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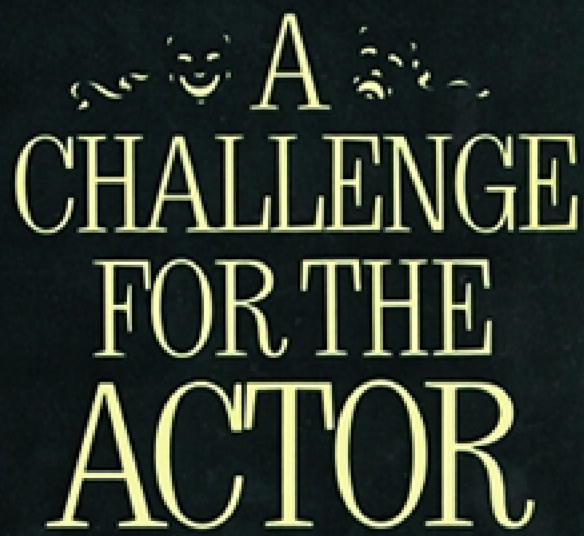

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS, AN APOLOGY, AND A LITTLE ADVICE

I've always thought that acknowledgments belong at the end because it is only after I have enjoyed a book very much that I am interested in knowing who helped bring it about. However, I will adhere to convention and offer my thanks at the beginning.

In my earlier book, *Respect for Acting*, whenever doubts arose about the scientific validity of my explanations or pronouncements about human motivation and its psychological causes, I consulted Dr. Jacques Palaci. At the time, he assured me that most of my theories (which were based solely on intuition and personal life experience) were sound. The clarifications he provided in other areas are still credited to him in this book. In *A Challenge for the Actor* I have deepened and expanded my explorations of human behavior and, since Dr. Palaci has long since moved to Paris, I was fortunate to become acquainted with the noted New York psychologist and psychiatrist, Dr. Harvey White. I want to thank him for his invaluable help and enlightenment. Although we were not always in total agreement, he said he was eventually "comfortable" with my conclusions.

Without the back-breaking efforts of my student Jane Flanagan, this book would probably have taken six years to write instead of four. Late into the nights, after her other job, she retyped each messy page I handed her, correctly interpreting my scribbled notes and additions in the margins and in between the lines. I was then able to read her cleaned-up version and test its content on my classes. I am also grateful to the students who listened to each new chapter. By their questions, expressions of edification, and delight, they assured me that I was on the right path. Their puzzlement or confusion

resulted in many fruitful revisions. These same students became willing guinea pigs when trying out the new exercises, thereby giving substance to their validity.

When I was finally able to present a completed, spanking-clean script to my editor, Robert Stewart, he brilliantly messed it up again with his many suggestions, for which I am deeply grateful. At this stage, my close friend, the playwright and computer whiz Jesse I. Feiler, stepped in to save me from the mountainous task of typing another fresh manuscript. He had it "scanned" by one computer, producing a disk which he then used in his own computer to enter the endless corrections. The result was something so beautiful that even Robert Stewart marveled. Jesse gets big hugs for this.

I now had my first personal experience with copy editors, those creatures who, on my previous books, were mainly responsible for correcting punctuation marks, grammar, syntax, paragraphing, repetitions, and the like. The thoroughness and nature of the work done by Carole McCurdy and Linda Epstein astounded me. I never met Ms. Epstein but I sat elbow to elbow for several days with Carole McCurdy as she explained their markings and revisions. Rearrangements and rewritten sentences were always better than mine. I thank them with all my heart, particularly for finally accepting my use of capitalizations and bold type as a means of emphasizing all the things I usually need to repeat ten times to actors in class, of stressing the content that I believe is at the heart of acting and the actor's problems—something that in the reading might otherwise be skimmed over.

My apologies to feminists who may take offense at continual references to members of the profession as "the actor" and "he." They must understand how tedious it would be if I always had to mention both sexes—"he or she," "the actor or actress." I call myself an actor, rarely an actress, and think of myself as a member of mankind—not of personkind. Ladies are definitely included.

The content of this book is meant to be put into practice. It will be of best service to those actors who patiently test its proposals step by step over a period of years. It cannot be assimilated or absorbed in a gulp. And theorizing without action is most often burdensome or confusing, leading to unsubstantiated opinions.

PROLOGUE: WHAT DOES IT TAKE?

It takes talent. TALENT is defined in the dictionary as "the natural endowment of a person with special or creative aptitudes." In an actor, I believe, these endowments consist of high sensitivity and responsiveness to sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell, of exceptional sensitivity to others, of being easily moved by beauty and pain, and of having a soaring imagination without losing control of reality. Once one is blessed with these endowments, it takes AN UNSHAKABLE DESIRE TO BE AN ACTOR together with A NEED TO EXPRESS what one has sensed and felt in the concrete terms of the characters with whom one will identify on stage. The need to express should not be confused with vanity or a kind of "Look at me, here I am!" egotism, which is so prevalent in the theatre. Nor should sensitivity be confused with neuroses or their personal display.

Theoretically, the actor ought to be more sound in mind and body than other people, since he learns to understand the psychological problems of human beings when putting his own passions, his loves, fears, and rages to work in the service of the characters he plays. He will learn to face himself, to hide nothing from himself—and to do so takes AN INSATIABLE CURIOSITY ABOUT THE HUMAN CONDITION.

It takes A SOUND BODY, as well developed and cared for as that of an athlete. It takes A TRAINED VOICE, as flexible as that of a singer, and FINE STANDARD SPEECH which must be developed for use in all the dramatic literature that makes greater demands on him than the regional speech with which he began his life.

When a God-given or genetically inherited talent exists, the would-

be actor must face the fact that it is of little use without the TENACITY AND DISCIPLINE it takes to make something of the talent.

To be more than an adequate or serviceable actor, it takes A BROAD EDUCATION in the liberal arts. If this has not been provided for, remember that once you can read, you can educate yourself in the understanding of human beings and the social conditions under which man has struggled throughout history by reading not just dramatic literature, but also masters of the novel and the endless biographies that substantiate faith in the realities of the past. Your feet can take you to museums, galleries, libraries, theatres, concerts, and dance performances. Your need for enlightenment will increase as you realize the ways in which these sources stimulate your own creative drives.

I wrote a memoir, *Sources,* for my granddaughter in response to her curiosity about what had made me an actress. I also clarified for myself the things that had been essential to my work. The advantages of my heritage, for which I can take no credit, my parents' influence on my first seventeen years, the development of a work ethic, the values I assimilated—all the things which were important to my artistic growth and still sustain me today—were extraordinary, and I'm aware that not everyone has been as lucky. Nevertheless, a little information about these "sources" may be of value to you.

I was born after World War I in Göttingen, one of the oldest university towns in Germany. Its cobbled streets and medieval architecture made it easy to identify with the realities of life in the Middle Ages. Our tall brick house with "my" beautiful garden in back stood near the meadows, woods, and streams, the hills and valleys rolling at the outskirts of the town. Almost daily roamings through them yielded discoveries that rivaled those made in the garden and at the seashore where we spent the summers. The recall of the visions, sounds, smells, and textures of my childhood serves my acting to this day. My mother was always near enough to be shown a newfound shell or pebble or flower, to answer questions, and to urge me on to other explorations.

In our home art and creativity were the religion, and God existed only insofar as He might be responsible for them. History was explored to lead to an understanding of man's struggle to overcome the problems of society. It was up to us to learn to appreciate and grasp

the miracle of the artist producing for his community, how he left an imprint on each successive epoch while rebelling against the status quo, to learn from the artist's attempt to enlighten and offer food for man's soul.

My Welsh-German father, the son of a violinist, had been an actor in his teens, a composer and musicologist in his twenties, and eventually he became a professor of art history.

During the First World War, as a result of illness that kept him out of the army and a lack of students because so many had to serve, my father was left with much free time. So he unearthed the scores of Handel's operas, which hadn't been performed since the composer's death, edited them, and translated them into German. After the war, he produced and conducted them, founding the soon to be renowned Göttingen Handel Festivals. My Danish mother was a soprano and sang such roles as Rhodelinde, Cleopatra, and Teofane at these festivals. I remember attending a dress rehearsal at the age of three, seated in someone's lap in a loge. I *still* shiver with pleasure whenever I sit in a loge today. I'm also told that I toddled around humming and singing Handel's melodies before I could speak in sentences.

In the mid-1920s, Germany was caught in inflation, unemployment, and dire social unrest, so my father gladly accepted the offer to come to the United States to chair the art history department at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. I was six years old when I experienced my first pain at leave-taking from friends, relatives, familiar rooms, and landscapes, and from my garden. I cried because the grown-ups cried and shared their foreboding of something forever lost. Nevertheless, my heart pounded as each new adventure confronted me. I must have begun role-playing at this time; I remember the ride to the boat train in my aunt's Mercedes-Benz, an open car in which even the leather seats smelled of luxury. As we drove through the villages, I "acted" to the manner born, waving to passersby as though I were a princess.

I was rarely consciously unhappy in Madison, but deep down I felt uprooted and alienated by the differences between the values of our family and those of the others in this community of the Middle West. I had no problem with the new language, which I seem to have absorbed rather than learned, but among my schoolmates I was always considered "odd"—from the time I arrived until I left Madison

for good at seventeen. Even my parents seemed strange to my peers because they didn't belong to the country club, play bridge or golf, or otherwise involve themselves in the typical social life of the town. They managed to make friends among some of the faculty who shared their interests, but I had only one real friend in grammar school and another in high school with whom I felt a close affinity. I'm sure that many artists share this sense of estrangement as children, which turns them to the life of their imagination as fed by literature, music, painting, and the performing arts.

Reading was considered as important as eating in our house. Lively and impassioned debates took place, usually around the dinner table, about the merits of William Faulkner, Virginia Woolf, Willa Cather, Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Mann, etc. Disagreement was encouraged because it led to the forming of one's own opinions. My father sometimes gave seminars to his students in our home and by eavesdropping I learned a great deal, even about the evaluation of a work of art—not to accept it simply because it was famous. I was never barred from adult discussions provided I didn't create a disturbance. If things were over my head or I grew restless, I simply went about my own business.

After my determination to become an actress set in (which took place upon seeing a performance of Elizabeth Bergner's Saint Joan when I was nine), I read as many actors' biographies as I could lay my hands on: Duse, Bernhardt, Bergner, Basserman, Kean, Booth, Barrymore, etc. My parents plied me with a history of the theatre and with plays. By the time I was fifteen I had read, if not grasped, most of the classics by Goethe, Molière, Schiller, Shakespeare, Shaw, Lessing, Hauptmann, O'Neill, Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, etc. I remember being given a fancy makeup box and a book of illustrations, how I made up for hours on end as an Oriental, a clown, a ballerina, a Russian peasant. I remember the pleasure with which I confronted my transformed face in the mirror. Very important to my theatrical education were the years I spent in learning modern dance. My mother had been a student of Dalcroze at Hellerau and a fan of Mary Wigman, so she steered me to the fine dance department at the university, where I also worked with visiting teachers like Harald Kreutzberg and Hanya Holm. The kinetic agility and bodily freedom achieved in this art form is of value to every young (or old) actor.

Thus I was blessed with a home life crammed with more than eating, sleeping, studying, and doing chores. My brother played the fiddle, my mother taught singing and prepared for the lieder recitals she gave. My father composed, when he wasn't working on a new book, and I practiced the piano for hours each day. The Pro-Arte String Quartet used the good acoustics in our living room to practice chamber music, and I became familiar with their repertoire without leaving my house.

Then came the trips to Europe. My father had an arrangement with the university whereby he took six months' leave to do research for his books every three years in place of the customary sabbatical at the end of seven. During these trips we traveled together through Scandinavia, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, Germany, France, and England. I had tutors and attended schools whenever we settled down in one place for a few months. My real lessons lay in the variety of cultures in which I partook. My role-playing developed and increased. Each palace was fuel for my imagination as I wandered through the rooms and gardens pretending to be queen, princess, lady-in-waiting, servant, mistress—whatever suited my fancy in making believe I lived at that place in a distant time. In cloisters, churches, cathedrals, I was a penitent, a martyr, a heretic, a member of the choir, a nun, a recluse. I was always stimulated by my father's vivid descriptions of the life of a painter, sculptor, architect, or artisan who had created the places we visited. (One discovered small obscene sculptures, for example, carved into the pillar of a church by an artist protesting the serfdom imposed on him by the ruling clergy or nobles who had commissioned his work.) I grasped in my very bones that people really *lived* in these buildings, allowing me to believe later on in the noncontemporary characters I played. I actually lived for a week in a castle on the Rhine belonging to a friend of the family. It was complete with moat, drawbridge, great stone halls, even a dungeon. Playing at knights and robbers became more than a game. My fantasies of living at a different time and place have never abated. Recently in Paris, at a visit to the Conciergerie, standing in Marie Antoinette's cell, I had an almost mystic sense of being there with her.

I admit that sometimes I had to be dragged through museums and galleries, preferring to be outside playing in an amusement park like the Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen. But today I am as grateful for

these experiences as I am for the hours I was made to practice the piano until it became a pleasure to play. Every extra penny was spent on theatre, ballets, operas, and concerts, and I heard and saw many of the great artists of that time. Some of them became my role models, and I was continually reminded by my parents that their achievements were based on dedication and discipline as intense as those required to become a priest or a nun. My developing work ethic sent me rushing from a piano lesson to a modern dance class, back home to read a play, downstairs to hear an opera on the radio, back upstairs to practice making up, finally plopping into bed with satisfied feelings of accomplishment. Or conversely, going to bed with a slightly sick feeling, if I had goofed off or wasted a day and missed a chance to learn or achieve something.

The examples given me by great artists and a growing awareness of the requirements and necessary dedication to one's field also introduced nagging doubts about my ability to fulfill these enormous responsibilities. Did I *really* have the strength or even the *desire* to be "like a nun," with the same kind of devotion to my calling? I had a great appetite for living, and the example of a happy family life in my own home did not let me exclude it from my dreams for the future. My mother encouraged my doubts, urging me to examine them fully. But every time I got a crush on someone or fell in love and dreamt of children and marriage, with the innocence of youth, I convinced myself that I could have it all. Periods of doubt never left me entirely, and conflicts arising between my personal and professional life made for a struggle lasting into my forties.

My last trip to Europe under my parents' wing occurred after my graduation from high school when I was sixteen. I attended the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London and felt more and more like an adult with my own room in a boarding house, coming and going as I chose between classes and my discoveries of the city. The parks and palaces, the Tower, Parliament, Windsor Castle, Westminster Abbey made the Elizabethans leap from the page. And I loved the notion of studying for my profession with classmates who shared my dreams even though the actual training was poor. At best it was academic, stressing the training of voice, speech, and movement, but I knew there was something wrong with being lined up against the barre to

recite the speeches of Rosalind or Gertrude in unison with twenty others, with the same gestures and inflections.

As a consequence of this burst of freedom, of feeling on my own in the pursuit of a life in the theatre, it was extremely difficult to fulfill the promise to my parents to complete my education at the university in Madison. From February till June of 1937, while attending school, I balked, complained, and cried that I wanted to *act*, not to pursue science and mathematics, until they relented and with faith and encouragement let me try my wings in the East. My first "professional" audition resulted in my earning the role of Ophelia in Eva Le Gallienne's production of *Hamlet*, which rehearsed all summer in Westport, Connecticut, and was performed at Dennis, Massachusetts, on Cape Cod in late August.

It was a terrifying yet euphoric experience: terrifying because of the responsibility of having been entrusted with such a role, and euphoric because I was in a professional company in a great play under the tutelage of a person who shared my parents' ideals of theatre as an art form, as opposed to its being simply a commodity for entertainment or diversion. When the successful production was over, I returned with the other actors of the company to Westport to rehearse a series of plays for a proposed future repertory company. This venture collapsed after several months, and with a heavy heart I turned to New York City to look for work. In January 1938 I auditioned for Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne and won the magnificent role of Nina in *The Sea Gull*, and so my Broadway career was launched.

Of course I was lucky, but what did I bring with me that made me (almost) ready for these roles? The background which my parents had given me, my education, a well-trained body, a sense of historic faith which let me wear the *clothes* of my characters rather than their costumes, a fairly decent voice, standard speech, and the *talent* of the amateur who still *believes* in the given circumstances of the play before this faith is short-circuited by the awareness of external professional skills. My tenacity saw me through the challenges presented by rehearsals and performances with the Lunts, although their discipline far exceeded mine. They ate, slept, and breathed the play and their roles. The attention to detail of even a few split seconds on stage

was never-ending. You were expected at a rehearsal half an hour before it was scheduled and to be in your dressing room hours before the performance, every hairpin in place, every line on your eyebrow perfect. (As Miss Fontanne said, "You don't make up for someone with opera glasses in the balcony but for someone with opera glasses in the front row.") And your mind and spirit had to be sharply tuned in to the adventure of making each performance alive for that wonderful audience who had come to share the experience.

I think of the next nine years from the summer of 1938 until the spring of 1947 as the transitional years of my career, during which time I sadly became a Broadway "pro," a slick hack, during which I lost my way and a love of acting until I finally regained it to begin a true life in the theatre. During each of those years I played six to ten weeks of summer stock, even managing to butcher a few beautiful Shaw plays with only one week of rehearsal. I played in seven Broadway productions with actors like Paul Muni, José Ferrer (whom I shortly married), Paul Robeson, Alfred Drake, etc. I worked with directors such as Guthrie McClintic, Margaret Webster, and Marc Connelly. I toured extensively. In 1939, through the prodding of my agent, I almost gave in to the lure of Hollywood. Film stars were then still the victims of the large studios, which referred to them as members of their "stable." Actors were truly considered to be pieces of merchandise and had no voice in the choice of films in which they were contracted to play or the roles assigned to them, all of which was too much for my need to determine my own destiny. (Years later when John Houseman once chided me for not becoming a member of his "stable" of actors at Stratford, Connecticut, I assured him that I was not a horse.)

At twenty-one, I had a child and a house in the country. It wasn't just the pull between a career and motherhood that confused me, but rather the state of my acting. I had been strongly influenced by the Broadway scene, the "lingo," and the work habits that surrounded me. Once I had left the Lunts, I became enmeshed in a professionalism that is based on external shapes and styles, tricks used to shape a performance almost at the first rehearsal. This resulted in the kind of acceptable clichés I had already rejected when I saw them on stage as a child. It was deemed "professional" to be able to tell a joke in the wings just before making an entrance in a serious scene, never to seem

to take the whole thing too seriously, to falsely accelerate tempos, to carefully place your laugh lines, to push for a theatrical energy, or to hush your voice for effective audience attention, to throw back your head on an exit to guarantee applause, to glide across the stage in a costume, to drape yourself charmingly across the arm of a sofa instead of sitting in it. I was always a good mimic and picked up such externals with ease. I wondered if I had learned all there was to learn. I got great reviews, I was "starred" on the marquee, and still I was left with an empty, hollow feeling of being only egotistically effective in a display of pyrotechnics. The approval, applause, and good reviews were not enough of a reward. I actually began to dislike going to work. In 1946 my marriage came to an end. I was on my own again and continued to work, but almost solely out of financial necessity.

In 1947 my luck changed—twice. First, Harold Clurman cast me for a Broadway play. I had never worked with such a director. In the early stages of rehearsal I felt as though he had pulled the rug out from under me so that I had to learn to walk and talk all over again. He never allowed the setting of line readings, mechanizing of stage positions or pieces of "business," exploring instead the existence of the characters and their behavior as they came into conflict with each other in the action of the play. I was asked to work subjectively, to give birth to the new person I was to become rather than to present a preconceived, theatrical illustration of her on the stage. My love, my "amateur's" faith in the work, was revived. I must admit that as the externals which had given me security in the past years were stripped from me, I needed the assurance of those whose opinion I respected that my new way of work was communicating. Without it I would not have fully trusted this way of working.

The second stroke of luck occurred when the leading actor in Clurman's production had to leave the company and was replaced by Herbert Berghof. A renowned European actor with a total understanding of contemporary acting, he helped me almost at once in the understanding and development of the new techniques I was testing, which I still apply, which are never-ending in terms of their discoveries. They constitute a craft as challenging, perhaps more so, than that of any of the other performing arts. I was now ready to begin the battle to be a real artist, as well as my own battle with the commercial theatre which continues to this day.

Herbert and I fell in love, and, as our lives became ever more closely linked, he invited me to join him in teaching at his studio. I was stunned. What did I know about teaching? He reminded me that as an actress who had worked continuously for almost ten years, having achieved a certain skill and the awareness of many errors as well, I should be willing to share this experience with less knowledgeable colleagues. The concept of sharing appealed to my desire to be of service to others, which was, in fact, a prime motivation for my having wanted to be a part of the theatre in the first place. While teaching, I soon learned that anything I was unable to verbalize or explain usually related to areas of confusion or muddiness in my own techniques. So the teaching of others forced me into clarifications of my personal work. It raised my standards. In upholding honesty in the work of others, denying their right to be superficial or to take shortcuts, one can't allow oneself to cheat. I'm far more nervous when students are in the audience than when the critics are there, because the students know more about the craft than the critics do. I simply want to emphasize that although I have become recognized as a teacher and feel that I am a good one, it is because I am, first and foremost, an *actress* and I teach what I am continually learning. I would like to disagree with George Bernard Shaw's statement that "He who *can*, does. He who *cannot*, teaches" to express my personal belief that "Only he who *can* should teach!"

Part One:
The Actor

1

The Actor's World

SINCE the time of the ancient Greeks a democracy has depended on its philosophers and creative artists. It can only flourish by continuous probing, prodding, and questioning of the social conditions under which man exists and tries to better himself. One of the first moves of a dictatorship is to stifle the artists and thinkers who have the ability to stir up dissent from any prescribed dogma which might enslave them. Because the artist can arouse the curiosity and conscience of his community, he becomes a threat to those who have taken power. We have countless examples in recent history: Hitler's ban, not only of the contemporary artists who challenged his regime, but even of some of the works of German classicists like Schiller and Goethe who defended freedom of thought and condemned anti-Semitism. He forbade performances of Beethoven's opera *Fidelio* because it espoused the cause of those imprisoned for their political beliefs. Contemporary artists who have dissented from dictatorships, from racism in South Africa, from military oppression in Latin America, and from our own bout with McCarthyism are legion. They have set an example as to the power of art.

As actors we must not consider ourselves immune from the need to learn about our world, our country, and our immediate community. We must arrive at the formation of a point of view. The aftermath of the "me generation" is producing many young people with reawakened concerns about their society; but it is often accompanied by a sense of futility in the belief that individual action won't make any

difference. I know that if I cast my one vote I can be sure that thousands of others are doing the same, that if I give only one dollar for famine relief, environmental protection, or civil liberties, thousands of others are giving, too. I also know that if I give or do nothing, many, many others will be as remiss.

Once we begin to learn about some of the world's problems and come to an understanding of our country's relationship to them, we can tackle the problems of our immediate surroundings. "My country, right or wrong!" is often taken out of context and used in an *un*patriotic, even dangerous sense. In any country, as in the individual, there is always room for improvement. The struggle to make changes for the better, to be of service in this quest, is the obligation of responsible citizenship. It is true that a by-product of being a performer is to jump on the bandwagon of a good cause. We have an intuitive compassion for our fellow man so we give freely of our time and talent to aid the hungry, the ill, and the homeless, and to protest against nuclear proliferation, unjust wars, and oppression, *once these things have been brought to our attention.* However, an educated grasp of false national values and the exploitative practices in our own society is glaringly lacking. We are lax in making changes in existing conditions, even within our own profession. To plead ignorance or to play the ostrich, to assume that individual actions don't count, can only result in further enslavement.

By going back to the origins of theatre art, in briefly tracing the history of its development, I want you to discover how and why it reached high peaks and why it so often sank into a shambles, why in America it has been dubbed "The Fabulous Invalid," and why it should be viewed as an invalid at all, fabulous or otherwise.

The ancient theatre of the Greeks, with its enormous arenas providing intellectual enlightenment as well as an emotional catharsis for the populace, spread to the Romans, where, under dictatorship and in its increasing attempts merely to entertain, it gradually declined into a state of soulless spectacle. It died out and the arenas fell into ruin. (How many such spectacles fill our arenas today—sometimes on roller skates? How many of our theatres have been allowed to fall to ruin or demolition?) Centuries later, in the Dark Ages, as people

reached for light, the theatre reemerged in the form of religious "miracle" and "passion" plays. Finally, it spilled into the streets and marketplaces as troupes of strolling players mocked and mimed and improvised their views of local political problems as well as the eternally fascinating problems of love and sex and family life. (How many churches, garages, or basements are we occupying today in our search for an audience, in our attempts to be heard?)

A flowering rebirth of the theatre began with the Elizabethans and continued in the epochs that followed with the great poet-dramatists of Germany and France. The recognition by heads of state that fine theatre reflected glory on their communities led them to increase their patronage and support. Abroad this support is still traditional, even though many of the theatres are grappling with the invasion of bureaucratic merchandising that threatens genuine artistic contribution to a nation. Throughout Europe we have examples of theatres subsidized by both the state and the municipality. (In Germany theatre is additionally subsidized by industry *and* labor.) Through continuous and *affordable* offerings, the audiences have also developed a tradition of theatre*going*. It has become a part of their lives. (While standing in line for tickets at Vienna's Burgtheater, I overheard a young woman chatting with a friend about her problems as a salesgirl. Then, casually, she asked her opinion about a recent film. "I haven't seen it. Why should I go to a movie when I can see a play?" was the reply.) These subsidized playhouses, which are the backbone of the countries' theatres, exist happily side by side with commercial playhouses, experimental theatres, and political cabarets. They provide enormous variety, not just for the public but also for actors deciding what kind of theatre they long to be a part of. (In Germany and Austria, in the state theatres, the actors are employed for life with paid vacations and retirement pensions equaling their salaries.)

In stressing the importance of subsidized theatre, I don't mean to imply that it is necessarily ideal for solving the artists' problems, but rather to emphasize that when this kind of support is given, it is an *acknowledgment* of the cultural benefits, the value that theatre can have for its community, on a par with its orchestras, operas, dance companies, museums, and libraries. It implies respect for the theatre artists. In the United States we have yet to *earn* this respect and

support. We will need to do so if we are to get out of the swamp of commercialization in which we seem to be stuck at the present. How did we get into this predicament?

Whenever I despair about the condition of the present American theatre, I remind myself how very young our country is, and I take courage in the awareness of its speed of growth from wilderness to civilization. Our first hundred years left little time for anything but clearing the wilds, breaking ground to provide shelter and arable land, gradually providing schoolrooms, churches, and town halls. The creation of a viable government, communication between settlements, a pursuit of higher education, and the arts had to wait their turn.

When we began to establish ourselves economically through the mining of our natural resources, through trading in furs, lumber, and cotton, we were deemed worthy of exploitation. There was renewed oppression from the colonial bosses abroad, which made revolt almost inevitable. Our Founding Fathers, making use of Greek philosophers, promised liberty and justice for all, even the right to a pursuit of happiness. The fight to fulfill these promises has not been won. It took us a long time to accept the very idea of what justice and liberty "for all" means, and that meaning is being sorely tested in the present. I believe that the right of the individual to pursue happiness is continually bent and perverted into something sought at the expense of others. "Free enterprise" has come to mean the right to exercise control over others, even to undo them. Corporate mergers are made, not to be of service to others, but for personal enrichment and self-aggrandizement. Our theatre is an integral part of this society.

The theatre's evolution is not only fascinating but totally relevant to our present dilemma.* From the Puritans we inherited the notion that all forms of theatre were immoral, that all performers were vagabonds, harlots, and charlatans (as indeed some of them were and some still are). As settlement of the colonies grew, laws forbidding any kind of performance were enforced in all but Maryland and Virginia. These laws were only lifted about 150 years after the Rev-

* Read Garff B. Wilson's *Three Hundred Years of American Theatre and Drama* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

olution, although laws forbidding actors burial in consecrated ground were not officially rescinded until the twentieth century. (In the late nineteenth century, New York's "Little Church Around the Corner" became the first to sanction burials, as well as church weddings, for actors—which is why I selected it for my first marriage!) Nevertheless, there were always actors willing to buck these obstacles, ready to slake the people's thirst for entertainment, ready to provide solace for their troubled lives, even if only on a primitive level.

Although French and Spanish settlers founded a few acting companies, it was the British immigrant actors who made a lasting impact. At first they performed on makeshift platforms in town halls and taverns, calling their performances lectures or "moral dialogues" in order to circumvent the law. The number of companies increased, and in 1752 the first real playhouse was built by merchants in Williamsburg, Virginia, for the troupe of Walter Murray and Thomas Kean. These companies were often family affairs in which man, wife, and children performed with the help of other actors. They all shared in the proceeds, scrounging for a living as most actors still do today. They played their English repertoires of Shakespeare and playwrights of the Restoration, and translations of German and French morality plays, usually in very abridged versions for reasons of time, budget, and the provision of more popular fare. They traveled extensively, particularly between the more sophisticated townships of Charlotte, North Carolina; Philadelphia; New York; and, after the Revolution, Boston. The trips were hazardous, roads and means of transportation were miserable, but even when our frontiers moved westward, the actors moved with them.

As native-born actors began to join the ranks of the British companies, they developed an inferiority complex, which seems to have intensified with the years. Charlotte Cushman and Edwin Forrest, in the early 1800s, were the first American-born actors to establish themselves, with great difficulty, as performers of importance. All during the nineteenth century, with the continuing arrival of prominent visiting English players, this sense of colonial inferiority continued and has not been entirely shaken off to this day. It is still fostered by some of our English colleagues and, certainly, by our own lack of a sense of self-worth.

William Dunlap, born in 1766, was our first American playwright;

he developed a type of morality play acceptable even to the Puritans. From it sprang the melodramas which became popular for everyone, including the most unschooled audiences. As a reflection of the social problems of poverty, drink, bossism, and slavery, they gave righteous answers in which villains got their due and victims were saved or went to heaven. (*Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Drunkard* became American classics.) Playgoers found a release from their daily troubles through their tears and cheers, their boos and hisses. The form of melodrama, gradually more skillfully conceived, gained in sophistication and continued as a mainstay of the theatre for many years, being played by the various companies along with the standbys in their repertoire. Melodrama faded at the end of the nineteenth century with the discovery on our shores of the new social realists, Ibsen, Chekhov, and Shaw, who not only made other demands on the actors but also deeply influenced our young playwrights—Eugene O'Neill among them.

I was always fascinated by the sense of heritage I felt when reading about nineteenth-century American theatre. But it came vividly alive for me when I first delved into a biography of Edwin Booth, who was certainly one of our greatest actors. I was suddenly able to identify with those times, to participate in the daily activities of the actors, to imagine their working conditions and draw conclusions from their struggles.

Edwin Booth was born in 1833, the second son of the British-born actor Junius Brutus Booth. He served his apprenticeship in his father's company, and, even before his father's death when he was nineteen, seems to have opted for a simple, realistically human kind of acting rather than the bombastic, emotionally histrionic style of his father. He strove throughout his career to deepen his skills. He traveled extensively with other companies. (I was amazed to learn that once when Booth was acting an abridged version of a Shakespearean play in a mining camp out west, the miners, many of whom were Welsh and English, interrupted the actors, shouting back the lines that had been cut—so well did they know the text.) For a few years in the latter half of the century Booth became one of the famous actor-managers who had their own companies and who made up what was called the Golden Age of the Actor. Eventually, Booth returned to being a guest player in other companies. He traveled

abroad, pitting his talents against the greatest actors of England and Germany. He suffered through the terrible time of his actor-brother John Wilkes Booth's assassination of Abraham Lincoln, which not only damaged his own career, but also reflected badly on the entire profession. Performers were once again looked upon as scoundrels, now even as murderers. It is a tribute to Edwin Booth's greatness that he recovered from this stigma and was mourned at his death in 1893 as "The Prince of Players."

Today, with permission of the Players' Club in Gramercy Park in New York City, you can still visit his home, the upper floors of which are maintained as a museum. You will get goose pimples, as I did, when walking into his bedroom to see his slippers placed at the side of his bed, imagining that he will come in at any moment. You can see his costumes, props, books, and scripts, which are beautifully displayed there. All this will, hopefully, whet your appetite for other biographies of the period.

Read about the young American, born in New York City in 1807, who fell in love with the theatre while attending performances sitting at the rear of the balcony and, realizing he would not be allowed to perform in fine plays in the United States, reversed the trend by going to England to make a career. He became one of the greatest tragedians of his generation and was eventually decorated by all the crowned heads of Europe for his portrayals of characters like Lear, Shylock, and Othello. In 1867 he died on tour in Lodz, Poland, where he was buried as an honored artist. His name was Ira Aldridge—and he was black.

Each actor-manager of the Golden Age had a home base with a theatre of his own and a company and repertoire of his own choosing. Everything was under his control: acting, directing, sometimes even the writing of the plays. These actors played melodramas, classics, and translations of new European plays. They took their plays on the road, often undermining the stability of the resident stock companies that had established themselves throughout the country. They vied with each other for supremacy. Their growing renown attracted prominent players from abroad who sometimes came without their own companies, as guest players. As the visiting actors began to bring in large profits, the "star system" took hold and, because these guest stars demanded that the resident actors bow to

their own style of performing, the quality of the local companies deteriorated. (Does this sound familiar?) Soon the actor-manager relinquished his responsibility for the company and also played as a "guest star." The supporting actors became convenient, necessary props. These circumstances helped to spawn a new creature: the nonperforming producer.

In the latter part of the century men like Augustin Daly and David Belasco started to take the reins away from the remaining actor-managers, hiring companies that they directed, for which they sometimes wrote plays, and for whom they devised more and more spectacular and scenically realistic productions. They took pride in developing new stars over whom they ruled like kings, treating them, as well as the other actors, like children to be taken care of. Actors lost control, not only over their choice of plays, roles, and the nature of their interpretations, but over their personal lives as well, as they were guided into fulfilling a salable public image contrived for them by their managers. (This type of star-making was later adopted by the Hollywood studios, which also made short shrift of any performer who dared to rebel.) P. T. Barnum, a showman if there ever was one, was not only establishing the circus in America but producing plays, importing performers, and building theatres for them. He once said, "Show business has *all* phases of dignity, from the exhibition of a monkey to the exposition of that highest art in music and drama." The terms *legitimate theatre* and *legitimate actor* derived from this period to differentiate them from the more popular forms of *show business* (which included the ever-growing entrenchment of minstrel shows, circus, vaudeville, and burlesque). But *legitimate* or not, they were still a part of the *business.*

By this time, civic orchestras and opera companies existed in most of our major cities, having been recognized as a cultural boon by the leading citizenry and consequently receiving their sponsorship. Theatre was considered a commercial, less reputable stepchild unworthy of civic support, and the leading actors did not fight to cast off this mantle of second-class artists. They satisfied themselves with the personal glory and accolades heaped on them while the supporting players dreamed of attaining the same status. Also, they no longer shared in the take but received a fixed salary at the discretion of the

management, and this salary lasted no longer than the run of the play. They were now "for hire."

Producers like Daly and Belasco at least had their roots in the theatre. They had spent their lives serving as apprentice actors, stage managers, and writers and were passionately involved in all aspects of production no matter how dictatorial they may have been. But toward the end of the century, the real villains of the theatre emerged in the form of the nonartists—the businessmen and entrepreneurs—and in each succeeding generation they have managed to exert a stranglehold over the artists who had higher aspirations than those of buying and selling merchandise. Sensing that enormous profits could be made, Charles and Daniel Frohman and half a dozen others formed the Theatrical Syndicate in 1896. (I don't know which word makes me shudder more, "syndicate" or "entrepreneur," with their connotations of racketeering, exploitation, and enslavement.) The Frohmans were already established businessmen-managers when they created this Theatrical Syndicate, which reigned for more than ten years as a prosperous but highly destructive monopoly. They bought or leased *all* major playhouses in the country, thereby forcing everyone to perform under their aegis, dictating who could play and what would be played. Since their prime purpose was to make money, to pack their houses, they pandered to the largest numbers and the shabbiest taste. Raising the awareness of the public, providing them with masterpieces, which had been a cause for some of the actor-managers, was deliberately ignored. Any actor or producer who rebelled was shut out and had to resort to inferior theatres or, once again, to makeshift platforms. A few fought back: Belasco, some prominent actors like Minnie Maddern Fiske, Joseph Jefferson, and, interestingly, James O'Neill, the father of Eugene. But they didn't make much of a dent. The syndicate began to lose some of its power only with the arrival in 1905 of *another* monopoly: the Shubert brothers, whose legacy remains with us today. And their real estate cartel was further weakened by others, some of whom are still firmly entrenched on Broadway.

The transition between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries produced many notable actors about whom it is wonderful to read: Julia Marlowe, Helena Modjeska, Ada Rehan, Maude Adams, Richard

Mansfield, Otis Skinner, E. H. Sothern, the Drews, and the Barrymores, among many others. But it is Minnie Maddern Fiske who stands out as an example for us all, a courageous, pioneering artist, incorruptible in her stand against the shutout of the businessmen-managers, playing in dilapidated or improvised theatres, maintaining her Manhattan Theatre Company, introducing the works of Ibsen as well as a "new" kind of acting, which was described over and over again as incredibly "lifelike" and "unstudied."

A superb black actor of the transition was Charles S. Gilpin, whom Eugene O'Neill later considered to be "the only actor who carried out every notion of a character I had in mind," when referring to Gilpin's portrayal of Brutus Jones in *The Emperor Jones.* Gilpin was also producer of the nation's only black stock company, at the Lafayette Theatre in New York.

Of course many young players of importance were putting down their roots at this time: Pauline Lord, Alice Brady, Helen Hayes, Laurette Taylor (the greatest actress in my memory), Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne.* But in the early 1900s "show business" in the large cities and on the road continued to burst with activity—and predominantly trashy plays.

The first outside move to counter these conditions was made by a group of men already known for their philanthropic contributions to the other arts: J. P. Morgan, Andrew Carnegie, John Jacob Astor, and Otto Kahn. Inspired by the recent international success of the Moscow Art Theatre, they built the New Theatre with modern technical facilities and a revolving stage. They engaged the idealistic director, Winthrop Ames, and a "permanent company" aiming for a repertory of classics and exceptional new plays. However, the productions seem to have been administered by the star system, and, perhaps for other reasons, the venture collapsed after a few years. But an artists' rebellion against the broad reign of second-rate popular entertainment was inevitable.

In most generations grumblings and rumblings can be heard among

* Read *The Fabulous Lunts* by Jared Brown (New York: Atheneum, 1986). It will paint a lively picture of much of the theatrical scene from the end of the last century right up to the 1960s, in addition to providing inspiration for a dedicated, single-minded pursuit of your goals.

people with visions of theatre as an art form. Within the same year, 1915, independent of each other, *three* ventures were born which had a long-lasting influence on the future of our theatre. Alice and Irene Lewisohn began The Neighborhood Playhouse as part of the Henry Street Settlement on the Lower East Side of New York. They served that community with challenging plays and performances for fifteen years, branching out to found The Neighborhood Playhouse School of the Theatre, which is still one of the finest of its kind. In the arts colony on Cape Cod the Provincetown Players started as a writers' theatre headed by the brilliant Susan Glaspell and her husband, George Cram Cook. They were joined by Edna St. Vincent Millay and the young playwright Eugene O'Neill, among others, and their works were played by such talented actors as Jasper Deeter and Walter Huston (John Huston's father). They moved to MacDougal Street in Greenwich Village for the winter season, where they continued until the stock market crash of 1929. (Who says Off-Broadway is a recent movement?) The third group called themselves the Washington Square Players. Dedicating themselves to performances of meaningful plays under the guidance of Edward Goodman, they functioned with young performers like Katharine Cornell and Roland Young, with designers like Lee Simonson and Robert Edmond Jones, and writers like Zoë Akins and Philip Moeller. But, more importantly, after three years they joined with a handful of others to lay the foundations of the famous Theatre Guild.

The Guild, founded in 1919, was the longest successful venture of its kind in our history, spanning almost forty years, functioning within the commercial system of paying for itself with the support of backers plus the use of subscription tickets as had become customary for concerts. Another new concept was to operate under the management of a board, comprised not just of an attorney and a business manager, but of actors, designers, directors, and playwrights. In their glory days they played a modified version of repertory with a company of some of the finest character actors of that time and young players like the Lunts. They launched great designers like Robert Edmond Jones, Jo Mielziner, Donald Oenslager, and Lee Simonson and writers like O'Neill, Sidney Howard, Elmer Rice, S. N. Behrman, Robert Sherwood, Maxwell Anderson, and many European playwrights, among them George Bernard Shaw.

(Allow me to stray from the subject to tell one of my favorite stories about an encounter between Shaw and the Guild. When they sent a cable asking him to make cuts in the play they were previewing because the curtain came down too late for commuters to catch their trains, Shaw cabled back, "Run later trains!")

Inevitably, the board of the Guild experienced a good deal of infighting and the artists began to relinquish their voice in decision making. Many of them also left the company for more lucrative offers elsewhere. Even the Lunts went out on their own, feeling they were being misused, but returned when they were allowed to be at the helm of their productions. Gradually, the Guild declined in quality and its influence over Broadway. In its last years, when the nonartist was once more in control, it became almost a booking agent for other productions.*

As an offshoot of the Guild, another noble experiment was attempted by artists in search of control over their own work: the Playwrights Company. It spanned the years from 1938 to 1960.† Disillusioned by the economic and artistic dictatorship of commerce, by theatre owners such as the Shuberts, by producers, even by the Theatre Guild, Robert Sherwood, Sidney Howard, Elmer Rice, Maxwell Anderson, and S. N. Behrman banded together to eliminate the nonartist producer by becoming their own producers. They were all established, Pulitzer Prize–winning authors and true liberals who believed that theatre should have social meaning providing moral enlightenment. They had many successful productions and were joined in the passing years by other prominent playwrights. But as they, too, were operating under the system of profit and loss, in economic competition with the rest of Broadway, their path was strewn with all the problems of the commercial scene which finally engulfed them, spiritually as well as economically.‡ When they disbanded they stressed, optimistically, that a similar attempt should be

* Between 1938 and 1952 I was in three of their productions: *The Sea Gull* with the Lunts, *Othello* with Paul Robeson and José Ferrer, and Shaw's *Saint Joan* with John Buckmaster.

† Read John Wharton's *Life Among the Playwrights* (New York: Quadrangle Publications, 1974).

‡ Under their aegis, I appeared opposite Paul Muni in Maxwell Anderson's *Key Largo.*

made again, but that its successes would depend on *the respect that the artists must have for each other and particularly their loyalty to a shared ideal!* But let me go back to the twenties for the proper sequence of our evolution.

In her teens Eva Le Gallienne had become a Broadway star in two of Ferenc Molnár's plays, *The Swan* and *Liliom.* Fired by her admiration of European actors and their traditions, she founded the Civic Repertory on Fourteenth Street. With unbelievable skill and tenacity, she enlisted philanthropic support for the productions of classical and neoclassical plays performed in repertory by a standing company with the occasional addition of guest players. From 1926 to 1932 the theatre was able to operate at prices that allowed real theatregoers (few of whom are rich) as well as young people to attend with regularity. The Civic is remembered by many with love and nostalgia and for the fact that a professional repertory had actually once existed in America.* In 1937, when I was yearning to be in the profession, it was to Eva Le Gallienne that I wrote for an audition. I *knew* of the Civic's reputation and believed that it was the only kind of theatre I wanted to dedicate myself to. I *didn't* know that it had been out of existence for five years, and that Le Gallienne was then battling to reestablish herself in independent productions while valiantly dreaming of a new Civic.

Inevitably, the economic collapse of 1929 and the ensuing depression of the 1930s had its effect on the entire theatre community. Social consciousness was almost *forced* on members of all the arts—and it developed to a high degree. Many actors' "labs" and workshops arose, based on political activism. But the Group Theatre was conceived as a theatre not only of social ideas but one with high artistic ideals. Strongly influenced by the principles of Stanislavsky and the precepts under which the Moscow Art Theatre had been built, it arose under the leadership of Harold Clurman. It began as a summer colony in Connecticut in 1931. Most of the twenty-eight actors and the three directors, Clurman, Lee Strasberg and Cheryl

* For a fuller understanding of Le Gallienne's vision and her struggles, read her two autobiographies: *At Thirty-Three* (New York, Toronto: Longmans Green, 1934) and *With a Quiet Heart* (New York: Viking Press, 1953).

Crawford, had worked together at the Guild, the Provincetown, and the Neighborhood Playhouse. They shared a disgust for commercialism and hotly debated everything from a lack of artistic integrity to inadequacies in acting and directing. They longed for an ensemble of merit with a shared language and ever-improving acting skills to perform plays of social significance. (As *always* in art, the inception of a fruitful collaboration is made possible by shared passions, by the airing of passionate disagreements, as well as by a search for answers. Nothing comes of the superficial social intercourse so commonly practiced by would-be artists.) In the summer of 1931, with the encouragement and some financial assistance of the Theatre Guild, Clurman was able to persuade the others to join in the experiment in Connecticut with only a promise of room and board. Among the actors were Sanford Meisner, Stella Adler, Elia Kazan, Franchot Tone, Morris Carnovsky, J. Edward Bromberg, and Clifford Odets. Later they were joined by John Garfield, Luther Adler, Lee J. Cobb, Irwin Shaw, William Saroyan, Frances Farmer, Sidney Kingsley, Robert (Bobby) Lewis, and Margaret Barker. The roster is testimony to the impact the Group made on our theatre. For ten years they were a major force in New York, making for change in directing, ensemble acting, and the kind of plays that attracted a new audience as well as the old.*

At the height of the depression, when the bottom fell out of commercial productions in New York and on the road, the thousands of actors *usually* unemployed were joined by thousands of others. Even worse, the jobs on which most actors subsist while waiting for roles in the theatre had also disappeared: waiting on tables, working in restaurant kitchens, doing office work, running errands, or being domestics. They were truly on the street. Young Henry Fonda joined the ranks of those selling apples on Times Square.

One of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's innovative ideas to pull us out of the muck was the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which included the Federal Theatre. This was the only time in our history

* For a full comprehension of their turbulent times, read *The Fervent Years* by Harold Clurman (New York: Knopf, 1945). In it there are many lessons to be learned from their successes and perhaps *even more* from their failures.

when we had a national theatre supported by the government. There was even an initial promise of no government interference or censorship. The project was so vast, so ambitious, it's a miracle that it ever got on its feet, but it survived from 1935 to 1939. Its defeat was entirely due to red-baiting congressional committees, which, in any event, wanted it off the federal payroll.

The statistics make my head spin. In four years, more than 1,200 projects were produced including everything from circuses, puppet shows, and musicals to operettas, new plays, and classics. In the first year alone, more than 12,000 theatre workers were employed in thirty-one cities; their work reached an audience numbering in the millions. Playwrights, impressed by these efforts, contributed their work without asking for royalties. Some of the productions were highly successful; others were innovative. Although the caliber of work was often poor, it never seems to have lacked in the enthusiasm of the performers.

Among the plays produced were fourteen by O'Neill, nine by Shaw, T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral,* an all-black *Macbeth,* and Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (under the aegis of Orson Welles and John Houseman, who collaborated soon afterward in the creation of the exciting though short-lived Mercury Theatre). Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock* was considered so "subversive" as to be partially responsible for the act of Congress that ended the Federal Theatre in June of 1939. One congressman asked if Christopher Marlowe was a communist. Others found Shakespeare too subversive. (Note the parallel in recent Congressional attempts to eliminate the National Endowment for the Arts or those of the Moral Majority to try to have *Romeo and Juliet* taken from the shelves, claiming that it encourages teenage suicide and drug use.) The central figure in charge of the Federal Theatre was the phenomenal Hallie Flanagan.*

The first half of the forties were, ironically, a time of economic recovery due to World War II. The commercial theatre rebounded with escapist plays, foolish wartime comedies (two of which I was

* To gain a complete picture of this woman and her unique achievements in spite of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, read the biography *Hallie Flanagan: A Life in the American Theatre* by Joanne Bentley (New York: Knopf, 1988).

guilty of participating in: *The Admiral Had a Wife* and *Vicki,* both with José Ferrer), and a few serious productions like *There Shall Be No Night* and *Othello.* Little was stirring of a noncommercial nature except for the ventures begun by European refugees like the theatre department at the New School for Social Research headed by Erwin Piscator, the opening of the Max Reinhardt Seminar in California, and, in 1945, in New York, the founding of the HB Studio by Herbert Berghof. Berghof wanted to create a space and a home in which he and his colleagues could experiment and study to improve their skills instead of hanging around drugstores and cafés like vagrants, complaining about their inability to find a creative outlet. In 1947 the Actors' Studio, of which Herbert Berghof was a charter member, was founded, on the same principle. Meanwhile, with the arrival of new playwrights like Tennessee Williams, Horton Foote, and Arthur Miller, and productions of the established Playwrights Company, plus important new forms of the American musical, the forties ended with a sense of hope and started off the fifties with a bang.*

I have the ad of a theatrical ticket agency from the end of December 1950 presenting a choice of the entertainment one could see *on Broadway* within the same week. It included three plays by George Bernard Shaw, one Shakespeare, a Pinero, an Anouilh, a Van Druten, the musicals *Guys and Dolls, Pal Joey, The King and I, South Pacific,* and *Call Me Madam,* with performers like Judy Garland, Gertrude Lawrence, Yul Brynner, Ethel Merman, Bert Lahr, Phil Silvers, Audrey Hepburn, Richard Burton, Julie Harris, David Niven, Jessica Tandy, Hume Cronyn, Charles Laughton, Charles Boyer, Vivien Leigh, Laurence Olivier, Henry Fonda, Cedric Hardwicke, and yours truly. As the decade drew on, productions declined in quality and popular commercial fare prevailed, but even when things seemed rosier many of us were unhappy with the lack of continuity and the conditions of marketing that always accompanied our efforts. As a

* For a brilliant overview of all aspects of theatre in America and Europe in the early 1950s, read Eric Bentley's *In Search of Theatre* (New York: Knopf, 1953).

direct consequence of this unrest, young artists rebelled. Off-Broadway stirred again with notable efforts by the Phoenix Theatre*, The Circle in the Square, and the Cherry Lane Theatre, among others. Many young performers making their mark—Geraldine Page, Jason Robards, Maureen Stapleton, to mention only a few—were training at the HB Studio. Samuel Beckett was being recognized as a great force, Edward Albee was making them sit up with *The Zoo Story, The Sandbox,* and *The American Dream.*

But the curtain of McCarthyism had descended over the nation and for most of the "fabulous fifties" its influence on the established theatre community of writers, directors, and actors made for an atmosphere of fear and the occasion for betrayals, sellouts, and suicides, or simply the stifling of voices. Unless you're already familiar with this black period when personal beliefs and convictions were challenged, when being left of center was considered a crime, when people of note were made the dupes of congressional committees in order to intimidate lesser-known citizens into submission, you can read about it in the many available political assessments or in the biographies of the victims and the perpetrators of these crimes. It's important if you want to guard against the recurrence of such shameful times. I still have difficulty in dealing with my memory of those days, so deeply was I wounded. I would like to reprint a statement I was allowed to make by Edward R. Murrow, the courageous journalist who took a stand against Senator Joseph McCarthy, who was responsible for some of the anti-Communist witch-hunting of the period. For a while, one of the features of Murrow's radio program was a segment called "This I Believe . . ." in which he gave McCarthy's victims a few minutes to air their credos. More than a hundred of their statements were eventually gathered in a little book.† Mine begins with a quotation:

> "I know that in an accidental sort of way, struggling through the unreal part of my life, I haven't always been able to live up to my ideal.

* For whom I played Turgenev's *A Month in the Country* and Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan.*

† *This I Believe,* Vol. 2, ed. Raymond Swing (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1954).

But in my own real world I've never done anything wrong, never denied my faith, never been untrue to myself. I've been threatened and blackmailed and insulted and starved. But I've played the game. I've fought the good fight. And now it's all over, there's an indescribable peace. I believe in Michelangelo, Velásquez, and Rembrandt; in the might of design, the mystery of color, the redemption of all things by Beauty everlasting, and the message of Art that has made these hands blessed. Amen. Amen." These words were given to the dying painter, Louis Dubedat, in George Bernard Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma.* It is the credo of an artist, a specific human being, and only part of the author's credo, whose beliefs are summed up in the entirety of his work. Not being a writer, a prophet, or a philosopher, but an actress, I will again employ the help of a playwright to paraphrase my faith: I believe in the ancient Greeks who initiated our theatre 2,500 years ago, in the miracle of Eleonora Duse's gifts, in the might of truth, the mystery of emotions, the redemption of all things by imagination everlasting, and the message of Art that should make the untiring work and striving, the inspiration and creation of all actors blessed. Amen. Amen.

In the other part of my life I feel "guilty" about living up to my ideal, but not as much as poor Louis Dubedat and, of course, not for the same reasons. I have in my life to guide me the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights and I believe in them to the letter—to the dismay of some. I, too, can get strength from Michelangelo and Rembrandt and Bach and Mozart and Shaw and Shakespeare, and the teachings of Jesus and Plato and Aristotle. These great makers and shakers have helped me to find reason, majesty, and greatness in the world. They have helped me to drown out the frenetic racket made by the compromisers who try to bend ideals to fit their practical needs and personal appetites and to deprive us of our spiritual salvation. The knowledge that every day there is something more to learn, something higher to reach for, something new to make for others, makes each day infinitely precious. And I am grateful. One thing makes for another. Shaw wouldn't be without Shakespeare, Bach without the words of Christ, Beethoven without Mozart—and we would be barren without all of them. I was proud the day I first learned to make a good loaf of bread, a simple thing which others could enjoy, or to plant a bulb and help it to grow, or to make a character in a play come off the printed page to become a human being with a point of view who can help others to understand a little more; all these things, and the effort to do them well, make it possible for me while "struggling through the

unreal part of my life," and being "threatened and blackmailed and insulted and starved," to be true to myself and to fight the good fight.

I survived this time of tapped phones, of the F.B.I. tippy-toeing in one's footsteps, of anxious glances over the shoulder in a café to make sure that no discussion was being overheard. I survived in a healthier state than many others. I had no guilt to deal with since I hadn't betrayed anyone. I didn't bear resentment at having *been* betrayed or "named" to congressional committees, because my accusers remained anonymous. I didn't go to jail, I didn't kill myself, and, as for the blacklists which barred me from TV and films, they simply removed me from any temptations or lures into the commercial world or the temptation to compromise my goals any further than I was already doing on Broadway. But it was the only time in my life when I was made fearful or felt that I had lost control over my own destiny. And for that, I have the right to remain outraged!

The relationship between the vast social upheavals of the sixties and seventies and the theatre is still hard for me to put into perspective objectively (except for my awareness that artists were late in reflecting or illuminating these times). In January 1961 at the inauguration of our new, young president with the poet Robert Frost at his side, we were challenged to acknowledge that our freedoms must be earned by the acceptance of our responsibility for them, that we must again seek to do something for our country rather than just for ourselves. Many accepted this challenge. The Gandhi-like civil rights movement made great inroads on our culture but these promises were dampened by the tragedies of the assassinations of Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., and again later by the murder of Robert Kennedy. L.B.J.'s furtherance of civil rights and his ambitious war on poverty were marred by his abetment of our ever-deepening involvement in Vietnam. In the next administration the situation worsened as the war reached into Cambodia and the public learned more and more about corruption in our leadership.

Meanwhile, the silence of the McCarthy generation had been broken by their children in reaction to their parents' lack of social involvement, as well as to their middle-class and often hypocritical values and the importance that had been given to the acquisition of material things. The rebellion of the young, which, of course, involved many moderates, also included two kinds of extremists with

distinctly opposite aims. On the one hand were the "flower children" who preached love and peace and looked for the simplest kind of existence, working only to achieve the barest necessities for communal living. Many of them were undone by the failure of their ventures and, particularly, by a further escape from reality into the world of drugs and what they called mind-expanding chemicals. On the other hand, we saw fanatical young political activists who believed they could change the established world by terrorist tactics against villains of their own choosing. They, too, were undone, occasionally by accidentally blowing *themselves* up with their homemade bombs. The events in Asia increased the polarization of our country with ever-growing numbers of conscientious objectors, peace marches, and movements that finally brought the tragic war in Vietnam to an end. Then, after the enforced resignation of the president and, in my lonely opinion, the four-year revival of an *honorable* Democratic presidency, we arrived in the eighties. But what was happening in the arts during the two prior decades?

For many years theatre activity seems to have been only slightly touched by the turbulent times, probably because of the lingering fear of new congressional crackdowns on political beliefs. (If government troops could shoot down students at Kent State, what could Congress do to an artist?) In 1962, Edward Albee's bitter and cynical indictment of middle-class social mores, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, made a big splash and influenced many of his younger colleagues for years to come. But throughout most of the sixties, Broadway flourished with its usual fare and the inclusion of British imports. In one year alone there were sixteen English plays with predominantly English casts creating a shutout of American plays and performers. Off-Broadway had also become recognized as an arena where profits could be turned. Consequently, big business moved in, the unions came with ever-increasing "minimum" demands to make sure labor would not be exploited, box office prices rose, critics attended with regularity, and popular plays were sought out with an eye to moving them "uptown" until, in most cases, there was little difference between being on or off Broadway or, as Herbert used to say, "Now we have small grocery stores downtown trying to compete with the big ones uptown."

An answer to these conditions was temporarily found in a recurrence of the original Off-Broadway movement. In increasing numbers, even smaller stages and workshops in basements and lofts were occupied by young people hoping to escape from the new union demands and the high budgets they entailed, once again reaching out to be heard in experimental works with a minimum of financial risk. These new ventures soon fell under a large umbrella dubbed Off-Off-Broadway. The Café Cino provided a platform for many young performers, directors, and writers like the gifted Lanford Wilson. Ellen Stewart began her Café La Mama, which is still very much alive today with countless experimental productions. But, as a whole, the Off-Off-Broadway movement was quickly infected by marketing practices of one kind or another. The more successful ventures merged with Off-Broadway; many went under or degenerated into being mere showcases. The very term *showcase* speaks for itself, illustrating that members of the profession are putting themselves on display to be bought by the highest bidder, each individual member of the venture serving his own ambitions to attract the agent or talent scout, the producer or author he has usually invited to "case" his worth. The possibility for a fruitful collaboration in the single-minded creative effort necessary to produce a serious work of art is automatically eliminated. Many people consider the Off-Off-Broadway movement a huge success. I consider it a dismal failure. At best it has made way for a few exceptionally gifted individuals who, having begun with youthful idealism, were fed right back into the mainstream of that same commerce from which they were initially escaping and where they usually remain with one foot, teetering, with the pretense that they are serving art. When, on occasion, they *do* achieve something of merit, it is an accident rather than a result of these conditions.*

Joseph Papp began to function on all four burners in the sixties. He is an exceptional producer with an understanding of social theatre plus an incredible ability to arouse the municipality and its philan-

* Today actors have the "Showcase Code," and playwrights have new provisions in the Dramatists Guild which specify and spell out the details of how we are allowed to sell our wares.

thropists into a support of his efforts. Free Shakespeare in the Park, street theatre available to all and sundry: What a seemingly impossible achievement. The growth of his people's theatre complex on Lafayette Street is an equally heroic accomplishment. Whether you applaud all the presentations or not is almost beside the point. In 1967, his production of *Hair* was the first to echo and reveal the existing problems of the young. The same can be said for his later success, *A Chorus Line*. I'm convinced that the daily hurdles he faces, the problems that must plague him in bringing about his successive efforts, problems that make artistic growth difficult, are similar to those which plague all projects that begin with honest and idealistic intentions. Among these problems are many for which we actors refuse to take responsibility, the ones with which I'll throw down the gauntlet at the conclusion of this chapter.

In the mid-1960s Neil Simon's comedies, not unlike the truly American plays of George S. Kaufman in earlier decades, began sweeping across Broadway with social insight and compassion, and, so far, they continue to do so. Perhaps in the future, in less farcical productions, they may even be recognized by those who now dismiss them as commercial fare for being plays that have arisen from the tradition of Gogol and Chekhov.

Also in the sixties, new support was coming from philanthropic foundations. Previously, foundations like Ford and Rockefeller had offered help to science and education. Now they extended it to the arts—even to the theatre. Smaller foundations followed suit, and a proliferation of regional theatres ensued. Foundations made it easier for established groups in Washington, D.C., Houston, Boston, and Chicago, to name a few, to expand and continue their work. And they helped new ones get started: in Ann Arbor, the APA; in San Francisco, the ACT; in Minneapolis, The Guthrie, which started off with flying colors; and many others. Foundation support continues, and regional theatre has become a force to be reckoned with, particularly as to the way in which it has moved into the Big Apple. While Nelson Rockefeller was governor of New York, he alone was responsible for persuading the federal government to involve itself in sponsorship of the arts, and the National Endowment for the Arts was the result. Later he created the New York State Council on the Arts. These institutions still extend help to ventures of good will,

albeit often meager help buried under bureaucratic restrictions.* They and some of the foundations are sometimes weak in their evaluations of potential talent and skill, so the output of many ventures remains provincial.

In the seventies, often with the help of Joe Papp, new playwrights appeared on the horizon, notably Sam Shepard, David Rabe, and Michael Weller. On the other hand, the Theatre of the Absurd had become increasingly absurd with the arrival of "happenings," plays of audience confrontation, nudity, sexual acts depicted in detail, and actors urinating into the audience—all in the name of "art" or in the name of "liberation" from old-fashioned theatre. In their desperation to perform, actors got so confused that they allowed for unspeakable indignities. Two young men once asked me what they could have done at an audition about being lined up by the stage manager to have their penises measured. Stunned, I answered, "You shouldn't have *let* him!" They were not fully satisfied by my reply.

For most of you, the 1980s will be remembered still unclouded by feelings of past history. Now that we are headed toward the twenty-first century, paying heavily for the extravagant, spendthrift Reagan years, you will understand how the decade's excesses were reflected in the theatrical super-spectaculars of Andrew Lloyd Webber and English imports such as *Nicholas Nickleby.* One theatre was gutted to make room for entire roller-skating ramps and rinks—in the name of "art." On the positive side, we saw the plays of August Wilson and emerging feminist writers Beth Henley and Wendy Wasserstein. Many actors decided that the Method had had its day and reverted to formalism, in imitation of the performers of English importations.

Not only in New York, but all over the country in increasing numbers, "innovative productions" (another phrase I detest) have often been considered to be "modern" theatre. Most of them are based on attention-getting devices and external gimmickry under the

* A short lesson in dealing with red tape was given me by that genius, Twyla Tharp. She had applied for a grant and was supposed to fill out a lengthy form including a request for a written proposal for her upcoming project, which the foundation would evaluate to see if she qualified for its support. Diagonally across the first page, in large handwriting, she scrawled, "I don't make proposals. I make dances!" She got the grant.

guise of giving new meaning to the classics. They are perpetrated by directorial "concepts" that place *Troilus and Cressida* in the roaring twenties, *Timon of Athens* in the American Civil War, *As You Like It* in a forest at the edge of a golf course with actors dressed in knickerbockers carrying mashies and putting irons, or *The Cherry Orchard* on a white shag rug, or—more recently—on Persian carpets. Any device is used to disguise the fact that neither the director nor his cast is able to live up to the author's intent. It simply points up the paucity of their vision and weakness of their skills. The "innovations" are still very much with us, encouraged by esoteric critical praise, proving the gullibility of an audience that wants to be "in the know" even while they're yawning out of the other side of their mouths. Perhaps someone will attempt a combination of the fashionable seventies and eighties with a production of an all-nude *Hamlet,* placing Elsinore in a health spa, in order to guarantee the theatre owner months of standing room only.

A healthy, gimmick-free, nonsensational, experimental theatre was curtailed by snowballing inflation, which, incommensurate with wages, put the price even of *Off*-Broadway tickets out of the reach of devoted theatregoers. Production costs spiraled, abetted by growing advertising costs and union demands and the increasing practice of featherbedding—ranging from up-front office expenses to the number of cigarettes allegedly purchased for each performance by the prop department, inflated bids by costumers, designers, carpenters, and electricians to the limo service demanded by stars for transportation to and from work. When challenged, the answers of the featherbedders are based on the philosophy that "everybody does it," always accompanied by the attitude that those who *don't* are "suckers" and fools.

But I firmly believe that the high cost of inflation, as well as the current lack of resources resulting from a recession, are only *excuses* idealistic theatre people make for the plight of the theatre. If your heart pounds, as mine does, at the mere mention of the beginnings of a theatre like the Neighborhood, the Provincetown, the Theatre Guild, the Civic Repertory, the Group Theatre, the Phoenix, or the APA, it must also sink with the awareness of each demise. We may also ask what happened to the promise provided for a time by some

of the theatres still in existence. We can place the blame on inflation, recession, depression, problems of profit and loss, the high cost of theatre tickets, lack of audience support—on union restrictions, on exploitation by big business, on real estate monopolies, on egomaniac producers or directors, on weak leadership, on opportunistic visions rather than artistic ones with a clear point of view, even on the critics—and we will be correct. *But* we forget that in our search for the blame, we may well have to place ourselves at the top of the list.

For example: The positive movements in our history, our floating islands of hope, have disappeared because they were deserted by the very artists who had initially sworn loyalty to them. I don't need to name names because they are easily traced, but in case after case, the ones who made the biggest splash in a given production were quickly lured away by the popular, more lucrative offerings of Hollywood and Broadway, having used their colleagues in the collaborative venture merely as stepping stones on which to reenter the world of "show-biz." They always left behind a weakened, demoralized company that grew more and more cynical, rightfully doubting if *anybody* really meant it! That is the *real* reason for our failures in the past and lack of growth in our existing attempts. Nonprofit theatres are often visited by guest players who let the management and other actors feel they are doing them a favor by passing a little time with them between their *really* important work in film or on TV.

Let's face the fact that since the disappearance of the golden age of the actor-manager in the 1800s, the acting profession as a whole has relinquished its responsibility to the theatre. It has willingly accepted the role of subservient child to a kind of parental control exercised by managers, producers, directors, even its own agents. This situation has worsened with the years. It sometimes resembles the relationship of prostitute to pimp, or the migrant fruit picker to the orchard bosses. Taking no position of their own, actors bow and scrape to be hired or merely noticed. Many have befuddled their minds and poisoned their talents with drugs. Many stars have forgotten that, as in sports, they can only win the game together with a strong team, no matter how much they may seem to score personally. We must not fog ourselves with illusions about an ideal theatre but fight for it all the way to the mountaintop. In the examination of our past and

present, I've tried to emphasize the swamps, the potholes, and the traps that have strewn all the paths taken before us in the fervent hope that with open eyes we can clear our own path as we climb it.

Perhaps we don't all have the same mountain in mind and must first decide which one we're aiming for.

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New York, NY 10020

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Manufactured in the United States of America

30 29 28 27 26 25 24 23 22 21

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hagen, Uta.
A challenge for the actor / Uta Hagen.
p. cm.
Includes index.
ISBN 0-684-19040-0
1. Acting. I. Title.
PN2061.H27 1991
792'.028—dc20 91-15782
CIP