THE PLAY

All plays, however skilful, will leave behind an emptiness, unless they are animated by some underlying idea that provides at once their unity and their *raison d'être*. Plot and form are not enough. In the great dramatist the theme is so inseparable from its whole artistic expression as to make analysis difficult. It is the substance of the author's vision, none the less potent when it flees general definition. To say of *Othello* that it is a study of jealousy, or even the tragedy of great-souled integrity ensnared and overwhelmed, is to say nothing. To describe *Measure for Measure* as showing the downfall of the Puritan, is to miss the significance of that full gamut of personalities, from Isabel living in the mind, to Claudio, living in the world of sense, and all their strangely satisfying pattern. And what can one say of the *Tempest?* with its intertwining of basic motifs—a consummation, a surrender, an order reborn—save that the surface action, the directly intelligible, comes secondary to something far deeper, with almost a prophetic quality.

I believe that this 'prophetic' quality is almost essential to great drama, which cannot wholly forget its religious origins. It is nearly always present in Shakespeare. Shaw has it, in his finest work. Two years ago I saw *Heartbreak House* within a few days of *Cavalcade*, and it seemed incredible that these two plays, with their picture of breaking civilisation, had not been born at the same moment of acute post-war disillusion; that Shaw's play had been written a full decade and a half before, when the war was at its height.

There is a like sense of inspired vision in the work of Shaw's compatriot, Sean O'Casey, increasing in his later plays. It was a fortunate coincidence that brought the Irish Players to the Little Theatre with *Juno and the Paycock*, when *Within the Gates* was being performed for the first time, at the Vaudeville. *Juno and the Paycock* follows what has become traditional lines, though the tradition is no older than the naturalistic period of the last century. Straightforward, realistic to photographic point, excelling in creation of character, full of humour and pathos, it is a period piece that already dates, an historical document of slum life in Dublin during the latter 'Trouble.' But the two moments that are its high-lights are two moments of pure lyricism, like a sudden rending of the veil, when first one mother then another keens her lost son, the second lamenting that she did not sufficiently pity the first because her son was a Die-Hard Republican. 'I should have remembered that

it was neither a Die-Hard nor a Stater, but only a poor dead child.' With the lovely prayer, stirring so many echoes, 'O Sacred Heart of Jesus, take away our hearts of stone and give us hearts of flesh.' By these two moments, in retrospect, the whole play lives.

In *Within the Gates,* as in *The Silver Tassie,* O'Casey abandons realism to explore new fields; or rather realism, symbolism, lyricism all find a place. The scene is Hyde Park, from spring's promise to winter's desolation; park-keepers, nurse-maids, guardsmen, stump orators, form a kind of choric background. It is at once a bitter satire and a mystery play in new terms, of which the ultimate burden is the search for God, and, though it is a play with many obscurities and even inconsistencies, it holds the attention from end to end. Its spirit is one of disillusion, if not of final pessimism. The poison of self-deception eats into all the chief characters; into the Dreamer's dreams — the Dreamer is a broken reed to those who look to him to express the ideal of the author; Sean O'Casey has outgrown the Celtic Twilight and has no illusions about Dreamers — as into the Bishop's eagerness to enter into the life of the common people; neither of them can bear contact with reality. At the end one is left indeed with a glimmer of hope, an impression that 'something yet remains,' but what? It is strangely obscure, as though the dramatist, as poet, felt impelled to express two contradictory streams in his own heart. Is he with the pure paganism of the Dreamer, who would have Janice 'die dancing,' and would see the brambles grow thick over the 'Down and Outs,' whose sinister chant and drum-beat grows louder and nearer as the play progresses? Is he with the Christianity represented, truly at last, by the Bishop, who blesses the derelict and forsaken the Dreamer despises; to which Janice at the last turns in peace? 'She died making the sign of the Cross. She died making the sign of the Cross.' . . . . It is as though the poet's heart and head were at variance. But, with all its defects, the play has the ring of greatness.

BARBARA BARCLAY CARTER.

GRAMOPHONE

H.M.V. It is interesting to compare the playing of the *First* **Brandenburg** *Concerto* by the Chamber Orchestra of the Ecole Normale, conducted by Alfred Cortot (DB 2033-4, 6/- each), with that of the Berlin Philharmonic recorded last month by Decca. The Brandenburg Concertos are on the border between symphonic and chamber music: the Berlin version, heavier in its contrasts and more solemn, inclines to the former; the Paris