ira made his first professional stage appearance. He met Edmund Kean, the great English tragedian, who soon discovered Aldridge's ability as an actor, and encouraged him to cultivate his gift.

Aldridge appeared first at the Royalty Theatre in London as Othello, and was received with great favor. After playing for some time in England, he returned to America and attempted a career as an actor here. He acted first in Baltimore, and was promptly rejected by the public. In chagrin he returned to England and entered upon a career which was destined to be most successful.

As an interpreter of Shakespere's plays, Aldridge was especially well received in England, and, naturally enough, in those parts to which his color was

suited he received most favor. Edmund Kean admired, in particular, his Othello, and often played Iago to Aldridge's performance of the Moor. Aldridge played at the Convent Garden in London and at the old Surry Theatre in this role as well as in Orinoco, Rolla, and Hugo. We are told that in those parts in which it was possible he played in his own natural complexion, and whitened his skin for the others. He apparently did the latter for King Lear, a play in which he was very highly commended in Europe. Madge Kendal, as a young actress, played Desdemona opposite Aldridge's Othello.

After he had established his position in Europe, this great Negro tragedian never again attempted to conquer his own country. He married an English woman, and spent the rest of his life abroad.

It is thought by some that Aldridge was for a time, as a youth in Maryland, apprenticed as a shipbuilder, and that he picked up enough German from the sailors he met to constitute a fair knowledge of that language. However, it is probable that he later studied German more thoroughly, for, in 1852, he went to Germany, where he played for three years with pronounced success. The fame he won in Germany gained for him the honor of a request from the King of Sweden to come to Stockholm and play there.

In 1855, Aldridge received the Gold Medal of Arts and Sciences from the King of Prussia. The only other persons upon whom that honor had been bestowed up to that time were Humboldt, the philosopher, Spontini, the composer, and Liszt, the musician. Aldridge was also made a knight of the Royal Saxon Ernestinischen, and was recipient of the Verdienst medal of the order in gold, presented by Duke Bernard of Saxe-Meiningen, brother of Queen Adelaide of England. He was a member of the Imperial Academy of Beaux Arts of St. Petersburg, and an honorary member of the Russian Hof Versamburg of Riga. He was the holder of the Imperial Jubilee Medal and advocate of the Assembly of Nobles.

Although his chief roles were Othello and other Shakesperian characterizations, Aldridge was said to have been irresistible in burlesque, and gained many admirers by his singing of "Possum up a Gum Tree." One critic has left for us the following comment:

> In farce, Mr. Aldridge is as funny as he is serious in tragedy. The ebony becomes polished--the coal emits sparks. His face is the faithful index of his mind, and there is not a darker frown than his, nor a broader grin. The ecstacy of his long, shrill note in "'Possum up a Gum Tree" can only be equaled by the agony of his cry over the body of Desdemona. The sublime and the ridiculous defined, but not blended nor confounded one with the other.

Aldridge gained considerable fame as King Lear. He got himself up as this white character by a "flesh-colored skull cap, with a few locks of silver hair, covering his woolly curls down to his eyebrows;

a wax addition was made to his flat nose, a thick coat of paint bedecked his cheeks, while a great, white beard concealed the lower part of his face and fell upon his bosom."

His career on the Continent reads like the progress of some fictional character. He only once referred to the possibility of returning to play in America. This was just before leaving London on his last trip to Russia, during which he met his untimely death. At this time he told his friends that after his return to England he might once more try his fortune in his native land. His last appearance in London was at the Haymarket Theatre in August, 1865, under the management of Walter Montgomery.

Aldridge's accidental death occurred in Poland in 1866. It seems that he was returning in his carriage to Llandills when one of the horses took fright at a blaze of light from a near by iron foundry. The carriage was thrown over the brink of a precipice, and Aldridge was dashed to his death. After lying in state for two days and being viewed by thousands of people, his remains were interred with great pomp at the German Evangelical Church, Lades. There were vast numbers of soldiers, members of societies, and many officials and dignitaries in the funeral cortege.

We are told that Aldridge was a man of distinctly African traits in his appearance, and his most striking physical peculiarity was the size of his head, which

measured twenty-three and one half inches in circumference. A London newspaper (1) described him as follows:

> Mr. Ira Aldridge is a bona fide African of mulatto tint, with woolly hair. His features are capable of much expression, his action is unrestrained and picturesque, and his voice is clear, full, and resonant.

Another critic had this to say of Aldridge: "He possesses an excellent voice, commanding figure, and expressive countenance, to which he adds the advantages of education and study." Another of his contemporaries said, "In private life, the pleasing and happy manners, the gentle and unassuming deportment, the suavity and grace with which Mr. Aldridge is endowed have won for him many friends, whose esteem will, we trust, be as permanent as his theatrical fame will be pre-eminently lasting."

Among other high compliments paid to Aldridge, the House of Representatives of Santo Domingo passed by unanimous vote, in 1838, a measure congratulating him on his successful progress in "contradicting the assertion that his race is incapable of mental culture," and bestowing upon him a commission with the rank of Captain and Aide-de-Camp Extraordinary to His Excellency the (then) President Boyer of Santo Domingo.

As has been previously noted, Aldridge was received with great enthusiasm not only in England and Germany, but also in Russia. The Russian press was generous with favorable comments, a typical one being

---

(1) The Morning Post. London. March 21, 1848.

the following from a St. Petersburg paper in 1858:(1)

> An American Negro, named Ira Aldridge, has been performing at the Imperial Theatre in several of Shakespere's pieces, and has met with great applause. His principal character, of course, is Othello, and he portrays the jealous African with such truth and energy that even those amateurs who recollect our great Russian tragedian, Karatugin, acknowledge the superiority of his sable successor. In Shylock, too, he shows unusual dramatic power, and, painted and tricked out for the stage, he passes very well by lamp-light as the Jew that Shakespere drew.

Aldridge's success abroad was so notable that even the press in his native America, where he had been rejected by the public, was led, somewhat reluctantly and deprecatingly, to echo his praise. The following is an example of such praise, tempered to the American public by referring to him as the "darkey tragedian:" (2)

> Ira Aldridge, the darkey tragedian, is performing with much success in the cities and towns of Russia. His personation of Othello at Odessa so affected the audience that at the end of the third act they rose en masse, and the ladies wept and waved their handkerchiefs.

Finally, I am including an entry from the diary of that distinguished critic, the Earl of Scarborough: (3)

> On Friday evening we were called upon to witness a perfect novelty in the department of theatricals, for such may be considered the acting of a man of colour, whether good or

---

(1) The St. Petersburg Herald. December, 1858.
(2) The New York World. January 13, 1852.
(3) The Earl of Scarborough. Diary. August 9, 1831.

otherwise, but the African Roscius (1) is certainly an actor of genius. His complexion is deeply tinctured with Afric's ray of shade; his figure is tall, manly, and muscular; and he is in the very vigour of manhood, being only in his twenty-fifth year. His pronunciation of the English language is as perfectly correct as that of a native, and his voice possesses great power, with intonations of an intuitive order, and which genius only can display: indeed, it is our opinion, that for every variety of intonation and inflection of the voice there cannot be rules given, for the orator of true genius can throw out from the feelings of the soul such refrangability of reflection (if we may be allowed to use these optical allusions) as beggars the rules of art.

The tragedy selected for performance on Friday evening was Shakespere's Othello, the hero being played by the African Roscius. Novel, imposing, and sublime was the first sight of the Moor, personated as he was by the sable African. So effective was the commencement before a word was spoken. The intonations of deep and sweet melody were, however, soon added to the grandeur of his personal performance, and every trait of the noble-minded, generous Moor was afterward presented in appropriate and conspicuous style. His second entré was princely, and the immediate interview with Desdemona peculiarly attractive. The word of love was tenderly uttered, and here the African Roscius met with judicious support from Desdemona, Mrs. Edwards. His acting during the brawl was animated; the subsequent risings of jealousy were defined in a masterly manner; and the dashed and hurried spirits were troublously portrayed. His next meeting with Desdemona was of a heart-rending description, and his exit from the scene most piteous.

"Farewell the plumed troop" was pathetically delivered, and the whole of that portion of the tragedy in which this beautiful soliloquy occurs was strikingly impassioned. The scene in which arises the contention respecting the handkerchief was acted by the African Roscius in a highly embittered tone of jealous "well painted passion." The internal commotions of despair, displayed in the last act of the tragedy, with the occasional accompanying "fury of words," were pictured with great force and feeling; and upon the whole we consider Othello, as played by the

---

(1) Aldridge was widely known by this name, after the famous Roman actor, Roscius, of the first century, B.C.

> African Roscius, a performance enriched with the brilliancy of genius. We must not in justice omit to observe that the Emilia of Mrs. Brooks was very spirited.

The foregoing account of the life and career of Ira Aldridge I have moulded out of critiques, newspaper clippings, and hand bills of his time. In addition to these, I found a memoir written in German, and one in Russian, which dealt with Aldridge at considerable length and in glowing terms. With some difficulty I was able to translate parts of the German, and a friend obliged by translating portions of the Russian. If this account seems too partial and the conclusions too one-sided, it is due to the enthusiasm of his contemporaries rather than my own.

THE DRAMATIZATION OF UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

Up to 1850 there was very little dramatic interest in the Negro of the United States. Less than a decade before the outbreak of the Civil War there sprang up a very sentimental interest in the black population of the South. Harriet Beecher Stowe had given the world her epoch-making novel, Uncle Tom's Cabin, which had likewise enjoyed wide popularity as a drama. The dramatization of this story proves the first instance where an attempt is made to present realistically to the American public an authentic representation of Negro life. It is also the first instance wherein the American theatre-goer sees a number of Negro characters (played, however, by white actors with faces blacked) on the stage.

I found it rather difficult to discover any facts about the authors of the several dramatized versions of Uncle Tom's Cabin. In fact, it seemed for a time that even their names had sunk into obscurity. This was indeed one instance where the play itself became so popular through several generations that the playwright was forgotten and not identified with the success of the play. In my search I found not less than fifteen stage versions, and there are undoubtedly many more extant.

When Mrs. Stowe published her novel, she did not reserve the acting rights, and there was a rapid growth of more or less meritorious dramatizations of the story. As a result, neither Mrs. Stowe nor her estate profited one cent from the popularity of the story on the stage, although it has enjoyed some three hundred thousand performances in America and abroad. However, Mrs. Stowe had had her attention called many times to the effectiveness of the theatre. Hence any loss she may have sustained may be charged to her deep-rooted prejudice against the stage.

Uncle Tom's Cabin was published on March 20, 1852, and by August it had been dramatized. We find Asa Hutchinson of Hartford, Connecticut, immediately writing to Mrs. Stowe for acting rights. Her reply to his letter, typical of the New England spirit of that time, was as follows:

> I have considered your application and asked advice of my different friends, and the general sentiment of those whom I have consulted so far agrees with my own, that it would not be advisable to make that use of the work which you propose. It is thought, with the present state of theatrical performances in this country, that any attempt on the part of Christians to identify themselves with them will be productive of danger to the individual character, and to the general cause. If the barrier which now keeps young people of Christian families from theatrical entertainments is once broken down by the introduction of respectable and moral plays, they will then be open to all the temptations of those who are not such, as there will be, as the world now is, five bad plays to one good. However specious may be the idea of reforming dramatic entertainments,

> I fear it is wholly impracticable, and as a friend to you should hope that you would not run the risk of so dangerous an experiment. The world is not good enough yet for it to succeed. I preserve a very pleasant recollection of your family, and of the gratification I have derived from the exercise of your talents, and it gives me pleasure to number you among my friends.(1)

Mrs. Stowe's attitude, however, did not keep others of less noble intent from thus catering to popular appeal, and the play was soon produced with theatrical effect as its aim rather than propaganda for reform. Hence we find playwrights of every degree of ability tinkering with the incidents of the story. The stage versions grew by what they were fed on, and in one of the first--written by a certain Charles Taylor--both Eva and Topsy were ignored in the cast. In spite of its unfinished state, this version was seen in New York, on August 24, 1852.

In the early autumn of 1852 we find Uncle Tom's Cabin playing in two London theatres,--the Royal Victoria and the Great National Standard. There is also record of a dramatization made by Mark Lemon and Tom Taylor, entitled Slave Life, and presented at the London Adelphi Theatre, in November, 1852.

The best known dramatized version was done by an American, George L. Aiken of Boston, an actor-dramatist of the time, and a typical man of the theatre both in tastes and in connections.

---

(1) Stowe, Harriet Beecher. Letters.

Aiken was born in Boston on December 19, 1830, and his first appearance as an actor was in Providence, Rhode Island, in June, 1846. He was a cousin to one George Howard who during the year of 1852 was manager of the Troy Museum Theatre in New York. Howard's daughter, Cordelia, had at that time gained quite a reputation as an infant prodigy. When she was only four years old, she played the role of Little Dick in the dramatization of Oliver Twist. Hence the proud father was in the field for other roles for her to conquer. It is not known who first suggested the part of Little Eva for the precocious child, but it was decided that Aiken should dramatize Uncle Tom's Cabin, which he did and had it ready for rehearsals in less than a week. This seems to have been a family affair, for the first Uncle Tom was Mrs. Howard's brother.

There is no doubt that Aiken was equal to his melodramatic task, for he catered to the fashion of the day by dramatizing many of the New York Ledger stories, like The Gun-maker of Moscow, The Mystic Bride, and Orion, the Gold Beater, all of which were produced in Albany. He also wrote many ten cent novelettes, and the Library of Congress credits him with such fiction as Chevalier, the French Jack Sheppard (1868) and A New York Boy Among the Indians(1872). It is not surprising, then, that Aiken emphasized the sensational features of Uncle Tom's Cabin in preference to what may be termed its lowly side.

The premier of the play occurred on the evening of September 27, 1852, at the Troy Museum. The Troy papers announced that "The doors open at seven--to commence at eight. Admission 25 cents, children half-price. Boys to the gallery, 12½ cents. Box seats, 12½ cents extra. Orchestra spring seats and cushioned armchairs, 25 cents extra." On the first program the author's name was not even given.

Apparently Aiken felt that the possibilities of the story were too great for him to treat in one play, for we find him later writing The Death of Uncle Tom; or, The Religion of the Lowly. This second dramatization was immediately produced, but it did not meet with the success that had been gained by its predecessor.

On November 15, 1852, we have the two plays welded into one in a "Grand combination of the two dramas on the same evening.....Little Cordelia Howard as Eva." The play ran for one hundred nights at the Troy Museum with Aiken himself playing George Shelby. It was next brought to the New York Chatham Street Theatre, where, on July 18, 1853, it began a run which lasted for a year. This original version was in six acts, eight tableaux, and thirty scenes. It was a massive production, calling for ingenuity of stage set, and Howard himself pointed it out as being an innovation. He is quoted as having said:

> I was the first, I may say, to introduce one-play entertainments. That is, till the advent of Uncle Tom in New York, no evening at the theatre was thought complete, without an afterpiece, or a little ballet-dancing. When I told the manager Uncle Tom must constitute the entire performance, he flouted the idea; said he would have to shut up in a week. But I carried my point, and we didn't shut up, either. People came to the theatre by hundreds, who were never inside its doors before; we raised our prices, which no other theatre in New York could do, and we played Uncle Tom over three hundred times during that engagement.

We are told that Little Eva was played so poignantly by Cordelia Howard that it drew tears from Edwin Forrest and the poet, Bryant, when they witnessed it. Even Mrs. Stowe herself was induced by friends to overcome her prejudice against the stage sufficiently to attend a performance at the National Theatre, Boston, with Mrs. Howard as Topsy and Cordelia Howard as Little Eva. It is recorded that Mrs. Stowe was delighted and deeply moved by the performance.

Soon there came a time when the play was so well established in the affections of the people that no theatre, however high its reputation, thought it out of place to revive Uncle Tom's Cabin with a cast of the most prominent actors. Everywhere, it was regarded as a typical Negro play, although, as far as I am able to ascertain, universally played by white actors. Up to this time, the development of Negro drama in America had received little consideration, but now interest was turned to the question of the Negro as a stage character. Hence this play is of great significance in this regard, as well as being an example of the tastes of the audiences during the early days of the American theatre.

THE NEGRO MINSTRELSY

"Although Uncle Tom's Cabin passed into obscurity," observes Alain Locke,(1) "Topsy survived. She was blissfully ignorant of any ancestors, but she has given us a fearful progeny. With her, popular dramatic interest in the Negro changed from serious, moralistic drama to the comic phase. The earliest expression of Topsy's baneful influence is to be found in the minstrels." Locke's collaborator, Montgomery Gregory, seems to hold a somewhat different opinion concerning the chronology of the Negro minstrels. He points out (2) that: "As early as the forties, the distinctive form of American amusement, the minstrel show, made its appearance. This was a gross caricature of Negro life, and the minstrel formula has done much to thwart the proper development of Negro drama. .....An interlude in the popularity of the minstrels was furnished by the immense popularity of the Uncle Tom's Cabin shows, and later of Dion Boucicault's Octoroon, both moralistic and sentimental dramas. They served to rationalize somewhat the stage conception of the Negro and accustomed the theatre-going public to the experience of seeing a number of Negro characters in other than the conventional 'darkey' roles."

---

(1) Locke, Alain. The New Negro.
(2) Locke, Alain, and Gregory, Montgomery, Plays of Negro Life.

There is apparently no set date for the advent of the minstrel shows on the theatrical scene. Certainly, of all the varied and manifold kinds of theatrical entertainment, the Negro minstrel is the only one which unquestionably owes its origin to the United States, and could not possibly have come into existence anywhere else in the civilized world. Negro slavery and the large Negro population in the Southern states were responsible for this one purely native form of entertainment.

The Negro, with his sense of rythm, his ability to improvise and to borrow, and his background of deep emotionalism, was naturally fertile soil for this branch of the theatre. Only here in America has the transplanted African been brought into intimate contact with the transplanted European. Hence, here in America the minstrel had its humble beginnings, expanded, flourished for many years, and declined. From here it was exported into Great Britain, where it established itself for many seasons, and made sporadic excursions into France and Germany. Its life extended a little longer than that vouchsafed to man. Time was when Negro minstrels held possession of three or four theatres in a single city, with a dozen or more traveling from town to town. Now they have surrendered their last hold on the theatrical metropolis, and only a solitary company is found wending its lonely way from theatre to theatre throughout the United States with the few surviving practitioners of the art reduced to the

presentation of brief interludes in the all-devouring variety shows or to the impersonation of sparse Negro characters in occasional comedies.

The original source of Negro minstrelsy is to be found in the South. The American minstrel show very remotely--if at all--resembled, as has been suggested, the bards of medieval Europe, except, perhaps, through a genuine love for song and a common gift for improvising endless verses. The theme of the American performer was quite different from that of his European predecessors.

The repertory of the blackface minstrelsy included distinctly American themes which foreigners could not invent, understand, or fully appreciate. American minstrelsy had its beginnings in the singing and dancing slaves of the Southern plantations. Slave captains were known to force their human cargoes to dance and sing on shipboard, and the plantation owners in America kept their Negroes "happy" and productive in the same way. Often, in slavery times, the master, in quest of amusement, would summon those of his slaves who were specially gifted as singers or dancers, and invite his guests and friends to the performance. I feel, however, that more often Negroes danced and sang because of their own innate and irrepressible fondness for rythmic and musical expression. The crooning melodies sung by the plantation blacks, and their peculiar, shuffling dances, were models after which the first blackface performers patterned their acts.

As I suggested before, the performances were spontaneous and almost instinctive. From the pathos and humor of the Negroes, their superstitious religious fervor, plaintive yet hilarious melodies, peculiarities of manner, dress, and speech the white minstrels built their performances.

The genuine "darkey" has been depicted as a folk figure of somewhat rustic character, but in the process of adapting this type to the theatre, the stage Negro came to present quite a different picture. His type was calculated to give the impression that all Negroes were lazy, shiftless fellows, careless of the morrow. He loved watermelons and ate them in a peculiar way. He turned out to be an expert wielder of the razor, a weapon which he always had ready for use on such special social occasions as crap games, of which the stage Negro was passionately fond. He could be distinguished by an unusually large mouth and a peculiar kind of broad grin. He dressed in gaudy colors and flashy style, and he always consumed more gin or corn liquor than he could properly hold. He loved chicken passionately, never passing a chicken coop without falling into temptation. His love for the grand manner led him to use lengthy words, not understanding their meanings, and twisting the syllables in the most ludicrous fashion in his effort to understand and pronounce them. This is the type of "darkey" that the white minstrels strove to imitate, or, more exactly, created and perpetuated.

The father of the American minstrelsy seems to have been "Jim Crow" Rice, who gave his first blackface performances about 1830. Rice found his pattern in an old Negro who did a peculiar step as he sang numerous verses to a tune of his own contriving, each verse being followed by the chorus:

> First on de heel tap, den on de toe,
> Ebery time I wheel about I jump Jim Crow.
> Wheel about and turn about and do jis so,
> And ebery time I wheel about I jump Jim Crow.

He gave the first entertainment in which the blackface performer was not only the main actor, but the entire act. His impersonation of "Jim Crow" depended for its dramatic success entirely upon the performer's ability as an imitator of the voice, appearance, and actions of a genuine Negro character. Apparently his mimicry was superb and absolutely true to life. His popularity brought him great financial returns and stimulated others to follow in his footsteps in an effort to duplicate his success. He was called, by the great Joseph Jefferson, the first and best knight of the burnt cork.

Rice was born of poor parents in the old Seventh Ward of New York City on May 20, 1808. As a youth he learned the trade of wood carving. Occasionally he served as a supernumerary at the Park Theatre. There is a tale to the effect that he attracted so much attention in this capacity by his eccentricities that on one occasion a leading character insisted upon his dismissal. He soon

abandoned his career as an artisan to take to the road as an itinerant player.

One day while Rice was walking through the streets of a Middle Western town, he encountered an old slave crooning an odd melody and doing a curious shuffling dance each time he reached the chorus of his little song. The original "Jim Crow" must have been a curious and interesting figure, a strange mixture of pathos and humor. His right shoulder was deformed and drawn up high; his right leg was stricken with rheumatism, stiff and crooked at the knee, so that the old Negro walked with a limp, obviously painful and yet laughable. As he worked, he sang his rather mournful tune, and did his unique little dance.

Rice was struck with the idea of imitating this curious figure on the stage. He copied the walk and dress of this Negro model, memorizing the stanzas of his curious song, and improvising many others. Then he asked a local manager for an opportunity to try his new act on the public. The "Jim Crow" act was accordingly interpolated in the local drama, and it proved popular immediately. Its stanzas were senseless and their meter atrocious, but the song was received by an outburst of applause and enthusiasm which must be accepted as a real tribute to Rice's unusual powers as a delineator of the type of Negro character he had chosen to portray.

Rice next appeared as "Jim Crow" in the Walnut Theatre in Philadelphia. Late in 1832, "Jim Crow" Rice, as he was now known in the theatrical world, made his debut at the Bowery Theatre in New York City, where he probably drew more money into the box office than had any other American performer up to that time. He was encored twenty times.

For variety, we are told, Rice used the four-year-old Joseph Jefferson as his partner in one performance. Rice dressed the lad to represent a miniature "Jim Crow", blacked his face, put him into a large sack, and came to the footlights, singing:

> Ladies and gentlemen, I'd have for you to know
> That I've got a little darkey here that jumps Jim Crow.

At this point in the song, the little, blacked-up boy was dumped from the sack upon the stage. The incident seems to be well authenticated; but regardless of whether or not the great Jefferson actually made his first bow to the public in this fashion, it is established beyond dispute that in the early years of his theatrical career he played various Negro parts.

Rice carried his "Jim Crow" act to London, where it became one of the song hits of the century. According to one writer, it was even sung in Delhi by Hindu minstrels. In later years, and in a greatly modified form, it was re-echoed in Uncle Remus. In Dublin, Rice played to a house of eighteen hundred dollars, and in Cork he drew nineteen hundred dollars to the box office for one performance.

His personal share on these tours was usually one-third of the receipts, and, for a time, he commanded the highest salary of any minstrel performer.

Rice wrote a Negro extravaganza on the plot of Othello, and collected many Negro melodies which he wove into medleys like "Bone Squash," "Virginny Cupids," and "The Virginny Mummy." Thus he became the creator of what was known for a time as "Ethiopian Opera." In these Negro "operas," Rice cleverly introduced old Negro songs into his own librettos. Some of his compositions were rather gross and vulgar in line and action, but this does not seem to have affected their success.

Strangely enough, Rice played in very few minstrel shows. He preferred to act alone, or to perform between the acts of a more serious play. Charley White's Serenaders and Ward's Minstrels were among the few companies that could enlist the services of this "father of minstrelsy." His last engagement was with the latter company in 1858.

For two decades, Rice was almost constantly before the public. Some years later, he staged a revival of his "Jim Crow" at the National Theatre in New York City. On this occasion he discovered rather quickly that his earlier drawing power at the box office no longer existed. Toward the close of his career, Rice also played the role of Uncle Tom in the great anti-slavery propaganda drama which was sweeping the North in the 'fifties.

Ten years before his death, "Daddy" Rice was stricken with paralysis, which temporarily deprived him of the use of his limbs. Although he recovered from the stroke, he was left with greatly impaired health. His eccentricities increased after this misfortune, particularly his habit of using five and ten dollar coins for buttons on his coat and vest. In September, 1860, when he suffered another stroke, he was in real financial distress. He had squandered his fortune in careless, if not riotous, living, and the father of minstrelsy died practically without a home or a friend.

Rice had many imitators who were eager to reap a share of the popularity and the financial rewards that this new form of entertainment seemed to hold out to the ambitious and clever actor. Not only on the stage, but also in the sawdust ring of the circus, Rice had many imitators, but most of the early blackface performers have long been forgotten.

Although the minstrels found the source material for their new art in the life of the Southern Negro, and occasionally presented more or less accurate delineations of the types they professed to imitate, the minstrel performers, as a class, did not consistently try to express true Negro life and feeling in their theatrical performances. Many of the famous minstrel men were Northern-born or foreign-born white men who had almost no first hand knowledge of the Negro's manner of life. The subjects

and ideas of many minstrel shows, especially in their later development, were distinctly Caucasian rather than Negro. Then, too, most of the popular minstrel songs of the decade when minstrelsy was the leading form of theatrical entertainment were written by white men, and only some of the earlier of these "Negro" songs had any real Negro basis.

Thus we have the minstrel show as the natural and almost inevitable development from the performances of individual actors who had presented such popular skits and songs as "Jim Crow," "Lucy Long," and other favorites. Negro acts had become established features in menageries, museums, circuses, and theatres.

Probably the first public presentation of what may properly be called a real minstrel show took place in the Bowery Amphitheatre in New York City early in 1843. There appears to be some dispute as to the exact time and place. We find Christy's Minstrels rivaling with the Virginia Minstrels for the honor of having staged the first performance in America by a minstrel company, although the latter is usually given this distinction in the available accounts of this notable event in American theatrical history.

The Virginia Minstrels were organized in New York City at the boarding house of Mrs. Brooks on Catherine Street where Daniel Decatur Emmett, one of the earliest and greatest of the galaxy of minstrel stars, happened to be living. The company consisted of four

friends---Emmett, Frank Brower, "Billy" Whitlock, and "Dick" Pelham. It occurred to one of the group to develop an ensemble performance, with the result that the quartette began to practise for a public presentation of a minstrel act. Their first show was presented either in Bartlett's Billiard Parlor in the Bowery, or in the Branch Hotel, a favorite rendezvous of showmen in New York City at that time. Some of the leading show men were present to witness this first performance.

According to Emmett's account, many in the audience were disposed to ridicule the new experiment in theatricals, for although the single blackface performer had become an established feature, this new combination had never been tried, not even on the comic stage. It was about 1842 that these pioneers of minstrelsy ventured upon the public stage, under the name of The Virginia Minstrels. After giving performances in various cities, they returned to New York and in 1843 left there for England. Despite the fact that minstrelsy later became very popular in England, the Virginia Minstrels seemed to arouse but little interest. Virtually stranded in a foreign country, the troup disbanded and its members returned to America. Many other minstrel companies were formed, among which the Royal Christy, the Sable Brothers, White's Serenaders, and Washington's Ethiopians were best known. Minstrelsy gained immense popularity, and a production of Monte Christo failed to attract satisfactory

audiences in Richmond, Virginia, until the enterprising manager engaged a band of "Ethiopian" minstrels to play between the acts. Minstrelsy had spread to England, the continent of Europe, Hawaii, and Australia. "Traveling here and there and everywhere are bands, almost innumerable, of every shade and quality..... Minstrelsy has become a fixed institution, an immovable fact," commented the New York Clipper in 1859.

As the drama of recent times has suffered by the competition of talking pictures and musical comedies, so minstrelsy was monopolizing the attention of the great majority of American theatre goers by the middle of the nineteenth century. The generation of Americans following 1850 saw the heyday of Negro minstrelsy in the United States, reaching its highest level from 1850 to 1870.

In the latter part of the 'sixties, Negro performers were much in demand. The Fisk Jubilee Singers toured both America and Europe during this decade, introducing a new type of Negro music to the audiences of two continents. Collections of "Jubilee Songs", introduced by Fisk University singers, in 1872, achieved an immediate popularity. Enterprising managers assembled companies of plantation Negroes, and presented them in "Ethiopian Concerts" in many Northern states. There also appeared in Cleveland about this time Negroes in slave costume, playing "upon the rude instruments of the South," such as jaw bones and shells. They were described as "a company of genuine field hands from the Southern

plantations, male and female, who were formerly slaves." Their music was "weird and grotesque," but generally "melodious music of the plantation,"--a ruder and more literal music than the portrayal of the Southern Negro music given by the Jubilee Singers of Fisk University and of Hampton Institute. At another Cleveland playhouse, the Colored Hamtown Singers sang their Negro melodies, and a dozen Jubilee Singers from Jackson, Tennessee, described as "weird choristers," appeared in "old time melodies, camp meeting hymns, Southern scenes, and grand tableaux." Calender's Georgia Minstrels were advertised as "the great Southern slave troup of uproarious plantation delineators." Later, the successors to this troup, Henderson's Colored Minstrels, performed at the People's Theatre in Cincinnati at admissions from ten to thirty cents. The company remained there a whole week, featuring John Armstrong, "the Alabama slave," who imitated steam calliopes, saw mills, and dogs, and who lifted chairs and tables with his powerful jaw.

As the white minstrel performers prospered, the character of their productions changed radically, and performers drifted farther and farther from the prototypes on which their art was originally based. Moreover, the insatiable demand of the American public for more and more entertainment led to production costs and salaries such that financial success became almost impossible.

By 1870 we find the minstrel show changing rapidly into something like a "tired business man's" show, the forerunner of present day burlesque and follies shows. Partly as a result of the panic of 1873, eighteen out of thirty-nine minstrel companies on the road failed. However, it was not until 1886 that the Al G. Field Minstrels, one of the last of these organizations, was launched. The minstrel show reached the climax of expensive productions at the Opera House in Philadelphia. In 1896 the New York Clipper listed ten minstrel companies which were touring in various parts of the country. Fifteen years later, the number was greatly reduced, and by April, 1919, Al.G. Field declared that there were but three minstrel companies playing in the United States.

The days of the minstrel show, except as a vehicle for amateurs, were over. The end, which began in 1880, did not actually come until the second decade of the twentieth century. Burnt cork performers are, of course, still popular on the vaudeville stage and in musical comedies, but when the Al G. Field Minstrels disbanded after the death of its distinguished owner and manager, it may be said that the final curtain was run down on what was at one time America's most successful form of entertainment.

It is difficult to explain the passing of the minstrel show. One writer has dismissed the question by saying that minstrelsy was "an art that was to endure for as many decades as the artless disposition of our countrymen

could permit." But this does not account for the changes the minstrel performances underwent which were so largely responsible for their decline. The minstrels became financially unprofitable due to large salaries and overhead. The Al G. Field Minstrels paid ten thousand dollars for the show's wardrobe alone, and the star balladist was under contract for four hundred seventy-five dollars per week. These increased costs of production, with a decreasing box office interest, resulted in the death of the minstrel show business.

In addition to economic causes, the decline of minstrelsy was largely due to the degeneration of the minstrel show itself. A Southern slave owner complained, as early as 1855, that of a whole volume of minstrel songs he could find "only ten with any trace of genuineness." Vulgarities replaced innocent comicalities, and caricaturing had come to replace carefully studied portrayals of plantation types. Then, too, the minstrel show was a wholly masculine affair, and therefore without sex fascination for its audiences. The vaudeville and musical comedy salaries attracted the best minstrel men into these new lines, and the public followed its favorites.

I cannot say what the future holds for minstrelsy in this period of renewed interest in Negro music, dancing, and folklore. Recently, all-Negro musical shows have become extremely popular, even in high priced theatres, to say nothing of cheaper burlesque and vaudeville houses.

The old time minstrel show seems to fit easily into the limitations of the radio broadcasting station, and famous comedy teams, like Amos 'n' Andy, receive large sums for a series of short broadcasts. In the Southern states, a number of troupes of Negro performers still present minstrel shows under canvas tents. Their shows are generally of slap-stick variety. Colored troupes like Charley Callender's Georgia Minstrels, Hicks and Sawyer, and Booker and Clayton have enjoyed considerable popularity for many years. Curiously enough, the Negro companies always black up for these minstrel acts.

I believe that the future of the Negro actor lies not in his minstrelsy activities, but rather in more serious drama. It "takes a clever man to make a clown," and the acuteness, humor, drollery, and downright absurdity of the Negro as a minstrel man seem to be prophetic of his superior capabilities which must lead, and, indeed, have inevitably led, to greater accomplishments.

THE OCTOROON

"By national drama," says Montrose J. Moses, "we mean not a class of dramatic productions written by Americans, but one appealing directly to the national feeling--founded upon domestic incidents,--and above all displaying peculiarities of situation and character by which we are distinguished from other nations."(1)

Although The Octoroon will not bear analysis as a literary production, it is important to students of the drama, because it does reflect realistically a vital problem in American life. With this new growth of realism, American drama grew stronger and became no longer a result of foreign borrowings and outworn models. In his effort to comment on all phases of American life, the Irish-born Dion Boucicault has here seized upon a truly American theme and problem.

This prolific dramatist, the youngest of four children, was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1822. He began writing at an early age, and even his earliest plays showed theatrical richness and surety in dialogue, although they lacked originality and high literary quality. In 1853, he married Miss Agnes Robertson, an actress, and came to America. Here he dominated things theatrical, his name filling the dramatic records, and his opinions strongly influencing the theatre-going public.

---

(1) Moses, Montrose J. The American Dramatist.

Boucicault's drama, whether good or bad, was always sought by the theatre, because it was made for the theatre. In fact, he was so intimately connected with theatrical life that he was narrowed by his knowledge of stagecraft, and this often caused him to sacrifice characters for situations, this being especially true in The Octoroon. He aimed only to make his stage pictures effective and to afford his characters ample scope for acting. Hence one must always view his drama from across the footlights rather than from close range.

Boucicault wrote, adapted, and translated some four hundred plays in about forty-nine years. "The entire number of performances of his plays was about fifty thousand," says Moses, "and estimating that the receipts at each performance averaged five hundred dollars, the public must have paid over twenty-five millions of dollars to witness the plays of this one man."(1) Boucicault, himself, declared that "he was a lucky bag out of which some managers drew fortunes and some drew blanks."

The actor-manager, F. S. Chanfrau, was one to draw a fortune when he drew The Octoroon, which achieved enormous popularity and ran for more than eighteen hundred performances. The success of The Octoroon was

---

(1) Moses, Montrose J. The American Dramatist. p. 157.

undoubtedly due to its sheer theatricality, and to his choice of this American topic as a stage accessory. Mrs. Boucicault was the original Zoë in The Octoroon, December 5, 1859, and met with instant success. Boucicult, being strictly a writer for the stage, had had the wisdom to study his wife's capabilities as well as his own, and, realizing their limitations, to write their parts accordingly.

In The Octoroon, Dion Boucicault proved himself quick to lay hold of events of the moment and incorporate them into his plays. In its way it was quite as effective, contorversially, as Uncle Tom's Cabin, and certainly it was a great stride towards honest character portrayal in Negro drama.

EDWARD SHELDON'S THE NIGGER

"The stage villain, stage servant, stage hero, and stage Negro are but conventions we lack the initiative to give up," says that distinguished critic, Walter Prichard Eaton.(1) Indeed, there is much wisdom in his words, as is shown especially by the dramatic offerings up to the beginning of the twentieth century.

The next step towards rationalization of the stage Negro is to be found in a play called The Nigger, written in 1909 by one young Edward Sheldon who had just emerged from Harvard College with already one play to his credit. In this first play, Salvation Nell, he showed his courage by attempting a large theme, and it was sold almost immediately to Mrs. Fiske.

In his next play, The Nigger, Sheldon plunged across the Mason-Dixon Line, and endeavored to set forth the tragedy of a high-spirited and high-minded Southerner, the governor of a state, who finds suddenly that his blood is tainted by ancestral miscegenation, and renounces (perforce!) all he has once held most dear, to go down and labor among the blacks. The theme was unquestionably big and vital, but naturally unpleasant to some palates. Then, too, Mr. Sheldon did not as yet have the maturity of mind or the technical ability to weave it into a convincing narrative. The play, as one critic

---

(1) Eaton, W.P. The American Stage of Today.

pointed out, which is "--at first raw with the bravado of extreme youth defying artistic restraint, is later discursive and dull.--Mr. Sheldon wrestles and is thrown."

But for our purposes the play is of immense importance. It was an honest attempt at significant, native drama, and it attempted somewhat to measure up to reality by insight, imagination, and adherence to truth and honest character portrayal. The play, apparently, aroused good, hearty, unashamed enthusiasm. One of the press notices thus described the premier:

> At the close of the second act the audience quite forgot the solemnity of the occasion and called loudly for the blushing author, who finally came forth with the timidity of a startled robin, clung frantically to the proscenium frame for an instant, and bobbed out of sight again.....He looked very young to have been speaking so plainly as he did sometimes in this play.

Thus the play very apparently had a purpose, but fell short in having less of a plan. The purpose was to present on the stage, in vivid, concrete terms, the plight of the modern Negro in the South, to urge mutual tolerance and patience, and to present sympathetically both sides, rather than to cry out against white prejudice or to encourage black rebellion. Mr. Sheldon further tried to point out the evils of the liquor traffic among the Negroes. The play sincerely aimed to touch life vitally in its choice of theme and material. Its purpose was to make a significant commentary on American life. "The play," said another critic, "naturally takes its place in the ranks of progress, not as one of the

old machines for the manufacture of theatrical excitement."

Mr. Sheldon had more to say than he knew how to say, and the wealth of material and magnitude of his theme made his job one of large proportions. He struggled to make the story plain, theatrically effective, and morally impressive; but the play appeared to me to progress by alternate waves of debate and action, and, in its third and final act, to repeat itself rather noticeably. Hence the total effect is neither that of a convincing argument nor a moving story, the result being somewhat splotchy. This goes to show, perhaps, as the late Mr. Galsworthy recently remarked, that the modern naturalistic drama of contemporary life is the most difficult of all drama to write.

The Nigger is, however, most poignant in its moments of sheer theatrical appeal. It was, indeed, of, by, and for Americans, and although played by only white Americans, it was another important step in the direction of serious portrayal rather than ruthless caricature.

THE HAPGOOD PLAYERS

One of the earliest movements in the development of an authentic drama of Negro life began with the Hapgood Players in 1917. It was most unfortunate that so significant a project should have been launched at such a tragic hour--on the dawn of our entrance into the World War. But in spite of its untimeliness, this group attracted much attention, and marked the beginning of a genuine interest in the legitimate drama of Negro life interpreted by Negroes.

On April 5, 1917, at the Garden Theatre, New York City, three one-act plays by Ridgley Torrence were presented by this company of Negro players, organized by Mrs. Norman Hapgood, the noted producer of Galsworthy's Justice and Chesterton's Magra. The production of these plays by this group was of vital significance to the Negro in drama for a number of reasons. The plays were written for, as well as acted by, Negroes, and their production represented the result of the combined efforts of three important artists--Ridgley Torrence, already a widely recognized lyric and dramatic poet of note; Mrs. Hapgood, whose previous productions represented a valuable contribution to the theatrical art; and Robert Edmond Jones, the creator of some of the most beautiful settings of the English stage. With these plays there opened up a new

force in American drama. It was an attempt to do for the Negro theatrically what had been done for the Irish by the Abbey Theatre movement: that is, to interpret to the public a race never quite understood in this land which was not of its own choosing. In addition, there definitely promised to develop a new medium of artistic expression with new graces, freedom, and atmosphere.

The plays were no imitation of the drama of the white race, nor were they the delineation of a conventional Negro type character. There was no pretense, burlesque, or forced humor, but rather consistent motivation, natural dialogue, and true characterization. These plays struck at provincialism, not only socially, but also artistically. Critics recorded that the actors' rich voices, flowing rythm, and treasure of emotional power were effectively revealed. For the first time, Broadway beheld Negro actors in serious drama, and the superb acting on the part of the players revealed the wonderful natural histrionic powers of the race.

Of the three plays, two were modern--Granny Maumee and The Rider of Dreams. The other was Simon the Cyrenian,(who was the cross bearer for Christ, and, according to early artists, an African). The cast was selected from Negroes in New York City, a few of whom had acted in stock companies, but most of whom were

"untouched by the crudities of the burlesque written for them." We are told that the intonation, business, and interpretation were withheld from the actors during the first rehearsals, and merely modified as the work progressed. The players were requested merely to be themselves. One critic called the work "unforgetable and prophetic." He continued: "The colored players and these plays are like a gesture or a window. Beyond is a prospect." Ridgley Torrence believed that they held "a way for art to take, and a people to move."

Each of the plays was individually worth while both dramatically and for its literary value. The two modern plays were of exceptional interest for their treatment of racial problems from the standpoint of the Negro, as well as for their strong suggestion of a growing folk drama in this country. Through them Torrence proved himself to be a far-sighted artist, and did a lasting service to American drama and to the Negro Theatre in particular.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF EUGENE O'NEILL TO NEGRO DRAMA

Shortly after the World War, Negro drama suddenly reached unprecedented heights of achievement. Several Little Theatre groups were at the forefront of this movement, but the outstanding one of these was the Provincetown Players. Negro drama was introduced to this group through the genius of Eugene O'Neill, and he, in turn, gained his first important recognition through his plays of Negro life.

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill was born in 1888 in a New York hotel--the son of James O'Neill, one of the most famous actors of his time. For the first seven years of his life, young O'Neill travelled with his parents when they were on tour. After some years in public schools and a private academy, he entered Princeton University, from which he was expelled a year later for some youthful prank. Hence we have O'Neill truly born in, and apparently for, the American theatre. He very early did odd jobs around the theatre, acted some, and learned the stage thoroughly. It was not long, however, before he temporarily deserted the theatre. After his expulsion from college, O'Neill became apprenticed in a New York mercantile house in which his parents had an interest. He next prospected for gold in Spanish Honduras, "returning with only a tropical fever." He shipped as a sailor across the Atlantic

many times to Europe, Africa, and South America. He became a newspaper reporter, a railroad conductor, and went on tour with his father, doing a bit of acting. In scores of ways O'Neill was beginning to know his fellow Americans of all races and classes, and to identify himself with the misery of their lives. It was, however, the seven months in a sanitarium, where he had been sent because of his rapidly failing health, that proved the turning point in his career. At that time the will to create became definitely central in his development. Having decided on the career of a dramatist, he came to Cambridge and had a year at Harvard with Professor Baker in the "47 Workshop."" After this time in Cambridge, O'Neill went to New York and became one of the founders of the Provincetown Players, by whom many of his early plays were produced.

O'Neill's first experiment in Negro drama was with The Dreamy Kid, a forceful and vivid one-act play of life in the Harlem underworld. It was produced at the MacDougal Street Playhouse early in 1920. In O'Neill's early work there was much that resembled his predecessor, Edward Sheldon, both having caught the strong, natural speech of the Negro; but O'Neill very soon showed evidences of having what Sheldon lacked--great theatrical power and imagination and a strain of rythmed beauty.

O'Neill's next contribution to the Negro theatrical scene made dramatic history. This play, The Emperor Jones, opens with a lengthy dialogue between Brutus Jones, a Negro ex-pullman porter, who has made himself emperor of a Carribean island, and his crafty white lieutenant, Smithers, an ex-tradesman from London. In the succeeding scenes, Jones is alone in uninterrupted conversation with the spooks of his conscience and the demons of the primeval jungle, with the ceaseless drum-beat of his rebellious Negro subjects in the distance. O'Neill created something noteworthy in this portrayal of a man and his fate, the past life and career of a crafty, brutal bully, and the wrecking of his power. The Emperor Jones was an exploration of the racial mind of the Negro, definitely subjective in its materials, free in form, and a step towards expressionism. Its protagonist was only an insolent tyrant, but the collapse of his criminal egomania and the defeat of his extraordinary vitality by the imaginings of his own brain were represented so magnificently and movingly that the play seemed to me to offer a complete parallel with Shakespere's Macbeth. With The Emperor Jones played by Charles Gilpin, the comparison is by no means too bold. Both plays end with the downfall of a powerful man who has lived beyond his strength.

The Emperor Jones took the world by storm when it was first produced by the Provincetown Players in their converted-stable theatre, the MacDougal Street Playhouse, New York City, on November 3, 1920. The excitement created by the production is graphically described by two of the original members of the Provincetown group:(1)

> The players sensed that the new O'Neill play (The Emperor Jones) was something rare and noteworthy, and became absorbed in giving it the production it deserved....Characteristically, there was no talk of a hit, no speculation as to what the critics would think or how long the play would run. There was the usual opening night party, only Miss Fitzgerald was on hand the morning after to unlock the theatre door. She turned the corner into MacDougal Street and ....saw a line of excited people waiting to buy tickets....upstairs the telephone was ringing madly and Christine's mother was shouting vaguely into it: "Teeckets? Yah! Vait! Vait!" There was no 'phone in the box office, and Fritzi spent a breathless morning scrambling up the stairs to the club room to take orders, down again to sell tickets at the box office window, and up again to 'phone the sleeping players : "Get up! The whole world is here! Get up!" The excitement lasted all day. Newspapers, advertising agents, ticket brokers, managers were calling....New York had found the Provincetown Players at last.

The first production of this play changed the fortunes of the Provincetown Players, for public demand soon forced them to move The Emperor Jones from Greenwich Village to the Princess Theatre in the heart of the theatridal district.

---

(1) Deutch, H. and Hanan, S. The Story of a Theatre. p. 114.

Overnight critics were speaking of O'Neill as the outstanding playwright of the country, and of Charles Gilpin as a great actor. The Players showed wisdom in their choice of this Harlem Negro to personate The Emperor. Gilpin had already had some theatrical experience in Ridgley Torrence's plays and as the humble Negro, Curtis, in Abraham Lincoln, but it took this new and greater role to bring out the full power of his unusual dramatic ability. Of his performance, one critic had the following to say:

> In The Emperor Jones, he showed not only a great power and a great imagination, in addition to his fine voice, but also an extraordinary versatility. It is a genuine personation, a being of flesh and blood and brain, utterly different from the actor's other work. He carries the long soliloquy of the six scenes in the forest with remarkable ease, building up steadily from his fright at the first Little Formless Fears, through his terror at the recurring visions of his crimes, to the horror that overwhelms him as the dim, buried, racial fears rise to carry him back to the auction block, the slave ship, and the voodoo gods of the Congo. Mr. Gilpin's performance is the crown to a play that opens up the imagination of the American theatre and builds beauty and emotion out of the spiritual realities of one corner of our life.

At the end of the theatrical season, Gilpin was selected by the New York Drama League as one of the ten persons who had contributed the most to the American theatre during the year. The list included, besides Gilpin, David Belasco, Gilda Varesi, Margaret Severn, Eugene O'Neill, Fred Stone, Lionel Atwill, Dudley Digges, Lee Simonson, and Ben-Ami. Later this talented actor,

who had really created the part, was invited to a public dinner honoring the ten best characterizations of the season. With these gestures it seemed that the Negro actor and Negro drama had at last arrived.

Through the medium of The Emperor Jones, O'Neill achieved almost instant success. Within five months of its original presentation by the Provincetown Players, and within two months of its first publication in the Theatre Arts Magazine, it was already in rehearsal by Little Theatre organizations in Detroit, Indianapolis, San Francisco, and New Orleans, and was in demand for reading from every corner of the United States, Canada, England, and Scandinavia. On consideration, I find it difficult to suggest just what its success might be attributed to. The play fails to embody any "special appeal to common humanity," and there is no lesson taught; but the whole strikes a lyric note, and O'Neill surpasses in his strong, direct, and truthful dialogue. In addition to this, the play was universally acclaimed by critics as being superbly one-man-acted. Charles Gilpin gave an unadulterated, truly Negroid, never-to-be-forgotten performance. Julius Bab, in writing of European judgements of the American theatre, says:(1)

> In my judgement, and in the judgement of many Europeans, The Emperor Jones is the most significant and compelling of O'Neill's works.

---

(1) Bab, Julius. Theatre Guild Magazine. Vol. 9, No. 1, p. 11, Oct., 1931.

In 1925 The Emperor Jones was presented in London at the Ambassador Theatre with Paul Robeson as The Emperor. The critics seem to agree that Robeson was distinctly inferior to Gilpin in this role, having a somewhat narrower conception of the part. The play has been presented in nearly every European country, including France, Russia, Spain, Austria, and Germany, and in America it was revived by its original producers, the Provincetown Players, with Robeson as The Emperor. This brilliant and forward-looking play has become a classic in the American theatre, and many directors of Little Theatre groups have recognized its marked possibilities as an addition to their repertoire. It is still reckoned by many critics as the greatest and most artistic of Eugene O'Neill's plays. The issue of Theatre Arts Magazine in which The Emperor Jones was first published is now of considerable importance among American first editions.

During the present season (1933) The Emperor Jones continues to add new chapters to its history. In February of this year it made the front page of many Boston and New York newspapers--an honor usually reserved for murders, earthquakes, and scandals. It had made the magic leap from the theatre to opera. There was general agreement that the whole really lacked musical content, but was rather color painting with sound, though just the right setting for O'Neill's

gripping play. Both the music critics and the audience differed as to the quality of the music, as is quite natural, I suppose, when discussing an idiom as modern as Louis Grenberg's. W.J.Henderson, in The New York Sun, sums up well the relation of the music to the drama:

> The curtain falls. There has not been a single air, only one passing lyric utterance, no melody; cross dissonance, raucous shouts by voices and instruments, and the pitiless beat of the drum, stilled only when the hallucinations of Jones are portrayed for us. ....there is nothing for the music lover to cherish, nothing for him to hold among the treasures of his memory; but while he is present in the theatre, he will feel the singular power of this turbulent and sometimes frenetic score to intensify the moods of the drama, which is enacted without the aid of the musical manners of speech familiar to the old opera goer. For the younger and less conventionalized listener, a candid confession that it was assuredly not opera set no obstacle in the way of an equally ready admission that it was genuinely "good theatre" and that it gave a new illumination to Mr. O'Neill's celebrated play.

Those of us who are interested observers of Negro drama felt that Paul Robeson, the noted Negro baritone and actor, should have been the logical choice for the role of The Emperor in the operatic production, but there was general agreement as to the skill and masterly power with which Lawrence Tibbett performed in this one-man show.

Eugene O'Neill is indeed one of our most prolific playwrights, and not all of his forty plays are masterpieces. Even the twenty-odd that have been published are of unequal merit. But he has the restless courage to experiment, which has led him into

every field of modern dramatic type, including what I shall call, for want of a better term, "psychological drama." His next important play of Negro life, All God's Chillun Got Wings, would be included in this type. It provided roles for both black and white players, and was in every way a staggeringly ambitious undertaking. As one critic observed:

> Marriage, in itself, has long proved an adequate theme for the stage. Add the race and color disparity, and the subject calls for the subtlest of psychological insight and the most ingenicus execution.

O'Neill was, in this play, a glutton for complications. In addition to working out the problem of a colored man marrying a white woman, he makes Jim Harris, the colored man (played by Paul Robeson), a sensitive, morally superior individual with a recurrent and unsatisfactorily explained lapsus mentis when attempting the bar examination. Ella Downey, the white woman, is a street-walker, already cast off by another man. To add to the confusion, she goes mad, and it is not clear to me whether her madness is related (either as cause or effect) to her marriage to a Negro. There are combined in hapless matrimony an economic failure, a "woman with a past," the race problem, intermarriage, poverty, and insanity, and the result is what might be expected--confusion approximating a nightmare of Ibsen, Brieux, Thomas Dixon, and Strindberg.

Obviously the play did not prove anything, point a moral, or teach a lesson. I sincerely hope that Mr. O'Neill did not attempt to demonstrate in this fashion that inter-racial marriage was foredoomed to failure. As far as I could ascertain, All God's Chillun Got Wings is merely a "slice of life" with a hodge-podge of abnormalities which did harm in befuddling an approach to an important and virtually unexplored question. It is true that life is in itself highly complex, and its problems are seldom simplified. The dramatist has the right to introduce as many variants as he pleases, but he must accept the responsibility if his public "fails to see the tree because of its branches."

All God's Chillun Got Wings was, however, a characteristic O'Neill product in its poignancy, vigor, and honesty. It conveyed a lasting impression of the cruelty and ruthlessness of the most peculiarly American-made brand of race prejudice, but I could not help wishing that O'Neill had made a clear-cut and direct presentation of at least one of the infinite number of combinations possible to the major theme--that of intermarriage of white and colored. Had he done so, the play would have had significance and value which it now lacks.

All God's Chillun Got Wings would hardly have been accepted by any group other than the Provincetown Players. If produced by anyone else, it would probably have been foredoomed to failure due to the most deep-rooted American prejudices. The difficulties in the way of its production by even this group have been graphically set forth by Helen Deutsch and Stella Hanau in their recent book, The Making of a Theatre:(1)

> The projected production of All God's Chillun Got Wings had been stirring up a press storm. The fact that it dealt with a marriage between a Negro and a white girl, and that the wife at one point in the action kisses her husband's hand, had been avidly seized upon. Ku Kluxers, Citizen Fixits, and Southern Gentlewomen, most of whom did not trouble to read the play (which had been published in the American Mercury) were goaded into action. Facts were enlarged and distorted, and expressions of opinion from pastors in Mississippi, from Colonels of the Confederate Army, from champions of Nordic integrity in Iowa, were printed and reprinted from one end of the country to the other. A picture of Mary Blair, who was to play the wife, was syndicated hundreds of times with the caption, "White Actress Kisses Negro's Hand," and a harmless little paragraph by Irvin S. Cobb about how "All God's Chillun" would need their wings in Paducah, Kentucky, where he came from, echoed and re-echoed in print like a thunderbolt of the demigod Authority. The envelopes from the clipping bureau grew larger and larger, until great boxes began to arrive. The office soon gave up the gargantuan task of pasting clippings into the press book and began stuffing them into shoe boxes and storing them in the back of the most remote closet in the theatre. In the final totaling it was found that the press-clipping bill exceeded the cost of the scenery.
>
> The Provincetown was exasperated by all the unfair and misinformed criticism which the play received before production. O'Neill, usually so detached, issued a statement to the press:
>
> "Prejudice born of an entire ignorance of the subject is the last word in injustice and absurdity. The Provincetown Playhouse has ignored all criticism not founded on a knowledge of the play and will continue to ignore it.

"Another point whose significance has either been omitted from all the sensational gossip or else misrepresented: we are not a public theatre. Our playhouse is essentially a laboratory for artistic experiment. Our aims are special. We are not seeking to rival the theatre uptown, we make no attempt to cater to the taste of a general public. Our audience is intentionally a restricted one.

"Admitting (which we do not) that we are responsible to any one outside our own organization, it is by our subscribers alone we can with any reason be held to account. All we ask is a square deal. A play is written to be expressed through the theatre, and only on its merits in a theatre can a final judgment be passed on it with justice. We demand this hearing."

A new Negro actor, Paul Robeson, had been cast for the leading part in All God's Chillun and so, as a canny move to focus the attention of the public on an actor instead of on a race controversy, the directors postponed the opening and introduced him in a revival of The Emperor Jones. Augustin Duncan had discovered him in an amateur production of Ridgeley Torrence's Simon the Cyrenian, (for those who delight in coincidences, it was coached by Charles Gilpin!) and had cast him opposite Margaret Wycherly in Voodoo. Robeson later played Voodoo in England with Mrs. Patrick Campbell and definitely abandoned his projected law career for the stage and the concert hall.....

With the bulwark of approval built by Robeson, All God's Chillun Got Wings opened on May 15th to an accompaniment of poison pen letters, telegrams to O'Neill threatening his life and the lives of his children, and an anonymous promise of a bomb in the cellar. District Attorney Banton, a southerner, had not read the play but knew that its author was the man who had written The Hairy Ape and The Emperor Jones. He declared that he would "get" O'Neill. Perhaps Banton had sat under Professor George Odell at Columbia and had taken too seriously that mild and seasoned scholar's jeu de mots: "Gentlemen," (rapping on the table) "Eugene O'Neill is responsible for the profanity and insanity on the American stage today!" In any case, he succeeded in putting his touch upon the play, for Mayor Hylan,

---

(1) Deutsch, H. and Hanau, S. The Provincetown, A Story of the Theatre.

> under his prompting, without explanation, refused to issue the necessary acting permits for the children who were to appear in the first scene. At the opening, James Light announced that the scene could not be acted; it showed the friendship of a Negro boy and a white girl and established the fact that the color line does not cross childhood. He offered to read the lines and the audience shouted its consent. The children were never allowed to appear, except for a few performances late in the summer, and the scene was read each night. .....
>
> Possibly All God's Chillun would not have attracted so much attention without the impetus of race prejudice, for it is one of O'Neill's less skillful plays. Because of the strong public feeling about miscegenation, the sale of tickets was limited to subscribers.

O'Neill reveals the innermost depths of his characters, and allows them in turn to reveal themselves without his intruding aid. He is, as was Shakespere, nothing of the propagandist. His figures speak for themselves and expose their own personalities, never being a mouthpiece for their creator or for any theory which he may believe. He surpasses Paul Green in the creation of artistic unity by means of a series of crisp, powerful scenes following rapidly on one another. From the first, he sought a medium more expressive than conventional.

His first long play, Beyond the Horizon, won the Pulitzer prize in 1920. Three times since then he has won the prize---with Anna Christie, Strange Interlude, and Mourning Becomes Electra---, and he has gained an international reputation. At present he is unquestionably and by common consent

the most important dramatist that America has yet produced, and the only one who has attained what may be called a world status. His plays of Negro life and many of his other plays have been produced in almost every theatrical capital of Europe. His plays have been altogether serious and often tragic, O'Neill being consistently very little interested in comedy. Few dramatists have so freely experimented in subject matter and form, but his daring has been, in most cases, justified by its results.

O'Neill's Negro characters are uncertain personalities, under the sway of grim obsessions, at war with themselves and race prejudice, and unconsciously seeking freedom and light. His simple and appropriate style is consistent with the Northern Negro dialect and is always effective when his characters express themselves naturally. Dramatically he is best when he shows his characters in the grip of powerful emotions, even as the Negro actor is at his best in the expression of these emotions.

PAUL GREEN AND THE FOLK-DRAMA

Negro drama owes much to the Carolina Playmakers of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. This organization, directed by Professor Frederick Koch, has given us the gifted pen of Paul Green, who has to his credit the finest collection of Negro folk-plays yet written.

Carl Carmer, in Theatre Arts Monthly, points out that:

> The story of Paul Green's preparation and accomplishment as a playwright is so straight in its direction, so logical in its progress, that seemingly the mind of the man and destiny have been agreed on an identical goal.

Paul Green was reared and educated among the people whom he wished to depict in his plays. He was born near Lillington, North Carolina, in 1894. The son of a farmer, he spent most of the first twenty years of his life on the farm, getting to know and understand the kind of people, white and black, he was later to put into his dramatic successes. For the work he chose for himself, he could not have had a better background. His observant faculties were given ample opportunity to assimilate an intimate knowledge of the North Carolina backwoods.

After irregular schooling he was graduated from a neighboring academy at the age of twenty. He taught in a country school for two years, and entered

the University of North Carolina in 1916. From 1917 to 1919 he was in the army seeing service in France; having entered as a private, he left as a second lieutenant. After the war, he returned to the University of North Carolina, and was graduated in 1921. He did graduate work both at North Carolina and at Cornell, majoring in philosophy, which he now teaches at his alma mater.

It was while Green was a student at the University of North Carolina that he took the course in play writing given by Professor Koch. This probably gave him the impulse, and certainly the encouragement, to express in terms of drama that which had so long held for him a deep-seated and native interest. Soon he began writing plays that showed a measured, orderly, and reasoned progression dramatically. He was a dramatist who wished to express the ideas he believed in through the representation of the characteristic life of his countrymen, and his philosophic mind had had time to discover what his senses had observed. As he reached nearer his goal, paths became more difficult and pitfalls more deceptive, but each play showed the strengthening of his powers, and at this time he fairly "spouted material." He had gained the necessary first-hand knowledge of the folk-Negro, and had become primarily a folk-dramatist, making for himself a place in a field which was new and little explored.

Says Carl Carmer, in Theatre Arts Monthly:

> Chopping cotton down the long rows with Lazy Lawrence dancing on ahead was no imagined experience to Paul Green. He knew why black laughter came from cabins at the end of a back-breaking day in the fields. He understood the emotional release afforded by an assimilated religion which the descendants of African tribesmen had bent to their needs much more successfully than had their white neighbors. The comedy of shiftlessness and wayward fancy, the comedy of a human, earthy attitude towards sex, the melodrama of a quick temper were made part of him by a long series of memories of the black people he knew. So were the tragedies of the Negro girl and her white lover, of the restless despair in the veins of the mulatto, of the persecution undertaken in the name of white supremacy.

Thus, sensitive to rythms and atmosphere, Green has confined his writing to the rural Negroes and whites of his native state. The society from which he has drawn his characters consists of plantation owners, poor whites, and Negroes. The relationships of these three classes and their effects on one another have furnished flawless dramatic material for the ready pen of Paul Green.

He was first made generally known by his one-act play of Negro character, The No 'Count Boy. which won the Belasco trophy at the Little Theatre Tournament in New York City in 1925. This was not a great play, but it was, within its slight limits, a triumph of imaginative writing. Later in this same year he wrote The Last of the Lowries, which was, within even closer limits, a fine dramatic portrait

sketch in the manner of Synge's Riders to the Sea, with a mountain feud playing the part of the sea that swallows up the sons of the family. This was such a true picture of the rural whites of a certain district that a member of the audience in one of the towns where it was played is alleged to have gotten up and shouted: "It's true! It's true! I know every member of that family, and it's all true!"

This quality, which the critics call "photographic reality," is what made these early plays of intense dramatic interest and of importance in spite of their limitations. His direct observation was redolent of the soil and utterly sincere. He was interested in surfaces only as they revealed underlying motives and meanings, insisting upon expressing himself in his own way, and refusing to pander to an audience. The plays were a distinct contribution to the small but growing literature of the Negro and American theatre conceived beyond the bounds of Broadway out of the very life and soil of the country. By the power of his creative and artistic qualities the craft has been compelled to turn its attention to Paul Green.

In 1927 his first long play, In Abraham's Bosom won the Pulitzer prize. It had been reworked from two short plays with new material added, and it was first produced by the Provincetown Players, New

York City, December 28, 1926. In Abraham's Bosom was an episodic chronicle in seven scenes which summed up, without sentimentality, the story of the white man's inconsistency toward the Negro. It very obviously said in seven scenes what might have been said to better advantage in five, and it very noticeably lagged in spots; but Green had chosen a vital problem and treated his stark theme with a burning power quite reminiscent of a Synge. However, there was an indication that he had not been able to forget his one-act technique and write his separate scenes so that they made a single play rather than a group of disjointed short scenes. Hence, in spite of the play's beautiful, fierce power, it is never able to attain a totally coordinated performance, and Green showed therein a certain amount of raw and undeveloped strength and power.

This dramatic biography of a black Abraham who lived as a prophet, unheeded and rejected even by his own people, contained all the rough elements of a great tragedy, even though they were not developed to the fullest extent of dramatic perfection. There was material for a pure and inevitable tragedy in the tortured soul of the play's protagonist, Abraham McCranie, in his failure to establish himself as an educator, and in his inability to cope with his weakling white half-brother and with his worthless son. It gave Green full opportunity for the employment of all his gifts,

especially his accurate observation, poetic sensitivity, and philosophic turn of mind. Then, too, the simplicity of the play's narrative form was wholly fitting to its content. So it was probably real discernment that caused the Pulitzer Prize Committee to see in this American drama values not found in the more popular plays of the same season, and by voting it the reward they enabled it to continue its curtailed run. It was acted by a cast, largely Negroes, with much sincerity, only occasionally showing evidence of unguided technique lacking in smoothness.

Last season Paul Green contributed The House of Connelly to the theatrical scene, and it was the first play of the season over which the critics of the daily newspapers could express any enthusiasm. The story told how Will Connelly had inherited the proud old traditions of the South in an age when efficiency ruled. He had his entire family, past and present, to fight against and a lone girl--one of his "poor white trash" tenants--to fight for him. Eventually, efficiency (and, of course, love) triumphed. The theme had excellent dramatic possibilities, and Green made more of them than in most of his earlier plays. The feeling of the old white South was in the production, and rarely have I read a drama of the passing old South where such living and poetically suggestive characters were drawn.

The House of Connelly included some Negro roles, and these were filled, in the Broadway production, by Negro players of excellent ability and training.

In the foregoing, I have mentioned Green's plays dealing with Negro life which have been granted Broadway runs. His five long dramas and more than thirty one-act plays include perhaps every type known to present-day drama--farce, travesty, comedy, fantasy, melodrama, and tragedy, in many moods and by methods that range from pure naturalism to pure fantasy. Many are experimental, and several are strongly reminiscent of the work of other dramatists, but there is a large and important group that is utterly original and thoroughly American in both subject and treatment. Green has the insight into character, the sympathy, and the imagination of a poet together with a sure sense of dramatic situation.

Although I believe the similarity to be superficial, the work of Paul Green has been likened to that of Eugene O'Neill, and it is easy to see why. They are both interested in the Negro theatre, and they both write well of Negro life, but I believe the differences between Green and O'Neill to be greater than their likeness. In their differences lie Green's superior qualities. O'Neill's inheritance and training are of the theatre. He knows its strength and its

weaknesses, and he has had to fight to escape theatrical convention and achieve fine freedom of form. Green was, on the other hand, raised on a North Carolina farm, and was untouched by theatrical influences and superficialities. He is a philosopher and a poet with a free, clear mind and a sharp dramatic instinct. His training with the Carolina Playmakers at the University of North Carolina served him well because of the emphasis they placed on the folk material, which happened to be essentially the stuff of his style. But his dramatic gift is entirely creative, and it is not by their literal truth, but by their beauty that his plays come alive. However, while both O'Neill and Green are blessed with a flexible and free technique, in Green it is not always sure. Doubtless due to the latter's immaturity, the loose ends are not lacking, and at times he is guilty of a labored speech which does not ring quite true, while his ideas and action are unnecessarily clogged with words. His style would usually gain by condensation, but the words in themselves are almost always expressive, and his dialogue often of highest quality.

Paul Green's future plays may be awaited not only with hope, but also with confidence. He sees tragedy more clearly than he sees that comedy of manners which is common to his contemporary playwrights. He likes to make fate, religious ecstasy, and deep-rooted

prejudice serve him in his plays. The theatre of which he is an exponent is in advance of current popular taste, but he is a master of his locale, always painting a more subtle study of Negroes than is afforded in Porgy or The Green Pastures. The American drama is indeed blessed in possessing this poet and philosopher, endowed with natural literary and dramatic gifts, developed by sound training and application, who bases his endeavors so firmly on observation and experience.

THE GREEN PASTURES

It seems fitting that I should devote a section of my discussion of Negro drama to the 1930 Pulitzer prize winner, The Green Pastures. This play, called by its authors a fable, was suggested by that comic picture of Negro life, Ole' Man Adam, by Roark Bradford, and was dramatized by the talented playwright-producer, Marc Connelly. The production included many grossly exaggerated pictures of the Southern Negro's religious imaginings, but it was nevertheless delightful in its simplicity and direct naïveté. Ole'Man Adam was merely funny, while The Green Pastures was both funny and moving due to Marc Connelly's expert arrangement and feeling for dramatic values. In many places he reached below the surface, and The Green Pastures is transformed into a profound and effective synthesis of dramatic elements showing in simple terms the relationship of every human being to his God.

The Robert Edmond Jones settings, too, lent just the right touch of ingenuousness in their simplicity and simulated crudity. They were never quite ridiculous, although completely in keeping with the deliciously exquisite humor and irresistible sentiment of the play. The greatest asset to this unusual play, however, was the fine, sincere acting by the one hundred Negro players. They acted with conviction and honest fervor, and showed

unaffected naturalness throughout the play.

The venerable, sixty-eight-year-old Richard B. Harrison, as the protagonist, created one of Broadway's outstanding roles and became famous overnight, although he had had no professional experience prior to appearing in The Green Pastures. He had been a teacher, dramatic reader, and lecturer, and had received many honorary university degrees as well as the Spingarn Medal (awarded annually to an outstanding Negro intellectual). Marc Connelly "discovered" Harrison while the latter happened to be visiting New York from an agricultural college in North Carolina where he was director of dramatics and public speaking.

In The Green Pastures Harrison was pious, unassuming, and benign with flowing gray locks and the conventional frock coat and white necktie of the Negro preachers of the South. There was little of the mystical or symbolic about him; he was simply human, walking about the earth "as a natchal man." Indeed, Connelly's picturing of the Almighty is so strangely original that it might appear shocking and even blasphemous were it not for the manner in which Richard B. Harrison portrayed the part. It has been generally agreed that no other actor in America could have filled the role without creating a suggestion of irreverence.

The Green Pastures is a folk fantasy in eighteen scenes. It is supposed to be a visualization of the Negro of the deep South and his rich, humble, trustful conception of Heaven as a place of eternal holidays and fish-frys, and of the Lord as a beneficient old gentleman, kindly but firmly dealing directly with His children. The play, to quote from the author's preface, is "an attempt to present certain aspects of a living religion in the terms of its believers."

There is a prologue in which a Negro preacher endeavors to expound the scriptures to a Sunday School class of small Negro children. The impressions created upon the immature minds of the children are reflected in the seventeen succeeding scenes. The first scene in Heaven is laid long before the creation of the earth. God and His angels, chief among them Gabriel, are enjoying a glorious fish-fry when God discovers something wrong with the custard that is being served. It seems that it needs more "firmament," and to provide plenty of this He "r'ars back and passes a miracle,"--the creation of the earth. The swiftly succeeding scenes picture in fanciful panorama familiar Biblical narratives from the time of Adam and Eve to the fall of Jerusalem.

Although the play is not an imaginative work of the very first order, there is a glow of quiet beauty and self-sustaining poetry in Marc Connelly's treatment. Said Mark Van Doren, (1) "I have talked with no one and

---

(1) Van Doren, Mark. The Theatre Guild Magazine, p. 47, April. 1930.

have read no critic who seems not to have been pleased with The Green Pastures." Critics consistently seemed favorably impressed by this Old Testament sermon seen through the Southern Negro.

Since February, 1930, the company has been playing continuously save for brief summer vacations. It has travelled the length and breadth of the country, and in September, 1932, its third season, it opened in Boston with the original cast almost intact. The Green Pastures was here for three months, an unusually long run for any play in Boston. It has, to date, played well over two thousand performances and seems to be still going strong. A Swedish adaptation of it has been presented at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm. The enthusiastic Swedish audience warmly greeted the European premiere of the great American miracle play--its first production with an all-white cast. It proved so successful that plans were made for presenting it in Oslo, Copenhagen, Berlin, and Moscow. One writer has even gone so far as to suggest that The Green Pastures be given annually as a sort of Negro Passion Play with the tradition of de Lawd descending from father to son.

The original manuscript of the play was admired but rejected by many New York managers on the grounds that it was impossible to produce without seeming sacrilege. The popularity of the play is now such that it is considered a dull day in the office of its producer,

Rowland Stebbins, if there is no news of an imitation or synthetic version of The Green Pastures. These unauthorized productions, probably inspired by the play's simplicity of theme and its spirituals, often amounted to a complete performance of the play without the scenery. The play had early been announced for full production in Los Angeles and in Pittsburg by parties of whom the management had never heard. For some time this was borne with polite resignation, until these manoeuvres began to affect the box-office, and then the management had to inform offenders that such activities might bring a prison sentence.

In bringing The Green Pastures to the stage, Marc Connelly has done something so admirably removed from the conventional in the theatre that his contribution to the drama of Negro life and his fame as a playwright should live long.

CONCLUSION

It is not only natural but inevitable that the Negro should have made a distinct contribution to American drama. In this thesis I have aimed to register the transformations that have taken place from the early stereotyped minstrel characterization to recent years when O'Neill, Green, and Ridgley Torrence have corrected the stereotype and considered the Negro worthy of serious treatment.

The early slave Negro, thrown into an alien environment, underwent soul-stirring experiences which had to find an outlet. In his religion it was provided by extraordinary fervor, simple and picturesque rituals, and complete surrender to emotion. The outgrowth was naturally music and its sister art--the drama.

Negro life has been rich in its yield of dramatic materials, but these have been almost universally utilized by white dramatists. The Negro playwright has had a very negligible influence. But drama is the result of social prosperity and cultural maturity. Then, too, until the last few years the Negro has had but little opportunity to study the technique of the theatre at first hand. Hence, until lately, not even good problem drama has been produced by Negro playwrights, as sentiment has proven too partisan for a fair dramatic balance of forces.

Propaganda has prevented aesthetic interest and artistic detachment. Sheldon and O'Neill have demonstrated the possibilities of the Negro problem play, while Ridgley Torrence and Paul Green have given us realistic studies of folk life and character. I am hopeful that the Negro playwright is soon to come. He has the choice between dramas of expression and interpretation and dramas of discussion and social analysis. Despite the lure of the problem play, I believe his real future lies in the folk play. He must achieve mastery of a detached, artistic point of view. The folk play, whether realistic or imaginative, must be drama of free self-expression and imaginative release with no objective but the beautiful and colorful expression of the folk-life of the race. With life becoming less of a problem and more of a vital process for the younger Negro, we may expect freedom of expression and interpretation in his efforts to paint and create. The highest function of this race drama must be to supply spiritual release, an imaginative channel of escape, and emotional re-enforcement to cover life with the illusion of happiness and spiritual freedom. Hence, a true and lasting presentation of Negro life is still a task for the young Negro dramatist to perform.

The Negro actor, in spite of his early handicaps and exploitation for the sake of popular amusement,

has considerably influenced American drama. The roots of drama are acting and emotion, and the resources of the early Negro song, dance, and pantomine transposed to the serious stage has altered much of American drama very definitely. The very life of drama is in dramatic instinct and emotion. All drama began in mimicry and its creative force is, in the last analysis, an interpretive passion. The Negro brings to the stage an essential and elemental pantomine with a facile control of posture and rythm together with the free use of his body and voice as direct instruments of feeling. This pure expression of emotion is indisputably the strong point in Negro acting. Until recent times this vein of Negro dramatic talent has been under the heaviest artistic impediments and pressure. The Negro actor has had to struggle up out of the shambles of minstrelsy and make slow headway against very fixed limitations of popular taste.

Farce and buffoonery have, until recently, completely overlain the folk comedy and tragedy of a dramatically endowed and circumstanced people. In the sensational successes, The Emperor Jones and All God's Chillun, there were two components--the fine craftsmanship and genius of Eugene O'Neill and the acting genius of Charles Gilpin and Paul Robeson. An advanced section of the American theatre-going public is rapidly becoming acquainted with the possibilities

of the Negro in serious dramatic interpretation.

What is of utmost importance to drama now is to retrieve some of the primitive artistry which the sophisticated and conventionalized theatre has lost. Commenting on a certain group of Negro actors, one discerning critic noticed the "freshness and vigor of their emotional responses, their spontaneity and intensity of mood, their freedom from intellectual and artistic obsessions." It is this inborn sense of something dramatic that is the endowment of the Negro actor, and even though only few possess it in high degree, it is a unique and racial characteristic.

Stagnant conventionalism is the great handicap of the modern theatre. Not only must the Negro theatre be liberated from external disparagement and self-imposed limitations, but also it must break with the dramatic conventions and have the courage to develop its own idiom, pour itself into new moulds, and be experimental. The material still awaits some great exploiting genius.

One can scarcely think of a complete development of Negro dramatic art without some significant artistic expression of African life and the traditions associated with it. Negro drama must revert to its inherent color and emotionalism, its freedom from body-hampering dress, its odd, tragic and mysterious overtones. African life and themes, apart from any

sentimental attachment, offer a wonderful new field for dramatic treatment. More and more the art of the Negro actor must seek its materials in the rich, native soil of Negro life rather than in the threadbare tradition of the Caucasian stage. The Negro dramatic conception is still too restricted, self-conscious, and imitative; but a folk-art pouring out from under long generations of repression is fertile soil for dramatic activity.

This survey has been the result of the author's almost continuous attendance at the performances of every example of Negro drama that has played in Boston and New York since 1928. As a student of contemporary Negro drama, I have seen or read nearly every book and article that has had Negro drama as its theme in whole or in part. To the authors of these books and articles I acknowledge my debt.

I am concluding with a sincere hope for a prosperous, powerful Negro theatre with high artistic ideals that will make for Negro drama a lasting and permanent position, and that will merit respect and admiration for interpreting Negro life for the pure joy of artistic expression.

Bibliography of Negro Drama

This bibliography owes a number of its plays to a similiar bibliography compiled by Alain Locke, also The Negro Year Book, edited by Monroe Work. I have, however, seen, read, or examined, most of the plays here listed.

I am listing separately the plays which have appeared since 1926; all of these I have had the good fortune of witnessing either on the professional or amateur stage.

Anonymous. "The Captured Slave"; produced in Buffalo, 1815.

Anonymous. "The Slave Hunter;" City of London Theatre, 1866.

Aldridge Repertoire (1866-67): "Karfa, The Slave."
"Virginia Mammy."
"Zanga, the Slave."
"Obi, or Three-Fingered Jack," a Pantomine. First produced in New York, 1820.
"Opossum Up a Gum Tree."
"Othello."

Allen, A. J. "The Battle of Lake Champlain"; Green St. Theatre, Albany, N. Y., 1815.

Ames, Winthrop. "Minnick."

Anderson, Garland. "Appearances"; Frolic Theatre, New York, 1925.

Archer, Thomas. "The Black Doctor"; London 1847.

Bashe, Jo Em. "Earth"; The Fifty-Second St. Theatre, New York, 1927.

Bate, Henry. "The Blackamoor Washed White," Drury Lane, London, 1776.

Battle, John T., and Perlman, William J. "The Bottom of the Cup"; Mayfair Theatre, New York, 1927.

Behn, Mrs. Aphra. "Abdelazer, or The Moor's Revenge" (Oronooko); London, 1667.

Bolton, Guy, and Carleton, Tom. "Children"; Washington Square Players, New York, 1916.

Bickerstaffe, Isaac. "The Padlock," Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, London, 1768.

Bishop, Nan Bagley, "Roseanne," Greenwich Village Theatre, New York, 1923.

Boucicault, Dion. "The Octoroon, or Life in Louisiana"; Winter Garden, New York, 1859.

Brown, William Wells. "Miralda"; Boston, 1855.
"The Escape, or Leap to Freedom"; Boston 1858.

Bruce, Richard. "Sahdji, An African Ballet"; New York, 1927.

Burrill, Mamie P. "The Aftermath"; The Crisis, November, 1919.
"They That Sit in Darkness"; New York, 1919

Busey, De Reath Byrd. "The Yellow Tree"; The Howard Players, Washington, D. C., 1903.

Cottor, Joseph S., Jr. "Caleb, the Degenerate"; Gilbert & Company, publishers, Louisville, Ky., 1903.

Cubertson, Ernest H. "Goat Alley"; first performance, New York, 1920; revival, Princess Theatre, New York, 1927; Stewart Kidd Company, Publishers, Cincinnati, 1922.
"Rackey"; 1919.

Cumberland, R. "The West Indian, a Comedy"; New York, 1818.

Davenport, Butler. "Justice"; The Bramhall Players, New York, 1920

Downing, Henry F. "The Racial Tangle"; London, 1920.

Du Bois, W. E. Burghardt. "The Star of Ethiopia, a Pageant"; New York, 1913.

Duff, Donald, and Manley, Dorothy. "Stigma"; New York, 1927.

Dunlap, William. "The Africans, or War, Love and Duty"; Philadelphia, 1811.

Duncan, Thelma. "The Death Dance"; The Howard Players, Washington, D. C., 1923.

Easton, William Edgar. "Dessalines"; J. W. Burson Co., publishers, Galveston, Texas, 1892.

Elliot, Elizabeth F. "The Slave Actress"; Benton's Theatre, New York, 1856.

Frost, Wm. Archer. "Cape Smoke"; The Martin Beck Theatre, New York, 1925.

Galsworthy, John, "The Forest, " Chicago Little Theatre, 1925. Scribner, 1924.

Green, Paul. "The Lord's Will and Other Carolina Plays;" Henry Holt & Co., New York, 1925.
"Lonesome Road," "Six Plays for the Negro Theatre;"
Robert McBride& Company, New York, 1926.
"In Abraham's Bosom, Robert McBride & Co., New York, 1927.
"Granny Boling", Dramatic Magazine, 1921.
"Sam Tucker"; "Poet Lore", 1921.
"White Dresses"; in "Carolina Folk Plays, New York, 1922.
Two Carolina Folk Plays: "The Hot Iron and The End of the Row"; in "Poet Lore, Vol. 35, 1924.
"The No 'Count Boy"; Theatre Arts Monthly, November, 1924.
"Prayer Meetin'"; "Poet Lore", 1924.
"In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin"; Samuel French, Inc., publishers, New York, 1925.
"Supper for the Dead"; "Carolina Magazine, November, 1926.
Grimke, Angelina. "Rachel"; The Nathaniel Guy Players, Washington, D. C., 1916; The Cornhill Co., publishers, Boston, 1920.

Grovenwelt, Sara B. "Octille, the Octoroon." N. D. C. 1867.

Hallam, Lewis. "Barbadoes"; John St. Theatre, New York, 1768.

Johnson, Fenton. "The Cabaret Girl"; The Shadow's Theatre, Chicago, 1925.

Johnson, Georgia Douglas. "Blue Blood"; in Frank Shay's "Representative One Act Plays", Fourth series, 1927.
"Plumes"; Opportunity, New York, 1927.

Lamartine. "Toussaint L'Ouverture"; Paris, 1833.

Lemon, Mark, and Taylor, Tom. "Slave Life"; Adelphi Theatre, London, 1852.

Lindsley, A. B. "Love and Friendship," or "Yankee Notations"; produced in New Yor, 1807.

Lippard, George. "Blanche of Brandywine"; New York, 1858.

Martin, George Madden. "The Lion's Mouth"; dramatized by H. L. Kennedy, in Modern Plays, D.Appleton &Co., 1924.

Mc Donald, T. "Frances"; "Opportunity, 1927.

Middleton, George. "The Black Tie"; New York, 1922.

Munford, Colonel Robert. "The Candidates", 1789.

Murdock, J. "Triumphs of Love"; Philadelphia, 1795.
"The Politicians"; Philadelphia, 1797.

Mvgatt, Tracy. "The Noose"; Neighborhood Playhouse, New York, 1922.

Nelson, Alice Dunbar. "Mine Eyes Have Seen"; "The Crisis", April, 1918.

O'Neill,EUgene G. "The Dreamy Kid"; Provincetown Players, New York, 1919; "Theatre Arts Monthly", Vol. 4, 1920; in "Dramatic Works of Eugene G. O'Neill, Vol. 2, Boni & Liveright, New York, 1924.
"The Emperor Jones"; Provincetown Playhouse, New York 1920; "Theatre Arts Monthly," Vol. 5, 1920, in Dramatic Works, Vol. 1, Boni & Liveright. 1924.

"All God's Chillun Got Wings"; Provincetown Players, 1924; "The American Mercury, January, 1924.

Ovington, Mary White. "Hazel"; "The Crisis," New York, 1913.

Pratt, Rachel Brook. "The Way of the World"; New York, 1921.

Richardson, Willis. "The Deacon's Awakening"; St. Paul, 1921.
"The Chip Woman's Fortune"; The Chicago Ethiopian Players, 1923.
"Mortgaged"; The Howard Players, Washington, D. C., 1923.
"The Broken Banjo"; Crisis Prize Play, 1924.
"The Krigwa Players, New York, 1925.
"Compromise"; in "The New Negro," New York, 1925.
"The Boot-Black Lovers"; Crisis Prize Play, 1926.
"The Flight of the Natives"; The Krigwa Players, Washington, D. C., 1927.

Robinson, J., "Producer.""The New York Stratagem, or "Banana's Wedding"; New York, 1712.

Robinson, Solon. "The Rifle". New York, 1867.

Rogers, William F., Jr. "Judge Lynch"; "The Green Mask Players, Houston, 1923.
Samuel French, Inc., publisher, New York, 1925.

Roosmalen, de, M. "Le Mulattre"; Paris, 1866.

Sheldon, Edward. "The Nigger" ("The Governor"); The New Theatre, New York, 1909; The Macmillan Company, publishers, New York, 1910.

Sheldon, Edward, and MacArthur, Charles. "Lulu Belle"; Belasco Theatre, New York, 1926.

Smith, Sol. "The Tailor in Distress"; Cincinnati, 1823.

Southerne, Thomas. "Oronooko"; London Drury Lane. 1696.

Spence, Eulalie. "Foreign Mail"; The Krigwa Players, Little Theatre Tournament, New York, 1927; Samuel French, Inc., publisher, New York, 1927.
"The Hunch"; Opportunity Prize Play, 1927.
"The Starter"; Opportunity Prize Play, 1927.

Stephens, Nan Bagby. "Roseanne"; Greenwich Village Theatre, New York, 1924.

Stowe, Harriet Beecher. "Uncle Tom's Cabin"; dramatized by J. Lacy, New York, 1853.
"Dred"; dramatized by T. Conway, New York, 1856.

Swayze, Mrs. T. C. "Osawattomie Brown"; Philadelphia, 1859.

Thompson, Eloise Bibb. "Cooped Up"; The Lafayette Players, New York, 1924.
"Caught"; The Ethiopian Folk Players, Chicago, 1925.

Torrence, Ridgley. "Granny Maumee"; The New York Stage Society, 1914.
"The Rider of Dreams"; The Hapgood Players, Garden Theatre, New York, 1917.
"Simon the Cyrenian"; The Hapgood Players, Garden Theatre, New York, 1917.
These plays were published as "Three Plays for the Negro Theatre", The Macmillan Co., New York, 1917.
"The Danse Calinda"; "Theatre Arts Monthly", 1919.

Toomer, Jean. "Kabnis"; "Broom", 1923; in"Cane", Boni & Liveright, New York, 1923
"Balo"; The Howard Players, 1924.

Trowbridge, J. T. "Neighbor Jackwood"; New York, 1857.

Tully, Jim and Dazey, Frank. "Black Boy"; The Comedy Theatre, 1926.

Ware, Alice. "The Open Door," a pageant; The Atlanta Players, 1923.

Webb, Helen. "Genefredè"; The Howard Players, Washington, D. C., 1923.

White, Lucy. "The Bird Child"; The Howard Players, 1922.

Wiborg, Mary Hoyt. "Taboo"; Sam Harris Theatre, New York, 1923; London, 1923.

Wilson, Frank. "Sugar Cane"; Opportunity Prize Play, 1925.

MORE RECENT NEGRO PLAYS

Battle, John T., and Perlman, W.J. "In the Bottom of the Cup"; Mayfair Theatre, New York, 1926.

Sheldon, Edward, and MacArthur, Charles. "Lulu Belle"; Belasco Theatre, New York, 1926.

Tully, Jim, and Dazey, Frank. "Black Boy": Comedy Theatre, New York, 1926.

Green, Paul. "In Abraham's Bosom"; MacDougall Street Theatre, New York, 1926.

Basshe, Em Jo. "Earth"; 52nd Street Theatre, New York, 1927.

Duff, Donald and Dorothy. "Stigma"; 52nd Street Theatre, New York, 1927.

Ferber, Edna. "Show Boat"; Ziegfeld Theatre, New York, 1927.

Lawrence Stallings & Frank Harland. "Deep River" Mansfield Theatre, N.Y. '27.

Rideout, Ransom. "Goin' Home". Masque Theatre, N.Y. 1928.

Sinclair, Upton. "Singing Jail Birds". MacDougall St. Theatre. New York. 1929.

Vidor, King. "Hallelujah". (cinema).

Eugene O'Neill. "The Emperor Jones". Revival of. MacDougall St. Theatre. New York. 1930.

Peterkin, Julia. "Scarlet Sister Mary". Hudson St. Theatre. New York. 1930.

Robinson, William. "Brown Buddies". Liberty Theatre. N.Y. 1930.

Ferber, Edna. "Show Boat". Revival of. Casino Theatre. New York. 1931.

Hodgson, H. "Heaven Bound Soldiers". Atlanta, Ga. 1931.

West, Mae. "Constant Sinner". Royale Theatre. N.Y. 1931.

Heywood, Donald. "Ole Man Satan". Forrest Theatre.
New York. 1932.

Peyton, Lew. "Bridal Wise". Broad St. Theatre. Phila. 1932.

Donoghue, Dennis, & Crossman, Marty. "Ham's Daughter".
MacDougall St. Theatre. New York. 1932.

Lipscomb, G.D. "Daniel". Mansfield Theatre. N.Y. 1932.

Washington, George D. "In Old Kentucky" . Keith's Theatre.
New York. 1932.

Myers, Annie, "Black Souls". MacDougall St. Theatre.
New York. 1932.

Morrison, Harvey. "Change Your Luck". Burbank Theatre.
Los Angeles, California. 1932.

Whipper, Leigh. "Yeah Man". Park Lane Theatre. N.Y. 1932.

MacGowan, John, "Singin' The Blues. Mansfield Theatre
New York. 1932.

Green, Paul. "House of Connelly". Mansfield Theatre.
New York. 1933.

Millin, James Knox. "Never No Mo'". Hudson St. Theatre
New York. 1933.

Graham, Shirley. "Tom-Tom" (an opera). Cleveland, Ohio. 1933.

Grenburg, Lewis. " The Emperor Jones" (operatic version).
New York. 1933.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF BOOKS AND ARTICLES

Aldrich, Ira. Article on, New York World, Jan. 13, 1852.

_____, ____, " " , Saint Petersburg Herald, Russia, Dec. 1858.

Bab, Julius. European Judgments of the American Theatre. Theatre Guild Magazine, Oct. 31, 1931, Vol. 9. No. 1.

Becker, B. & Josson, E. "Ritual and Dramatized Folk-Ways", New York, Century Co. 1926.

Belasco, David, "Tomorrow's Stage and the Negro". Liberty Magazine, Aug. 7, 1926.

Bosset, Rene, "Berbers in North Africa". New York. Century Co. 1924.

Bradford, Roark, "Ole Man Adam and his Chillun", New York, Harper Bros. 1928.

Brown, Sterling, "Southern Road", Harcourt, Brace & Co. New York, 1932.

Budge, A.W. "Osiris" Cambridge, Harvard University Press. 1921.

Carmer, Carl, "Aphra Behn " Theatre Arts Monthly, June 1928, Vol. 12. No. 6.

Cole, John, "A Critique of the Performance of Othello" by Ira Aldrich, 1831, London, Private Printing.

Connelly, Marc, "The Green Pastures". 1929. New York, Albert & Charles Boni.

Crawford, Mary C. "Romance of the American Theatre. Little, Brown & Co. Boston. 1926.

Culbertson, E.H. "Across the Jordan". Theatre Arts Monthly, Dec. 1929. Vol. 13, No, 12.

Deutch, H. & Hanau, S. "The Story of a Theatre" 1932. Farrar and Rinehart, Inc. New York.

Earle, W. "Theatre Royal Poster. 55 29½ London. in Boston Pub. Library, Allen, Brown Collection.

Eaton, Walter Pritchard, "The American Stage of Today" 1928, Boston. Small, Maynard & Co.

Field, Alec G. "The History of Minstrelsy", 1917. New York. E.P. Dutton & Co.

Green, Paul, "Carolina Folk Comedies", 1933. New York. Samuel French & Co.

_____, _____, "Lonesome Road" 1926. New York. Robert M. McBride & Co.

Hannau, S. (See H. Deutsch.)

Hughes, Glen, "The Story of the Theatre". 1928. New York. Samuel French & Co.

Mantle, Burns, "American Playwrights of Today". 1929. New York. Dodd, Mead & Co.

Miller, Anna Irene, "The Independent Theatre in Europe" 1932. New York. Longmans, Green & Co.

Moses, Montrose J. "The American Dramatist" 1926. Boston, Little, Brown & Co.

_____, _____, "Representative Plays by American Dramatists from 1765 to the Present". 3 Vols. 1925. New York. E.P. Dutton & Co.

Odum & Johnson, "Negro Workaday Songs. 1926. Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Univ. of N. C. Press.

Odell, George C.D. " Annals of the New York Stage". 1927. New York. Columbia Univ. Press.

O'Neill, Eugene, "Three Plays". 1921. New York. Boni, Liveright & Co.

Quinn, Arthur Hobson, "The History of the American Drama" 2 Vols. 1928. New York. Harpers Bros.

Scott, V. N. "Zombi". Theatre Arts Magazine , 1929. Vol. 13, No. I.

Skinner, R.Dana, "The Changing Theatre". 1932. New York. Longmans, Green & Co.

Sobel, Bernard. "Berleycue". 1932. New York. Farrar & Rinehart Co.

Stevens, Thomas Wood, "The Theatre from Athens to Broadway". 1932. New York. D.Appleton & Co.

Sullivan, Mark, "Our Times, the Turn of the Century". 1926. New York. Charles Scribners Co.

Isaacs, Edith R.J. "The American Scene". 1928. New York. Samuel French & Co.

Johnson, H. (see Odum).

Josson, E. (see Becker).

Kennedy, Robert Emmet, "Black Cameos". 1924. New York. Albert And Charles Boni & Co.

Landu, William, "The Jew in Drama". 1927. New York. William Morrow & Co.

Lewis, Roland B. ""Contemporary One Act Plays". 1922. New York. Charles Scribners & Co.

Locke, Alain LeRoy. "The New Negro". 1925. New York. Albert and Charles Boni.

_____, _____ _____, and Gregory, Montgomery, "Plays of Negro Life". 1927. N.Y.Harper & Bros, Co.

London Morning Post, Mar. 21, 1848. London, England.

Taylor, Joseph Richard. "The Story of the Drama". 1930: Boston. Expression Co.

Torrence, Ridgley, "These Three". Plays for a Negro Theatre. 1919. New York. MacMillan & Co.

Van Doren, Mark, "The Green Pastures". Theatre Guild Magazine. April 1930.