Chapter-II

The Dramatic Art of Pinero
As a Writer of Farce and Comedy of Manners:

If the sky darkened on the stage of the seventies, it showed the first signs of the dawn in the eighties. For the benefit of a colleague and friend, F.N. Maclain, Pinero produced on the 6th October, 1877, at the Globe Theatre his $Two Hundred a Year$. The author was only twenty two years old, and was a member of the Irving Company at the Lyceum. The play was not published and there is no record of its revival, but it was acted by Miss Crompton Dradbury. It deserves a place in the history of theatre because it introduced Pinero to the public. It was the first enacted play of Pinero. His *Two can play at that Game* and *Daisy’s Escape* are among the other plays which Pinero produced to meet the demand of the ‘stage of the day’.

A critical examination of some of his comedies will show that Pinero was an innovator. For the first time an English dramatist freed himself from French servitude. The native English humour had created English farces for the English public instead of following the prevailing vogue of translation and adopting ready-made farces from France. He had the eye to see that England had a life and an active way of its own, the characters talked and moved in a different fashion. His greatest
achievement, however, was that he did not raise a laugh for its own sake but for the sake of enlivening character.

Of the early comedies, *The Squire* produced at the James Theatre, London, on 29th December, 1881 is notable for its study of character and the choice of his themes. Pinero does not show an obtrusive predominance of the abstract element over the human and concrete factors. He introduces character at its earliest point in the development of the plot. The difference, therefore, between *The Squire* and Sydney Grundy's Degenerates is the difference between a live play and a dead one. Archer says, "The difference between a live play and dead one is that in the former the character controls the plot while in the latter the plot controls the character".1

Sir Arthur Pinero, really a Victorian at heart, wrote his first play at a time when Ibsenism began its assault upon English Drama. His later and more noted problem pieces represent an incomplete understanding of realism matched to a fine sense of construction. Scribe, Augier, Sardou were the French technicians whom he emulated. His ability to construct plays was extraordinarily fine; his main difficulty lay in an insufficient

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ability to observe life and humanity and reveal what he saw. Once he outgrew his early comedies which brought him fame and much money, he plunged into thesis plays which were successful in those days, but which seem childishly unresolved today.

In *The Squire* Pinero presents, in the character of 'Kate Verity', a real study of a woman, secretly married to Lieutenant Thorndyke and faced not only with scandal but also with the fury of the Lieutenant's former wife. *The Squire*, posing as it does the problem of a woman with a past, points unmistakably to *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. But in the resolution of complications, Pinero uses the theatrical trick of retaining the secret till the very end and then letting the cat out of the bag. The inevitable separation between the lovers is prevented by the sudden disclosure by Dramor that the former wife is dead and, what is more, the person puts a veneer of morality over the episode by drawing this conclusion for the market. But for the long arm of coincidence the play would have been a tragedy. Harold William says, "The theme of the play is stultified by a meaningless solution. A young couple marries only to find
that the first wife is living. The troublesome first wife is removed by death and so the knot is cut, leaving the problem as it was".  

This is a notable point. However, the plot of the play is controlled and guided, for the most part by character. To Kate Verity's benevolence as Mistress and Squire, we owe such other characters in the play as Christie, Izard and others of the Harvest Feast. It is from the sense of womanly dignity that the principal incidents flow. In the character of Gilbert we have the picture of a patient lover, friend, philosopher and guide. To Kate, the lover is only once roused to a pitch of frenzy. The discovery that the woman is as wrong as the man softens his nature. His self sacrifice for Kate's happiness is mainly instrumental in the return of the lovers and in the justification of the title of the play. The Squire was looked upon by Archer as a milestone in the path of progress. The praise is wholly justified.

The Rocket was produced only two years later on 10th December, 1883 at the Prince of Wales Theatre, Liverpool. It shows by comparison that the playwright was forging his weapons and developing the comedy

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of characters. *The Rocket* is experimental and too stagey to be called a comedy. There is no character worth the name that holds our attention. It centres round the desire of John Mable to trace his daughter, Florence, once consigned to the care of his brother but now lost through the latter's evil designs.

*The Squire* and *The Rocket* are contemporaneous. *The Squire*, however, is a definite advance on what had gone before in the fifties, sixties or seventies. *The Rocket* is a clever piece based on the Scribe school. As comedy it does no more than contrive one or two skillful situations for the amusement of the spectators. No character study enters into the development of the play. Chance and coincidence are the last determinants. There is no attempt either to go into the essential problems of men or to set out the serious problems of life with ludicrous results. *The Squire*, on the other hand, is a play noted for its clever characterization. Thomas Hardy felt that Pinero was an unacknowledged adapter of his novel, *Far from the Madding Crowd*. He protested that the subject matter of *The Squire* formed part of his own contemplated play and that his "drama was rendered useless for it was obviously not worth while for a manager to risk producing a piece the whole gist of which was
already to be seen by public at another theatre".\textsuperscript{4} Pinero of course replied; Comus Carr replied and others also joined the discussion. The Daily News contained several letters on the subject. The Times duplicated the list and there was further correspondence.

There is no evidence to support a statement that some woman had sold the same plot to Pinero and Hardy, without, letting either know what she had done. The fact is that Hardy was an anonymous writer while Pinero had the habit of talking over his plots with Kendal, one of the Managers of the St. James theatre. Kendal, heard about Hardy's plot from his partner Hare to whom Comyus Carr had submitted the Hardy manuscript. Thus Pinero may have gained some knowledge of Hardy's plot without reading it. In any case the newspaper record of 1882 show that Pinero’s Squire ran successfully until July 15\textsuperscript{th} and that in October it was performed at Daly's Theatre in New York.

Between 1885 and 1887 were produced the three farces, The Magistrate, The School Mistress and Dandy Dick. These were followed in 1889 by The Cabinet Minister and by The Amazons in 1893. These may be

\textsuperscript{4} Care J. Weber, Hardy of Wessex, Columbia University, France, New York, 1940, p. 268.
called the Court Farces produced as they were at the Court Theatre. These plays gave Pinero a leading place in the English Theatre.

_The Magistrate_ (1885), _The School Mistress_ (1886), _Dandy Dick_ (1887), show Pinero's originality. As the creator of English farces, he broke new ground in the field as T.W. Robertson had done in comedy. The Victorian farces were based on incident or intrigue. Pinero had also tried his hand at the farces of intrigue. His characters in such plays were mere puppets that moved and acted according to the plot. They were used for the presentation of a comic idea. There was no element of surprise. In the court farces the characters are living and vivacious. They have an existence of their own. The plots move according to them.

The aim of each of those plays was to make fun of various characters "by creating real people, exhibiting them in their actual surroundings and making them act in a highly improbable and yet just possible way." Pinero used both wit and tact in order to make people laugh without making them angry. "Pinero had wit enough to be genuinely funny and tact enough to keep him upon the right lines. The Dean in Dandy Dick, for instance, is so real in essence and so unreal in

action that no one can be offended. He is a real person, but he is doing for the moment what a real person would never do."⁶

Pinero went beyond the stage Robertson had created. He had the advantage of many French models. Apart from the pioneering work done by Robertson, Pinero had also the advantage of the efforts of men such as Gilbert, Albery, Theyre, Smith and Young and he was quick to seize upon the possibility of developing the farce of character as clearly seen in the *The Magistrate, Dandy Dick, The School Mistress*. "In these plays," says Hamilton Fyfe, "Pinero brought back to life the farce of character based upon incongruity, the farce which shows in the most lighthearted and interesting fashion, possible people doing improbable things."⁷

*Dandy Dick*, furnishes a good illustration. *The Dean of St. Marvell* eager to raise money to preserve the Cathedral Spire and urged on by his sporting widowed sister, Georgiana Tidman, commissions his butler, Blore, to put $50 on a horse, Dandy, Dick. The Dean plunges deeper by administering a bran mash to the horse and is arrested on suspicion of 'trying to poison a starter on the eve of a race. After, a period of

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7. Hamilton Fyfe: Arthur Wing Pinero, Playwright
confinement in the local lock-up, he is released through the combined efforts of a constable’s wife, former a cook at the Deanery and Georgiana and Sir Tristram Marden, who are the joint owners of *Dandy Dick*. Georgiana is so affected by Sir Tristram’s exploit of releasing the noose hanging over her brother’s head that she rewards him with her hand.

The play was put at the Court theatre on the 27th January, 1887 written at the instance of the Manager Clayton. The play fulfils the idea of a Dean, the paragon of dignity and decorum, caught in an undignified dilemma. The serious household is utterly changed on account of the aunt, Georgiana. Even the Dean’s daughters, Shalame and Shera, beg $ 40 from the aunt, who advises them to put their very petticoats on Dandy Dick—the winning horse. The last ounce of merriment is wrung out of Act III in which the Dean is in the police lock up, and his cook, Hannah Topping, offers a way of escape, as the coach goes to Dustan’s, the Dean’s altercation with Noah, who charges him with alienating his wife’s love and eating his food, adds to the comic confusion.

*Dandy Dick* is a farce of characters. The situation grows out of their idiosyncratic behaviors. The farce relies, for its success, on the juxtaposition of odd effects, a certain license in exaggeration and the sort
of invention that surprises by itself. Once the audience has been led to 
laugh at the unexpected, it does not greatly quarrel with ingenious 
extravagance, and this play stands as a specimen of Pinero's technique.

The same method is at work in *The Magistrate* where he saw the 
way to lighten the lesson by committing the unwary Posket of a 
precocious step son, who adds to his tribulation by involving the 
Magistrate's wife and mother in the midnight escapade. The 
complications that give rise to fun in *The Magistrate* arise from Agatha's 
indiscretion, who on the death of her first husband married Posket, and 
did not carry the fair weight for age.

The play is based upon old-fashioned jokes though it owes its 
success to the juxtaposition of odd effects. There is an attempt to raise a 
laugh. Fyfe says, "*The Magistrate* is more mirth provoking but the fun is 
more forced. The idea of a young man nearly twenty passing as a school 
boy of fourteen is not very delicately worked out." However, the notable 
point is that the audience is led to laugh at the unexpected and so long as 
it does laugh, it does not greatly quarrel with the ingenious extravagance 
on the part of the playwright. It was Pinero's unfailing sense of the

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ridiculous that effectually came in to play. This is shown to the full in The Magistrate which may faintly stand as a specimen of his method and his success. As in Dandy Dick, so in The Magistrate, Pinero saw a chance of drawing the magisterial robe aside leaving the moral unexpressed, and letting the delinquent off with no worse penalty than laughter. He saw the way to lighten the lesson by committing to Posket the charge of a precocious Stepson who is half brother to Tony Lumpkin. He can lend money to his own father for gambling when his innocent mother says, “Do not teach my Cis to play cards.”9 The boy, in fact, is already investing money on Sillikin for the Lincolnshire Handicapped. He is more than a match to his mother and plays a practical joke by getting a slow horse for her, while he himself is on the way to the hotel.

The School Mistress, produced at the Royal Court Theatre on Saturday, 27th March, 1886, is likewise a farce pitched on to the level of a comedy. Once again Pinero’s formula is worked out to make probable people do improbable things. The adventures in the Volumnia College directed by Miss Dyott are exaggerated to the point of a farce. No sooner is Miss Dyott’s back turned than the mice begin to play. She has married

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the impoverished gentleman, Queckett, and to obtain money for having
the honour of being employed in the gradual discharge of liabilities
incurred by her she plans to take part in an opera planned for the
Christmas vacations.

_The School Mistress_ is a wilder farce than _The Magistrate_ or Dandy
Dick. The witty dialogue and the neat characterization however make the
play different from the rough and tumble variety of comic drama.

In 1889, came _The Cabinet Minister_ which, though successful,
cannot be ranked with the others. It does not fit into the formula of
“possible people doing improbable things.”

Another new farce formula developed by Pinero is further
developed in _The Amazons_ produced at the Court Theatre in 1893. In it he
develops the mannish woman idea. The quaint breathiness of the girl in
man’s attire brings the far off echoes of “the forest of Arden”. In this play
we see Pinero’s insight into the heart of the characters. It is a play “full of
entertainment and charm.”

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To conclude, Pinero achieves, in the court farces, a type of farce based upon incongruity and whose roots were in character, a farce truly English in colour and climate. It is a farce in which the plot springs naturally from the idiosyncracies of the people and develops naturally from the easy humour and wit of the dialogue. The author forces no moral, makes no social observation or comment on a picture of contemporary life. The farces are unimportant, even the humour is out-dated. The Victorian age had an old-fashioned humour of its own and it was only in this type of humour that Pinero could have expressed himself freely. The plays will scarcely live as Congreve’s and as Sheridan’s plays live. Their importance however, lies partly in the independence of the author’s judgment, which made him shake off foreign bondage, and partly in the fact that they made people in the eighties see his pre-eminence in farce and sentimental comedy. By the nineties he had already shown his mettle in the more responsible vein of social satire before he played the last role of a dramatist. The value of the farces lies, as Nicoll puts it, “in the building of plot and the requirement of stage speech.”\textsuperscript{11} The success of the farces, however, rested on what Edward Terry called, the animated clarinet whose personal qualities contributed greatly to the popularity of

\textsuperscript{11} Nicoll, \textit{A Nineteenth Century Drama}, (1850-1900), p. 176.
these plays. The farces gave valuable lesson in stagecraft to Pinero. He was successful in the portrayal of not only principal characters but also subordinate ones; he did not pretend to depict the manners of the time but was content to accept the theatrical world of make-belief. The naturalness of the plot and situation, the care with which he wrote the dialogues, make these farces important in the development of Pinero’s art.

**Sentimental Comedies and Dramas:**

Before writing his first anti-romantic plays, Pinero began as a writer of sentimental plays. Sentimentalism is the most difficult of the modes of drama to define. Historically, sentimental comedy arose in the last years of the seventeenth century. It had a successful career up to the Victorian era. It changed shape and spirit constantly. In the first stage it was nothing but the comedy of manners wrapped and altered in the last act by sudden revelation of characters or by some swift change in the conduct of plot. In the second stage, there arose a drama of sentiments, the laughable matter developing, not out of the sentimental plot and character; but out of a section of the play an ordinary comic atmosphere is created in such a play. In the third stage we have problem drama which
developed out of the sentimental drama. It disguises itself as cynicism, or objectively, it is an open attack on the weaker elements of the Victorian way of feeling. An account of sentimentality, no doubt, depends, upon the definition given to the mood or philosophic theory from which sentimentalism originates, but certain features are common to all. Ernest Bern Baun is of the view that a certain confidence in the goodness of human nature constitutes sentimentalism. Pity and confidence are the important elements which can be seen in the drama that arose after 1740. Sentimental drama can be distinguished by the presentation of a moral problem. In the comedy of humour and comedy of manners the sole aim is laughter, vice is lashed for the sake of ridicule and lack of moral code is the theoretical creed of intrigue, humour and manner schools. This is the view held by A. Nicoll who says that the presence of a definite moral, even if it was only a seventeenth or eighteenth century moral, is definitely of the sentimental kind. The characteristic features then, are presence of a problem, of pity and of a certain confidence in the goodness of human nature. To this may be added a certain amount of sympathy, not with the character on the stage but as exemplified in the individual's own actions, and the relating of art to life and the return to a highly artificial love of
natural scenery and rural landscape and the deliberate enunciation of a moral. Sentimentalism is akin to romanticism in so far as it gives permanency to feeling rather than to reason or the sense of fact. It differs from romanticism only in this that it is not associated with the strange and remote but with the immediate and familiar. It is a kind of domesticated romanticism. Fine emotions are evoked; the treatment of familiar, social and domestic life such as investiture involves the idealization of the familiar and domestic, and this results in classification of the values that drive themselves from the realistic treatment of life.

_Sweet Lavender_ is the most popular of Pinero’s plays. Its attraction lies in the perfect mixture of fun and tenderness. The characters are the “fictitious, half-believed personages of the stage” as Charles Lamb called the characters of the artificial comedy of the eighteenth century. It popularity rests on the “genial humanity” and “kindliness” and “sweetness”.

The process of idealization appears in _Sweet Lavender_. Here Pinero invests with roseate light, not the grandiose heroes and heroines of romance, but the figures of common life. We are introduced to Dick Pheryl, who is an impecunious, drunken barrister with a heart of gold.
With him is living, Clement Hale, who instead of reading law, makes love to the laundress’s daughter, Lavender. The charwoman in the play despite her low calling is represented as a most refined person. She is endowed with sentiment worthy of a convent. Mrs. Gulfillian, a widow and Mr. Wedderburn’s sister objects to the charwoman being in attendance upon Clement:

Mrs. Gulfillian : Nonsense, sir, these people attend upon you. The girl’s mother is what you call a common servant.
Dick : No, she is what I call a lady.
Mrs. Gil. : A lady?
Dick : If I have the privilege of knowing you for that length of time, nothing will induce me to speak ill of you.  

_Sweet Lavender_ was the most popular play of its time. No less a critic than Clement Scott accorded to the play very high praise. He said, “Much has been said and written of Pinero’s early period and the later period. His _Second Mrs. Tanqueray_ and other fantastic but brilliant clever efforts at the St. James backed by the good will of George Alexander, his _Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith_ and _The Gay Lord Quex_ directly encouraged by John Hare, have had their enthusiastic admirers and their equally

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12. _Sweet Lavender_, Act I.
conscientious deprecators. Some have liked them, however, ignoble the subject. Others have regretted that the age in which we live required them unquestionably; they have all been popular. They are the outcome of an age that allows society to rule the stage and not the people. But I do not think I ever heard one dissentient voice raised against "Sweet Lavender,"\textsuperscript{13} Clement Scott found that there was no ignoble subject.\textsuperscript{14} "There was a deep vein of tenderness for all time and that \textit{Sweet Lavender} will perform on the stage of tomorrow when the \textit{Second Mrs. Tanqueray} and \textit{The Gay Lord Quex} would rest at the cemetery of the dead drama.\textsuperscript{15} The play was wholesome, pure, refreshing and charming, a tale of man's sure trust and woman's gently confidence."\textsuperscript{16}

The play had a most successful run; 737 performances were given in London alone. It was performed in America, where, the West Indies, even Russians saw performances of the play. In the German performance the sentimental was eliminated, and stress was laid on the comic.

To the modern reader; however, the interest of the play is that it is a success in the field of domestic sentimental drama. The theme of the

\textsuperscript{13} Clement Scott: \textit{Drama of Today and Yesterday}; Vol. II, p. 396.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
play is sentimental. It is especially attractive and congenial to the sentimental dramatist. Apart from the moral-immoral theme, there is the rehabilitation motive in the transformation of the hard-hearted into the soft-hearted by the power of kindness and love. In a word, the nucleus of the situation in *Sweet Lavender* is the redemptive power of good, the exposure of social vices and short comings and their disappearance under the searching light of goodness are incidental. As a point of technique also the play is sentimental, the author represents middle class and lower class characters and he is faced with the necessity of working out a dialogue technique appropriate to such a milieu.

*The Times* also is a play based upon sentiment. In his introductory note to the play Pinero says that "in its design it is a comic play". Yet it appeals because of its sentiment. Mr. Egerton Bompas may be snobbish and ambitious. His wife may appear ridiculous. But they are both very human and real. They evoke our sympathy. It is not the purely comic scenes in the play that make the most impression upon us, but the ones in which tears lie not far beneath the humour.

*The Times* lays down the process of idealization. Bompas is idealized and his speech at the end of the play is a deliberate piece of
moralizing. Even *The Hobby Horse* is a sentimental comedy with a dash of satire. Moreover the author, utilizes the "sneering tone" and introduces sentimental touches; the affectation of the upper class is the central theme, the intrigue itself is sentimentalized; coarser manners are toned down to an atmosphere of decorum; wit is largely lost and laughter arises out of this mannerized society. Moreover the play is altered in the last Act by a sudden revulsion of character or some swift change in the conduct of the plot. These plays therefore can not be regarded as satires. The root weakness of sentimentalism is the falsification of the fact that arises from the preference of the sentimentalist for pleasant feeling to harsh reality. Diderot and Beaumarchais pleaded that this new type of play was based on reality being, thus, closely related to man's duties in ordinary life. A. Nicoll has rightly remarked that the "Drama is like a man with a money box fully awake to the value of wealth and considering the best way in which he may save to add to his store; tragedy is like the man to whom wealth is worthless fiction."  

**Serious Drama**

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The English drama was still inferior to the drama of other countries; it had long been divorced from literature; plays were readable but unactable and thoseactable were not worth reading. Not a single play could be named great since Sheridan wrote his *School of Scandal* in 1777. Throughout the first decades of the nineteenth century, English theatre had been kept living by a galaxy of great actors. The actor loomed large in the public eye; his portrait was everywhere. In France, Germany, and Italy theatres took their names from Moliere, Schiller and Goldoni; in London, they were named after actors—-the Garrick, Wyandhan's, Terry's Penleys, etc. The actor was an honoured guest at the annual Banquets of the Lord Mayor and Royal Academy, side by side with Princes, Ambassadors, Bishops, Judges and Generals, members of the government and Leaders of the Opposition. The public itself had lost its taste for the artistic and serious drama; its desire was all for the trivial and common places, authors had not the courage to resist the popular tendency and the managers took care not to attempt a change in the system of long runs.20

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20. On the evening of October 17, 1903, Pinero responding to the toast at the dinner given by the Lord Mayor took a conciliatory initiative but dinner and drama remained antagonistic to each other.
The impact of Ibsen, which has done so much for the resurgence of the modern serious drama, was still remote though Ibsen had been discovered (in 1887) by British authors and Archer had written a series of important articles on him. Nevertheless, British censorship was powerful under whose embargo had come Johnson, Marston, Chapman, Maringer, Shakespeare, Sudermann, Hauptmann, Tolstoi. Naturally, Ibsen was thought to be immoral. The background of the English stage, save for the faint glimmer of Ibsen, was one of darkness. Shakespeare filled these houses; the Harbour Light, The Silver King or Still Waters Run Deep of Charles Wyndhams and Mary Hoare delighted the audience. Fools rollicked through absurd impossibilities, and Merry Margate was a musical entertainment.\(^{21}\) Ibsenism, however, was in the air and the time was slowly coming when the dramatist would be seized of the idea of transferring to the stage the discussion of problem of conduct and character. Pinero, whose eyes were always turned to the future, sought to record actual experience flowing in the natural irregular rhythm of life in *The Profligate*. In 1891 the Independent Theatre society had been formed and somehow managed to avoid the anti-Ibsen censorship. `Ghosts´ was staged and Pinero saw the play. He studied other plays by Ibsen in which

\(^{21}\) Fyfe, H. *Sir Arthur Pinero's Plays and Players*, p. 94. (Ernest Benn Ltd., 1930)
problems of sex and marital life were aired. Pinero must have been fascinated by Ibsen’s A Doll’s House performed at the Novelty Theatre in 1889. The same year J.T. Griend produced Ghosts. Hedda Gabler, The Master Builder and Rosemersholm. The result was that in his serious plays such as The Profligate, The Second Mrs. Tanqueray, The Midchannel he sought to deal with the problem of married life.

The value of The Profligate, therefore, lies in its seriousness of purpose, Cunliffe, however, has something different to say: one cannot take it seriously. After condemning the Profligate to commit suicide in the original version, he accepted the suggestion of John Hare, the actor manager who produced the play and let the sinner of with a happy ending. So, instead of being a reproof of virtue the play as acted was really an encouragement of it. The Profligate instead of being a horrible example suggested rather the possibility of making the best of the worlds. Cunliffe does not take in to account the courage of the author who has chosen such a theme. In order to prove how earnest he was, Pinero added a sub-title to the play, The Sword of Damocles. The subtitle suggests how Pinero sought to strike a balance between the old comedy of manners and

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the serious form of drama. The hero of the play, Dunstan Renshaw, who is a specimen of dissolution did not adhere to the time honoured convention of the stage hero to kill himself in expiation of a great wrong done to a defenceless, nor were the audience given a ready-made solution. They took the lessons as they came. Pinero did not have to teach his moral to his audience as obviously as the old moralities did where virtue held urgency both on the stage and in society. *The Profligate* therefore was a serious play of its generation and its value is enhanced rather than diminished by the fact that the author did not offer a solution by way of a moral lesson. Therefore, *The Profligate* is a serious play at a time when trivialities prevailed. Pinero sought to raise the serious question of a man's profligacy vis-a-vis his happiness in life. He continued to be audacious. In Act III of *Gay Lord Quex* Pinero put a bed, though this suggestion was not as direct and vulgar as in one of the versioned performances in which the sexual act was vividly suggested on a sofa. In *The Enchanted Cottage* Pinero made a clergyman speak of his wife's pregnancy and imminent delivery in the boldest terms possible, so that the ground was prepared for a character in modern drama to say in clear
terms, if need be. "I am going to have a baby: Reticence and coyness are things of the past."

*The Profligate* is the first great English experiment in serious drama in the nineteenth century. The attempt of the author is revolutionary and his honesty of purpose is clear. He is out to enforce strict standards of social morality; he pursues his theme to the bitter end. The subtitle *The Sword of Damocles* and the rhyming couplet attached to the play alone bear testimony to the author's seriousness of purpose. Pinero did not present Dickensian humour or the breeziness of slip-board setting to his play. In fact, the atmosphere of the play is one of dead earnestness, unrelieved by dramatic relief. It is doubtful whether modern drama would have reached so far in point of earnestness, if Pinero had not led the way. The resolute desire of the author to study human nature shows a certain course of conduct more or less deliberately and recklessly pursued. This is the sign which proves that of the principal character, Dunstan Renshaw shows the psychological truth that a human being is to a large extent a slave of his habits. This may be called the doctrine of determinism. Certain consequences are determined for us by the course of our conduct, if our actions are the result of our motives and if the
motives are suggested by habitual action, by a type of conduct deliberately pursued through several years, we get the relationship between cause and effect, just as we do in the external world of nature. Given the antecedents, certain consequences are inevitable.

Furthermore, modern drama is characterized by the disappearance of all tendency towards romance. We now begin to study humanity with the aid of science; we have to bid good bye to the hero-villain pattern of the older drama. So Bulwer Lytton or Victor Hugo would be possible. In George Bernard Shaw we find a distant and determined attack against all romance as being worthless even if it exists and is essential to drama because it does not exist. A dramatist is not afraid to call things by their real names and he makes no effort to gloss over ugly facts. Important influence in this direction, of course, came from Ibsen; he profoundly altered man's conception of society. This storm of realism, which frankly takes in to account what would otherwise appear indecorous, treats the tendency to shake off all reticence. This indeed is the basis of the modern drama of realism. The fact that a dramatist accepts the conditions of the time in which he writes, that his characters must be treated in the light of psychological analysis and not exaggerated or idealized and that the
character alone should determine the end, which means that the hero or
the heroine will not necessarily prosper in the end because he or she is
good. These are the adjuncts to realistic drama. Pinero in *The Profligate*
did not go so far. He did not bring forth, in unmistakable terms, the
particular problems of age or raise certain tendencies and states of
thought or feeling. He was not a prophet or a seer, as Ibsen was. But he
certainly laid the basis for Modern English drama of realism by his
courageous attempt to deal with an ugly character and by his portrayal of
that character. He showed that men work, not from a single motive, but
complex motive. Dunstan Renshaw was not just a dark detestable being;
in the company of Leslie, at any rate, he was a man trying to be virtuous.
The modern basis of tragedy is character. In the Greek drama man
struggled powerlessly in the grip of fate but fate today is not our ‘star’ but
we ourselves are the fate because we are underlings. It is another word
for the retribution of our own follies, our own acts of omission and
commission. The Greeks sought to bridge the gulf between cause and
effect by inventing a force outside man, a force that led men to justice and
a solution would appear an oversimplification of the case, and so the
modern dramatist locates the cause of ruin in man’s nature and not in an
outside agency. Upon this principle *The Profligate* is founded. On 24th April, 1889, when John Hare opened the New Garrick Theatre with *The Profligate*, it constituted an important landmark in the history of the theatre in England.

The true significance of the play lies, not so much in its achievement as its broad aims. The writer was writing under limitations but he sought to raise the play above these limitations, if only for a brief hour. "The period was not primarily a period of achievement but rather of effort; suggestive, tentative rather than formative. Its relics are moods, attitudes, experiments, fantastic attenuation of weariness, fantastic anticipation of a new vitality."23 Judged in the context of the age, Pinero’s *The Profligate* is a play which the English theatre could be proud of. Robertson had paved the way "from artifice to reality but English drama still went in blinkers so far as the serious drama of a seamier element is concerned."24 *The Profligate* set out to show that the man who leads a dissolute life before marriage will have to repent it afterwards.

"It is a good and sooth-fast saw,
Half roasted never will be raw;

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24 F.S. Boas, from *Richardson to Pinero*, 1936, p. 258.
No dough is dried once more to meal,
No coach New-shapen by the wheel.
You can't turn curds to milk again,
Nor now by wishing back to them,
And, having tasted stolen honey,
You can't buy innocence for money."

These lines by Pinero upon his play bill form the keynote of the play. Dunstan Renshaw (the Profligate) is not the kind of man for whom we can feel much sympathy. On the eve of his marriage to the girl who, according to him, has purified him, he indulges in vulgarity; on the morning of the wedding he shows no regret. He marries Leslie. He is a profligate with no redeeming feature. However, his misery towards the end of the play draws a little sympathy.

"I married," he tells Murray," in darkness, as it were; she seemed to take me by the hand and to lead me out into the light. Murray, the companionship of this pure woman is a revolution of life to me.... But you know, because you read my future, you know what my existence has become. The past has overtaken me! I am in deadly fear! I dread the visit
of a stranger or the sight of strong handwriting; and in my sleep I dread that I am muttering into her ear the truth against myself."

The Profligate's conversion and his record for virtue were as intense as St. Augustine's. The reconciliation of the wife with her husband, a concession made by Pinero at the instance of Hare proved John Hare stood out against the suicide ending and Pinero capitulated in the end in defence of his conscience and 'principles'. The Profligate instead of being a horrible example suggested rather the possibility of making the best of both the worlds. Pinero suffered the better judgment to be overridden by the demands of the actor based on the supposed taste of the public and wrenched the denouement into a happy ending. On the other hand, the happy ending was preferred to an unhappy ending for the logic of events in the play demanded it. The altered ending merely weakened the effect of the dramatized sermon, a piece reinforced by incredible coincidences and platitudinous speech making.

When the playgoers expected trivial amusement, Pinero dared to deal with self-inflicted death, a point which showed Pinero to be a serious

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25 Pinero, Preface to The Big Drum.
26 Morgan, Tendencies of Modern English Drama, p. 36.
author. He challenged the conventional conception of the theatre. Fyfe held that it would be unfair to blame Pinero for the mawkish ending. Since he wrote with his tongue in his cheek he said a happy ending was valuable for it to set the people thinking.

A more serious and determined attempt to write in the new vein is to be seen in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. The story of Dunstan Renshaw shows us that a man cannot escape his past. The story of Paula Tanqueray shows the same truth as it applies to a woman. Like Renshaw, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* “wanted to leave behind all that has marred her life, to let it be as if it had never been. But she finds the burden of her former self dogging her every footstep just as he did.”\(^{27}\) It was to meet the new demand for realistic problem play that Pinero wrote this play. The Ibsen controversy had been raging for some years and Pinero’s attempt was courageous. He showed that an English dramatist could write, if he chose, fine, serious and moving plays. Initially the author was afraid of presenting *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* for more than two or three matinees. He did not expect people to take an interest in tragic drama. He made arrangements with George Alexander, the actor manager, for a

\(^{27}\) Fyfe, Arthur Wing Pinero, Play wright.
series of matinee performances, and even offered the play without fee.28 The play was produced on the 27th May, 1883; it was an immediate success: there was loud cheering on Acts I, II, III and IV; and when the author appeared on the stage, there was more cheering.

The play was hailed with a chorus of praise, W.T. Arnold wrote in the *Manchester Guardian*: at last a living English man has written a play of which it is possible to be proud. W.L. Courtney wrote in the *Idea of Tragedy* (1900), 'Hereafter we shall know better, I think, how great an achievement Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* is, how a true tragedy in form, management and style.'29

*The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* is one of the masterpieces of the modern stage.30 It has initiated the Modern English social drama and established it not only as a possibility but as a fact. He brought serious people back to the theatre and paved the way for Galsworthy. In England *The Second Mr. Tanqueray* began as a bombshell and endured as a landmark. With it English drama emerged from the Robertsonian nursery and took for the first time since the eighteenth century a man's look at the

29 *Courtney's Idea of Tragedy in Around Theatres*, Max Beerbohm, p. 96.
30 W.L. Courtney, in the fortnightly Review, XCIX, 1913.
world. Ashley Dukes in Drama and Life says: Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* is generally considered to be another landmark of the Modern English stage, but it was written after the influence of Ibsen had begun to be felt."

A critical examination of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* shows that it had an exposition unsurpassed. However it is a realistic play which in itself was a notable advance in regard to the contemporary theatre. Moreover, it is an English play with English characters; the setting of Act I and II and true to the English background. It is the very immorality of the play that points to its painful moral. As the first modern English drama, serious, and realistic, the play has a strong claim to being the most significant play of the century. *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893) is the play most likely to be remembered of Pinero's works despite the fact that he was writing steadily from 1877 to 1932, a matter of fifty five years.

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32 Ashley Dukes, *Drama and Life*, p. 96.