CHAPTER VIII

FANTASY AND SUPERNATURAL
The origin of fantasies in literature has a long history behind it. The pioneer is Lucian (C. A.D. 115 – C. 200), the Greek author of The True History (Vera historia) describing an imaginary travel to the moon. The work is the forerunner of Gulliver and also of Fielding's "A Journey From this World to the Next". The second important source of fantasy is perhaps connected with the tradition of the Danse Macabre, an expression which seems to have been derived from the Aramaean word mēqābreṯy, meaning "grave diggers" (see T.L.S. 27 April, 1946). The Danse Macabre came into prominence in the fifteenth century. The explanation for this may be found in the great mortality caused by the Black Death and in the preaching of the friars. The Danse originally appeared in France as a kind of mimed sermon, which showed members of the various orders of society, each being dragged away by its own corpse. The cemetery of the Innocents in Paris contains the earliest known painting dating back to 1424, giving a view of the Danse and containing also a verse dialogue between the living and the dead. Holbein also painted a picture of the Danse. In many dramas of our time we can notice clear evidence of the fact that the tradition is not yet dead and that it makes its appearance in many different forms. An
example of the macabre is found in "The Night at an Inn", recalling the Danse.

Fairy tales have also provided inspiration. We may quote Queen Mab in Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" as she appears in Act I Scene IV as illustration of the element. She is the fairies' midwife who brings to birth men's secret hopes, in the form of dreams by driving 'athwart their noses' in her chariot as they lie asleep. Drayton in his "Nimphidia" makes her Oberon's wife and the queen of fairies. 'Mab' is perhaps from the Irish 'Medb', a legendary queen of Connaught, or from the Welsh 'Mab', a child.

The folk sources have been investigated by Frazer in his "The Golden Bough". We find in Hardy's "The Return of the Native" an evidence of superstition and magical practice. This would mean that Hardy had made observations on his own account in painting the picture of the rural world and incorporated superstition as an element governing the simple mind. The latest approach to fantasy is by way of surrealism which has in this century influenced all the arts.

1. Fantasies are an important element in some of the plays. They may be intended to arouse fear or to give pleasure on a purely aesthetic level. To the latter class will belong Harold Brighouse's "The Prince Who Was A Piper". Here we have a world dominated by feelings and ideas alien to our own somewhat

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drab and colourless existence, for the things that rule there, are art and beauty. The King of a certain country has a daughter who refuses to marry the Prince, chosen by him until she sees and approves of him. This disobedience annoys the royal parent who shifts the responsibility for this on to his Lord Chancellor and to her Governess threatening them both with a death which is even fearful to contemplate, should the girl continue to be disobedient. They will be thrown into a dungeon to be gnawed at by sharp-toothed rats. On the day of the action everything seems to go wrong. The King finds that he has no crown on his head and there is a pedestal in the garden without the statue which stood on it. This last news gives an idea to the princess Maie. She declares her purpose to her waiting-maid to pose as a Greek Goddess in classical drapery, giving the impression that she is a stone statue and finding thereby an opportunity to see the prince when he arrives. The latter also desires to see his bride before marriage and disguises himself as a piper, so that he can make his entry into the kingdom without being known or noticed. The garden is thrown open to the populace to celebrate the marriage and the prince who enters it as piper is immediately surrounded by women, eager to listen to his notes. The young prince had always thought himself as an excellent piper, and his personal opinion was eagerly confirmed by flatterers in the court but he did not know what was the real worth of his
performances from courtiers, seeking his favour. Now, he thought was his opportunity to find out how far he could actually delight and move people by his piping. But the view expressed by people around him was not at all flattering and the ineffectiveness of his piping was proved when practically everyone withdrew to flock round a mountebank nearby. Only one girl stayed on. She said she was a cobbler's daughter. The prince did not understand the relevance of the information volunteered until she pointed to his glittering shoes which he had not changed and from which she inferred that he was the prince. He played to her and told her how he could take her with him along the roads and see the wildness and beauty of nature, together with her. The princess who stood as statue listened to all this rhapsody and was feeling reasonably jealous when the girl left; she addressed the prince asking him to help her down the steps, and what followed was a joyous declaration of mutual love, the clouds of suspicion and distrust blowing away without leaving a trace behind. The King who was notified of his daughter's flight from the palace was naturally worried. The delayed arrival of the prince made matters still worse. He was, however, happy to see a little later that things had shaped themselves to his entire satisfaction. The condemned Lord Chancellor and the Governess were restored to favour at the request of the prince and pardon was also extended to a few others who were also punished for failing to do their duty.
The play is strong in its poetical elements; the exchanges between the King and the Lord Chancellor in the opening scene are lively, showing an enjoyable display of wit. The poetry is not merely an aid to romantic imagination; the framework of intellect lends it an increased power, an attractive variety. The situations are fanciful but they are not conducted in a manner which puts a distance between us and the world where they occur. We feel that the play gives us everything we know and care for, but gives it in a changed atmosphere where the rainbow brightens, as it were, against a bank of clouds and shows that we are seeing things in a poetical dimension which, nevertheless, possess a reality of their own, capable of being related to our own prosaic experience.

2. F. Sladen-Smith's "St Simeon Stylites"² is not a pure fantasy because it has a hard core of historical truth, which he only embellishes by introducing an element of fantasy. St Simeon spends all his life in the practice of austerities at the top of a very high column and is by turns exposed to heat and cold as the seasons roll by. Various people climb up to see him and we have here an account of four main visitors, the last being the Devil and his satellite. The first to call was a pilgrim who invited him to visit a gaily coloured city.

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² F. Sladen-Smith's "St Simeon Stylites", One-Act Plays of To-day Fourth Series (George G. Harrap & Co.Ltd., 1960).
the next was a great King accompanied by his jester, who invited him to dedicate his life to the people's cause and work with him for this humanitarian purpose. There are some sharp remarks made by the jester which have a freshness and comical effect contributing to the enjoyment of the play.

The King remarks appreciatively that the saint's life revolves in peace and Simeon replies that he may be blown off the column by a strong wind almost any day as a comment on how little his condition is understood by even intelligent people from outside. The jester adds that in that case he will be revolving in pieces punning on the word "peace" used by the King. The next visitor is Eudocia who wishes to be admired and loved by the Saint and even blows a kiss to him while she leaves the Saint. The Saint responds in a measure to the beautiful girl, he even admits her charm and its effect upon him. Next the Devil comes along and announces that the visitors were sent by him and what they said to him was all inspired. With reference to the girl in particular Simeon refuses to accept the view. How little of a saint he was, is seen in his persistent belief that their mutual attraction was entirely genuine, the Devil having nothing to do with it. His picture is not at any rate that of a conventional saint.

In Tennyson's poem Simeon's trials are stated. His saintliness, his desire for holiness seem true qualities of character even though temptations assail him from all sides.
Simeon in this play can speak with bitter irony and insist that his way of life is the best. Love may hold an appeal for him but he has the power to conquer it. His austerity, he declares, is not a sign of holiness. He feels that he owes this to habit. Everywhere, whatever the field may be, habit will explain this kind of persistent attachment and application. This attitude has the recommendation of an essential humility, even if it should fail to explain all the facts.

Simeon is a man of complex character,—his saintship is not an accomplished fact. The conflict goes on within his mind which is a battle ground of good and evil,—it is in fact a view of the world in miniature. The play is a comedy because serious things appear in this light when viewed from outside. The struggle of Simeon is hard and bitter, and his struggle is with the powers of darkness. The Devil comes to try him, he takes shape and form and speaks with the words we know. That it is difficult to get out of his sphere of influence is known to all who seek the spiritual life, it is known to others also with a humbler aspiration on the spiritual plane. To depict the conflict with the Devil, present as an antagonist and discussing the temptations he has contrived, is to endow the action with an element of comedy. The play has the character of a morality and the jests and wordplays may be linked with a still earlier mode of entertainment and instruction,—the mysteries and the miracles.
"The Flight Of The Queen" by Lord Dunsany is a subject taken from the Nuptial Flight of the Queen Bee. The bees and the insects are given human voices and manners, and also aspiration. The reference to the aether mountain where the Queen finally undertakes her nuptial flight indicates the aspiring attitude. The character of this play is to a certain extent marred by the knowledge of the actual facts presented allegorically, the bee gaining the human voice gains a character which is neither human nor that of a creature as tiny as the bee. The names are chosen to give us an effect of the humming sound made by the bee and the most surprising sound collocation occurs in that of Zoomzoomarma and perhaps a little less of the same kind is found in Moomoomon. We cannot help feeling that in spite of the subtle art in the treatment of the theme there is an undeniable element of the ridiculous in the transformations required by the allegory. This is not lessened but increased by remarks which seem to suggest an entirely anthropomorphic situation in the bee land and the comment made upon the experiences of love by one of the characters, sounds frightfully like what a poetically disposed mind may say, "It was some strange new thing. It was strange and new like this song". The problem of fantasy is not solved by an arbitrary combination of disparate elements. Their effect

4. Ibid., p.104.
will be chaotic and art always seeks to impose an order so that out of a mass of things we can discover a coherent and intelligible behaviour and attitude, carrying conviction. In fantasies such an impression takes great imaginative power to create and here we do not find anything done to call forth our pleasure or admiration except a certain delicacy, maintained at a level of good humoured appreciation. The imaginative life has not been realized.

4. Rachel Lyman Field's "The Patchwork Quilt" is concerned with the discovery of a title deed whose secret was known to an old woman but forgotten by her because of the infirmity of age. Anne her daughter and Joe her son-in-law are anxious to trace it because they want to sell the land at a high price. The offer would be closed within a few hours and the lady was trying in vain to remember. Her daughter Emily had died forty years ago and she said that she still came and saw her as a matter of habit. Old Mrs. Willis was attached to her patchwork quilt and in the centre of it was a large white square. The title deed was lodged there. Mrs. Willis had obtained the land by her marriage and had kept the deed thus concealed for safety. But the daughter did not like the look of the quilt, another was supplied and this one was transferred to the cook's room. Betty, the little girl brought it back to the joy of Mrs. Willis but it was once again carried back, though Betty said to unheeding

ears that the white centre crackled. The deed was not traced and the daughter neither saw nor understood why her mother loved the quilt so passionately nor cared to investigate what made the white patch crackle. The element of fantasy is found in the temporary return of the dead to life and in the old mother's claim that her daughter Emily saw her quite frequently, though dead forty years ago.

What seems interesting about the play is an indirect hint at the obdurate manner in which simple facts are ignored even when their knowledge is vital to our concerns. The comic element is found in this obtuseness of the human intellect, the failure to observe and understand what is so evident, and it is also suggested that the little child Betty had a better ability to notice things and to ask the right questions.

5. Fantasies sometimes have a satirical purpose in view. F. Sladen Smith's "The Man Who Wouldn't Go to Heaven" is an example. Several people arrive at the gate of heaven after death. The angels receive them at the heaven's gate and take them into the state of Bliss. Some who are without marked virtue, without any goodness according to ordinary standards were also chosen. This indiscriminate elevation raised an outcry which made the situation comical. One of the arrivals Richard Alton refused to go to heaven. He was a socialist

worker, a platform speaker, a passionate partisan and even after death he continued to lecture and voice his sentiments of grievance against oppressors. There was a lunatic waiting outside the gate and Alton accepted an invitation to play a game of cards with him. In a few moments he became absorbed and when his attention was aroused by an interruption in the game, he was told that he had entered heaven. This made him angry and he declared that he had not climbed the steps, but heaven here is apparently, conceived as a state of being and not as a region with geographical limits. He went on saying that he could curse the powers that oppress, but his voice grew fainter and Alton stood motionless before the calm angels who watched him. The idea seems to be that the lesser things are discarded where the greater is achieved. The discovery of the most worthy is made when self-forgetfulness produces the needed spiritual atmosphere, expelling the disturbing clamours that deafen the ear and blind the eye. As Jesus says, the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to children, and it is by suspending the adult qualities of the mind which makes us restless that we can have access to the peace that passeth understanding. The comic idea is not realized until the game of cards cools down the temper of the socialist.

The socialist showed a pugnacious temper in his refusal
to enter heaven. Even after death his cause as a socialist did not relax its hold upon him. The fierce temper shown in his resistance against the invitation to enter the serenity of heaven gives rise to laughter. Other people waiting for translation also showed various fears and preoccupations hindering them from enjoying the blessed state.

6. "Bay the Moon" 7: The characters are all birds and animals. They assemble at a meeting with lion as chairman. The problem before them is to take measures against man variously reported by the birds and animals who had seen him. The owl in the assembly is a cassandra, making prophecies of misfortune ahead. The bird usually refers to a book of knowledge for the statements it made. What all of them seemed particularly disturbed to think of, was a betrayal by one of their own members. For, the dog was assisting man. The dog was sent for, it explained its position and admired man whose friendship it valued. Taking advantage of a relaxed vigilance on the part of the animals it hastened back to its master in response to his whistle which was now heard. Meanwhile, man had lighted a fire, which the animals greatly dreaded and made for himself the kind of surrounding he needed for comfort and security.

There are fourteen characters in the play of which two are only birds and the rest which include a serpent, may be

classified as beasts. The cast is unusual but the conduct of the play is throughout interesting. Although the character of a fable is here preserved, the problems considered are practical, requiring rational approach. The play shows animals possessing intelligence which may well belong to humans but labouring under limitations which they cannot possibly overcome.

7. A. A. Milne in "The Boy Comes Home" develops a theme with great wit. The question raised had considerable interest for the English people after the first world war. The play is more important as a social picture than as a piece of propaganda. After the war a young man returns home to his uncle and his aunt. His father being dead they are his nearest relations and the uncle is the legal guardian. When he went to war he was a boy; now he was a man, used to the exercise of authority and capable of giving orders because he had served in a post of command. A servant-maid who refused to do any extra work had to submit to his will because he knew the art of tackling subordinates.

The tale of this wonderful authority he had acquired made the older people conceive a great, though unspoken admiration. The uncle proposed in his mind to make him work at his factory, although he knew that the young man was more interested in university education. After breakfast he dozed off for a little and seemed to see before him his nephew ready to shoot him with his pistol for opposing his will. The young man explained that there were a million people trained in the

use of arms and an uncle's death could easily be accounted for as an accident. He woke up from this slumber to discuss with his nephew plans about his career. His words seemed to be those he had heard in the dream and the uncle, fearful of what might follow in case he should cross his will, showed a readiness to yield to his slightest wish; he even tried to persuade him to choose an academic career. The young ex-service man, however, wanted to earn rather than learn and the meeting ended peacefully without a hitch. The comedy shows effectively how a dream can obtrude on reality. The uncle not having experience of war nor much of an imagination was frightened. The drama develops a dream situation into a day time experience effecting the transition wittily and with adroitness. The element of propaganda enters in the reference to the violence which soldiers had witnessed and perpetrated and which could enter ordinary life without warning. A Damocles's sword hung over the life of most people threatening destruction and disorder. It is from this point of view that the play seems to be a warning against the danger which war gives rise to in a civilized community. Milne's dialogue has a witty edge to it, it is sparkling and always distinguished.

8. Oliphant Down's "The Maker Of Dreams" was first produced in a Glasgow theatre in 1911. It has a cast of only

three characters, Pierrot, Pierrette and the Manufacturer. The last is a supernatural being and the title of the play describes the business he performs. Pierrot is a musician and his partner is a dancer. The former is gifted but erratic; often swayed by feminine charms, he is only interested in discovering an ideal beauty after his heart. Pierrette looks to his comforts but the young man's mind is running on a girl he had seen, standing by the horse trough with a fine air, wearing a string of great beads. He is going to look for her warning Pierrette: "When you and I took on this show business, we arranged to be just partners and nothing more". Thus he could marry whom he chose and so could she. He went on singing songs about the cuckoo and the mellow and musical June, for he was an artist. She invited him to darn socks with her. He indignantly refused and Pierrette told him, "It's pretty much the same all the world over. First we wear holes in our socks, and then we mend them. The wise ones are those who make the best of it, and darn as well as they can". This was the philosophy of conjugal life but he did not listen, for all the while his mind was preoccupied with beautiful faces he had seen and he ignored the girl, sweet though she was, and the charms she possessed. Even her selfless devotion did not move him in the least. An old man now comes in unexpectedly and

10. Ibid., p.66
11. Ibid., p.67
learns from her how much she loved her partner whom she admired for his talent, believing that any woman would be in love with him. The old man was the dream-maker; he heard all this and brought about a change in the man's wandering fancy by some spell he cast upon him. He said, he could make people dream and Pierrot actually began to dream about his partner. Now all was well between the two through the dream-maker's interposition. The latter after performing his good office glided away almost unperceived; the young man and the woman are now in each other's arms wishing for nothing more than the marriage which would unite them for ever.

The songs in the play are an expression of a great poetic sensibility. They display a sensitiveness to the beauty of nature when life grows sweet under a warm sun.

The character of the play is only half-fantastical; the appearance of the manufacturer serves the purpose of solving what was the most important problem between the couple,—great devotion on one side and undeserved neglect on the other. The means adopted is supernatural but the delicacy of its introduction redeems the fault and makes the play both human and acceptable.

The play's beauty lies in the songs, and in the dialogue which often reveals an insight into love and marriage not commonly found in a comedy. The songs give a vivid sense of
nature's changing aspects and the human response to this variety characterising the background: In this we find one of the most impressive elements in the play. The manufacturer of dreams is a strange invention but we may accept his presence as a symbol for the unconscious, asserting its power over erratic imagination and checking its tendency to inflict pain and indulge in ingratitude.

9. "The Ugly Duckling" by A. A. Milne is based upon a theme resembling Brighouses's "The Prince who was a Piper". The title suggests a similarity between the princess and the duckling of Hans Andersen's tale. The duckling despised by all becomes at the end a beautiful swan. Princess Camilla, it was predicted at her birth, would be found beautiful by her husband on the wedding day and will appear to be so to everyone thereafter. The King and the Queen put their heads together for the purpose of making Prince Simon marry her. What they plan is a piece of deception but as the event showed, it was not necessary. The prince comes in disguised as an attendant. The princess meets him, also concealed as an attendant. This was according to the trick devised by her parents. The young people, however, meet and fall in love. The disguised prince finds her beautiful and they now disclose their identities. The prediction is thus fulfilled.

The play is written in a graceful style and the ceremonies followed have a quaint, old-world charm. The atmosphere does not resemble that of our everyday. Here is a world of enchantment where simplicity of soul is found and wickedness does not cast its evil shadow. The name of 'Malkin' which belongs to the great aunt of the princess shows the play's true affiliation to be with magic and fantasy.

10. "How the Weather is Made"^{13} by Harold Brighouse. This fantasy about the weather offers a myth describing the relation between the sun and the different seasons in human terms. There is also a little romantic episode to conclude the play; it suggests that although the weather changes from month to month the human need for love remains constant, changeless in the midst of the changing. A lady calls upon "the clerk of the weather" demanding to know why in the age of science the weather should be permitted to behave so capriciously. The clerk gives her a display in which the sun appears as a man and the seasons with their attending circumstances as women. The sun making complaints of long hours of duty during June expresses a preference for January because the month has a paler appearance which gives him pleasure. June with her tanned look demands the good offices of frost for the purpose of looking a little like January.

13. Harold Brighouse's "How the Weather is Made" - One-Act Plays of Today Third Series (George G. Harrap & Co.Ltd. 1961)
The persons of the different seasons are all introduced as characters. Their squabbles are very human, their preferences and dislikes have also the same quality. The months and the different climatic conditions are humanized. This would perhaps make an excellent scenic effect. The whole thing is a fantasy, a kind of relaxing one's rational and logical attitude to enjoy a delicate and amusing allegory about the world of nature surrounding us. The lady is not impressed by the demonstration to withdraw her complaint against the capriciousness of the weather and declares that she would go to California and live there without being troubled and disturbed by the constant changes of climatic conditions. The young clerk invites her to tea at a restaurant, and the play concludes on the eve of a romantic development, which although not described, leaves scope for the exercise of imagination.

11. "A Masque of Aesop" by Robertson Davies. It is a play in prose with a number of songs. Among the characters are Apollo, the sisters of fate and Aesop. The idea of the writer is to give a modern setting to the fables and by this shift in time to satirize the contemporary world. Aesop appears as an offender before Apollo and in self-defence produces some of his famous fables. One speaks of a discord

among the members of the human body and is intended to bring home the lesson of unity and harmony at home and abroad. There is also the fable of the Country Mouse and the Town Mouse. Modern democracy is pilloried by the story of the cock and the pearl because of its failure to accept non-utilitarian values. The pearl is rejected on the ground that it does not help the business of life. The education imparted under democracy show a deterioration, for children are asked to memorize rather than establish a living contact with truth.

Apollo does not punish Aesop. On the other hand, he speaks sternly to his accusers but he does not spare the sage either, because in his pride he puts wisdom into the mouths of beasts, as if human beings do not possess dignity enough to be his mouthpieces. As a result, his stories are read by children and only, occasionally, are the lessons applied by the wise. True wisdom, it is asserted, belongs to God and among human beings it can reach the highest excellence only when founded on love.

The play is a very interesting experiment indicating how things look by means of a shift in time. This is the art of the satirist seeking to expose anomalies of the present by pouring upon them the light that belongs to the past. By this means are the weaknesses exposed and a firm basis supplied for a more rational and intelligent attitude. Although the
theme is obviously Hellenic in origin, it is more properly a form of criticism directed against the contemporary world. Fantasy is here used for a satirical purpose. In this respect Swift is the great ancestor.

12. Rosalind Vallance's play "Pandora's Box" is described as a mime. It contains choruses and is in the main written in verse. The idea is old but its embodiment gives it a freshness. The story, however, is the old one of how troubles suddenly descend upon man. The metaphor of the box being opened so as to let loose sorrows and miseries and give them the power to cause human unhappiness is picturesquely suggested, the co-existence of evil and good is inevitable because the imprisoned forces are now liberated.

The state of man is now seen to be gloomy, stretching like a desert where one could scarcely get anything to comfort one and strengthen one, to face the struggle and pain from which there is apparently no escape. The box is reopened and the chorus ecstatically cries,

"Oh, who is this? What lovely fairy thing?"

and the leader answers,

'Tis Hope, my children, Hope, with iris wing!
And hark, she sings, 'Lift up your hearts again,
I am the Rainbow shining after rain;
I am the Flower that springs where Grief has trod;
I am the Future. I am the Voice of God.'

15. Rosalind Vallance's "Pandora's Box" - Twenty-four One-Act Plays (Everyman's Library London J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1959)
16. Ibid., p.251
The passage shows a delicate imagination; the fears caused by the flock of evil influences which flew out of the box are laid at rest and the metaphor of the Rainbow shining after the rain describes well the feeling of rejoicing that came after a spell of fearful apprehension. The effect of a mime is conveyed by gestures oftener than by words and we can see the extreme sense of relief in the chorus joining hands and the children embracing,—a scene after which the curtain finally drops.

13. Miles Malleson's "Paddly Pools" is a fantasy, at the same time anti-war propaganda, forming one of a group of more realistic plays on the subject "Black 'Ell" and the "D Company".

The play is a fantasy because of the characters participating in it. They are the Little Old Man who declares: "I have lived longer than the world — and never before have I known such sorrowing. And I am helpless to make it less." The play opens with a little boy Tony asking his grandpa many questions, some of which cannot be answered. Tony had seen the postman bring a letter which overwhelmed grandpa with misery and made him cry. This, of course, was the news of his father's death in the war. The boy saw visions of the Little Old Man and tried to make his grandpa see them too.

18. Ibid., p.219
The old man dozed off and failed to keep pace with the nimble mind and the acute visual powers of the child. The Little Old Man has not seen so much suffering in the world since his last visit a thousand years ago. Now he bethought himself of a plan for the amelioration of the world. This he outlined to the boy. What is wrong about it, is that, it is too metaphysical for the understanding of a child: "the life in you and me is just the same as the life that is everywhere; the paddy pools run into the great live sea; you and I can do the same." 19

This is the lesson of love and respect for life intended to produce a better world ensuring unbroken peace for mankind. To the three friends who come to him the Little Old Man addresses an appeal calling upon them to broadcast the message he had delivered to the child. There is perhaps some hope that the message, so far as the spiritual agents are concerned, will be rightly interpreted: "Go to the land of men; to every nation and to every home, and teach the children what I have taught this child. Only the children - the grown-ups will think it nonsense. We meet again in five hundred years." 20 The fantasy thus comes to an end. The child returns to his grandpa and we are left expecting good results to follow the plan announced.

19. Ibid., p.221
20. Ibid., p.227
It is a little absurd to make a child the first recipient of such a profound doctrine. The need of the moment is certainly great and perhaps under the pressure of the problems it is not unusual to lose a sense of proportion. Apparently, the play reveals a noble ideal; its embodiment is, however, unconvincing. There is no doubt that children represent the future; to bring them up in the right atmosphere is, therefore, a necessity but they are not capable of understanding doctrines of a philosophical nature.

The principal interest of the play lies in a sense of a happy looking forward with supernatural agents presiding over human welfare. That such an expectation has been frustrated within a few years of the play's publication, does not make it meaningless for us. Here in this play there is no exposure of folly but a lament for human suffering and a desire to bring it to an end by the creation of a different order of existence based on a different attitude in human society transforming the world into a more happy and habitable place.

14. "The Invisible Duke"21 by F. Sladen-Smith is a combination of farce and fantasy. A Duke comes to an astrologer to seek his help. His betrothed has, apparently, played him foul and has entered into a liaison with his cousin, Francesco. A short letter he has discovered seems to be

evidence of this but it is ambiguously worded. They are both coming to the astrologer and the Duke's intention is to see and overhear them during the visit and remain invisible himself. The astrologer is to find some potion which will harmlessly, and for half an hour only produce the desired result. The astrologer sets to work immediately and pours into a cauldron various substances to which his clownish attendant Nekko adds recklessly other ingredients as well. The Duke takes the drink and in a little time his hand turns invisible. The process starts but does not complete itself when a knock at the door announces Emilia's arrival. The Duke is hastily stowed away in a box full of air holes. Emilia comes in, in a rage for having been kept waiting at the door so long. She wants her hair to be dyed red. In a few minutes Francesco also comes in and they greet each other as if the meeting had been entirely unexpected. The astrologer leaves them to prepare the compound and the couple now make open love, kissing and embracing each other with passionate words. The Duke hears everything. As a measure of safety Nekko advises that they should all sit on the lid so that the Duke may be kept from doing harm to them. The advice is effectively followed; it was Nekko's second brain-wave, the first was when he aided in making the substance which produced invisibility. The Duke had said, whoever could make it would be
the king of the earth. The astrologer entered the scene robed royally with a crown on his head attended by followers who were also extravagantly dressed in his honour. He asked everyone to dance. The Duke restored to his human form and comes out of the box and joins the dance.

The contents of the play are intended to carry us away from the revenge motive normally characterizing human relations and give in its place a desire to enjoy in a spirit of self-forgetfulness. The Duke is a frustrated lover but he has the authority to punish any offender, and, of course, any offence against himself. His participation in the dance is a piece of fantasy. The whole atmosphere of transformation and boiling cauldron, though re-echoing the witch scene in "Macbeth" has a trivial and farcical appeal but the enjoyment is, nevertheless genuine. The witty dialogue contributes to the enjoyment in a considerable measure as also the clownish parts played by Nekko and Dekko in the alarmed repetitions of words spoken by the astrologer, their terror-stricken movements and their unconcealed curiosity about the proceedings in the astrologer's laboratory. The business of drama is to remove the tensions of life. A tragic show can do this but a similar cathartic effect may also be produced by drama of an inferior class, by farce and comedy as well. The tale of the modern Paolo and Francesca
has been brought down to the level of comic entertainment and, instead of instant death for the offence, there is pardon and mutual enjoyment.

15. "Square Pegs" by Clifford Bax is a verse drama, the medium being mainly blank verse, the subject-matter a piece of fantasy which aims at a contrast between the modes of the sixteenth century and those of the twentieth with an implied criticism of the latter. Only two characters, Hilda and Gioconda, take part in the action. Hilda comes to Merlin's Gate where one "May turn the Book of Time to any page", and her mind wanders to ancient Rome, to Nero and Tiberius, and then to 1066 which she immediately rejects because her school day memories of William the Conqueror made her hostile to the Norman hero. She rejects the eighteenth century because of the custom of wearing a wig and chooses the age of Titian and the Borgias. She has read about them in Symonds's book. Immediately, thereafter, Gioconda of the sixteenth century arrives; the latter is, however, keen on the twentieth century and chooses the period as the one she likes most to live in. She has been painted by Titian, and not by Da Vinci, although she seems the same person as Mona Lisa and her main complaint against her time is its dull dances, pavane, lavolte, forlana,

23. Ibid., p.39.
cinquepace and the long pageants at Venice. She chooses the twentieth century because of cream and strawberries, of day long idling in the June blue-sea and because also of Bennett, Wells and Shaw. Hilda asked her name and it is a flowery one in her mouth — Gioconda Francesca Violante Giulia della Bionda. Hilda calls it a poem with surprised pleasure. The subject turns on love and Hilda complains that she misses in love-letters the grand metaphors and similes which belonged to the sixteenth century and is distressed by the slang and the off-hand manner of her lover Harry. Gioconda's experience has been different. The letter she received from her lover was in rhyme and was carried to her by her lackey at dawn; the horse and the rider both died because of the speed they made to reach her. The letter smothered her with praises but she herself preferred the manner of Bernard Shaw, without any touch of sentimentality. Hilda, however, found the style adorable. Now they decided to play between them the roles of lovers that best appealed to each. We should mention here that Harry's letter was also read as an indication of contemporary modes. He had a nasty scar in a motor accident and his proposal of marriage is made in one brief sentence, "Oh, and what price you marrying me?" Gioconda played the

24. Ibid., p.45
twentieth century lover, and Hilda the sixteenth. Gioconda, acting the part of Harry, uses slang with great effectiveness. Hilda, on the other hand, assumes the elaborate and elegant manner of Gioconda's lover Pandolfo. Hilda now asks, why don't we swap? It means that Hilda will take Pandolfo and Gioconda, Harry. But the arrangement is not in the end accepted by either. Both love their young men too well to lose them and the play ends with the optimistic idea which Gioconda offers as final comment on the situation: "That in all centuries life is goodly wine!"25

The play resorts to a fantasy in the conception of the book of time and its manipulation at will by two characters. The conclusion to which we are led is inevitable. Dr. Johnson made it long ago in his translation of Father Lobo's "Voyage to Abyssinia". He said that under God's dispensation good things are so evenly distributed and balanced with their opposites that if a fair estimate is made no country will be found to enjoy superior advantages over another. What he said of a country is now said of an age, a period of time, and it is here suggested that no stretch of time in the past possessed an absolute superiority over any other. The point of the criticism of this age is its aversion to sentimentality, its avoidance of any expression of emotion and the large admixture of slang in its

25. Ibid., p.52
speech. This last may be a deliberate armour, a kind of self-defence against the onslaught of sentimentality and other types of excess.

The play is an examination of two periods of history; they are juxtaposed for purpose of contrast and by this method their qualities are brought into prominence and we can see how much of the one or the other pleases us and why. The art of the dramatist is tactfully applied to enable us to balance the two situations in our mind impartially.

16. "The Bespoke Overcoat" by Wolf Mankowitz is a loosely constructed play in prose comprised in sixteen scenes. Its author adds a preface, explaining the story. We may quote a few sentences from the preface: "Love is a luxury which very poor people can afford" and the play "is a story of this love.... To prefer to go on living is to love in the context of this story, and because this is loving at its most deprived the story is a sad one." Alec Clunes, responsible for its stage-production, "realized that Fender was not a ghost and that this story was not a ghost-story; he understood that The Bespoke Overcoat was a sustained, typically over-long Jewish joke - than which there is no sadder and no funnier story." As the author quotes the producer's remarks approvingly, this no doubt

27. Ibid., p.375
28. Ibid.
in his estimate is the true interpretation.

The play is a variation on Shylock's words "sufferance is the badge of all our tribe." (MV, I,3,111).

Fender works at a warehouse for forty-three years and is turned off because he is too old to be efficient. He has shivered through many winters and finally appeals to his friend, Morry, a tailor to recondition his worn-out overcoat. This was out of the question, for age had reduced it to shreds. Hence orders had to be placed for a new one. This was "the bespoke overcoat" for which a certain sum was also paid on account.

After dismissal Fender died of cold. He came as a ghost to see Morry. Between the two the business tie was not the only binding force. For they were true friends. Fender would even forgo the comforts of the new world to return to his familiar surroundings. His new world is described as a hotel. He lacked nothing there but he came back to obtain by theft an overcoat lined with sheepskin, which his master had refused him. This galled him even when he had ceased to live. With Morry's help he enters the ware-house and takes the overcoat. This was revenge, for, apparently, it had no use for him.

Fender's life was one of deprivation. He does not seem to have ever had a proper meal and he said, if he had
an overcoat to keep him warm. What else could he want? A dish of soup was too dear for him. Black bread was enough to provide him with nourishment. But the tale is not a ghost story, as Alec Clunes had justly observed. For there is no element of the sensational. In life as in death Fender remains outside this pale, so to speak, the pale of civilized comfort and security. One can laugh sardonically at his lot and find it even amusing. But one cannot help remembering the words of Shylock. The suffering is unredeemed, a dark without a silver lining. That the cruelty of certain people has brought this about does not make it less but more bitter to contemplate.

Hitler's regime brought about an anti-Semitic climate in Germany unprecedented in human history. Thus the sadness of Jewish history remains and its tragedy is repeated age after age. But the Jews have now a State of their own in Palestine and to their rank belong some of the world's greatest men. It would, therefore, be a too one-sided view to regard this account as a faithful picture of Jewish society. There is an element of exaggeration which may to some taste suggest a streak of sentiment.

17. "The Golden Doom"\textsuperscript{29} by Lord Dunsany. Two little children in a playful mood scrawl a few lines of verse in gold on their King's gate. The King is terrified because the verses

\textsuperscript{29} Lord Dunsany's "The Golden Doom", One-Act Plays of To-day, Third Series (George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1961).
appeared to signify his doom and he attributed the authorship to the star. Prophets were consulted, they finally came to the conclusion that this was a warning against the King's pride and that he should now rule as a commoner, putting away the crown. The King put the crown outside the gate, and a little later the actual author of the verse came there and took it away believing it to be his missing hoop. The King, as superstitious as ever, was pleased at the thought that the stars had accepted the crown as a sign of his humble and contrite heart. This meant that the threatened danger was now gone. The play is a fantasy but it expresses an idea about the supposed naivete of an eastern monarch which will surprise students of history not having any data to justify such a view. Lord Dunsany is a master of dialogue and his inventions are sometimes macabre and sometimes pure fantasy. The present play belongs to the latter class.

18. "Confession by Proxy" by Nora Ratcliff. This is a

30. The time of occurrence is given by the author as "Some while before the Fall of Babylon". This ancient date may to a certain extent explain the picture given of the superstitious king. The real reason seems to be that to an English audience the word "Eastern" has associations which may easily be exploited for such a fantasy. The willing suspension of disbelief is easily achieved on such an assumption.

play which seems to be a kind of a fantasy such Virginia Woolf attempted in Orlando. It is a revival, almost a reincarnation of old feelings and feuds by means of a dress with which these are associated and which were worn by some young girls out of curiosity. The old nurse told them not to do this and the warning was well justified as the events showed. One of the girls was almost stifled to death because of jealousy aroused by her behaviour. This is an old episode being acted over again. Delia Fanshawe had to bear the brunt of the business and was nearly throttled to death. The old nurse Berry recalled a similar incident and confessed that on the particular occasion jealousy had led to an actual murder of which she had spoken to no one before. Writers have described cases of similar transformation and the temporary amnesia accompanying them. The play exploits the subject and is likely to be of interest as a stage play. But from the ordinary point of view it will seem no more than a fantasy produced in a graceful style.

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19. "The Purple Bedroom" by Eden Phillpotts. The purple bedroom of a castle dating back to Elizabethan times had the

* The situation described reminds one of The Return by Walter De La Mare, (W. Collins & Sons Co.Ltd., 1910, p.144). Here one Lawford sits beside the crooked tombstone of Nicholas Sabathier a Huguenot, who committed suicide in 1749. On return home he is bewildered to see his face in the mirror. It is completely changed, yet in everything else he remained his old self. There is some correspondence also with Virginia Woolf's Orlando (1928): Orlando changes sex during four-hundred years. He is first a lover, then beloved, jilted and is jilted etc.

reputation of being haunted. Tradition said that an Earl was in love with a girl called Ann but she gave her love to a foreigner called Don Pedro. The Earl killed Ann out of jealousy. Practically, no one had slept in the bedroom for three hundred years. Reginald Smith came there with his servant Bassett, who was the first to see the ghosts. The master was told about them and also that except for a little uncouth noise they made, they were perfectly harmless. Smith, however, told his butler that since he had the nerves he should spend the night in the purple bedroom while he preferred to sleep in the adjoining corridor. Bassett accepted the arrangement and met the ghosts nonchalantly. There was mutual introduction to begin with. Don Pedro undertook the recital of the story while the ghosts of the Earl and Ann interrupted, offering corrections. The story was that the girl actually loved the Earl - the murder was committed by Don Pedro who thrust the dagger into the Earl's hand and escaped into an ante-chamber with a diamond necklace which he stole. He thought that after some days when the storm would blow over he would be able to escape into safety. But the trapdoor which he thought he knew how to open closed behind him and would not open again. He sat in a chair with the diamond necklace and a written confession on his knees, meeting death by starvation three hundred years ago. The Earl went on a Crusade under a cloud and never returned.
The ghosts said that the story must be told correctly. This was the condition for the attainment of their salvation. As regards the diamond necklace obtained from the Moghul emperor and an emerald clasp of the Earl's family, the ghost (the Earl Fitzdoodle) offered them as gifts to the butler. If he tried to hand it over to the legal owners, he threatened, he would continue to haunt the place. Smith came as soon as the morning light showed and at first sceptical about the diamond necklace being genuine, later observed that it could buy more than the whole of America. The butler, however, was planning to marry a girl and giving her an adequate present out of this necklace. His ambitions were lowly, evidently, because he did not realise the full value of the jewels.

As a play it is sensational and to a certain class of people it might prove even entertaining. In any case, stories have often been made out of the discovery of lost treasures, and the introduction of the supernatural element makes the situation even more exciting. As a play it has not much interest or value. As a ghost story it may appeal to lovers of the melodramatic and the sensational.

20. "The Man Upstairs" by Hugh Beresford has the dreadful fascination of the macabre. A couple of brothers journeying through a stormy night stop at a house for shelter. The elder leaves the younger for a little to make some urgent enquiries.

in the neighbourhood. The younger is terror-stricken because of something uncanny and mysterious in that richly furnished house and its deserted appearance. Soon after he is alone, someone with a ghastly look comes down from the upper storey, tells him of a murder he had committed, all the time fixing upon him a mesmeric look. The poor stranger loses his consciousness; his brother returns shortly after with assistance and restores him. He explores the upper storey out of curiosity and finds there what he calls the smell of death. A local man describes the house as haunted by the spirit of a murderer who had hanged himself in a fit of insanity. The court, however, inflicted the death penalty on another acquitting him of the charge of murder. The hanged man is the man living a ghostly life upstairs and coming down daily to encounter the ghost of the murdered man and the ghost of the man executed, under judicial sentence. The ghost re-enacts the crime every night. The view of a dead man re-enacting its life is not unlike what we read in Yeats's 'Purgatory', it is also similar to the belief which Yeats often put forward about dead men revisiting the scenes of their life.

21. "The Golden Wedding Day" by Hilda Anderson. The play is supernatural in some parts which serves the purpose of a deus-ex-machina. A popular couple celebrate their golden wedding and obtain £25 from neighbours as a mark of appreciation and esteem. They had lost their son in war. This circumstance

deprived them of the peace they had expected in old age. On the anniversary night they saw a light suddenly coming and passing away through a door, mysteriously flung open. Mrs. White, the wife saw in this light the apparition of the son, killed in the war. When everybody had retired for the night, Evans, a Welsh farm-hand entered his master's room and demanded the money, which they had received as present that evening and even threatened to kill in case it was refused. Suddenly the same light now reappeared; the thief fled in terror. The night was one of rejoicing in spite of this mishap, for immediately after a young couple they knew, announced their engagement and congratulated the old couple on their escape from the hands of the ruffianly servant. The supernatural is capable of exciting interest. It has this power to a greater extent when the story is linked up to war and the tragic fate of a young soldier. Sir Oliver Lodge popularized this interest in spiritualism and was believed to have established contact by this means with his son Raymond killed in the war.

22. "Fetched" by Joyce Atkins. There is in this play an interpretation of sin and punishment according to Christian belief. Absence of charity is seen here to be much worse than more obvious faults of character. A married woman confesses to her mother-in-law that she had prayed to the Devil because of her husband's cruelty to set her free from his hands and to

take him away. The husband lay dying in bed. A vicious face showed itself against the shutters. The wife thought that the Devil had come to fetch him and was, no doubt, greatly surprised to hear that he had come instead to take her away. For she, and not he had addressed a prayer to the Devil. The basic element of a morality appears in this play as well. The human soul is a pawn which the Devil seeks to capture in a morality. The same motive is also present here.

The dialogue between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law is vigorous. The latter's cockney speech lends animation to her words. The Devil's introduction required an unsophisticated social background which the dialogue serves in part to create.

23. "The Tinsel Duchess" by Philip Johnson. The duchess is young, less than twenty-five and the duke is eighty-eight and very sick. A doctor comes to see him, prescribes medicine but he finds the old man terror-stricken. In the ducal family, death is preceded by the vision of a man riding a white horse. The doctor gives him assurance of recovery and leaves. At a late hour at night an acrobat comes with a pistol in the room of the duchess. After some words with her he leaves her for the duke's room. A report of a pistol is heard followed by the announcement that the duke has been murdered and that

the murderer was seen rushing away with the speed of wind on a white horse. Pursuit was useless; the figure of the vision thus incarnated in the form of the acrobat gave a sense of the supernatural and ruled out the idea of capture. The duchess was entitled to a small house in London and a subsistence. This explains the title. The date of the action is 1810, the era of the supernatural and the romantic movement which followed upon the Gothic tales of horror. As a play it seeks to present a view of the mystery which sometimes determines the fates of men and remains inexplicable because when such a thing happens as it does at least in poetic imagination, the obvious thing to do is to serve a dish of horror rather than attempt an explanation. For what is aimed at is a thrill and not an illumination of the mysterious as is expected in a detective tale.